Oral History Project
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Interviewer:
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Q: As a Sinologist, how would you interpret “guanxi (關係)” and how would you introduce this concept to the Western World?

L: That is an interesting question. On the one hand you have a constant distrust in a part of the institutions. If you look at the evolution of political philosophy so to speak in China, it’s always about the virtue of the ruler, right? It’s always about “dao de (道德) and de (德),” right? And much less about the institutions. Anything that controls them is also closely connected to moral behavior as a matter of fact. Like Mengzi, who had persuaded the ruler to adapt moral behavior. This is the warm side and the cold side is institution. There has not been any institution (in the Western meaning) in the history of China until the 20th century. All the ministries, they had some kind of prescriptions for how to proceed, but that was changeable. So the institutional part of this is a rather weak part and, of course, there is a lot of distrust in this, especially in ordinary people (老百姓). Even when it comes to divination “guan (官),” the “official” always represents the bad side. It’s a bad character because they are getting involved with trials, processes and whatsoever. “Guanxi” in that view is a strong tool to replace the weak institutions. This is not to say the West is a system run without guanxi. Everything in the human world is based on relationship, even in the banking world or the political world. But still in the Western society we don’t necessarily need a moral ruler; a ruler who speaks of moral behavior, because we have the institutions and everyone can appeal to the institutions. Elections or the control by parliament for instance, which is an old thing in the West. You have this in the Empire of Rome, the Agora in the Forum Romanum, the Agora of the Greek. That’s all based on institutional control. So the factor for guanxi being so strong in China is maybe due to the fact that the institutions are so weak.

Q: Does your experiences in China have any impact on your idea about ‘relationship’? How would you evaluate the differences between the Chinese style of guanxi and the Western idea of relation?

L: It depends on what you really want, if you desire something like scholarly cooperation, cooperation between scholars, relationship or guanxi is always the case. You always need a kind of warm relationship rather than a cold one. I don’t think the trust in institutions could replace the factor (of guanxi). The trust in institutions is an important factor of course. When it comes to the sphere of policy making, of course you need institutional cooperation. In that case, institutions are even more important than the people in the institutions. My study in Sinology does have influence on this subject even that I wasn’t really aware of it. But studying political philosophy and the evolution of it makes me sure it’s all about virtue. But in the long run, I think, the focus on guanxi cannot help China to fit in the 21st Century in which everything is based on institutions. China has been trying to change for sure, otherwise it couldn’t survive. There have been some scholarly works
focusing on this topic. A splendid work was written thirty years ago by Immanuel Hsü, which was
titled “China’s Entrance into the Family of Nations.” This is a very good book. Hsü describes a kind of
new international system which no longer beholds tribute system of China. There are still problems
in China’s dealing with the European Union. China used to deal with countries or states in a bilateral
way. Yet the European Union is a complex and an association of governments of states. This special
character of the European Union has formed challenge to China. China has to change; this world is
perhaps still governed by virtue, but, more importantly, also by institutions. There is no longer a
world simply ruled by either the cold side or the warm side.

Q: Now let us go back to the early period of your intellectual development. When you started to
study China, there must have been many topics triggered the research interest of Western academia.
You have chosen to study “Chinese interpretation of dreams,” which should be a topic relatively
periphery. Why?

L: Yes. This is a very good question in fact. All my research topics so far, starting with the topic of
“dreams”, then going on with the organization of knowledge in the Song period and later on the
encounter between Western knowledge and Late Imperial China and the organization of knowledge
once again. All these had sort of ... they directly spoke to me as a person. I wanted to discover
something that you know ... I told you I of course are absolutely convinced that institutions are
valuable are needed but personally I am more Chinese, I am not so much interested in the problem.
At that time, that was also closely connected to my personal history. I was interested in
psychoanalysis and I was interested in the western law so to speak, in the western history of dream
interpretation. And of course in divination (占卜) in general. And that is of course the basis. Now I
return to the sources and the project is vitally, more or less, devoted into the question of
prognostication, prediction. And I do think there are differences, cultural differences of how to
predict future and how to approach the future. Now I think it’s periphery but at the same time it’s
perhaps (I didn’t know this at that time) but it’s something where you can get closer to a Chinese,
traditional Chinese understanding of the human mind in the relationship between the presence and
the future, of men’s destiny, fate, you see what I mean. It was, at that time, it was absolutely
periphery. But later on, a couple of years later, even Chinese scholars in Mainland China started to
study that. Of course without my influence, I mean they didn’t even know about my existence.

Q: Why did you begin to study dreams? Is there like a so called “current study” at that time that looks
on dream?

L: Not for China, definitely not. There was of course some kind of ... I would say, since Freud and his
followers the Western society is a deeply psychoanalytic society, we use words like ‘complex’ or
‘depression’ as very general terms because everyone used it. Where else if you look for words in
Chinese denoting complex with...you might see something like 情结, which is a highly specialized
term, but they would not be used in daily life. We are perhaps the more psychoanalytic oriented
society, which China was not at that time. It slowly starts now, we have all the translations now,
there’s a great market, psychology. My idea for the thesis, in general, was to find a different angle to
approach, let me say, it would be preposterous to say, the Chinese mind. Getting closer to the
Chinese psyche, the Chinese soul speak it is preposterous I know. But you see what I mean.

Q: I notice that when you started to write your habilitation, you changed to another topic. Why is
that?
L: I mean, you now, let me say, as I told you: my first encounter with living Chinese culture so to speak was in Taiwan and then right afterwards in Mainland China. And I was asking myself about my personal experience concerning that encounter, and my personal encounters. And then I was looking for a precedence, early things in history that might possibly have shaped China-Western encounters. That is also, that implies that you have to look for the prejudices you inherit. I was perhaps shaped by some, well certainly was, by some judgments about Chinese culture that were deeply, without even being conscious of them, they were deeply sort of implanted in my own thinking. I had of course read Hegel and Heidegger, all these judgments, French of course, and their judgment on so called Chinese rationality, Chinese government, Chinese customs and so on. Looking for that, researching this history was also a cornerstone for me, a milestone to come to grip with my own judgments and prejudices, once again, very closely connected to my own personal experience. Chinese Studies has also been a part of myself, I don’t identify with Chinese culture but I identify with research on it. So the Jesuits was of course very instrumental for shaping important points of the image that the West had of China, until now. That was important. The Jesuit shaped also the enlightenment view of China. Voltaire’s thinking of China couldn’t be conceived of without the Jesuits, without their informants. No everything since enlightenment there had been one current, they have changed into the 19\textsuperscript{th} century of course, later on I moved to the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the other encounter, to have a closer look into more factors that might have contributed to my judgments and prejudices.

Q: Being a scholar, you are not trained by the religious way. How do you evaluate your work as adopting different approaches from those priests?

L: I am not a missionary, I mean I don’t want to persuade anyone of a, let me say, of a certain religion or religious behavior. So the ultimate goal is more to understand than to transform. I have, in fact, when it comes to the study of the transformation of organization of knowledge in late imperial china, when I arrived first in Mainland China in 1995 and I tried to persuade some historians to have a closer look together with me. They were Chinese historians. This was regarded in 1995, I clearly remember, that was regarded as watching the National Shame, and they even had a Dictionary of National Shame (Guochi Zidian 國恥字典). Mainland China was not yet prepared to that. Whereas now you have chairs for that, you have study centers for that. That is not entirely my merit, I know that. But I contributed to that. So to some extent I worked as missionary, without willing.

Q: So, you already discussed the now very popular topic of National Humiliation with the Chinese historians at that time?

L: Yes then inviting them here, not to Erlangen, I was still at Göttingen and that time, starting a research project on vocabulary, which you can find online now, we have 127,000 entries of new words, neologies, 新语. And we wrote two books about that issue, new terms for new ideas, new meanings. That was most unusual on that time, when I arrived to china, with that project to China and tried to find new collaborators, people who really would work with me.

Q: I think it is still popular.

L: Certainly. And it was not, I can tell you.

Q: Could you provide more details of this part of your work?
L: Once again, I am just retracing the origins of the history of the first Sino-Western encounter. Of course in the 19th century it was science basically, democracy, things like that, to the Protestant church, some missionaries who tried to convert China to a so-called Christian rationality which is absurd by the way because Christianity is not rational. You see what I mean. No no, I am Christian, but I am deeply convinced that in order to believe you have to believe in absurdity. That is my personal attitude. Anyhow, this is really becoming a popular research topic. The birth of new disciplines for instance, the whole organization of knowledge had been changed in Later Imperial China, the 同文館. And then gradually the introduction of new disciplines, the old disciplines disappeared, there is no more 经学, no more... you see what I mean?

Q: It has become periphery now.

F: Very. This is always seen to the eyes or the glasses of the new disciplines in fact. If you say Confucius was a philosopher you need to have some idea of philosophy which is western philosophy basically. Then, only then you can say Confucius was a philosopher, he was instrumental for Chinese education or western terms. Basically he is a 圣人. That is absolutely utile for 经学, this is good philosophy, they have done some good things. But once again, I investigate into these roots of that encounter.

Q: I read your CV and noticed that you actually went to quite a few places to research, to work as a scholar. How did it begin? You went first for example to Paris and then Geneva. How did that experience shape your idea and research orientation?

L: That came later, first France in fact and then Geneva, which is a French speaking place. This is interesting because the French or France or French speaking places, including Geneva, is perhaps the only European country of the European language community you can say where China has a sort of systematic place in the intellectual universe. If you look at any bookstore in any French speaking city for instance you will find the large bookshops kindly devoted to China, translations of novels, translations of so called philosophy, works on politics, and all in French. Whereas, if you go to the same bookstore or comparable bookstores in Germany or Holland, you won’t find comparable things. And they still write in French! And they have an audience for that, a general audience which is interested. So that is no new thing about the French speaking scholarly community, they just continue to write, until now the very day, in French and only French speaking people would understand. That is an audience, sufficiently large, large enough as it seems. I can just give you an example. This is one of the most high-browsed so to speak publishers. What they do is a series of bi-language editions, this is 王充論衡 with an introduction, a translation, with notes, very well done. You see, this is a whole series. This is almost impossible, I think in any other country in the West, perhaps in the United States, in the English speaking world, but at Germany...

Q: You mean that the fact people have begun to study this seems to be very early to you?

L: They have a better consciousness of themselves [laughs] and they had of course their colonies in the Far East. No wonder they are more interested, I mean, the general audience is more interested in things the Chinese do... if I started a series like this, I don’t think it would sell, in German. No, no, I’m not speaking about the Anglo-Saxon world, there’s a market; they have a large community of course

Q: So, the scholarship in Europe is sort of relating to the history of colonialism?
L: I don’t think so

Q: This is interesting. I remember Germany is actually the European great power who participated in the colonization relatively late.

L: They were latecomers.

Q: So this also shaped the German scholars’ interests in China?

L: I think so, I don’t know to what extent, of course. Of course, Germans had some missionaries in China, people like Richard Wilhelm for instance, they are vital for German understanding of China. But they were more philosophers, they had a worldview. China for them was an ideal country so to speak, far away, a mystery, you know. That’s perhaps a bit different. The thing is, if you ask about my experience in French speaking colonial communities, those people had a more moral self-conscious approach.

Q: As a German scholar you must perceive a different idea of China Studies. How did that help you to communicate with French scholars? As you have always had had a special perspective due to the different backgrounds.

L: Yes very special... I think what the Germans, in general, not only vis-à-vis the French, have to offer is a history of criticism of ideology. Erich Voegelin for example, of political studies then, it is a German tradition so to speak. Even vis-à-vis the Anglo-Saxon world, especially the American scholars, I ensure that... This related much more to Mainland China and their ideology, for example, perceiving the replacement of the communist ideology by the nationalist ideology, looking really at the roots at.... This is something that perhaps someone with a German background could approach with a more... in a more distinct way.

Q: Could you talk about the French scholars who had had influence on your knowledge development when you were in the French speaking world?

L: Yes there are many, I studied with, one year, with Jaques Gernet. He was at that time considered the pope of western, no, the European pope of sinology.

Q: Really, the pope?

L: Yes, really. He has just celebrated his 90th birthday, he is still in Paris. He wrote one of the most influential book, even translated into English, it was “The Chinese World”, which is a historical introduction. I had the opportunity when I had my postdoc, I went to Paris to study with him. He was a good teacher, a good scholar. Jaques Gernet was important. Others were too. At that time people in France were really interested in the history of science in China. So I got a lot of inspiration from historical science, and I still have some contact with them.

Q: So such development had not yet started in Germany?

L: Well, it took some time. It was only... I mean... the French discovered so to speak, they had the opinion that I was talented... it was in fact the French who recommended me, recommended me back to Germany, to German universities. Very interesting... I had to go abroad to easing 回家。Without the French I do not know what my destiny, my fate would have been. This was very important.
Q: There must be some differences between Paris and Geneva, right?

L: Yes. Paris is Paris, the center of the French speaking world... whereas Geneva is comparatively marginal. But it also had its own importance. In Switzerland there’s is no centralism, of course in France there is a lot of centralism. It is a small but independent state. Very interesting. I like it.

Q: Could you talk about your experience in Berlin?

L: Yes. Berlin has one of the most important collections of Chinese material in general, in Europe. There’s a library, the Prussian state library. But there are also small collections. There’s a lot of ethnographic material, arts, music, and many museums. But in fact, my most active period in Berlin was at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Berlin. It was like a place of Paradise. Like the Princeton Institute for Advanced Studies. I mean, I taught there because you have to have a teaching record, you know. So I taught at the Free University. But the main... the center of my life was of course the Institute of Advanced Studies in Berlin. I made acquaintances with a lot of interesting people there, not only in Chinese Studies, more in other fields, history of the Orient, or Greek philosophy, ancient Greek philosophy, very inspiring.

Q: There have been some debates regarding the comparison and differences between the ancient Greek philosophy and the traditional Chinese philosophy. What is your opinion about this topic?

L: Different routes. Yes, definitely. But it depends on the topic you want to compare. You know, I mean, if you have this kind of bird’s eye-view-perspective, then of course it could be problematic to compare. But if you have certain topics to address, why not? Let me say for instance, you could ask which role institutions played in Greek thought and of course which role they played in traditional Chinese political philosophy. And then you could come to certain confusions of course. But they are always restrictive, you never know. That is something I really would sort of prohibit. To say: Chinese are like that, in these general things, that makes you be a prisoner of your civilization, of your culture. This is one of my deep convictions. We are not prisoner of our culture, we can go transgress it, we can go beyond. But Hegel was a prisoner of his culture. I would say of course we are a product, we have a background, but I believe in the kind of freedom to go beyond the limit of our education and even to change. China has changed for instance, so has Germany for instance after the Napoleon Wars. Cultures are constantly changing organisms. So you are not a prisoner.

Q: I read from your CV that you had been in Fudan University right?

L: In 2005. For three months a bit more than three months I say. As a visiting professor

Q: That shouldn’t be your second trip to China since finishing your dissertation, right?

L: No, definitely not, it had already been twenty years behind me. I had been in Fudan. But I had always been there for conferences, private sort of scholarly stays. That was the first time Fudan invited me to act as a visiting professor. At that time yes, because they were the people that who were really the first to be interested in my research project. It is really clear, it is evident, that this encounter between Western science and traditional Chinese scholarship, the battlefield was in Shanghai of course not in Beijing. Much more in Shanghai of course. And there were people like the present director, the vize director of the Academy of Social Sciences, Xiong Yuezhi (熊月之), you met him, isn’t he a nice man. And he discovered that Shanghai’s history is inconceivable without the West in fact. ... Even modernity took place in Shanghai, Lu Xun lived In the French concession. The
Shenbao was of course published in Shanghai. The Western impact was of course larger. Shanghai’s identity is much more easily to be defined, as being influenced by the West. So of course Shanghai was the place, at that time. It’s not that I am in favor of Shanghai.

Q: But your first visit to China was to Beijing, right?

L: The first was of course Beijing and then, I don’t know why,... I have even been to Yunnan and other places. It’s difficult to say, of course, there’s perhaps a bit less control, but at the same time you could say people at Beijing are a lot of more courageous.

Q: Except the people you mentioned in the previous interview, are there other scholars who took the role of assisting you in terms of idea building, and to your scholarship... I mean Chinese scholars who were crucial and even brought shock to your research?

L: Not a shock but a ‘meeting of minds’. Of course Xiong was one of the more important persons for me and still is. And then there is another professor...

Q: Xiong is more like a contemporary Chinese scholar.

L: Ah you mean the old one. There’s even younger one. At my first encounter, I saw more the constraint of these people. I told you last time He lin (賀麟) and Zong Baihua (宗白華) and old guys. And Zhang Dainian (張岱年), of course. Even these people I feel much more the constraints of communism and they are victims. They once have been perhaps free minds but they were so...
Frankly speaking, this is perhaps very personal, but I didn’t much creativity, some more old guys that were victims of their ideology or of the ideology that was imposed on them.

Q: Did these people survive after the Tian An Men Event?

L: Oh yes. They had more problems to survive the Cultural Revolution but then... you mean 六四? No problem, some of them had died before, some of them lived after. The purge did not go very deep at that time, from 89. They did kill a lot of people. But, if you were not killed and if you were not really exposed, ... all those people had more or less participated in public demonstrations, had said one or the other word in favor for the students. But they were not really afflicted. They were so victimized, all those guys. If you had lived for forty years under this: always all those constantly changing, these political campaigns, all these 反右. How could you really intellectually survive? I have a lot of veneration for old people so to speak. But they were more an object of my study not a source inspiration. Much more the younger people. This is very sincere, very frank...

Q: I believe this is due to the different historical conditions where these different generations of Chinese scholars have lived.

L: No, I have a lot of compassion, even being some much younger than they were, I sort of felt ... You have to go to countries like that to see what a gift freedom is. You have to deserve it, you just grew up in a free country. There was another one, a professor in my age, a bit younger even, 章青. He is head of the department of history in Fudan, still now. Very open-minded. He’s the one who invited Hayden White, the postmodern historian, to Fudan University

Q: when and how did you meet with him?
L: That’s difficult to say. In 1995 I went to China to gain the support of Chinese scholars for this project, new disciplines, neologisms and so one. When I went to Shanghai, I went to the 辞书出版社. They had a library, and the library was in a very bad shape. That’s ridiculous, they could have been proud of assimilating so easily, so quickly to this. In almost not times the Chinese were part of the international world.

Q: What time was this, could you redress it again?

L: When I was there? In 1995, that was the first time I came to China with that project. Some people were open and others were not.

Q: So you went there trying to find you some kind of cooperation, a publisher?

H: I went there in fact not because of the publishers, but because I knew most of the material I was interested was in their library. But the library didn’t have a catalogue, there were in a waste, of fires everywhere, it was really a bad shape. That was interesting, because at that time almost no one was really interested. Of course in Taiwan there were people, but they were old, like Wang Ermin (王爾敏), he is of course a very great scholar. But he was already a bit too old to cooperate. But he had very good insights. I still appreciate his ideas much more than anyone else’s, about this time.

Q: Then you went to Fudan.

L: Yes, and there I met some people who seemed to be very cautious, very prudent in the first period. Like that was, sort of problematic views, new fields. They are afraid, first of all, they always try to test how far they could go. That makes it really difficult.

Q: Why is 章青 important to your work?

L: Because he was an historian, he had worked on Xueshu shi (學術史) in the late Qing period. And so...

Q: And you didn’t know him before your trip to Fudan?

L: No, I didn’t know him. I sort of researching people, you have to look at applications, it takes some time, you get acquainted with people who might be close to the field you are interested in.

Q: I have a question. Both 熊月之 and 章青 are China trained scholars?

L: He was trained in China. He was 工农兵, really poor family.

Q: You mean 章青?

L: No, 熊月之. I don’t know much about Zhang Jing’s background. Xiong had in fact had written a book about 西学东渐史. That was of course a source of inspiration. I thought this is a guy I could possibly cooperate with. And in fact I could. Then we started first in Göttingen then here a project inviting Chinese scholars and students to this place, there were twenty, including people like Xiong Yuezhi, Zhang Jing, even master students, you know. So by this way they constantly became acquainted more familiar, more acquainted with our topics. It always takes some time, even without communist China it takes some time. For different approaches concerned. Yes you might be right. Of course in Mainland China people ask different questions, they want to know about what they call
modernization for instance. That is a core, a vital issue, I am not interested in, I mean…. [laughs] I am interested in….

Q: You said high culture.

L: Yet, but even modernization could concern high cultures in fact. I am interested in ways Western knowledge was sort digested in China. And modernization is of course part of this optimism on the future, these ideas about progress. It started a bit earlier than Yan Fu and that’s still vital in China. You don’t have much skepticism on progress, which you have in the West, there’s a lot of scepticism. Technology for instance, there’s skepticism, even on political thought, the Frankfurt school for instance. But not only Frankfurt school, many others.

Q: The political theory.

L: They have a lot of political theory in China. But it is more critical vis-à-vis the West but vis-à-vis China. These are some differences in fact. This is still a society, where people are deeply convinced of the linearity of progress, which is something absolutely wrong. But they are convinced of it, even knowing they had the Cultural Revolution, The Great Leap Forward where people starved, this doesn’t really matter. Especially in a word ‘believe’, which is by the way, ‘faith’, is a neologism, 信仰 did not exist in traditional Chinese. That is a loan word from the Japanese. It basically represents something like religious belief, a Western religious belief, which in my view, have never existed in China. And then of course, at the first moment, for people like Hu Shi and many others and so forth, belief in science was the thing, it was like a religious belief. And later on came the belief in Marxism-Leninism and that is also 一種信仰. That is also something I am interested in and there is actually the difference between people in Mainland China and myself.

Q: Have you encountered difficulty in terms of Communication with the China trained scholars?

L: No. Of course if you tried to organize a conference there somewhere would be a party secretary lingering. Of course there are things that cannot be said in China. You can’t talk about Taiwan. You can’t talk about Tibet. But if you know about this kind of restrictions in public then you can find a way, you can make your way with these people. It clearly depends, I don’t want to give the names now, but I know some Chinese scholars who know that Taiwan is not a vital part, not an integral part of China, culturally speaking maybe, but political speaking there’s a little. The older they are the more they would acknowledge that. The problem is with the younger ones because of 爱国主义教育. they have some sort of come through this patriotic education.

Q: You have reminded me about my experience in Beijing this year and the scholar I met there whose name is Zhao Tingyan (趙汀陽).

L: Oh I know him!

Q: Zhao Tingyan has very interesting ideas about building a new world order. I think he is one of those who provided new inspirations to academia.

H: Zhao Tingyan is one of them, who is in fact, that’s interesting that you mentioned him… because he speaks so much rationality but also to the idea of freedom, of course, freedom of mind, personal total freedom, individual freedom within society. He is one of the rare people in China who think about society, because for them usually society is the improvement of the state, which is ridiculous,
but which you can explain with communism. If they say... they have 專制 in many ways when they 
were told “This is 社会要求”, this is “国家的要求”. This is one of them. And of course if you think 
about the living people, then it is difficult because the older ones were victims and I could not really 
get... I mean how to say...Those who resisted are much more important for me. For instance, I’m 
reluctant to accept his ideas, but I think Mou Zongsan 年宗三 was a great scholar, very influential 
one.

Q: Resistance in what terms?

L: Well, they just left China and went to Hong Kong which was an exile for them. Even Taiwan wasn’t 
right for those people. They have shaped a lot of present-day China. They are more or less now 
forgotten in Taiwan which ok for them perhaps. But they are very essential in Mainland China now 
because Mainland China tries to reinvent Confucianism. They, like Tang Junyi 唐君毅, were 
systematic thinkers who really tried to rethink the Chinese past, the whole of it. Of course they were 
wrong in many ways, I thing, because they neglected religious aspects, practical religious aspects of 
Confucianism and many other things. That was an inspiration, but it was a kind of inspiration that 
sort of made me more eager for discussing these topics, not as a kind of new faith I would adopt, 
something I would really ...

Q: So you also have met many exiled Chinese scholars?

L: I met more than that in Taiwan in fact. During my second long trip to China that also included the 
diaspora scholars in Taiwan. All he wanted was to survive, more or less. Like 徐復觀, of all these 
people, he was the last.

Q: And you just said you don’t really agree with these diaspora Chinese scholars?

L: No, I don’t. I think that he had to neglect a lot of historical Chinese past so to speak. I said for 
instance the everyday aspect of religious behavior within Confucianism he had to do away with it, 
because Confucianism was no more religious power at this time. All these guys, 熊十力, started with 
them. They had to reinvent sort of Confucianism with new terms. This about the field of moral 
philosophy. It has religious aspects but it isn’t a religion. I don’t think it is right but it’s an enormous 
contribution to reinventing China.

Q: The personal experiences should always shape ones’ perspectives. I think that’s also a kind of self 
therapy.

L: Yes in fact as a therapy to overcome the humiliation of China, of China by the West if you want to 
say, of China by communism which was also a Western invention. But I don’t admire scholars 
generally speaking, they were good teachers but they had these shortcomings.

H: Humanity?

L: Exactly.

Q: The next question is more personal. As we know, you have married a Chinese lady. Could you talk 
about it and the relations to your scholarship? Is there contradiction in the marriage life regarding 
the cultural differences?
L: Yes and no. First no: No one is “prisoner of his culture”. The fact that she is living here for more than twenty years of course that shaped her idea. She sort of loves the German nationality, you can vote here, you cannot vote in .... You see what I mean. That is the “no”- part. The “yes”- part is of course, there are still father in law and mother in law who are living in China, are living in Hangzhou. That’s a nice place in fact. They live in China. We go there, they come here. These are of course people who are not very young. The father is retired university professor, historian of the Beijing by the way, who has studied Songyi Wang, very important. He is not very familiar with Western way of life. You have to confront them of course, especially when it comes to the education of children. That is perhaps a point. We are ...

Q: How about the education of the children?

L: Educating children, yes. There are cultural differences in fact. This is a long history of civil service exams civilization, you see what I mean. There is an emphasis on learning in facts, all the specific kinds of learning, learning properly as these teachers would be demanding. We try more different kinds of learning functions. Learning of freedom, which is not part of civil service. There are differences, but it is good that you always have to negotiate, difference approaches how to tackle a problems. But that is good for you because you learn more about yourself, about your preconditions. I am far away from this kind of anti-authoritarian education which is kind of a main current here in the West in general. I am far away from that. There’s always a compromise when you negotiate. Well, don’t talk about hygiene because I like Chinese food, no problem. I have problems eating rice each day.

Q: I think the Chinese way of education encourage the development of children’s creativity less, comparing to the Western way, especially the American way, of education.

L: They do of course because of the surrounding here. The fact that, I mean it’s really more than a couple of weeks. In China they feel more like Westerners, Germans. Of course school teachers encourage all kinds of creative work. But I don’t think, you are far away from this, you have a creative mind! You shouldn’t be too modest. I don’t think you are a victim of Chinese education. Of course, certain Chinese ways of sort of appropriating knowledge are interesting, repetitive, they emphasize learning by heart, repetition, a sort of pattern you have to follow. In the long run this could prevent, could be an impediment for China’s position in the world or for the creative contribution to the world. But well, I don’t know. I have so many friends at the Academic Sinica in Taiwan who are utterly creative. They are no prisoners in fact. Some of them are of course, have been trained in the West but not all of them. A kind of spirit perhaps, there is a collective that really work hard.

Q: The next question is about your current project. You have invited people from different research fields. I kind of thinking this is not normal, for normally people would like to have people from similar research spheres to collect ideas. What is your main idea about such a special management of the project?

L: Look, you are right. The project, as I conceived it, is too large for one person. That was the basic idea. If you want to think big, it must be really large, it must have a framework that goes beyond one person. You have people here, you have a lot of subprojects. I tried to encourage a lot of subprojects. There’s is some project by Takashima from Berkeley and Puett from Harvard and von Falkenhausen once again UCLA. He works on the 甲骨文. This has been published in Academic Sinica (Studies of Fascicle Three of Inscriptions from the Yin Ruins Volume I & II, Taipei 2010). This is such a perfect
thing, but I will never be able to do this. This is all about 甲骨文. This book has been published last year in Taipei. So this is one project for instance. Then we have another project about 隸書, almanacs.

Q: When did you start to plan this project?

L: When I was at Princeton at the Institute for Advanced Studies for one year. It was once again a paradise. I had time to think about possible evolution, development of my own future. I had been director of a graduate school here, which was a very postmodern graduate school. I went to all this French philosophy, Derridas, Bourdieu, Foucault, I was quite bored in the long run. I wanted to get back to a field which once again was/should be connected to my own interest. In fact all the people who have been invited so far have to some extent contributed to this project in general. It’s too large for one person. If I was a pure ethno-historian so to speak, then this field would be too small once again. Inviting people for this project implies that they have to contribute for instance to our book of knowledge. One of my aims is, next year or so I will start to write a book for the general reader about aspects, technical aspects of divination, fortune telling, dealing with future in traditional and modern China. And all these people more or less contribute, maybe without knowing it, but I know of course. You see what I mean. There will be a chapter on oracle bone. But it won’t be my own research of course, that should be a kind of overview. I don’t think these people will be able to write a book like I have in mind.

Q: I have met with Zhu Pinyi and Marta. I am kind of curious: how they have related to your project? They are apparently doing very different topics of research.

L: Marta is really working on 手相, palm divination, that will be a chapter, but that will be a couple of pages in that book. And Zhu Pinyi of course is working on the encounter, the idea of “were they really involved” in what was called Chinese superstition. One of my aims of course is also to contribute for instance to our book of knowledge. One of my aims is, next year or so I will start to write a book for the general reader about aspects, technical aspects of divination, fortune telling, dealing with future in traditional and modern China. And all these people more or less contribute, maybe without knowing it, but I know of course. You see what I mean. There will be a chapter on oracle bone. But it won’t be my own research of course, that should be a kind of overview. I don’t think these people will be able to write a book like I have in mind.

Q: That’s true. This is related to my next question. How would you define yourself in the field of Sinology in Germany? How would you define your own role, and even your contribution?

L: I did a lot for things that ..., I felt a lot of responsibility to bring knowledge to the general reader. I edited two volumes of the “Country Report China”, for the Office for Political Education. These books are read by ten thousand of twenty thousands. And it’s read in school and so forth. It wasn’t part of my research interest but that was a kind of responsibility I felt, more than many of my colleagues.

Q: Bringing knowledge to the general people? Why do you think this is important?

L: I think it’s important because, first of all, we will have to deal with China in some way in the future. The more knowledge people have the more sort of ... not tolerant but the more understanding they will be. Having the history of my own country in mind, when Germany became a nation in 1870, all
the powers were not really amused by that. They had difficulties to deal with it, because of the German Emperor being boastful and things like that. But this ended up in WW I!

Q: Actually Germany was like China in the late 19th century and early 20th century; it was on a rising path, a rising power.

L: Exactly and it went wrong. I think this is still part of people in Chinese Studies in the West, at least at some of them who assume that responsibility. And I did assume that responsibility.

Q: Do you think your word has some power or influence to the policy making?

L: At first of course not, but in the long run. These books are read by high-school students and usually officers of the German army, all these people that are more or less being recipients of these books. There might be some influence the long run. That was not my only concern; I did that because I wanted to do that. Second I wanted to say it is my role, my function in this country. I have some new ideas perhaps. You can be proud if you have, during the scholarly life, two ideas or so. We haven’t yet spoken about another idea. But one idea was of course that kind of impact of Western knowledge on the birth of disciplines in China. In fact no one has done this before. So that was one idea. The second idea was now to inquire into projects to the future in the Chinese tradition, past and present. The third idea was, that in the long story, was about the visual representation of classical passages by diagrams. Many, some of my articles are devoted to that question. That is still very interesting. That is the third idea. If you can make up these three ideas, just leaving the usual path of Chinese Studies, that is a kind of contribution.

Q: I totally agree. How would you evaluate the current development of Sinology in Germany?

L: First of all if you look at the figure, the amount of people who do Chinese Studies at professors in general, it’s still ridiculous. I’ll just give you one figure to compare. There are 350 chairs, that does not mean professors (that would double the amount), for history, German or European history, in this country. And you have about thirty chairs for Chinese Studies, thirty to thirty five, very few in comparison. We are far away still from the United States where good universities have on the one hand European history and you have Asian history on the other hand. This is very balanced. This is not balanced here, we are still very marginal, we have to try for this importance, even within the faculties. So we cannot even afford having some kind of combined effort towards a new direction. But there are some fields the Germans have always been quite interested in and also talents in. One is of course historiographical thought in general, which is surely to be continued by a constant evolution in the People’s Republic in Mainland China, just because of this heritage of criticism of ideology, “Ideologiekritik”, which is also I think more developed in Germany than for instance in France or the United States. If you look for instance at the Olympics with Zhang Yimou (張藝謀) and this great stage managing, it was German scholars who wrote critically about that, much more critically, much more deeply, including myself. Because here we have this heritage of fascism. We went through this, we know what mass mean, mass, the use of masses as an aesthetic power. Much more than people do know in the United States or Australia. You have to go to Nürnberg, I don’t know whether you have been there, the Reichsparteitagsgelände, this party compound. You have to go, this is really enlightening. Not for you so much, but for an average Mainland China scholars. I always send them there and say have a look at that. They come back enlightened and say: We did not know that there were some many aesthetic similarities between fascism and communism. You have
to go there, let’s go together, next time in January. Think of a moment to go there together. It’s really worth to see. But just to make a long story short.

Q: Yes you are right. It depends on traditional scholarship.

L: There is an awareness of ... That’s also a possibility of German scholarship. And then we have of course good philosophy. The University of Hamburg just opened a research area on manuscripts. This is a good effort to combine let me say knowledge, to combine knowledge on manuscripts in different cultures in different epochs, civilization. Very good thing. The French have this ‘fathom of manuscripts’ but that is a much larger area. So there are things to be done in fact if we were more and more numerous we could do more. In many cases we just have to defend our strongholds. “Here we are, China is important”.

Q: I visited the department of Political Science in this university, and to my surprised I found no China expert there. They have a few professors doing research about Asia, but not specifically about China’s role and impact.

L: That is representative on most of the German universities. This is supposed Asianists and Europeanists. Basically they are all Europeanists. Of course one or the other might be interested in some issues like Japanese political thought, but very few. It is a shame, I have no explanation for that, there’s no excuse. It’s a shame. That is eating up a lot of our energies. Just lobbying, if you want, within the faculty.

Q: It’s all about who’s getting resources

L: Absolutely, I’ve got the largest resources in the history in the whole history of the faculty of Latin but that needs an effort and there’s a lot of jealousy, I can tell.

Q: Why is there so lack of research interest in China here?

L: First of all, as we said together, there is no colonial history, that’s true. That’s just ten years ago that they realized that. It’s not the same text. No it’s measurable, and I just agree. You have to know that this is really consuming a lot of energy for most of us. You could say I don’t mind these things, I do my research on Han inscriptions or whatever, and I don’t care about the situation of my field in the faculty, in the university, in the country. This is not my way of doing things. I try to build something which is more important and perhaps a bit longer-lasting. But that is indebted to my creativeness, my madness.

Q: Are there more German students interested in Sinology now?

L: There is more demand than offers. This is why the Chinese very clever founded this Confucius Institute to meet with the demand. Very clever! It is a pity that Taiwan in fact has lagged for such a long time. They missed chances from 1999 more or less when Chinese became active in foreign language teaching, teaching Chinese as a foreign language. There was good teaching in Taiwan before, they missed the chance. This is ridiculous because it’s too provincial. But they had to come to grip with their own identity. I know I see the problem, of course I do. But it’s a pity. But anyhow there is a large demand in Europe in general, in all of the countries. More than 2000 students in Rome! Germany is more federal so to speak, more decentralized. But it needs also a rethinking of faculties, faculties are like feasts, funeral feasts. Of course, for instance the next, there is a position in political
science. That position should be given to someone who is either specialized on China or Japan. But not!

Q: I think there are more people doing European Studies

L: And they will continue that way. We have to change them, to influence public opinion.

Q: My first impression about the Department of Sinology here... it seems to me that you are doing everything. For me this was surprising.

L: And also art history. Don’t forget art history. At Oxford University, they have Craig Clunas who is a big man, a person for art history. No I agree. On the west side, this is really important. It is a shame for this country. But that is so closely connected to old structures of euro-centric thought to the defense of your stronghold. It would be good to have someone in political science. It would be good to have someone in history. It would be good to have someone in history of art. And so on and so forth. Then I wouldn’t need a stronghold. That’s great, we just establish a center. That’s our craft faculty center so to speak, craft department of the faculty. That’s impossible here and in many other places in this country too, we have just to defend our profession. It’s interesting but it’s absolutely shameful.

Q: The next question: After so many years, when you reflect your past research and scholarsh...

L: Except for these three ideas, there is something perhaps rather meritorious, that also even without willing, even sort of influenced development of in Mainland China, the kind of the study of history of disciplines that established a field. That is a kind of evaluation. On the other hand, building up all these centers, constitutionally successful, first at Göttingen University, here, that is very important for me.

Q: It is also very important contribution.

L: It is a contribution, but it is a left-scholarly contribution. It’s more if it was a political contribution. But I deeply feel... But it is a shame, but it is a shame for situation. And I would likely encourage more of my colleagues to do more lobbying, in fact. It is not only lobbying for themselves but also lobbying for the object of their study. But that takes a long time. I have no idea. Well I did my best, I am still trying. But there’s still a long way to go, even for me. But most of that work is now been done in English too. This is the result of the self-marginalization, not self-marginalization, of the marginality of the field here. If you write in German, no one will take a notice whatever

Q: English is still the only universal language.

L: But it was different 80 years ago, Max Weber, unthinkable. Or in the religious studies. Or one of the best examples for Chinese studies is Richard Wilhems German translation if the 易经, which later was translated into English, which is still the most influential, not the best I say, but the most influential translation in the Anglo-Saxon world. There was a time when this was an important field, but it did not last long. And then the catastrophe of the war. We kind of relapsed into euro-centrism, which is still the case. It’s more the case for Central Europe than perhaps for Western Europe. It is much more the case for Germany, Austria, even Italy. Well Italy is a good example. You have Venice, the University of Venice, this is really better. It is like the United States almost already. On the one
hand you have the Asianism, the Europeanism. But that is a rare exception. And then of course look at Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, they are even more marginal. That is something that probably has something to do with Central Europe. But Germany should be more active. This university is the tenth largest University in Germany, 33000 students, a lot of teachers and professors. If you look at the patterns of non-Western studies, this is ridiculous. At first when I came here I tried to find out what their research interests were and I did some things in common with them. There were graduate schools, I directed or contributed to many other things. As Asianist you are at the margin, at the periphery, you are always used for comparative issue, comparative purposes. We are in the center and we ask, we have a kind of counter examples, something like that. This project is one of the first in this country where questions are put from a Chinese Studies point of view, not a Chinese point of view, a Chinese Studies point of view. And the others are invited to provide answers. Or comparisons or things like that. So the initiative is ours and not theirs. So that is also a kind of contribution but people do not always react in a suitable way.

Q: How do you think the education of German students in the field of Sinology?

L: Well, that is just a few years ago that they introduced the new program, the bachelor program. And it is not really working well because they adopted a lot of things that ... One of the models was of course the universities in the United States, but they did not understand how these universities work. There is much institutional fault and problems. But the students have become basically the same. They are more deprived of time. The study programs are much more strict or rigid than before. That deprived them of some academic freedom. Still, you cannot... even the worst program will never kill an elite. It’s impossible. There is a kind of probability that you have ten percent good students. And they are always there, even with the worst program. Even with the new programs, that’s supposed to learn more in a shorter time, the problem is perhaps is how they digest the knowledge, how they work with this knowledge. But it’s definitely more knowledge, time is shorter, time is more intense and the programs are stricter. It’s not only shortcomings but they are perhaps a bit left-creative. It’s an “Asianization”. You see, we are “Asianizing,” because it’s all oriented towards the examination. Examinations become much more formal. More learnt-by-heart knowledge than before. Before it was critical, you could ponder over questions, let’s approach that from that way, from another angle. Now it’s more positive knowledge. It’s really sinozized in fact. You will always find very very intelligent people, and the question is how to encourage them. That is perhaps made a bit more difficult, to encourage people, how to foster their needs. That is a problem. In fact, before, almost all of them, all of the students, more than 80 percent at least, went either to Taiwan or to China, for a year at least. That is almost made impossible by the new system. It still works, but people are much less eager to, because they are childish, that is the problem, the system makes them more childish.

Q: You mean that’s because students want to graduate as soon as possible.

L: It’s impossible, they head to everything, a long line to the curriculum. It will be a problem, I don’t know, at the end the remaining people, who are talented, who are interested, who are willing to learn, I think the ratio will be the same than before. I’m optimistic. We need more people to be interested in East Asia or at least in non-Western cultures.

Q: How would you evaluate the rise of China?

L: These are the things the Consortium, the Research Project works about predictions, but there are unpredictable things. During the last thirty years there is a substantial contribution of Chinese and
Mainland Chinese scholars on different fields of Chinese Studies. Thirty years ago you could still neglect more than ninety percent of what they wrote, not relevant. They either pondered over China’s future or they made petty contributions. Now this is really serious. For ancient China, there are important Chinese scholars that you can’t afford neglecting them. That is a good thing. Chinese scholarships although you still can say, they ask different questions than we do, but that doesn’t matter. It is something to be taken very serious. We can’t do without them, it’s a good thing.

Q: Are you still doing the research on how the Western knowledge is conceived in China now?

L: Yes, even then. I want to concentrate more on my topic now. But even then there’s a lot to do for watching contemporary China. For politics, just like Chinese scholarship, no one will be able or entitled to neglect China in the future, it’s just there. You can say, as I do, I don’t like this government. But they can’t do without, so you have to find a way. Of course as a scholar I always try to find a way among scholars at a low profile basis, with politics not too much involved. High level politics will always be a risk. I think it’s good that our chancellor invited the Dalai Lama. I think this is good, because it is a sign of strength or decisions in the moral... But at the same time you cannot neglect China, like the Falun Dafa (法輪大法), this is the kingdom of the evil, we don’t touch it any longer. That is wrong. Many people in this country and especially even more in the United States of course think now: “The enemy’s back” to some extent. The Chinese threatens to the US, the Confucius Institute. There are large complains. This is Carl Schmidt, “the enemy of the friend”. I think the same can be observed in China, the same tendencies: “The enemies are back”, the main enemy is of course the United States. Vice versa you find lots of these tendencies. But this is a tragedy, because this directly leads to what perhaps Germany behaved in 1914, the Chinese becoming more boastful. The Europeans task could perhaps consist in mediating, in finding a way between these two extremes without capitulation without resigning entirely to the great Chinese power. I try to comprehend this, this is an idea, I know that I am not a politician. But I think being firm in certain convictions but telling them at the same time. But our opinion does not involve a kind of 善伤中国人的感情, like a sensitive woman. The Chinese behave like that. Ai Weiwei (艾未未) says that. Very interesting remark.

Q: Ai Weiwie is a good friend of Zhao Tingyan, do you know that?

L: Yes. Zhao Tingyan praised him even in public at a session in the German embassy when Ai Weiwei was already under fire, not arrested but under fire. Zhao Tingyan said this in presence of the minister of the Central Committee, praised Ai Weiwei. I will never forget that. You see these courageous people in China. I also appealed in fact, the Germans appealed to releasing Ai Weiwei. I was one of three persons who did that. But that was finally signed by more than 5000 people from the public sphere, politicians, cultural sphere, all kind of artists. Of course I received a letter by the Chinese embassy. But this is the way how to deal with it. Once you have perhaps observed, seen, become aware of the fact that this doesn't lead more... of course you have to stick to your convictions.

Q: For me, this is an act representing the traditional Chinese virtue 仁.

L: Absolutely. I do. Otherwise there must be some kind of family affinity. You see what I mean. It must, of course. It’s something that’s not entirely mine and will never be. But there must be a kind of affinity, elected affinity. Goethe said that, “Wahlverwandtschaft”. Of course. That makes me still ...That was interesting. At first when I launched this appeal, first of all I wrote to all my colleagues
in Chinese Studies. And I got interesting answers. There were people just spontaneously signed, not always friends of me, but they signed. And others said: “Perhaps there was some tax fraud.” Or: “Please, I want to continue to go to China. I won’t be invited any longer.” Lack of courage! As long as, once perhaps, I don’t know how far they would force me. If tomorrow either there’s a civil war or they attack something or they attack Taiwan, I won’t get visas any longer because this will not….You see what I mean.

Q: But it still is very courageous. I totally agree. In the States there are so many people concerned about their interests about, let’s say, the visa thing. Everybody knows that it’s hard to do research in China once you got political record.

L: Let’s see how far we can go. That’s always, it is, a question of negotiation.

Q: I remembered in the conference held on the study of Gao Xinjian’s works, someone raised similar discussion.

L: Oh yes. Gao Xingjian is a small part of this experience. It is so shameful because a couple of month ago we had who is a very famous writer Wang Anyi (王安憶) from Shanghai but not as good as Gao Xingjian I would say. Lots of Chinese people here, hundreds in fact. She gave a lecture. Some of her pieces have been translated. It’s interesting. Well I have a big feeling I can tell you, towards her writing. But anyhow so Gao Xingjian. What I wanted to say, it’s very difficult to judge. On the one hand we have a kind of increasing repression, we have more telecameras in the universities, there is a kind of control, surveillance, supervision, that has been unheard of before.

Q: Here?

L: Not here, in China. And of course, telecameras, surveillance...On the website also. And so on and so forth. All the artists... On the other hand, we have a kind of developing freedom of different lifestyle, that is really good. Before that was 統一, now you really have different models of living, are accepted or being accepted, which is a difficult thing. And you have a kind of decentralization which is also an interesting thing. Sometimes it is sort of... difficult to say... It could be advantageous for China to have this kind of decentralization. But sometimes it is also the egoism of some local [...], of feudal princes, who want his province or district to be more developed than others. That is of course coming to the expense of the country. So it’s difficult to say. It’s getting much more complex than before, and that’s the good thing about it. All kinds of initiatives. I mean nice people...

Q: When I tell my professors in the States about my topic, one of my professors who majors in political philosophy, heard that question and asked me: “Why didn’t you mention the Marxism in China?”

L: It’s hard to say. It’s like a dying church.

Q: A dying church?

L: A dying church to some extent. Because people are still supposed to, and they do learn 毛主义 in high-school and then at university and get to discourse, and that shaped the worldview, that shaped the worldview even in trivial matters. Let me say, believe for science, progress, things like that, having a concept of what superstition is. No one, I think, believes in being able to get to paradise, communist paradise tomorrow. But it’s still there. And it’s there perhaps even as a long term...
Q: I am going to have the last question for today. How do you evaluate your own works and scholarship in current stage?

L: I think for me humanities is there for basically assessing the current status of mankind and constantly reflecting on it. As a sort of self-reflection. Where are we, which is our position, which is the world’s position. And then of course foreign cultures and distantly cultures can enormously contribute to our understanding of ourselves. That is a general remark. As far as I am conserved I have always tried to realize that by studying non–Western, non-European, although I am deeply rooted in Western culture. I know that’s in the Greek. That is one thing. I think there are different, let me say, different ways of evolving in my own approaches, different ways, different kinds of development. One is, one project, one idea or one orientation engenders the second one, creates the second one. This is a sort of logical result of the first one. And sometimes there is something like a mutation, like mutations in nature, like a leap. For instance, I mean, Western knowledge in Late Imperial China does not have much to do with Song philosophy. This is a kind of leap, a mutation in the Darwinian sense. And all I can do is to sort of wait for this kind of of enlightenment. Sometimes, be patient and look for your encounters with persons, persons have always to say something important, and with books of course. And then enact or find some kind of intuition, some kind of intuition, deep in yourself. That is the only way. And just do what you have to do for the moment. You have some ideas, but they might be mid-term or short-term, but long-term ones I have never had.

Q: I have an extra question. Do you believe in divination, Bugua (卜卦)?

L: Oh yes, sometimes in fact, and don’t ask me whether I believe in it because believe would be a Western category. I trust sort of...

Q: Do you know how to operate it?

L: Yes, it is not very difficult. You have 49 sticks, you dice them and then you count. Well the problem is of course how to approach this entire body of this more than 2000, more than 3000 years old body of interpretations. Knowing that the 易经 has had a history and that only for Western language you at least need three or four translations. Because, even in China, it was interpreted in different times in different ways. So the original understanding we know few things about it. We know more about it from the 王弼 interpretations and so on and so forth. And the 三 jing zhushu (十三經注疏)
interpretation, which is from Tang times and Song times. Basically you would need different interpretations because the Chinese exegeses changed at different times. I’ll give you an example: 元亨 XX which is the Tang text of… Already the Song people and perhaps even the Tang people did not know what that meant. So they had a new understanding of it which, of course, shaped their interpretations of…..

Q: Did you use 易经 in your daily life?

L: Not very often, but I can tell you, I’ll give you an example. A couple of days before, this project had to be defended at the ministry. And I knew that there were 18 rivals and only three could be chosen. This was a kind of showdown, like in western movies, Wild West movies. You were given two hours in front of a committee of perhaps 15, 16 people, foreign experts and some domestic too. But most of them come from foreign countries and of course representatives from the ministry. Two days before this showdown and before I had to go to the ministry I of course consulted the oracle. And what I had was the hexagram 大有,” possession of the great”. And I can tell you, notwithstanding whether you believe in it or not, whether you trust it or not, I think about it, there is a which is a kind of psychotherapy, think about it, which is a kind of pastoral care, that of course makes you more confident, issues some kind of strength. And for the negative oracle the same thing, it makes you, more prudent, more cautious, gives a warning, don’t trust it fully. And that is already something. And I am convinced that this in traditional China at least, not the 易经 alone but all fortune telling sort of fulfilled what was pastoral care in Christian religion, a kind of psychotherapy. And a good fortune teller would of course contribute to your life.

Q: I used tarot for divination of my future journey before applying for DAAD scholarship here.

L: Of course. I am not a specialist on this. We have a Bazhe (八字) 先生 here, he’s from China. That is difficult because… It would be difficult for a Western professor of some studies of humanities in the West to acknowledge that he or she uses tarot or 易经 or astrology for his or her decision making. But I would say, personally I would say, it is a different kind of science, just a different kind of knowledge perhaps. Because it has a system. You can of course say, I reject the prerogative of this knowledge and then it’s ok. But there’s an intrinsic logic, an intrinsic systematic logic in these systems and I would bring them close to medicine to some extent. Because medicine is always based on diagnoses, and some of the diagnoses are pertinent, are relevant, and others are wrong. And it is also based on experience. I like the tarot by the way, I am very much interested.

Q: I think the most difficult part is always interpretation.

L: Both use images, if you want. In almost each of the hexagrams there is an image. If you use the tarot cards or decks with the images.

Q: When did you start to get…

L: Interested in that…. I was interested in Western astrology, the tarot, other techniques predicting the future. The 易经 of course played a role. Even if I, of course, had no idea…

Q: When was that? When you were still a student?

L: Just at the beginning of my studies, even before I got enrolled in the Chinese Studies program.
Q: That’s interesting, because it is even difficult for the Chinese people to apply 易經 in the daily life. I had some friends interested in this art, but not many of them could really use it, even for references.

L: I mean of course, as a foreigner you have the advantage of, first of all when I was 20, 21 years old I could neglect the Chinese tradition. Of course later on, you know you become enlightened of the longue durée of their tradition. It is an expert knowledge of course. Interesting because I am studying the 严复 diaries. And he almost, about each week, consulted the 易经. Very interesting in terms of, how to say, for him there was perhaps no contradiction. For people like Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 it would have been inconceivable because there is a contradiction in their view. You cannot... But for 严复 there was none. The interesting thing is that he plays a lot with the changes of one hexagram for the other. But he uses celestial stems, 天干地支 for explaining. So we have our 算命先生 here. What he thought about these diaries, some of them are difficult to understand. What happened in Yan Fus mind? But he did not. That’s a high civilization. He is specialized in Sishu bake 四書八古, Bake Sishu, and although Yan Fu uses words like the binary cycle, he does not really understand what it means. You see, it is specialized knowledge. Like the liu ren 呂人, jimen fengjia 奇門遁甲 all those techniques. Not necessarily if you met the one, if you could...

Q: I think it is really important to introduce such kind of knowledge to the general leaders in the Western world. I do believe that this aspect of culture has shaped the daily life of normal people deeply.

L: No, I shouldn’t I think (laugh).

Q: Well no I mean not here, in China or Taiwan. Because people always think there is some kind of...

L: 缘分

Q: Yes exactly, like 缘分. And this kind of things really influences people. Even in policy making.

L: Exactly, and that in the long run is part of the project, looking at this impact on people. “Weltanschauung” und “Lebenswelt”, daily life. Of course that’s interesting. Because that’s the difference between a culture that is based on monotheism and the will of god. Even if you don’t believe in it you are still shaped by it. And if you believe in 缘分, destiny... which can’t be predicted sometimes. You cultivate faith.

L: obviously 陈水扁 used the tarot.

Q: And many Taiwanese politicians went to temples and asked opinions of the Gods.

L. But people wouldn’t acknowledge that. They are still under the impact that we are here even, to what degree, to what extent, the impact of the verdict against superstition. If you want to be enlightened it’s not easy.

H: Yes of course. I am going to end the interview. Do you think there is probably more you might want to ask interview?

L: I may keep this, right, and if there’s something... I would suggest that we keep in touch. First of all, there is this project of going to Nürnberg together. And then ask something...