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Dr Joseph Needham on his 90th Birthday in 1990, received congratulations from a special Delegation of the Chinese Academy of Science who had travelled to England for this purpose to deliver them to him in Cambridge. *Courtesy Needham Research Institute.*

Joseph Needham was undoubtedly the most distinguished scientist and scholar I met in my life. When I took over as Editor of *Discovery* in 1956, Joseph Needham had just started his magnum opus, *Science and Civilisation in China*, the first volume of which appeared in 1954 and its breathtaking, all-science embracing outline made it famous even then. At the time of writing these notes, 1998, a total of 17 large volumes take up 86 cm on my shelves, and it is expected that the complete opus will extend to 30 volumes. In my opinion, rightly, it has been called “the greatest work of historical scholarship of the 20th century”. I often met Needham, read his works, and esteemed him greatly.

Needham, born in 1900, joined the Editorial Board of ISR at the inception of the Journal in 1976, and it became customary later to celebrate a Board Member’s 80th Birthday with a contribution of his own choice. This was not yet usual when the Journal was only four years old and when Needham was 80, but it was corrected 10 years later in the issue of ISR 15/4 after Needham had celebrated his 90th birthday on 9 December 1990.

“A Personal Impression” was contributed by his life-long friend W. Brian Harland and this was followed by “China and Europe—Their Different Progress in Science” a joint analysis by Needham and by Colin Ronan who was at the time the Secretary of the East Asian History of Science Trust and the author of *The Shorter Science and Civilisation of China* of which three volumes had appeared by then. The article attempted the almost impossible task of summarising 15 volumes in a few pages.

Harland gave an intimate and moving biographical sketch how Needham had been attracted to China, its culture and history, since his undergraduate days and how Needham’s Christian social conscience had been easily confused by the ignorant with Marxist communism. Needham as Head of the British Scientific Mission at H.M. Embassy in Peking, had travelled throughout China during World War II, and had obtained an encyclopaedic knowledge of the whole of Chinese scientific activities.

What started as a single historical research broadened, and he called experts to help, and it blossomed into a Research Institute, now named after him. It is housed in a new beautiful building in Cambridge, in almost Chinese style, from which *Science and Civilisation in China* is guided and completed. I started at first to buy the volumes as they appeared, but later could not afford to continue this costly habit. I therefore reviewed for ISR each new volume as it came from the Cambridge University Press, an activity which made me admire Needham more and more, as his spirit continues, in spite of his death, to inspire us all. [See Appendix II, Bibliography, Title 428]