

Needham Research Institute Newsletter

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Visit of the China Entrepreneurs Club, July 2012



On July 24 we were honored to receive a visit from a group of members of the China Entrepreneurs Club (CEC), led by the chairman of the club Mr Liu Chuanzhi 柳传志, who is chairman of Legend Holdings limited and Founder and Honorary Chairman of Lenovo, now the world's largest manufacturer of PCs. He was accompanied by 18 other members of the club, many of them leaders of major Chinese businesses. British government representatives accompanied the party.

In the initial approaches to arrange this visit, we were told that CEC were coming to Cambridge in the hope that we could supply them with an answer to the so-called 'Needham Problem' – why did pre-modern China not build on its relative prosperity and high level of technical development so as to lead the world into modernity, rather than the countries of Western Europe? I planned to respond to this question in a way that would stress that history could be relevant to present-day concerns, and that the NRI was therefore worth the attention of people such as our visitors.

After a welcome from Professor Martin Jones on behalf of the Trustees (in Chinese!), followed by a short talk from

Professor Mei Jianjun, who explained the regard in which the Institute was held by Chinese scholars. I then gave a talk under the title "The old Needham Question and a new Needham Question: long-term issues in Chinese science and technology development". In this, I suggested how issues arising from Needham's work pointed in directions that were centrally relevant to China's current development plans.

The response to my talk from our visitors was very striking, and very lively. Led off by Mr Liu, visitors gave us a series of very frank expressions of view on the problems those present had faced in building and sustaining technological innovation in China today, stemming from present political and economic circumstances. Fuller reports and comments on this visit may be found at the following Chinese websites:

<http://finance.sina.com.cn/china/20120725/115212665853.shtml>;

<http://finance.china.com/html/201207/31/293189909.html>

Christopher Cullen

It is a pleasure to record once more in these pages the gratitude of the Institute for the long record of support from the Lee family of Singapore for the great work begun by Joseph Needham, which we have the privilege of continuing today. In *SCC* volume 4 part 1 (Physics), published in 1962 Joseph Needham gratefully noted “a splendid contribution towards the expenses of research for the chemical volume” from Dato Lee Kong Chian, who is still remembered as a great figure in the world of business and philanthropy in Singapore, as well as the first Chinese Chancellor of the University of Singapore. But the support of the Lee family has not been limited to one man. Since the 1980s the Institute has received steady support from Dato Lee Kong Chian’s son, Dr Lee Seng Tee (S.T. Lee), himself a globally active philanthropist, support that has become more and more generous

S. T. LEE



as the years have gone by. Dr Lee has already honoured us by accepting an Honorary Fellowship of the Institute, and the *SCC* volume on Ceramics bore a dedication to both Dr. Lee’s father and himself. The Trustees of the Institute have now decided that it is appropriate to make acknowledgement of their gratitude in a physical form, and have therefore voted to name the westernmost of the Institute’s three wings as The S.T. Lee Wing. The ceremony to unveil the dedicatory plaque at the entrance to the wing will take place in early 2013, and we shall of course report on this event in the next number of this Newsletter. As Director of the Institute, I have had the privilege of visiting Dr. Lee on several occasions to carry out the pleasant duty of thanking him for his repeated benefactions, and it therefore gives me great satisfaction to know that the part of the building that houses my own office will be named after him.

Visit of Renowned Calligrapher DU Benji



On August 3rd, the renowned Chinese calligrapher Du Benji, creator of the ‘One World, One Dream’ inscription for the 2008 Olympics, visited the Institute, accompanied by Mr Alistair Michie, who is an Honorary Associate of the Institute. The party was welcomed by a group of young researchers, who showed them round the building. Mr Du created two works for the Institute: one of them was an inscription showing the name of the Institute in Chinese, 李約瑟研究所, Li Yuese Yanjiusuo, and the other (at the Director’s suggestion, conveyed by Mr Michie in his absence) was of a famous phrase by the Ming loyalist scholar Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692), 象外無道 *xiang wai wu dao* ‘There is no Dao outside phenomena’.

H.T. Huang (Huang Hsing-Tsung 黃興宗) 1921-2012

One of Joseph's oldest Chinese friends, an SCC collaborator and former Deputy-Director of the Institute, HT, as he was known to all his friends, passed away peacefully at his home in Alexandria, Virginia, on Monday 21st May this year.

Born in Malacca in September 1921, HT was teaching at a Bailie technical school outside Chengdu in 1943, when Joseph Needham hired him as his personal secretary at the Sino-British Science Cooperation Office. For the next 15 months, he accompanied JN by road, rail, boat and donkey on his extraordinary trips across Free China. The first was



H.T. with Kuang Wei 鄺威 and Chen Zixin 陳自信 by the monument at Jianmenguan 劍門關, Sichuan, Aug. 1943

what must have seemed in retrospect a gentle jaunt around picturesque parts of Sichuan province in the summer of 1943. These were followed by the epic trips out to Dunhuang in the northwest (autumn/winter 1943) and to Fuzhou on the eastern seaboard (spring/summer 1944). The bonds of friendship forged on these exhilarating and exhausting journeys lasted the rest of their lives.

After another long and arduous voyage, HT arrived in Oxford in autumn 1944, completing a D.Phil. in organic chemistry there in 1947. This was followed by further study in the US, a career working in the food processing and pharmaceutical industries, and finally, from 1975-1990, a period as Program Officer at the National Science Foundation in Washington D.C.

JN and HT never lost touch during this period, and by 1984, HT had agreed to provide a chapter on biological pest control for SCC Volume 6, Pt.1: Botany (CUP, 1986). He then went on to write his masterful summation of a life-time's interest in China's food culture, SCC Volume 6, Pt.5: Fermentations and Food Science (CUP, 2000). During this period he came to Cambridge often, in particular during his time as Institute Deputy-Director from 1990-1995.

We would like to take this opportunity to express once again our condolences to his family. He will be very fondly remembered by all who worked with him here.



H.T. Huang outside a guest-house in Lizhuang, Sichuan province 四川李莊, June 1943

New postdoctoral fellowship funding

During a recent visit to Hong Kong I held a number of meetings, with representatives of The Independent Schools Foundation Trust (ISF Trust). This body was established to set up a new independent secondary school, The ISF Academy, with the mission to be "a community of learners, independent in thought and action, deeply rooted in Chinese culture, global in understanding and experience, and excellent in all endeavors." Students at the school are expected to be equally proficient in both Putonghua and English, and follow courses of in-depth study of the ancient cultural heritages of both China and Europe. The school enjoys excellent facilities in a beautiful seaside setting, and under the leadership of the Head, Malcolm Pritchard, provides an education that many parents in the UK would be happy for their children to receive,

It gives me great pleasure to announce that The ISF Foundation, led by Mr Peter Wong, have agreed to fund on a recurrent basis a three-year postdoctoral research fellowship tenable at the NRI for research in any area relating to the history of science, technology and medicine in China. The ISF will fund full salary and other costs of the fellow. In return the fellow will be expected to assist with a short annual summer visit to Cambridge by a group of senior students from the ISF Academy. He or she will also receive funding for visits to Hong Kong, during which academic hospitality will be provided by the Hong Kong University Institute of Humanities, to whom we are most grateful for their involvement under the leadership of Professor Angela Leung, the Joseph Needham - Philip Mao Professor in Chinese History, Science and Civilization. The presence of long-term researchers is a highly positive factor in the development and sustaining of our research community at the NRI, and we are delighted that this opportunity for a young scholar is now open.

Christopher Cullen

Joseph Needham Award

On 26th September the Institute was visited by a delegation from the Chinese State Administration of Foreign Expert Affairs, to present a joint award from themselves, the Information Office of the State Council, and other bodies. The award, in recognition of Joseph Needham's inclusion in a list of the 10 persons deemed "the most influential overseas experts in the 60 years of the P.R. China" was for "his devotion to research of the 4,000 years of history and achievement of science and technology in China and his significant contribution to the world's understanding of the technical civilization in China". Others recipients of the award included such eminent figures as journalist Israel Epstein and Nobel Laureate in physics Tsung-Dao Lee.



Library News

As a result of the generosity of one of our staunchest supporters, Dr. S.T. Lee (see the second page of this Newsletter), the coming year will see exciting developments for the Library, both in terms of book and digital resources acquisitions, and the provision of much-needed extra storage space. These will be described in detail in the next Newsletter. Meanwhile, 2012 saw continued growth of the Library, and also of the number of users of the collection, both from within the University of Cambridge and from further afield. In addition to the generous donation of individual items to the collection, there have been 3 significant gifts of books, enhancing in particular our Korean medicine section. These include a collection of more than 50 volumes of translations of traditional Korean medical texts into modern Korean from The Korean Institute for Oriental Medicine in Daejeon, and 30 volumes of Korean books on the history of medicine in Korea, donated by Professors Shin Dongwon and Moon Manyong of the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology, also in Daejeon. In addition, we received a collection of books and research papers formerly belonging to Dr. W.G. Bailey of Simon Fraser University on the history and use of the medicinal plant ginseng from his widow Leah Skretkowicz. We are, as always, very grateful to all those who continue to support the Library in this way.

This year, I made two trips abroad. The first, in May of this year, was to the University of Chicago to attend the confer-

ence "Texting China: Composition, Transmission, Preservation of Pre-modern Chinese Textual Materials", held in honour of T.H. Tsien, author of our *SCC* volume on paper and printing. Then, in late July and August, I spent 3 weeks visiting Hong Kong, Guangzhou and Taiwan. After a few days in Hong Kong, I spent nearly a week at our latest SBFT partner institution, the Agricultural History Centre of the Department of History at South China Agriculture University 华南农业大学 in Guangzhou. Dr. Needham visited this University in 1978, an event still warmly remembered today. While there, I talked about the work of the NRI, visited other institutions and museums in the city, and bought books. I then moved on to Taiwan, where I re-visited the National Science and Technology Museum in Kaohsiung, site of the excellent exhibition on Dr. Needham's work in China in WWII in 2000. The trip enabled me to collect many more books for the Library, to visit old friends, and to see first-hand the on-going rapid changes in south China. My thanks go to all of my hosts for their warm hospitality.

Seminars

Once again, our Friday text-reading seminars have been a focal point for stimulating discussion on a wide range of topics in our field. I would like to thank all those who took part, both speakers and audience, for their contributions.

John Moffett