

THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

TWENTY-FIFTH CONGREGATION

Conferment of the Degree of Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*

*A Citation*

Dr. Joseph Needham, DSc(Hon), LLD(Hon), DLitt(Hon), PhD(Hon)

If towards the end of the twentieth century men of Renaissance could still be found who have transcended growing specialization in learning, Dr. Joseph Needham would certainly be a supreme example. It is indeed encouraging, in spite of C.P. Snow's warning of polarization of the two cultures, that we still have men of Joseph Needham's vision who can look at the twain in the right perspective. Scientist, historian, philosopher, and educator, Needham began his long and brilliant career as a pioneering biochemist known for his books *Chemical Embryology*, 1931 and *Biochemistry and Morphogenesis*, 1942. His lifelong affiliation is with Cambridge University, where he has been first Fellow (1924-66) and then Master (1966-76) of Gonville and Caius College, and since 1976 Director of East Asian History of Science Library. His many honours and awards, including Honorary Counsellorship to UNESCO and, significantly, Leonardo da Vinci Medal, I cannot mention in full. For his scholarly achievements and educational contributions we share admiration with academic communities all over the world.

But Needham means much more to us than just a great scholar. To us he means *Science and Civilization in China*, a trail-blazing yet monumental work encyclopaedic in scope, vivid in imagination, and painstaking in scholarship, the result of forty years of expeditions and researches in collaboration with other distinguished scholars. By arranging and assessing historical relics of two thousand years, the book undertakes a long overdue reevaluation of the important role science and technology played in ancient China. With ten of the twenty volumes published, this work has already exposed the prejudice of conventional scholars, foreign and native Chinese alike, that Chinese civilization did not excel in science and technology.

Men of foresight have been articulate in warning us against the use of science not for conquest of Nature but for conquest of man. It is most meaningful that Needham's choice to remedy the social abuse of science is by a return to Chinese philosophy. Let me quote his own words: "If the world is searching for an ethic firmly based on the nature of man, an ethic which could justify resistance to every dehumanizing invention of social control, an ethic in the light of which mankind could judge dispassionately what the best course to take will be, in the face of multitudinous options raised by the ever-growing powers given to us by the natural sciences, then let it listen to the sages of Confucianism and Taoism . . . China has in her time learnt much from the rest of the world; now perhaps it is time for the nations and the continents to learn again from her."

For his advancement not only of learning but also of international understanding, Mr. Chancellor, I request Your Excellency to award Dr. Joseph Needham the degree of Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*.

October 17, 1983