

Hellmut Wilhelm, Memories and Bibliography

Introduction

Professor Emeritus Hellmut Wilhelm passed away on July 5, 1990, in Seattle at the age of 84.¹ Professor Wilhelm was appointed to the faculty of the University of Washington in 1948 where he was a member of the Far Eastern and Russian Institute and the Department of Far Eastern Slavic Languages and Literature. He retired in 1971. During the twenty-three years he spent at this University, Professor Wilhelm taught both Chinese history and literature. His year-long lecture courses in pre-modern Chinese history and the history of Chinese literature offered great inspiration to several generations of students. Auditors in these classes regularly included distinguished members of his own faculty.

Professor Wilhelm was born on December 10, 1905, in Tsingtao (Qingdao), Shandong Province. His father was the esteemed Sinologist Richard Wilhelm (1873–1930), who went to China in 1899 to teach for the German Church Mission in Shandong. Richard Wilhelm is well known today for introducing the great classics of early Chinese civilization to German readers. He is renowned in the West for his translation of the *I Ching* or *Book of Changes*, a work that his son Hellmut continued to study and interpret throughout his own scholarly career.

Hellmut Wilhelm received his early education in China, and he thus gained an intimate familiarity with the Chinese intellectual world around the time of the Chinese Revolution. After World War I, he returned to Germany with his father, who was appointed to the first chair of Sinology at the University of Frankfurt. Hellmut Wilhelm served as his father's assistant at the newly founded China Institut, which published the Sinological journal *Sinica*. Hellmut continued his study of Chinese while preparing for a career in law. In 1928 he passed the State Examination in law and briefly worked as an intern in the Frankfurt courts.

After the death of Richard Wilhelm in 1930, Hellmut decided to continue his father's Sinological work and undertook a Ph.D. degree in Sinology at the University of Berlin. He completed his degree in 1932 with a dissertation on the seventeenth century scholar Ku Yen-wu.² For various reasons, most notably the rise to power

¹ Accounts of Hellmut Wilhelm's scholarly career include F.W. Mote, "Hellmut Wilhelm: A Biographical Note", *Monumenta Serica* 29 (1970–71): iii–vi; Howard L. Goodman, "Hellmut Wilhelm's Collection at Princeton: Last Stop from Peking and Points Beyond", *The Gest Library Journal* 1.2 (1987): 5–18; Michael Gasster, "Hellmut Wilhelm, Sinologue", *Chin-tai Chung-kuo shih yen-chiu t'ung-hsün* (Newsletter for Modern Chinese History), 8 (1989): 27–51.

² *Gu Ting Lin, der Ethiker*, Inaugural-Dissertation zur Erlangung der Doktorwürde genehmigt

of Hitler and the Nazi Party, Hellmut decided to leave Germany for China, where he remained until 1948. During this time he was a correspondent for German and Swiss newspapers and then held an appointment as Professor of German Language and Literature at the National Peking University. The years Professor Wilhelm spent in China allowed him the time to do research on a broad range of subjects in Chinese history, thought, and literature. In the early 1940's he delivered a series of lectures on Chinese thought and history to the German community in Peking. The first set of lectures, presented in the winter of 1941-42 at the house of Wilhelm Haas, and published in 1942 under the title *Chinas Geschichte: Zehn einführende Vorträge*, presents a broad survey of Chinese history, from pre-history to the fall of the Ch'ing. A second set of lectures delivered in the winter of 1943 formed the basis for the book *Gesellschaft und Staat in China* (first published in 1944, and reprinted in a revised edition in 1960), which offers a broad survey of the development of Chinese social structure and political thought. Professor Wilhelm also devoted a series of lectures to the *I Ching*. The German version of the lectures appeared in 1944 under the title *Die Wandlung: Acht Vorträge zum I-Ching*. They were subsequently translated into English and published under the title *Change: Eight Lectures on the I Ching*. This remains the most widely read introduction to the *Book of Changes* in a Western language.

While at Washington, Professor Wilhelm taught almost every aspect of Chinese studies, including literature and philosophy, politics and religion, ancient and modern history. He was a leading member of the grand constellation of Far Eastern and Russian specialists that was created in Seattle under the leadership of George Taylor. Professor Wilhelm also played an important role in the training of graduate students who came to the University from all parts of the U.S. and various countries to pursue advanced degrees in Chinese studies. Many of these students are now professors at distinguished universities around the world.

Hellmut Wilhelm was a scholar of international renown. Recently, one of his articles was translated into Chinese for a scholarly journal published in his native Shandong province,³ and his *Gesellschaft und Staat in China* has been translated into both Czech and Spanish. Professor Wilhelm's first love was the *I Ching*, a book that he believed embodied the essence of Chinese thought and values. Between 1951 and 1967 he presented a series of lectures at the annual meetings of the Eranos Society in Ascona, Switzerland. In these lectures, which were published in 1977 by the University of Washington Press under the title *Heaven, Earth, and Man in the Book of Changes*, Professor Wilhelm showed how the *I Ching* addressed

von der Philosophischen Fakultät der Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Berlin (Darmstadt: L.C. Wittich'sche Hofbuchdruckerei, 1932).

³ "Lun T'ang T'ai-tsung shih", *Wen shih che* (1989: 6): 86-90.

the most profound questions of human life: the place of man in the cosmos and his relationship to nature; change versus continuity; peace as an intellectual concept; leadership and authority; freedom. As one of his students, Professor Michael Gasster of Rutgers has recently characterized these lectures, "they speak to the world outside China, and make reference not only to Leibniz but to Goethe, Jung, Hindemith, and Yeats, to Schiller and Theodore Roethke, to St. Francis and Karl Marx and to imagery in the art and poetry and thought of India".⁴ For many years after his retirement Professor Wilhelm could be found in his study overlooking the Lake Washington Ship Canal reading Chinese texts and writing a history of Chinese literature. Ever the kindly teacher, he graciously continued to receive visits from colleagues and students, who sought his advice on scholarly matters. The essays published here are tributes from Professor Wilhelm's colleagues, friends, and students. They were first delivered at a special symposium dedicated to Hellmut Wilhelm at the annual meeting of the Western Branch of the American Oriental Society, held on the University of Washington campus on October 27, 1990. We publish them here to honor the memory of a remarkable scholar, whose life and work profoundly affected so many people.

David R. Knechtges
Seattle, May 27, 1992

⁴ "Hellmut Wilhelm, Sinologue", p. 41.