

CHANGE AND PROGRESS IN UNDERSTANDING
CHINESE RELIGION*

(Review article)

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In the West, and especially in North America, the 1960s, the decade in which I myself reached university, witnessed the start of a remarkable upsurge of interest in the religions and philosophies of the East. The influence of this unforeseen extension of religious pluralism upon the religious life of the United States has been explored to some extent already by Harvey Cox¹, but its wider effects may be traced much further than the world of the exotic imported cults themselves. In academic circles, where the enthusiasms of youth confront the requirements of scholarship, a somewhat more pallid reflection of the change in society at large may be seen in the expansion since that decade of the teaching of Eastern thought and Eastern religion. In its turn, one effect of this expansion has been the establishment of the study of Chinese religion as a recognized area of religious studies and of sinology. This development may be measured by a number of indicators: the creation of a Society for the Study of Chinese Religions, which “is formally related to the Association of Asian Studies as an “Affiliated Group”, and constitutes the “Chinese Religions Group” of the American Academy of Religion”²; the production of bibliographies of past scholarship³; the appearance of review articles surveying new developments⁴; and the translation into English from other European languages of important writings in the field dating from the first half of the century.

* Apropos of: Richard Wilhelm (tr. Irene Eber), *Lectures on the I Ching, Constancy and Change* (Bollingen Series XIX:2, Princeton University Press, 1979), xxiii + 187 pp., \$9.75, and Iulian Konstantinovich Shchutskii (tr. William L. Macdonald and Tsuyoshi Hasegawa with Hellmut Wilhelm), *Researches on the I Ching* (Bollingen Series LXII:2, Princeton University Press, 1979), lxvi + 257 pp., \$12.50.

The origins of this last practice may be taken back to as early as 1951, when the first English edition of Max Weber, *The Religion of China*, translated and edited by Hans H. Gerth, was published by the Free Press in Glencoe, Illinois. But despite the addition of a thirty-one page introduction by C. K. Yang to the 1964 edition, bringing it closer in format to the translations now appearing, this volume may perhaps best be seen as marking a stage in the development of sociology rather than of the study of Chinese religion as such. Both sociological and sinological concerns are prominent in Maurice Freedman's 1975 translation of Marcel Granet's early work on Chinese religion⁵. Here, however, Freedman's statement that the "decision to undertake the translation was made as a result of a few week's work in Paris towards the end of 1972 when I was collecting material upon Granet in connexion with a study of the Western perception of Chinese religion"⁶, and some more extended remarks in an earlier publication which attempted to survey the contributions of pioneering figures like Granet and de Groot⁷, show that a close relationship existed for Freedman between the progress of his own thinking about China and the translation of a book already half a century old. Thus his volume differs markedly from earlier translations of books by Granet produced during his lifetime, where no attempt was made to add introductory material commenting on the original⁸. Implicit in Freedman's introductory essay (and quite explicit in his earlier paper) is a desire to take stock, to place Granet in the context of his own times so as better to be able to understand the distance between his perceptions and contemporary Western thinking on Chinese religion.

Frank Kierman Jr.'s translation of the writings of Henri Maspero on Taoism and Chinese religion, for which I was asked to provide an introduction, was prompted by a more immediate need: that of presenting to college students not at home in the French language a classic study frequently cited in later scholarship⁹. This work formed a natural sequel to Kierman's earlier translation of Maspero's writings on early China, which contains a substantial introduction by D. C. Twitchett¹⁰. Though not the product of quite the same process of reexamination that inspired Freedman's work, Twitchett's introduction also characterizes Maspero as a man of his times and provides a clear and useful outline of the changes that

have taken place in our understanding of early China since those times. The introduction to Kierman's translation of Maspero's writings on Taoism accordingly attempts a similar survey of developments in Taoist studies.

Richard Wilhelm died in 1930, long before Granet and Maspero. In 1951 it was possible for C. G. Jung and Cary F. Baynes to write the "Foreword" and the "Translator's Note" respectively to the latter's translation of Wilhelm's German rendering of the *I Ching* without making any reference to differences between Wilhelm's understanding of the *I Ching* and interpretations current at the time of publication¹¹. Irene Eber, however, supplies with her translation of some essays on the *I Ching* by Wilhelm dating from the late 1920s an introduction of fifteen pages much more like those prefacing the Granet and Maspero volumes; one notes also the explanation in the "Translator's Preface" (p. vii) that the translation was first undertaken for the benefit of fellow graduate students who did not know German well. The introduction itself contains, after some preliminary remarks, a brief but informative sketch of Wilhelm's life, noting especially the influence upon him of Lao Nai-hsüan and C. G. Jung. His position on the relationship between Chinese and Western culture, a sort of affirmation of pluralism coupled with a rejection of cosmopolitanism, is then compared with that of Joseph R. Levenson (1920-1969). Although the comparison is not inappropriate, the differences between the two men are also worth observing. Levenson, writing out of a very different background and set of circumstances, has much less of the self-assured tone of Wilhelm, and one wonders whether he would have expressed himself entirely happy with the results of Wilhelm's elevation of the *I Ching* to the status of a world classic¹².

But a more serious problem emerges when Eber reaches her account of scholarship on the *I Ching* since Wilhelm's time. For in the first paragraph of this outline (p. xxi) we read "Among recent archaeological finds, hitherto unknown portions of *I Ching* materials have come to light". These materials, recovered from a tomb of the second century B.C. at Ma-wang-tui, near Ch'ang-sha, are of such importance that we would appear to be trembling on the brink of a complete revolution in our understanding of how the present text of the classic came into being¹³. A full edition and study of the *I Ching*

finds has not yet appeared, but when this does happen it will be just one part of a process of reassessing early China as a result of a startling series of recent archaeological discoveries, many of which serve to provide a much broader context in which to see the emergence of the *I Ching* as a classic than has hitherto been possible¹⁴. Eber's remark (p. xxii) that "Western scholarship on the *I Ching* has not been plentiful" no longer holds good, now that the open-minded young people of a decade ago have become the struggling junior academics of today. For example after the appearance of her translation the journal *Philosophy East and West* published an article on the *I Ching* in each of its quarterly issues from October, 1979, to October, 1980, except for the third quarter of 1980, in which however such an article did appear in the *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*¹⁵. Yet in so far as any of these articles relate to the early history of the *I Ching* they are all liable to be instantly vitiated by the publication of the results of research into these new sources.

But of course many of them do not concern themselves with history, and in a sense Wilhelm was as little concerned with history as it is possible to be. As Eber makes admirably clear, he was much more interested in the living tradition of the *I Ching*, which he saw as just as important to the West as to China. His meditations on its meaning, though exemplifying the spirit of the late traditional Chinese approach to the text, are not part of an attempt to understand Chinese thinking, but rather an attempt to participate in such thinking, not necessarily with a direct reference to China at all. It follows that if there have been advances in this direction since Wilhelm's day they have nothing to do with the study of Chinese religion¹⁶. Since Eber does not make this consequence explicit, but rounds off her introduction with a paragraph apiece on revisionist Chinese scholarship of the twenties and thirties, Hellmut Wilhelm and C. G. Jung, plus a quotation from the poet T'ao Yüan-ming, the difference in approach between this volume of translation and those already discussed above is somewhat obscured by the similarity in format. Of course Eber's work has, and will have, its own uses, not only to those of the same mind as Richard Wilhelm, but also to anyone interested in the history of sinology. But what does need to be stressed is that though at first glance this book would ap-

pear to provide material for taking stock of our progress in understanding Chinese religion by measuring our perception against his, in fact Wilhelm was engaged in an exercise which makes such comparison impossible.

A more convenient base-line to take might be the work of Iulian K. Shchutskii (1897-1937), who awards full marks to Wilhelm (p. 224) for his “interpretative translation from the point of view of the present oral tradition”, but otherwise quotes with approval Alfred Forke’s remark that Wilhelm “lets go too freely the rein of his fantasy” (p. 45). Though Shchutskii’s writings show him to have something of a free spirit himself—as it turned out, far too free a spirit to be allowed to remain alive in Stalinist Russia—his aims and methods were very much the same as the majority of academic students of Chinese religion then and now. His work on the *I Ching*, as translated into English, does nonetheless constitute something of an anomaly. The original was completed in 1935, but circumstances did not permit its publication in Russia until 1960. Thus despite a lengthy and sympathetic review by Paul Demiéville, published in 1963¹⁷, it can hardly be said to have been regarded in its day as a recognized milestone in early twentieth century sinology. Partly as a result of this slow progress to recognition the names of no less than half a dozen other scholars appear together with Shchutskii’s on this volume. Not only has the process of translation involved the work of three professors; the final result is preceded by prefatory material from three separate hands: an “Introduction to the English Edition” (pp. vii-xlvi) by Gerald W. Swanson, an “Introduction to the Russian Edition” (pp. xlix-lxiv) by N. I. Konrad and a “Biographical Sketch” (pp. lxv-lxvi) by N. A. Petrov. Shchutskii’s text itself, together with bibliography and index, does not amount to four times this length. But there is little duplication of effort between these introductions; for example both Swanson and Konrad provide material to supplement Petrov’s sketch, but the former is naturally more frank concerning the brutal and tragic circumstances of Shchutskii’s death.

Konrad is also distinctly summary in dealing with research in the *I Ching* between Shchutskii’s time and his own: he simply adds to Shchutskii’s bibliography some forty or so references, minus any comment. Swanson is much more conscientious, mentioning less

than a dozen of the most useful studies, but together with his own assessment of their value. His "Appraisal of Shchutskii's work" (pp. x-xxxvi) also brings to bear later (and earlier) scholarship wherever he feels that it has anything of significance to add to Shchutskii's conclusions. He does not, however, say anything about the discovery at Ma-wang-tui or its implications. For both Swanson and Konrad are as much exercised to explain Shchutskii's neglect of a great deal of well-known earlier scholarship on the *I Ching* as to update his work. This neglect does not extend to Western scholarship—Shchutskii has a pleasantly wicked survey of the shortcomings of his predecessors in his first chapter—but rather applies to the majority of the most highly regarded works on the *I Ching* written during the Ch'ing dynasty (1644-1911). Konrad finds a sound political reason for this, and concurs in Shchutskii's omission; Swanson, unconvinced in any case that Konrad has divined Shchutskii's motives correctly, rectifies it by including a survey of the most eminent Ch'ing *I Ching* scholars and their publications. Swanson himself concludes (p. xlii) that Shchutskii narrowed the scope of his selection of Ch'ing *I Ching* studies so as to treat only scholarship congenial to his criticisms of the accepted attribution of the text to Confucius¹⁸.

Though this would seem true enough, one can entirely sympathise with Shchutskii. He was, in fact, well aware (as p. 196 makes clear) that the *Ssu-k'u ch'uan-shu tsung-mu*, a standard bibliography of earlier Chinese literature compiled in the late eighteenth century, already listed "about five hundred works devoted in one way or another to the *Book of Changes*", and that even this number excluded works written by Taoists and by scholars in Japan. Faced with the prospect of having to trudge through this (for the most part) distinctly arid terrain, Shchutskii seems to have decided instead to triangulate from a limited number of salient points, mostly on the periphery of his chosen territory¹⁹. For the purposes of his own translation in particular he explicitly states (p. 225) that he bases his understanding on the commentaries of Wang Pi (226-249), the Japanese Itō Tōgai (1670-1736), and the Buddhist referred to by him as "Wan I (1598-1654)".

Now these choices are noted by both Swanson and Konrad (pp. xxxi, lviii). The latter construes them as a selection of one Taoist,

one Confucian and one Buddhist, and so is obliged to devote a couple of pages to advancing possible reasons for the choice of a Japanese Confucian rather than a recognized Chinese figure. But if I have guessed Shchutskii's reactions to the superabundance of traditional *I Ching* studies correctly, he may rather have been unconsciously or consciously looking, *inter alia*, for commentators on the edge of that tradition. Wang Pi, it must be said, certainly became central to the tradition as it developed, but in his time, as initiator of the philosophical approach to understanding the *I Ching*, he marked a very sharp break with a line of commentators stretching back through the Han dynasty to the period when the text was first accepted as a classic²⁰. And Itō Tōgai, whose obvious appeal to Shchutskii was that he was the first commentator not to treat the various layers of the text as a monolithic unity, was undoubtedly a Confucian, but one so far removed both physically and mentally from Chinese preconceptions as to be almost an outside critic. Finally "Wan I", the first commentator to attempt a translation not simply into another language but into the terminology of another system of thought, adopts such an unorthodox approach to the text that one fears he may have actually led Shchutskii (who was certainly deluded as to the correct pronunciation of his name) rather far astray.

For neither Konrad nor Swanson appear to have pinned down the identity of this most mysterious member of Shchutskii's trinity. Swanson's ignorance is mildly surprising, since "Wan I" had not escaped the indefatigable erudition of Demiéville, in whose review he stands exposed as none other than the great Buddhist master Ou-i Chih-hsü (1599-1655)²¹. Even Demiéville seems not to have consulted any actual copy of Chih-hsü's work, the *Chou-i ch'an-chieh*²², since he is content to repeat the conflicting bibliographical information on it found in reference works. Though a complete account of the editions of the *Chou-i ch'an-chieh* would be out of place here, it is worth noting that it was completed in two stages (in 1641 and 1645)²³, that it was included in the supplement to the seventeenth-century "Chia-hsing" (or "Ching-shan") edition of the Buddhist canon, and that it is available as part of a series of photolithographic reproductions of that canon²⁴. Moreover, a reading of the *Chou-i ch'an-chieh* does not by any means justify

Shchutskii's claim (p. 225) that "Buddhist terminology, in view of its great precision and mastery within European Buddhological literature and Japanese Buddhological lexicography, makes possible an understanding of Wan I's commentary without allowing the slightest ambiguity".

For example, to judge by the translation of a portion of Chih-hsü's remarks on pp. 205-6, Shchutskii has misconstrued references in his text to the "two vehicles" as meaning "Hinayana and Mahayana". This is one possible value of the term, but here the context shows that it indicates the vehicles of the *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha*, and so stands for the less spiritually advanced forms of Buddhism taken as a whole. But the ambiguities in the text are not simply confined to one or two points of terminology; rather, they permeate the work from beginning to end. Chih-hsü, despite his title, does not simply "translate" the *I Ching* into the terminology of Ch'an (Zen)—a task which would scarcely have been possible in terms of Ch'an as it had been understood in earlier times in China. For in his attitude towards Buddhist doctrine he was a thoroughgoing syncretist, espousing a variety of Ch'an less concerned with the paradoxes of the great Chinese patriarchs and easier to reconcile with the doctrines of other schools. Hence in his commentary we find not one consistent scheme of interpretation linking the *I Ching* with a particular system of Buddhist thought but a confusing mixture of standard Buddhist terminology with technical terms drawn from T'ien-t'ai, Hua-yen or other sources peculiar to specific Chinese schools of Buddhism.

Furthermore his work is not even consistently Buddhist: Shchutskii is closer to the mark on p. 198, when he describes him as having produced "a synthesis of the Sung school and Buddhism", and on p. 223, when he speaks of him having come "to recognize the *Book of Changes* as a philosophical text, which in the skilful hands of the adept could play a role in the introduction to Buddhist philosophy". Even this last sentence is not entirely correct: Chih-hsü does speak in his preface of aiming to lead Confucians to understand Ch'an, but equally declares that he is using Ch'an to approach Confucianism²⁶. He is not simply using a Confucian text as a primer for illustrating Ch'an ideas; rather he sees the *I Ching* as a manifestation of exactly the same thing as Buddhism, though a

manifestation of an inferior sort²⁷. He is not simply “writing in the terms and expressions of Buddhist philosophy” but rather finding Buddhist as well as Confucian meanings to the text itself, like a Christian reading Vergil’s poetry as both a pagan document and an adumbration of the gospel of his own religion. For these reasons I find it impossible to share “a confidence in the objective correctness of the interpretation” which Shchutskii himself claims (p. 225) that he arrived at through Chih-hsü’s commentary.

I do so with regret. One can readily understand the appeal that the idiosyncratic and wide-ranging Chih-hsü had to a free spirit like Shchutskii, and the very least that a reader will bring away from this book is a deep respect for the boldness and imagination of Shchutskii’s attempts to solve the problems he faced. But the failures of our predecessors present a picture just as instructive as their successes, and much more sobering. Clearly Shchutskii was forced to bite off much more than he could chew, though he could hardly have done otherwise, as a pioneering scholar making a serious attempt to struggle with a whole tradition of Far Eastern scholarship almost entirely ignored by the few Westerners to have preceded him in his *I Ching* studies. Still, he produced extraordinarily good results, and one wonders whether all the changes since his time may really be counted as progress.

For though I have found it convenient to consider his work in conjunction with a number of translations sharing a similar format, it must be conceded that grouping them together as studies of Chinese religion is in some ways an arbitrary expedient. Few of the translators and writers of introductions involved would probably claim to be “experts on Chinese religion”, but rather sociologists, historians or even philosophers, whilst men of Shchutskii’s generation at any rate would not have been unhappy with the yet broader designation of sinologist. Ironically, however, the increased openness towards Chinese religion of recent years has been accompanied by, and even accelerated, an increase in specialization consequent upon the establishment of a newly recognized division of academic territory. This narrowing of focus inevitably involves a tendency to constrict the range of effort required of us if we are in any sense to understand the totality of Chinese civilization. Translations of outdated scholarship can only have a limited use, and if introduced

without warning into undergraduate reading lists they may be worse than useless, serving only to perpetuate misinformation and misconceptions. But if they can bring to us echoes of a less specialized age, in which scholars were prepared to confront their problems whole, even if they could not solve them, they will have been well worth while.

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¹ Harvey Cox, *Turning East*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1977.

² See the *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Chinese Religions* 6 (Fall, 1978), p. ii.

³ For a bibliography devoted to Chinese religion as a whole, see Laurence G. Thompson, *Studies of Chinese Religion: A Comprehensive and Classified Bibliography of Publications in English, French and German through 1970*, Dickenson, Encino, 1976. More specialized bibliographies would include Alvin P. Cohen, "A Bibliography of Writings Contributory to the Study of Chinese Folk Religion", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 43.2 (June, 1975), pp. 238-263, and the bibliographies on Taoism listed in the introduction to Kierman's translation of Maspero on Taoism (discussed below), though this overlooks the marginally relevant Jae-ryong Shim, "Selected Bibliography of Philosophical Taoism", *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 7.4 (December, 1980), pp. 341-356.

⁴ These would include David Yu, "Present-day Taoist Studies", *Religious Studies Review* 3.4 (October, 1977), pp. 220-239; Michel Strickmann, "History, Anthropology and Chinese Religion", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 40.1 (1980), pp. 201-248; and T. H. Barrett, "Chinese Sectarian Religion", *Modern Asian Studies* 12.2 (April, 1978), pp. 333-352: a further review entitled "The Study of Chinese Eschatology" will appear in *Modern Asian Studies* in 1983.

⁵ M. Granet, tr. M. Freedman; *The Religion of the Chinese People*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1975.

⁶ Granet, tr. Freedman, *The Religion of the Chinese People*, p. vii.

⁷ M. Freedman, "On the Sociological Study of Chinese Religion", in Arthur P. Wolf, ed., *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society* (Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 19-41.

⁸ I have in mind M. Granet, tr. E. D. Edwards, *Festivals and Songs of Ancient China*, Routledge, London, 1932, and M. Granet, tr. K. E. Innes and M. Brailsford, *Chinese Civilization*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1930.

⁹ Henri Maspero, tr. Frank A. Kierman, Jr., *Taoism and Chinese Religion*, The University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1981.

¹⁰ Henri Maspero, tr. Frank A. Kierman, Jr., *China in Antiquity*, The University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1978.

¹¹ Richard Wilhelm, tr. Cary F. Baynes, *The I CHING or Book of Changes*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1951.

¹² Eber quotes a single (though very revealing) paper by Levenson; a much fuller appreciation of his position may be gained from Maurice Meisner and

Rhoads Murphey, eds., *The Mozartian Historian*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1976.

¹³ Eber refers the reader to the first Chinese reports of this discovery. These are conveniently summarized in English on pp. 117-118 of Michael A. N. Loewe, "Manuscripts found recently in China", *T'oung Pao* 63.2-3 (1978), pp. 93-136.

¹⁴ On this transformation of our understanding of early China, see especially D. C. Twitchett's introduction to *China in Antiquity*.

¹⁵ The issues concerned are in the twenty-ninth and thirtieth volumes of *Philosophy East and West* and in the seventh volume of the *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*.

¹⁶ One might exclude the work of Richard Wilhelm's son, Hellmut Wilhelm, whose explications of the *I Ching*, though basically following in the footsteps of his father, are informed by an enviable familiarity with early Chinese literature. See, for example, the essays collected in his *Heaven, Earth and Man in the Book of Changes*, University of Washington Press, Seattle and London, 1977.

¹⁷ In *T'oung Pao* 50 (1963), pp. 266-278.

¹⁸ Both Shchutskii and Swanson somehow overlook the important Ch'ing scholar Ts'ui Shu (1740-1816). Ts'ui's criticisms of accepted notions concerning the *I Ching* are, however, touched upon in a convenient Japanese survey of *I Ching* studies: see Honda Wataru, *Eki gaku* (Heirakuji shoten, Kyoto, 1960), pp. 15, 69.

¹⁹ Any reader who feels called to correct Shchutskii in this matter might care to start by reading the three hundred and sixty-two titles on the *I Ching* assembled by Professor Yen Ling-feng and published as the *I Ching Chi-ch'eng* by Ch'eng-wen Publishing Co., Ltd., in Taipei in 1976.

²⁰ See Shchutskii, pp. 63, 209, and for the political context of Wang Pi's novel development of *I Ching* studies the remarks of Richard B. Mather on pp. 163-165 of his essay "The Controversy over Conformity and Naturalness During the Six Dynasties", *History of Religions* 9.2 and 3 (November 1969/February 1970), pp. 160-180.

²¹ *T'oung Pao* 50, p. 271, n. 2.

²² Miswritten by Shchutskii on p. 223 as *Chou-i t'an-chieh*; this is unfortunately not the only such error to be found in the volume.

²³ Cf. Chang Sheng-yen, *Min-matsu Chūgoku Bukkyō no kenkyū* (Sankibō, Tokyo, 1975), pp. 172, 174, 294, 295, 298.

²⁴ Hsiu-ting Chung-hua ta-tsang-ching hui, editors and publishers, *Chung-hua ta-tsang-ching*, series two, volume 40 (Taipei, 1968), pp. 32299-32464. Also readily available is the edition of this work produced in 1915 by the famous Chin-ling Scriptural Press, which has been reproduced in Taiwan both in Yen Ling-feng's series mentioned above (n. 19) and subsequently in separate reissues of 1978 and 1979.

²⁵ *Chou-i ch'an-chieh* 1.2b-3b, pp. 32301-2 in the *Chung-hua ta-tsang-ching* edition.

²⁶ *Chou-i ch'an-chieh*, preface, p. 2b, p. 32299.

²⁷ For the basis of Chih-hsü's syncretistic views, see Chang, *Min-matsu Chūgoku Bukkyō*, pp. 33-34, 416-417.