

Albert Terrien de Lacouperie’s (1845–1894) Translation of the *Yijing*, and the Debates in Europe and Asia over the “Western Origins of Chinese Civilization”¹

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Abstract

This essay examines the effort made by a French scholar named Albert Étienne Jean-Baptiste Terrien de Lacouperie (1844–1894) to translate the basic text of the *Yijing* (易經 *Classic of Changes*) into English, and the role that his idiosyncratic translations and interpretations played in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century theoretical debates over “the Western origins of Chinese civilization” (中國文化西來說). A central argument of the essay is that both politics and ethnocentrism played a significant role in shaping the responses of Western and East Asian scholars to this particular translation, influencing, in turn, Japanese and Chinese translations of it. In the end, however, new archaeological discoveries in China, together with the rise and rapid growth of Chinese nationalism, sounded the death knell for Terrien de Lacouperie’s controversial theories.

Keywords

Terrien de Lacouperie, *Yijing*, translation, mistranslation, Babylonia

1. Introduction

In 1892, Albert Étienne Jean-Baptiste Terrien de Lacouperie (hereafter Terrien), a bright, acerbic, passionately opinionated, and largely