

Needham Research Institute Newsletter

李約瑟研究所通訊

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EUROPEAN SCIENCE FOUNDATION WORKSHOP LAUNCHES NEW VOLUME IN SCIENCE AND CIVILISATION IN CHINA SERIES

SCC Volume VII.2, *General Conclusions*, edited by Kenneth Robinson contains Joseph Needham's 'Conclusions and Reflections' – in effect his final thoughts on a life's work. This volume was launched during a three-day international workshop "Sciences in Asia: Representations and Historiography, 17th to 20th Centuries" held at the Institute from 13th - 15th January 2005. The workshop was jointly organised by the NRI and the REHSEIS unit of the French national research organisation, CNRS. The European Science Foundation provided generous support for this event.



Scholars from nine European countries join scholars from China, Japan, India and the USA at the workshop, 14 January 2005

It was thus the fruit of collaboration between two major European centres concerned with the history of science in Asia, and took place in Europe's only research institute devoted to that field. It brought together a group of researchers from all over Europe, many of whom were meeting one another for the first time. The launch-pad of the meeting was a review of the work of Joseph Needham (1900-1995), Europe's most influential sinologist and historian of science in the 20th century.

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After wide-ranging but well-focused discussions, the participants agreed that it was essential for the development of their fields that the contacts begun in this meeting should be deepened and widened, and to this end they agreed to cooperate in the development of a Programme proposal to be submitted to the European Science Foundation for support.

Twenty-one scholars made formal contributions to the workshop. All contributors agreed that the meeting was extraordinarily successful in building intercultural and interdisciplinary bridges. Through the highly specific case studies presented by many speakers, important general issues emerged which bear centrally on Asian-European cultural relations and scientific interchange. These related to such questions as the nature of scientific modernity, and to the validity of sweeping bipolar contrasts between East and West. It was also clear that in order for both Europeans and Asians to comprehend both their scientific pasts as well as their possible futures it is essential to consider the relations and contrasts between the highly diverse histories of Asian cultures, and to abandon the habit of assuming that such frameworks as 'China and the West', 'India and the West' etc. can capture all that there is to say.

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS HONOURS SCC



*Launch reception for SCC Volume VII.2: (Story Page 4).
(left to right) Lady Youde, John Moffett, Kenneth Robinson,
Christopher Cullen and Gordon Johnson.*

AMBASSADOR PRAISES SCC VOLUME ON CERAMIC TECHNOLOGY

On 11 January 2005, through the kindness of the Chinese Ambassador to the UK, a reception was held at the Chinese Embassy in London to celebrate the publication of the lavishly illustrated history of Chinese ceramic technology by Rose Kerr and Nigel Wood, Volume 5, Part 12 of the SCC series. This book explores a range of questions, including: Why did China discover porcelain more than one thousand years before the West? What are the effects of China's influence on world ceramics? During the evening, the Ambassador, His Excellency, Zha Peixin made the following speech:

“The Chinese invention of porcelain has profoundly influenced the world. As the beauty of Chinese fine porcelain has mesmerized the world, it also gained the oriental land worldwide fame. Ceramic technology has been regarded as one of the most important contributions made by the Chinese people to the scientific and technical heritage of mankind. It also demonstrated the wisdom and creativeness of the Chinese people. Indeed, our ancestors had created a splendid ancient culture and made immense contributions to the world heritage. A nation with such creativeness ought to have a bright future. China used to be more advanced among nations for centuries. However for various reasons, since the 19th century, China had lagged behind. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and especially in the past 25 years, great changes have taken place in China. China today is in its process of national revitalization. China has 23 percent of the world's population. With further development and modernization, I am sure my country will make even greater contribution to mankind.



Dr. Christopher Cullen presents the Chinese Ambassador with a copy of SCC, Volume V.12

At the launching of this latest book of the *Science and Civilization in China* series, we can't but deeply miss the late Dr. Joseph Needham, a great scientist, a great historian and a great Sinologist. More than half a century ago, he cast his eyes upon China. With great ambition and determination, he embarked on the study of Chinese ancient science and technology. His life's work on the *Science and Civilization in China* series opened up a new window on Chinese history and built a new bridge between the oriental and western civilizations. He depicted China's contributions to science and technology as an essential part of the civilization of the whole of mankind. This unique in-depth

perspective has radically changed the ways in which scholars and scientists in the west evaluate the history of Chinese culture and science. And it also changed many prejudices and misconceptions in the west about China and its people. His name is now listed in the textbooks of Chinese history for China's middle schools. I'm sure he will be remembered not only by the Chinese people, but also by people throughout the world.”

SUCCESS BY YOUNG SCHOLARS

Every year thousands of students apply to be admitted to Cambridge to work for a PhD degree. Competition for entry is very fierce, and for many students success in being offered a place is followed by an ever fiercer competition - the struggle to win one of the relatively small number of scholarships offered by the University. We are delighted to be able to announce that this year two young scholars who have each held one of the institute's short-term fellowships have used their time with us as the basis for success in both these competitions: both of them have been given PhD places in the University, and both have been awarded full financial support. Liu Xinyi came to us from the University of Hefei through one of our Andrew W. Mellon fellowships, and will be working for a PhD in archaeology; he has a place at Darwin College. Wang Zilan will be working for a PhD in anthropology, and is now a member of Magdalene College. Her initial visit to the NRI was funded by one of our Li Foundation of New York fellowships, and she is from the University of Wuhan. We are very pleased by these successes, partly of course for the sake of the young scholars themselves, but partly too because all this reassures us that we are awarding our fellowships to the right kind of people!

HUGH PRICE (Bursar 1996 - 2005)

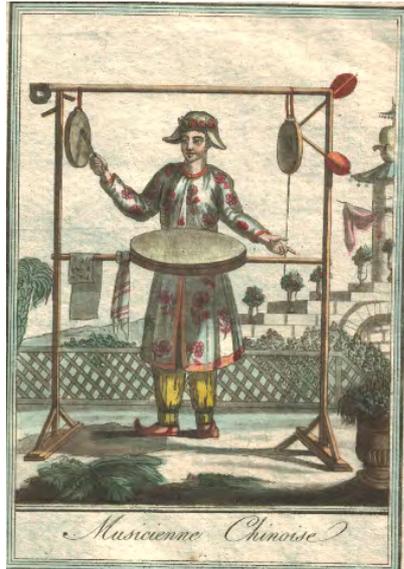


We are sad to report that Hugh Price, whose retirement we announced in the previous newsletter, died in February of this year. Hugh joined the Institute as Bursar in 1996 upon his retirement from Darwin College. He is remembered with fondness by his colleagues, and one of his favourite trees, *Prunus Tia Haku*, will be planted in the grounds of the Institute in his memory this autumn.

ARCHIVES PROJECT

From Philosophy to Mechanical Engineering

July 2004 saw the beginning of the 3-year project to catalogue the rich archive of documents created and collected by Joseph Needham and his colleagues in the course of producing the volumes of *Science and Civilisation in China*. The work began with a detailed

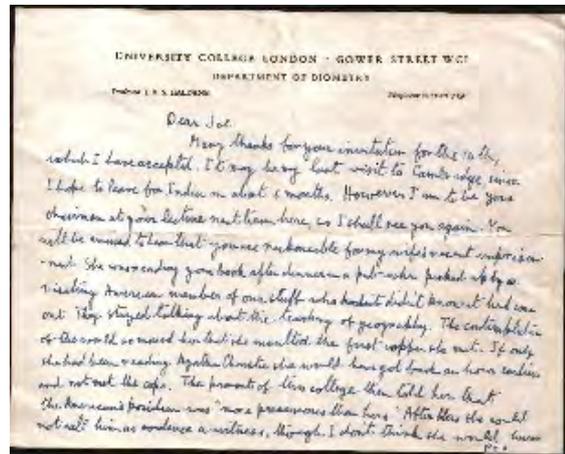


assessment of the SCC/93/1/53 - French print of a Chinese musician, probably 18th century

material in order to determine the content and what should be described for researchers. Each individual record series was identified and the structure of the collection mapped out. This structure was then transferred to the University of Cambridge designed cataloguing software, Cantab, to provide a solid framework for the cataloguing work. The Cantab database is designed to facilitate cataloguing in accordance with the International Standard for Archival Description.

At the start of the project the physical condition of the collection was also assessed to enable the purchase of the archival storage and packaging materials needed to ensure its long term preservation. As the documents are catalogued, they are placed in acid free folders, which in turn are stored in acid free archive boxes. Steel shelving has been purchased to house the boxes.

The catalogue has now been completed for many of the 'peripheral', though no less important record series. These include Needham's very interesting files of 'correspondence on and after publication' and 'reviews'. These hold a wealth of illuminating material, much of it originating from well-known figures such as Rewi Alley, J. D. Bernal, Arthur Waley and Laurence Picken. The large and bulky series of Needham's original typescripts, annotated proofs and illustrations has also been completed. This material enables a greater understanding of the development of each volume and the project as a whole over time. Titles of other series already listed are 'prospectuses and brochures'; 'correspondence with publishers'; 'prefatory materials'; 'publicity and complimentary copies'. On completion of these files, work began to catalogue the main body of material, the research files. These are arranged in order of the SCC volumes, as Joseph Needham left them. The documents include research notes and correspondence from across the globe.



SCC4/2/17 – Letter from J B S Haldane of the Department of Biometry, University College, London, includes a description of his wife's 'imprisonment' as an indirect result of reading SCC, Volume 2, (Undated, Late 1958).

'She was reading your book after dinner in a pub when picked up by a visiting American member of our staff who didn't know it had come out. They stayed talking about the teaching of geography. The contemplation of the world so moved her that she insulted the first copper [= policeman] she met. If only she had been reading Agatha Christie she would have got back an hour earlier and not met the cops.'

By the end of the first year of the project, a detailed catalogue had been made of files created for introductory Volume 1, through to those for Volume 4, Part 2, dealing with mechanical engineering. Work is currently underway on files relating to civil engineering.

More than 8,500 individual items have now been listed and the project is on target for completion mid 2007, when the catalogue will be released onto the Internet via the Janus website. It is gratifying and exciting to think that we are working towards a time when researchers will be able to put this unique piece of documentary heritage to good use. Please note that access to the archives will be restricted until completion of the entire project.

Joanne Meek, Cataloguing Archivist

FRIDAY TEXT READINGS

Now in its 13th year, our term-time Friday text-reading seminars have proved to be as popular and useful (to both speakers and listeners) as ever. The last year has seen the usual eclectic mix, from Mongol horse husbandry to Chinese scientists and physical labour in the Early 1960s, Shang dynasty archaeology to Japanese maritime technology in the C16th. There have also been a number of presentations on the impact of European mathematics and astronomy on China, including the workshop *Imperial science in early and mid-Qing China*. We are most grateful to all the speakers and those who have taken part in the seminars. Full details of the current term's seminar programme are available on our website at <http://www.nri.org.uk/seminars.html>.

On 13 January 2005, Cambridge University Press held a reception at their bookshop to mark the publication of Volume VII.2, edited by Kenneth Robinson, which contains Joseph Needham's final conclusions and reflections on the SCC project and its implications. During the reception, Mr Richard Fisher, Executive Director, Humanities and Social Sciences, made the following speech celebrating the success of the *Science and Civilisation in China* series:

“In 1954, when Volume One of SCC was announced, overall turnover of the Syndics was £317K: just for comparison it is now £130 million!. [...]

The work itself was almost immediately recognised not just as an intellectual event, but also as a bibliographic event, and I remember reading an article years later by Mark Elvin saying how important the physical look of volume one had been to its reception. Frank Kendon designed the printed boards and jacket; John Dreyfus designed the page, with its two layers of footnotes in Roman and Chinese characters. [...]

Within the Press, I would like to salute the following on the editorial side, all of whom have worked on the Needham project over the years: Michael Black, Peter Burbidge, Alan Crowden, Pauline Hire, William Davies, Marigold Acland, Michael Sharp – as F. R. Leavis might have said, a Great Tradition is there. This is in addition to the production, sales and marketing colleagues for whom SCC has been so central, because it has been one of the defining CUP undertakings of the past half-century. Nearly 75,000 books have been sold in the Needham strand as a whole, making nearly £2million for the Syndicate overall (much of it, at the risk of sounding like Fred Trueman, when a pound was worth a pound). We are enormously grateful to the teams of editors, contributors, advisers, assistants, who have kept the Great Project moving forward, and at this stage I would like to thank particularly Christopher Cullen, Sue Bennett, Sir Geoffrey Lloyd, Lady Youde and our chairman Gordon Johnson, for all of whom the Needham Project has been something very special.

Were the Syndicate akin to the BBC, having to make a case for Charter Renewal, then I would like to think that Science and Civilisation is one of a very small number of props that our Chief Executive Stephen Bourne would take with him to make the case in Westminster or Whitehall for our continued existence. It does seem to me exactly the sort of long-term, large-scale collaborative research enterprise involving all parts of this University, including its Press, and friends of this University throughout the world, that we should specially salute.”

THE LIBRARY

It has been a busy year for the Library. Along with the project to catalogue Dr. Needham's SCC archives described in this issue, the Library has begun a retrospective cataloguing project funded by the Mellon Foundation. The project, which began in April of this year and will last 18 months, will ensure that the entire monograph collection of the Library will be catalogued online for the first time, making our unique collection more accessible to scholars around the world. Information on how to access the catalogue can be found at <http://www.nri.org.uk/library.html>. I am very grateful to Catherine Anson, formerly Librarian at the Faculty of Oriental Studies, and Huang Jing for all their hard work in moving the project forward. Of related interest is the recent upgrade of Newton (Cambridge University Library OPAC) to a Unicode version. This means that for the first time we are able to use original script to catalogue our East Asian books directly onto the system. We hope that this will soon lead to users being able to search for books in the original script.

I recently returned from an exchange visit to Guangxi University of Nationalities in Nanning, funded by the Sino-British Fellowship Trust. The University is home to a group of scholars who conduct research into the history and anthropology of local traditional technologies, such as paper-making, dyeing, etc.. The visit enabled me to become acquainted with the scholars and their research and to collect local research materials. I am very grateful to Professor Wan Fubin, his colleagues and students for their kindness and hospitality during my stay. The trip naturally allowed me to indulge in my usual spree of book-hunting in both Nanning and Beijing for new research in our field, as well as providing me with the opportunity to attend a conference in Beijing on traditional Chinese medical illustrations, attended by leading historians of Chinese medicine from China and beyond. This year, along with the Director, and several visiting NRI scholars, I also attended the 11th International Conference on the History of Science in East Asia in Munich. This conference, magnificently arranged by Professor Paul Unschuld, is the most important opportunity for meeting scholars working in fields relevant to the Institute and to hear about their latest research and publications. I am very grateful to Dr. Anthony Butler for providing the support for this trip.

I should like to conclude by thanking all those, both institutions and individuals, who have made donations to the Library in the past year. These are an essential component of our unique collection, and are greatly appreciated.

John Moffett