

OBITUARY

In Memoriam: Wolfram Eberhard, 1909-1989

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Wolfram Eberhard, Professor Emeritus of Sociology, University of California at Berkeley, was one of those rare scholars of Western, Central, and Eastern Asian societies and cultures whose interests and abilities were so broad that he can justifiably be described as a genuine "renaissance man" of Asian studies. As a teacher and scholar, he directly or indirectly influenced the careers and lives of a generation of students and scholars in many parts of the world. Even after his retirement, he continued to actively teach and publish, as well as to inspire a new generation of students.

The course of Professor Eberhard's life and career reads almost like an adventure tale.¹ He was born on March 17, 1909, in Potsdam, Germany, into a family of astrophysicists and astronomers on both the paternal and maternal sides of his family. The family influence was to bear fruit in Eberhard's doctoral dissertation on the astronomy and astrology of the Han Dynasty, and in several studies, coauthored with his uncle Rolf Müller, on the astronomy of the Han and Three Kingdom periods. These works were reprinted as volume 4 of Eberhard's collected essays, *Sternkunde und Weltbild im alten China* (1970a). Eberhard was educated at the Victoria Gymnasium in Potsdam where he studied Latin, Greek, French, and two years of English. He had no other English instruction until 1948, when he arrived in the United States and was expected to start teaching in English within a few weeks.

Eberhard entered Berlin University in 1927, where he concentrated on classical Chinese and Social Anthropology, with additional studies in Manchu, Mongol, Japanese, and Sanskrit. Among his teachers were Otto Franke and Erich Hauer. His doctoral dissertation was accepted

in 1933. Because Berlin University did not offer instruction in colloquial Chinese, Eberhard simultaneously, although secretly, enrolled at the Seminar for Oriental Languages in Berlin where he studied with Ferdinand D. Lessing. He had to enroll secretly because at that time his teachers of classical Chinese did not support his interest in colloquial language; conversely the teachers at the Seminar did not approve of him studying classical Chinese. After receiving his diploma from the Seminar in 1929, Eberhard worked in the Berlin Anthropological Museum under the direction of F. D. Lessing.

In 1934, he made his first journey to China. The purpose of the trip was to collect ethnographic objects for the Museum. In Chekiang, Eberhard travelled in the countryside, studied temples, and collected folktales with the help of Ts'ao Sung-yeh 曹松業; most of these tales were published in *Erzählungsgut aus Südost-China* (1966). Shortly thereafter he went to Peking where, with the help of friends, he found work teaching German and Latin at Peking National University, Peiping Municipal University, and the Medical School at Paoting. Eberhard and his first wife Alide (née Roemer), who occasionally coauthored with him and also assisted him with editing and translating into English, lived with Helmut Wilhelm in Peking. In 1934, his first son, Rainer, was born.

The next year Eberhard travelled across northern China to Sian 西安, the sacred mountain Hua-shan 華山, T'ai-yüan 太原, and the Yün-kang 雲崗 caves at Ta-t'ung 大同. His interviews with Taoist priests on Hua-shan were the basis for the text of a book coauthored with Hedda Hammer Morrison, *Hua Shan, the Taoist Sacred Mountain in West China* (1974).

Eberhard returned to Germany and from 1936 to 1937 was the director of the Asiatic Section of the Grassi Museum in Leipzig. During this period, he was under heavy pressure to affiliate with the Nazis. In 1937, Adam von Trott helped him obtain a Moses Mendelssohn Fellowship (an American fellowship) which enabled him to purchase a round-the-world ticket by which he obtained permission to leave Germany. Eberhard first travelled to the United States where he visited the Field Museum in Chicago and the Nelson Gallery in Kansas City, and delivered two lectures at the University of California at Berkeley. From there he went to Japan and China, but because of the Japanese invasion of China he eventually wound up in Hong Kong.

While in Hong Kong he received the offer of a professorship at Ankara University. Even though he did not have the appropriate visas, he made his way by a circuitous route to Turkey where he was joined by his family. From 1937 to 1948, Eberhard taught history at Ankara

University. He taught in Turkish, and published in both Turkish and German on a wide variety of subjects, including Chinese folklore, popular literature, history, minorities and local cultures in China, the relations between the Chinese and the peoples of Central Asia, and Turkish history, society, and popular culture. Eberhard's tenure at Ankara contributed significantly to the development of sinological scholarship in Turkey. The first edition of his *History of China*, written in Turkish, was published in 1947. This was translated into German, English, and French; the fourth English edition was published in 1977. While at Ankara, his second son, Anatol, was born in 1938.

In 1948, Eberhard received a one-year Rockefeller grant at the University of California at Berkeley, where, the next year, he was offered a permanent faculty position in the Department of Sociology. From that time until his retirement from Berkeley in 1976, Eberhard taught a wide variety of courses related to the societies and popular cultures of Western, Central, and Eastern Asia. Because of his broad vision of Asian society and culture, his courses were regularly attended by students in the Departments of Oriental Languages, History, and Anthropology. In turn, he frequently sat on the M.A. and Ph.D. thesis committees of students in these departments as well as in his own Department of Sociology.

While at Berkeley, Eberhard continued his extensive program of research and publication, studying settlement patterns and collecting minstrel tales in Turkey during 1951-1952, development problems in villages in Pakistan and India in 1956-1958 and 1977, villages on the Burma-Yunnan border in 1958, education in Afghanistan, businessmen in Korea and Taiwan, and, with the assistance of Alide Eberhard, family planning in Taiwan in 1960. He frequently carried out research in Taiwan and taught in the Departments of Sociology and Anthropology of the National Taiwan University. In addition, he taught at Frankfurt University, the Sinological Institute at Heidelberg, and the East Asian Institute at Munich. Eberhard was on the editorial boards of the journals *Sinologica* and *Sociologus*, and of the two series "East Asian Civilizations: New Attempts at Understanding Traditions" (Vienna) and "Asian Folklore and Social Life Monographs" (Taipei), the last co-founded with Lou Tsu-k'uang 婁子匡 in 1970. He was a member or fellow of such prestigious scholarly societies as the German Academy of Sciences and Literature at Mainz, the Bavarian Academy of Sciences at Munich, the Turkish Historical Society, and the American Folklore Society. In 1954-1955, he was president of the Western Branch of the American Oriental Society. He received an honorary Doctorate from Lund University in 1980. After retiring, he continued his active

schedule of research, travel, lecturing, and teaching. Following a long illness, under the care of his wife Irene (née Ohnesorg), Professor Eberhard died in his home on August 15, 1989.

Eberhard published a prodigious amount of scholarship on a wide variety of subjects. His bibliography for the period 1931 to 1978 contains 630 entries, which includes 60 books (including several editions and/or translations of his *History of China* and other works), 185 articles, many translations, notes, abstracts, and numerous book reviews.² Many of his articles were reprinted along with some newly published essays in the six volumes of his collected papers, from *Settlement and Social Change in Asia* (1967b) to *Life and Thought of Ordinary Chinese* (1982b). From his publications it can be seen that his enduring interests in Chinese and Turkish folklore and folklife, and in the geographically, ethnically, and socially marginal people of China were clearly developed in the early years of his career. Articles in the latter half of the 1930s and the early 1940s show the early stages of his theoretical work on the origins and development of Chinese society, its diverse ethnic composition, and complex social structure. This work culminated in the publication of his *Kultur und Siedlung der Randvölker Chinas* in 1942, and in his two-volume *Lokalkulturen im alten China* in 1943; volume two of the latter was translated into English and extensively revised in 1968. Later contributions came in his *Das Toba-Reich Nordchinas, eine soziologische Untersuchung* (1949), *Conquerors and Rulers: Social Forces in Medieval China* (1952b, revised 1964), *Social Mobility in Traditional China* (1962), his first volume of collected essays *Settlement and Social Change in Asia* (1967b), his fifth volume of collected essays *China und seine westlichen Nachbarn* (1978) and *China's Minorities: Yesterday and Today* (1982a).

It is Eberhard's interest in and voluminous publications on Chinese and Turkish folklore and folklife that form a continuous theme throughout his entire career. From his earliest folklore collecting in Chekiang in 1934, through his Turkish folklore collecting, his explorations of popular culture in Taiwan, his constant interest in the culture of ordinary people, to his detailed analysis of texts both ancient and modern, came an outpouring of books, articles, and reviews that made him the leading scholar in many areas of Chinese popular culture. The publication of his *Typen chinesischer Volksmärchen* in the Folklore Fellows Communications series (Helsinki) in 1936, provided the topological framework for bringing Chinese folktales into the systematic study of world folktales. His *Chinese Fairy-Tales and Folk-Tales* (expanded from a 1936 collection written in German), published in 1937, was the predecessor to many of his later collections of Chinese folktales, songs,

theatre plays, novels, and parables, and was revised under the title *Folktales of China* in 1965. Along with his collections of folklore materials, Eberhard also published numerous studies analyzing the content, structure, and transmission of Chinese folktales and folk customs. Many of these analyses may be seen in his second and fourth volumes of collected papers: *Studies in Chinese Folklore and Related Essays* (1970b), and *Moral and Social Values of the Chinese* (1971b). Eberhard's sociological viewpoint also influenced his research on folktale transmission. Not only was he concerned with the tale-teller, the audience, and the social context, but he also showed that the respective genders, ages, and family relationships of tale-tellers and audiences have a very marked influence on the content of a tale. His research on this aspect of tale-telling is the theme of his *Studies in Taiwanese Folktales* (1970c).

Eberhard's interest in folk culture included extensive research on Chinese popular religion in which he became a leading scholar. His *Guilt and Sin in Traditional China* (1967a) analyzes the widely distributed moralistic tracts (*shan-shu* 善書) as a source for Chinese moral and social values outside the orthodox Confucian tradition. His *Chinese Festivals* (1952a; revised 1972; translated into Russian 1977) is an insightful brief survey of Chinese religious festivals written for the general reader. His publications on Chinese popular religion influenced many of the younger scholars who founded the Society for the Study of Chinese Religions and its journal (1976).

A constantly recurring problem in folk literature, art, and religion is the interpretation of symbols. Eberhard turned his attention and the resources of his wide reading to this problem. Starting with some early notes made by F. D. Lessing, Eberhard compiled *A Dictionary of Chinese Symbols*, which was first published in German in 1983 with a section of color photographs, translated into French in 1984, and into English in 1986 (both of the latter without the color photographs). Besides examining the symbols for their historical, literary, religious, and metaphorical implications, he also showed that many symbols also have sexual implications that had not previously been explained. Some of Eberhard's earlier interest in symbols can also be seen in his series of studies on Chinese dreams published from 1966 to 1978, including his booklet *Chinesische Träume und ihre Deutung* (1971a).

Many of Eberhard's works on Chinese folklore and folklife were published in the "Asian Folklore and Social Life Monographs" series (Taipei). This series, which Eberhard co-founded, also hosted the publication of many other scholars' works on related topics concerning Eastern, Central, and Western Asia. With Eberhard's encouragement,

the publisher of the AFSLM series, The Oriental Cultural Service, also reprinted several valuable and long out-of-print monographic series and collections relating to Chinese folklore, such as the "Folklore Series of National Sun Yat-sen University" and the "Folklore and Folkliterature Series of National Peking University and the Chinese Association for Folklore."

In collaboration with Pertev Naili Boratav, Eberhard published *Typen türkischer Volksmärchen* (1953), thereby providing a topological framework for the study and comparison of Turkish folktales within a world-wide context. This was preceded and followed by several articles including his *Minstrel Tales From Southeastern Turkey* (1955). Although Eberhard seems to have devoted much of his attention to Chinese folklore after the 1950s, he continued to inspire a younger generation of scholars of Turkish folklore.

Eberhard's training in both classical sinology as well as modern sociological and ethnological research methodologies gave him an advantage in his research that very few others could match. He could effectively study problems in ancient texts, and he could equally well engage in contemporary field research, devise and carry out surveys, and work with statistical data. His enormous outpouring of scholarship also came from seemingly boundless energy, great skill in organizing data, and his ability to read very rapidly. He was known as a master of the punch-card and knitting needle method of storing and retrieving data (in an age long before the computer data base). He was also very generous in sharing his data with others. If I telephoned him with a question, he would ask me to wait, and within a very few minutes worth of knitting needle thrusts he returned to read me a list of primary and secondary references, with page numbers, referring to my query.

Eberhard's energy seemed to be unlimited. An excursion with him through the streets and alleys of a Taiwanese city would leave someone half his age exhausted, while Eberhard was ready to continue on. He had an extremely keen eye for detail in field work, and always knew the best place to go at every juncture. Whenever he was in Taipei he went to see Taiwanese movies (which resulted in *The Chinese Silver Screen: Hong Kong and Taiwanese Motion Pictures in the 1960's*, published in 1972). He especially favored one theatre in Taipei and always bought a ticket for the thirteenth row, because he knew there was enough space for his six-foot frame and long legs between the twelfth and thirteenth rows of that particular theatre. After a long day of field work on the streets of Taipei, he always knew where to find a small Taiwanese-style tea house to relax with tea and snacks. No matter what the circumstances, he always maintained his polite and courtly manners and his

sense of humor.

Eberhard was also an inspiring teacher. His wealth of knowledge along with his firsthand experience, often conveyed with a slightly whimsical sense of humor, never failed to attract a loyal following of students even though he frequently held his classes at eight o'clock in the morning—he told us this was to insure the seriousness of the students. He was always generous with his time, his knowledge, and the data from his famous punch-cards. When he sat on a thesis examination committee, his questions to the student were difficult but always pertinent and fair. He was also famous among his students for his punctuality in returning the drafts of thesis chapters with very detailed criticisms. Even when doing field work in Pakistan, he would quickly return a draft with page after page of typed single-spaced comments (his handwriting was practically illegible). He was also conscientious about teaching the succeeding generation of students. When he came to my university to deliver a lecture, he remained in the room for a long time afterward talking with my students, making notes about their queries, and promising to send them answers—and he did. Within a few days the students received letters with the pertinent information.

For his most fortunate students, Professor Eberhard was more than an inspiring teacher. He was also a personal friend who was always ready to listen to our troubles, and provide sympathetic guidance to help us through the rough stages of life. It was our extraordinary good luck to have him as a teacher, mentor, and friend.

Professor Eberhard's scholarship will endure in his writings. His kindness, friendship, and inspiration will endure in our memories.

NOTES

1. Most of this biographical information is taken from ALLAN and COHEN 1979, xix-xxiv, to which the reader is referred for additional detail.
2. See ALLAN and COHEN 1979, 225-266.

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