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Howard L. Goodman, "Hellmut Wilhelm's Collection at Princeton: Last Stop from Peking and Points Beyond", The Gest Library Journal 1, no. 2 (1987): 5-18, accessed January 14, 2017, https://library.princeton.edu/eastasian/EALJ/goodman_howard_l.EALJ.v01.n02.p005.pdf

Hellmut Wilhelm's Collection at Princeton: Last Stop from Peking and Points Beyond

HOWARD L. GOODMAN

Hellmut Wilhelm in Seattle

In 1948 a gentle, smiling man began packing up his boxes of Chinese books in Peking. In a classic case of bureaucratic befuddlement, China at that time outlawed shipment overseas of many items (including books) by freight, but not by post. About 1,500 boxes of books were subsequently mailed without much fuss to Seattle, Washington.

That is just a sketch of only one chapter; from before that time and continuing on, another had begun—the same two protagonists (book collector

and books), yet their contents changed somewhat. The collector set out on new intellectual quests and had new scholarly necessities; new books were chosen to fit them. For the history of the Gest Library we are interested here in this latter chapter. Of course, we must review the previous one in more detail.

Hellmut Wilhelm, son of a Christian missionary in Shantung who became a secular scholar, carved out a life which was in its own way intrinsically rooted in the very thing that the politicized new world has often found impossible to understand—genuine cultural synthesis. His brand of cultural synthesis can never more be duplicated. In his day the modern university system in China was taken seriously by Chinese and Western scholars. Friendships among Chinese and European scholars, teachers, and writers led to the sharing of life-long values, both cultural and personal. Chinese political and social leaders could treat the long-term foreign residents in their midst as brothers in a professional endeavor, and they could form alliances in order to gain insights into their languages, specialties and views. The foreigners relished the opportunity to engage with minds bred at the critical core of a vast and sophisticated culture which, above all, needed slow, careful attention by an outsider to grasp fully.

Hellmut Wilhelm had been raised in China as part of a foreign educator's household, but an unusual one at that.[1] His father Richard's circle of acquaintances in China and back in Germany included the likes of K'ang Yu-wei, Martin Buber, and Carl Jung. Hellmut himself was raised together for many years with a young lad named Chou I-liang, who would become one of the world's most respected historians of early China. Richard Wilhelm's missionary teaching eventually yielded to his desire to promote the European understanding of China's heritage, and he translated into German a core of Chinese classical writings. He approached his task of translation slowly, under the consistent tutelage of *bona fide* Chinese masters of the classical tradition. Lao Nai-hsüan was one such teacher, a Chinese scholar-official who was expert in literature, the classics, the *Book of Changes* in particular, as well as mathematics. From this array of figures in the life of the future scholar and bibliophile, Hellmut Wilhelm, we can detect a solid blend of West and East. Neo-romantic German mysticism, modern ideas about the mind and reality, as well as the most up-to-date in Chinese "evidential scholarship" were accepted and learned in one household, as well as in a father's and son's careers. The younger Wilhelm continued his studies

back in Germany in the late 1920s, himself switching—from law to sinology; he had finally decided to assume his father's researches and aims. Upon returning to China in 1932, he wrote for a well-known German periodical and continued the organs of German-Chinese cultural exploration which his father had started. He eventually became a professor of German at Peking University.

While acting as exponent of this type of cultural synthesis he did not limit his contacts to scholars, scholarly journals and university offices. He was an active member of a whole sub-society in Peking, many of whom felt forced to stay because of perverse forces in their homelands. Wilhelm might have preferred to be able to continue his travels and teachings back in Europe, and to become a German sinologue; or to maintain editorial and scholarly control over his publication interests. But as the world grew more topsy-turvy, the Germans of Peking grew more interested in ordering and re-telling their own world. Hellmut Wilhelm's experiences in this community produced some of the best sinological writings of our century.[2] But as we shall see, much also can be learned from writings and publications which he collected.

In 1949, open-minded cultural synthesis suddenly become outmoded. Truck with countries beyond China's borders ceased. Men like Wilhelm simply packed up, and noble experiments ended. The experiments had not been initiated by governments but by individuals, by loose associations of international friends (a confluence of hosts and guests), by university programs, and by the common forms of social intercourse and everyday life that cemented them together in a natural way. Not all the Sino-Westerners had the same combination of inquiry and interests as Hellmut Wilhelm. Some returnees to the West brought back their specially honed theories of Chinese political history, some brought the basic skills for research into traditional Chinese letters, or some merely the memories of events and meaningful friends. Like the others, Hellmut Wilhelm worked these fruits of the synthesis into his new life. Some of the books and documents packed up in 1948 plus a whole set that still was to come into existence constitute a key by which his unique world map can be understood.

The 1948 shipment was a whole library; the Chinese titles in it constituted most of the basic tools as well as many of the sources needed by a historian of Chinese culture. They were the Chinese side of the Wilhelm equation and acted in that capacity in Prof. Wilhelm's new life in the spacious Pacific

Northwest. Seattle, Washington, was an up-and-coming center for the study of modern China. It was the logical place for him to land—several fine German and Chinese sinologues were at the forefront of the Seattle scene and had known him in Peking.

We are not concerned with this Chinese library, although it eventually helped to establish the University of Washington's East Asia Library as a contender in the humanistic field of Asian studies when he transferred it to that institution. The Gest Library by the time of that transfer (in the early 1950s) had already met up with its Chinese bibliographic core, which had come from Canada and was being expanded and built up properly. But thirty years later, in 1982, Hellmut Wilhelm's second library came to the Gest. It was not even a Chinese library, but consisted of 2,258 Western language titles, many collected in China and others purchased in his travels to England, Germany, and Switzerland (for the Eranos Conferences) after 1949.

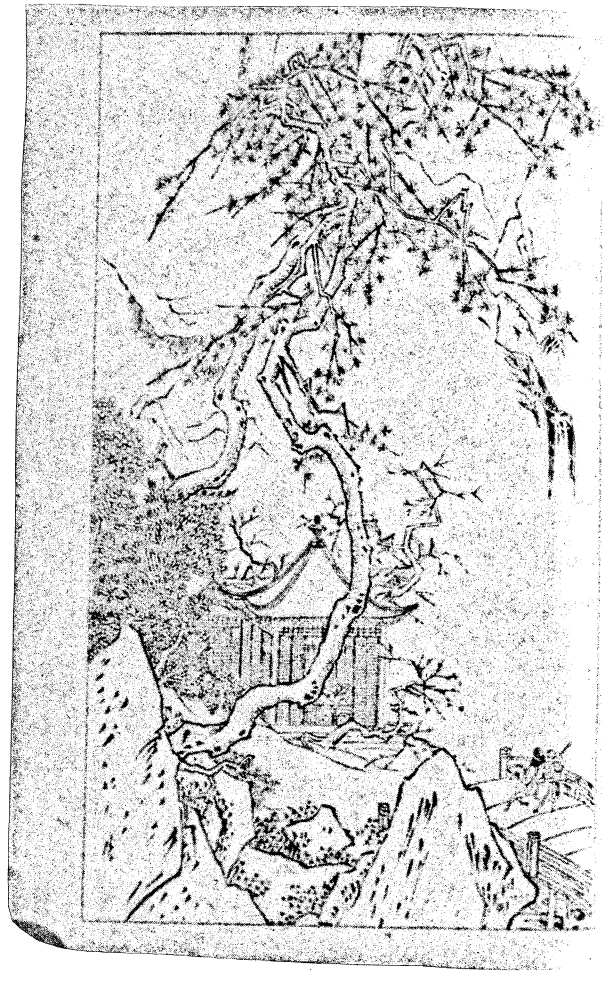
Although the term "curio" has been overly used by well-meaning (and sometimes quite skilled) amateurs in the study of Chinese culture, let us nevertheless say it about the new collection at Princeton; its connotation can be good: something rare which invites regard. Furthermore, the Wilhelm Collection may serve Princeton University in quite practical ways. It can help East Asian Studies departmental courses to be taught more efficiently and with the potential to stimulate student interest. Finally, it can help to inculcate a particular kind of appreciation for that area of knowledge. The books in it are not just standard reference works and sources of Chinese thought and history in Western translations, but the map-like traces of a singular mind, one which put together facets in a way that no one else has thought to do. Because of the father's heritage of scholarship and because of the son's fertile researches in the U.S. and in modern Europe after World War II, the collection leads anyone who is able to ruminate in it and to see the titles all in concert to think about the effect of Chinese literature itself on the earliest Western sinologues, the traditions of sinology, the effect of one of China's most important classics on the West, and the role of archetypes in explaining commonalities across time and continents. Hellmut Wilhelm has held all these ideas as uppermost.

More needs to said about the curious, however. The land of the curious—the barrio of German (and other European) intellectual and material life in the middle of the Imperial City—comes slowly to life in the Wilhelm Col-

lection. Pick up some of the journals and see a literary chronology of the times, or occasionally a jarring mixture of the heroic with the politically heinous. The Collection has copies of *Sinologische Arbeiten* [Sinological Tasks], published by the Deutschland-Institut in Peking. It has already been noted by other writers that the *Arbeiten* grew to be controlled by Nazis to the extent that Dr. Wilhelm could no longer stay at its helm in good conscience.[3] The Wilhelm Collection contains other journals which show the entrance of Hitlerism into the literature of the German community in the Far East. Unlike *Arbeiten, China-Dienst* [In the China Service], published in Shanghai, is a new addition to the holdings of the Library. Its stated purpose was the furthering of German-Chinese relations. However, just how far that was intended to go is suspect. It sounds mostly like a Nazi political organ—very martial: the meaning of "China service" must be read as "good German soldiers at the outposts." Articles and weekly columns in these issues, running mostly from 1933 to 1936, talk about the true situation in the homeland ("Zur Lage in Deutschland," "Der Soldat des Dritten Reichs") or about the 'Jewish problem' ("Die Scheidung zwischen Deutschtum und Judentum"). German youth were exhorted to be correct in politics ("Wesen und Aufbau der Hitlerjugend").

There is a tangible difference in the tone of things German when compared with another rare item in the Collection, again a valuable addition to the Gest's holdings. The name of the journal is *Die Dschunke*, and was published in Peking from April, 1940, to May, 1945, or a bit thereafter. (May, 1945, was the last issue collected by Hellmut Wilhelm. It does not seem conceivable that it went on much after that, if at all; otherwise later issues would have entered the collection during his presence there.) A check of the *Union Listing of Serials* has shown it, as well as *China-Dienst*, to have been nonexistent in U.S. libraries up to now. Nor can one imagine that it found a safe home in Germany.

The premier issue set the tone and ambience; the paper was crisp, there was a beautiful facing plate next to the title page (see Illustration 1) and inside could be found a translation of the words of no less a famous Chinese intellectual than Hu Shih. Issue 20 (Nov., 1941) had almost its whole contents devoted to W. A. Mozart, plus Chuang Tzu-inspired verse entitled "Die Harmonie der Sphären" by Vincenz Hundhausen, a noted multi-lingual literatus in the exile community. In other issues we see the same formula: articles on German greats of earlier centuries (Holbein in No. 44, with



Die Dschunke

Herausgegeben von Erich Wilberg

Heft 1 — April 1940

„Wer sich selbst und andre kennt
Wird auch hier erkennen:
Orient und Okzident
Sind nicht mehr zu trennen."

Blumen blühen, Knospen springen!
In den roten Bäumen singen
Nachtigallen, Nachtigallen!
Möven fliehn auf weißen Schwingen,
Um die blauen Fluten schlingen
Gräser sich und wehn und wallen.

Lenzesleuchten, Windeswehen!
Alle, die es ganz verstehen,
Sind im Glücke, sind im Glücke!
Zarter Flöten zärtlich Flehen!
In der Sonne Untergehen
Kehrt die Dschunke still zurücke.

Ssü Yüan-Djiä (11. Jahrh.)

Das Original zu dem nebenstehenden Bilde ist eine der wenigen erhaltenen Schöpfungen Ma Yüan's des Älteren, der in der Sungzeit lebte und schon von seinen Zeitgenossen als unübertroffenes Vorbild gepriesen wurde. Der Pekinger Lithograph Ta Tien-sun zeichnete die Kopie nach dem Original auf den Stein.

(Gest)
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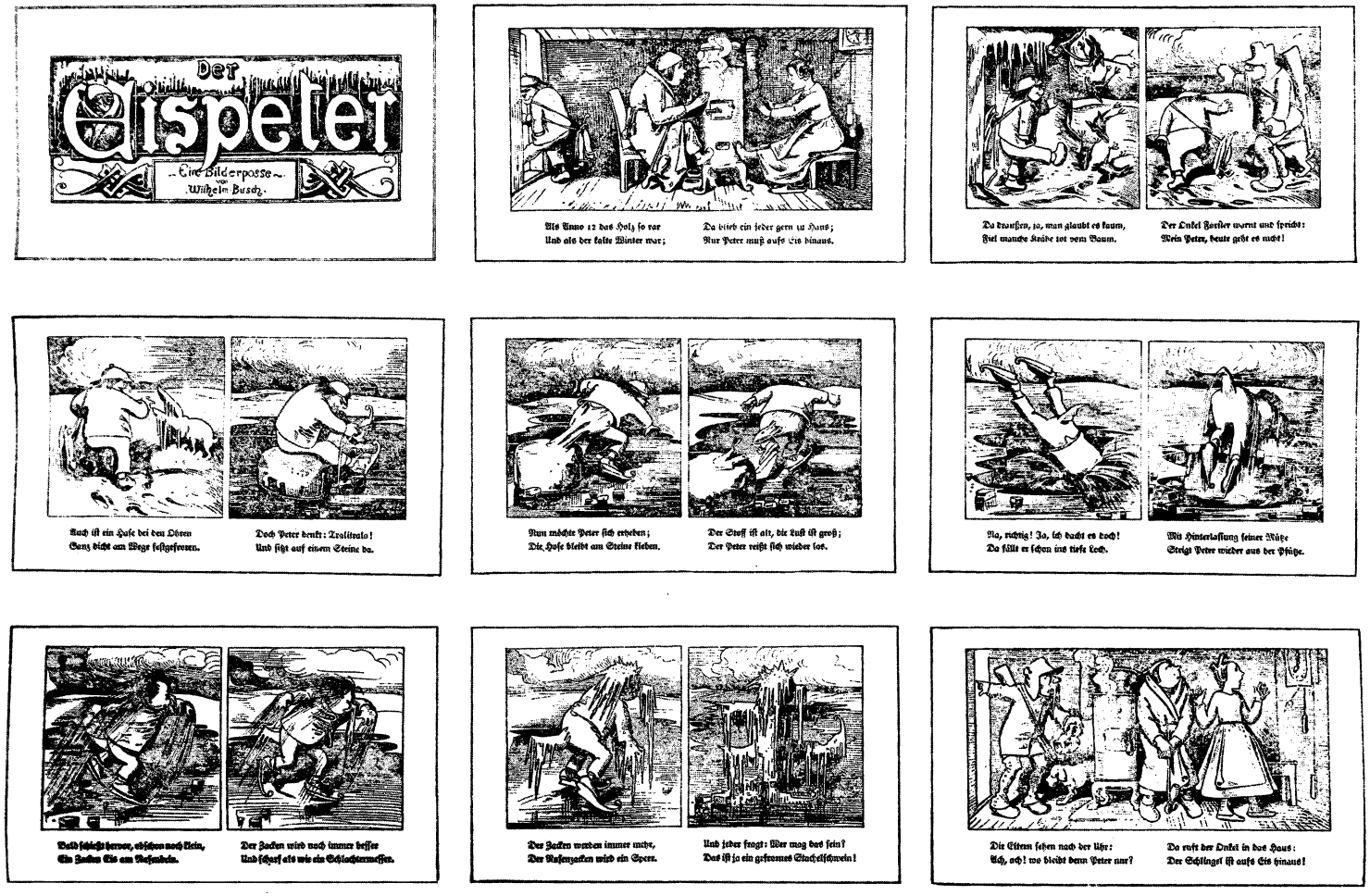
1. The premier issue of *Die Dschunke*, April, 1940. The cover page shows the logo and art deco typeface. The frontispiece is a lithograph based on a painting of Ma Yuan the Elder (Sung dynasty).

woodblock prints; Peter Paul Fechner with photos of his sculptures, in No. 21; and plenty of the Voltaire/Frederick the Great correspondence) along with China (translations from the classics and *belles lettres* often by Richard Wilhelm, Lin Yutang, or Hundhausen). By the last issue, in 1945, the paper quality had deteriorated badly and the number of specifically sinological contributions had already been dwindling (Hundhausen was carrying much of the load, even reaching back to the Western classics—"An Virgilius").

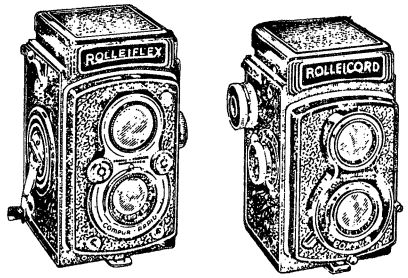
Here is what our colleague at Princeton, Anthony Grafton, Professor of Renaissance and Reformation European intellectual history, had to say about the journal when he inspected it at the Gest Library:

> *Die Dschunke* vividly reveals a tiny but fascinating last outpost of European culture, the German community of Peking in the war years. The journal's content of articles is a bewitching combination of efforts to preserve the classical German humanist culture already defunct in the West, with efforts to come to terms with Chinese culture and earlier Westerners who tried to master it. On one hand, one finds long articles on great German classicists like Johann Winckelmann (see No. 46, 1944), and less stately but more amusing products of more recent times like a foldout comic story by Wilhelm Busch. (See Illustration 2.) Much of the more heavyweight material is marginal: excerpts from standard German works on philology and literary history reprinted for an exile public with little access to the originals. Taken together, though, they reveal impressive efforts to preserve values and celebrate heroes of German humanism. At the same time *Die Dschunke* serialized German novels and offered translations from Chinese poetry, and was the forum for German missionaries to write essays on the earlier heroes of their enterprise, like von Schall. But the journal's latent content is in some ways more revealing than its manifest content. Advertisements for Turkish cigarettes sold by Greeks in Peking, European grand hotels, fine bakeries, and Rolleiflexes (Illustration 3), exude a wonderful flavor of the 1930s and 1940s (the world of *Stamboul Train*), and remind us of a world in which a Western elite could buy its May wine, fine scotch and high cuisine anywhere from Europe. Such unification of the globe by retail merchants was unequaled until the recent airport dutyfree phenomenon



2. Detail from a complete cartoon story, in the form of an immense foldout, by Wilhelm Busch. This appeared in Issue 11 (February, 1941) of *Die Dschunke*.

Rolleiflex



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3. A montage of the various kinds of advertisement repeated frequently throughout the run of *Die Dschunke*.

(which offers much less attractive goods at higher prices). A social historian of Germany might be able to use *Die Dschunke* as an unexpected source through which to discuss an island of peace and even cultural resistance to Nazism inhabited by that small number of Germans who spent the war years in Peking.

The Sino-German synthesis also occurred outside of China. Another journal in the Wilhelm Collection was published from 1926 to 1935 in Frankfurt am Main by the China-Institut, an organization spearheaded by Richard and continued by Hellmut Wilhelm. The title is *Chinesisch-Deutscher Almanach*, a fine production, printed on the highest quality paper, and including original works. (Of course, one cannot belittle *Die Dschunke* for having had to make do with what it could get.) Every issue of the *Almanach* began with a calendar. The first issue's calendar for the Chinese *ping-yin* year coordinated the *Book of Changes* hexagrams with the Western calendar. The 1927-28 issue had German translations from the *Tao-te ching* for each month. Articles by leading sinologues like Erwin Rousselle, Willy Hartner, Edouard Erkes, and Richard Wilhelm, covered mainly the Chinese classics, Chinese art, religions and the calendar system. The tone is imperial in a special sense: not like *China-Dienst*, with its outstretched arm of Hitlerjugend instructing fair Pekinese to take a correct look at Axis Manchuria, but like Chinese imperial courts ever since the Han dynasty, more specifically since the coming of Christianity at the end of the sixteenth century. Coordination of the calendar and re-interpretation of the classics had been staid but important tasks of each new emperor, and the Jesuits had opened this scholarship to learned foreigners. Thus, we see not just a continuation of acceptable elite, Sino-European collaboration, but an example of East-West synthesis in which the participants sought meeting points of the two cultures, not political control or self-aggrandizement.

Probably the most curious of all Wilhelm Collection items is *Etudes Confucéennes*, a newsletter of the Confucian Science Church, published approximately monthly from 1953 to 1962 in Geneva under the aegis of one G.H. Schuetz. There are birthday paeans to Confucius, lectures on neo-Confucianism, an article: "Neo-Confucianisme et Hassidisme," and a long running attempt to begin translating the obscure (to Westerners) *T'ai-hsüan*. Hellmut Wilhelm had been asked to contribute to the newsletter, and his work is seen especially in the *T'ai-hsüan* project. A questionnaire in No. 26 asks such questions as "Etes-vous vous-même confucianiste?" "Avez-vous

lu les classiques confucéens? Dans quelle langue?" "Avez-vous visité des Temples de Confucius? Lesquels?" (Geneva was obviously the wrong place for Schuetz's church.) Wilhelm, having given a serious scholarly contribution, probably looked on amusedly at these attempts to teach truth.

We leave the curious and move to the scholarly. The Wilhelm Collection contains interesting clusters of items. All scholars know what it is like to need a volume of a journal that circulates in a library. Often we wish that the journal offprints of one writer could be collected in one place (as they are only rarely). The Collection is a fund of such offprints. The entire journal output of Hellmut Wilhelm himself is represented, as is nearly the whole output of Herbert Franke up to about 1980; many articles of Nicholas Poppe, Udo Posch, Agehananda Bharati, August Wittfogel, Wolfram Eberhard, Vincent Shih, and Jaroslav Prusek are there as well. Some of the above are likely never to be reprinted, and some of the authors, like Posch and Bharati, are highly unusual characters whose articles deserve reading purely from the standpoint of the histories of sinology and indology. In the case of Wilhelm's offprints, some are of obscure provenance. The Collection also holds eighty-three typescript dissertations and theses. Only a small number were ever published in other forms and most reflect careful research on traditional sinological subjects. Finally, there are issues of obscure or not easily obtainable journals like *Orient/West*, *Recontre Orient Occident*, and *Mundus*. There are single numbers of such 'new age' voices as *The Order of the Universe* (with an article about the metaphysical truth of the trigrams), and the more conservative *Inward Light*, by the Friends Church, with an article on the soul healing properties of R. Wilhelm's and Carl Jung's interpretations of the East.

What are all these things supposed to add up to? So far I have only been recounting oddities and singletons, little things about sinology that seem not to have any critical mass in today's scholarship. One must forget that the library now exists as rows along several spare (I use the word advisedly) aisles in the Rare Book Room of the Gest Oriental Library. One must picture instead the library being used by students. In that case, the assemblage can speak with its own voice, a rare example of a book collection imbued with personality. Hellmut Wilhelm had an enormous interest in interpretive meldings of Jungian thought, religions, and literary excursions. Newsletters and journals which mention the *Book of Changes*, as well as the expected sticks, dice, and cards associated with that classic in its modern U.S. incar-

nation (see Illustration 4), form an interesting part of our relations with China. Undergraduates who are bent on learning Chinese so that they can advise corporation presidents and government bureaucrats about Chinese business environments might gain from learning about the long process of Chinese-Western "syntheses," a new one of which seems always about to emerge. They can see the more than thirty-five books which were published before 1875, one as old as 1770. Their contents show what it was like in Shanghai, London, and Paris bookstores when the public first saw books purveying Chinese culture. A student might ask, "How did the early

4. Games, cards, and mantic devices based on the *Book of Changes*. These were popular especially in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s. Prof. Wilhelm has always supported the popular phenomenon with genuine curiosity.

impressions of, for example, English Protestant missionaries or French literati take form?" "What was considered interesting about China at a time when, in the West, authoritative learning and the classic languages held almost the same kind of vaunted place as they had for aeons in China?" Hellmut Wilhelm's strong commitment to his father's aims, to the fathoming of all aspects of China's lettered culture, and to the *Book of Changes* in particular, all help to shape the thoughts of whoever has the pleasure to sit among the books in one room, under one roof.

There is of course a huge store of work-a-day sinological books in the Collection, the kind which is needed in Princeton's courses. Many of them duplicate Gest's Western language titles. The Wilhelm Collection, however, is not just a duplicate book source, ready to supply replacements when circulating books are worn out, destroyed, or stolen (the last two of which in our frazzled society happen frequently and beyond the control of library administrators). No, again the mind must build a picture of something closed and quiet, a room with shelves and windowed cases (hopefully with wood in abundance, like the wooded treehouse of the Wilhelm study in Seattle). In this place, located somewhere in a future Princeton, the Wilhelm Collection, perhaps augmented by other titles, would be a special, non-circulating library inside of Gest (itself already a cult library, known among juniors and seniors as Heaven's answer to thesis writing). Hopefully, the integrity and rare quality of the Collection would be preserved so that the older traditions of sinology can mingle with the new demands of today, and so that connections with the past can be made.

Students using the facility would be able to use a data-base catalogue of the holdings. This catalogue has already been devised by the author and allows on-line searches for titles, authors, or of any number of subjects. A student's project for a paper may lead him to ask: "What books have been written on Ming erotica, or what theses on medieval poetry, or any illustrated works on literature published in China before the revolution? Can I find them in the Wilhelm Collection?" The answer would be yes: six, four, and one.

Hellmut Wilhelm's relationship with Princeton goes back quite a way; the Collection does not signify his one and only association with us. Prof. Wilhelm was a visiting professor here in 1961-62, and his editorial and scholarly acumen was attached to the *Book of Changes* publishing success at Princeton University Press. Perhaps when the day comes that a pleasing and

inviting room is built, we shall have gathered there all the sinological titles by Richard and Hellmut Wilhelm, added various other Princeton Press items concerning the *Book of Changes*, as well as adjunct things like the paraphernalia (mentioned and illustrated above) and works of fiction and nonfiction about the appealing classic, so that we can have a *Changes* nook.

While we are waiting for that day, the scholarly community is invited to inquire about the Collection. Although it is, and hopefully will remain, non-circulating, nevertheless the printed catalogue is in place in the card room. It lists the holdings by author, title, and by journals and offprints. There is also a survey of the Collection grouped by several important subject areas. The books may be examined in the Rare Book Room at the normal times. The Gest Library staff (c/o Chinese Bibliographer, Gest Library, Princeton University, Princeton, N.J. 08544) will be glad to perform additional searches and proffer a readout of the results, provided there is no time constriction and the project not overly large.

NOTES

1. For a short biography of Hellmut Wilhelm, see F.W. Mote's "Hellmut Wilhelm: a biographical note," *Monumenta Serica*, 29 (1970-71), pp. iii-vi.
2. One of these was *Die Wandlung*, beginning as lectures to the European community trapped in Peking by the Japanese and eager to engage in cultural study. This later was published in English as *Change: Eight Lectures on the I Ching*, Harper & Row, 1960, and became one of the best introductions to the *Changes* available in the West.
3. See Mote, *op. cit.*