

Obituary: The Taoist hell of Joseph Needham, 1900-1995

by Michael Billington

On March 24, the 94-year-old British China scholar Joseph Needham passed on to his just rewards, acclaimed by an obituary in the British newspaper the *Independent* as “the Erasmus of the 20th century”—in fact, they gush, “a sober assessment suggests that with the passage of time, he will be recognized as a greater figure than the scholar from Rotterdam.” He is hailed as “one of the greatest scholars in this or any country, of this or any century.” The same newspaper calls his multi-volume *Science and Civilization in China* “perhaps the greatest work of scholarship by one person since Aristotle.”

The comparison to Erasmus is a sacrilege, and calling Needham a great scholar is equivalent to praising Hitler and Stalin as great statesmen. However, it is indeed reasonable to say that Needham succeeded in compiling in his major works as much nonsense and as much evil as did Aristotle. Since Needham continues to be viewed both in the West and in China—in the People’s Republic as well as in Taiwan—as one of the foremost experts on the comparative studies of Eastern and Western science and culture, it is imperative to mark his passing by reviewing his actual record—which should convince the credulous that Mr. Needham is now most likely sharing the eternal flames with his old friends Bertrand Russell, Mao Zedong, Julian Huxley, and other like-minded genocidalists of the 20th century. His lifelong devotion to communism in various forms will be seen as merely a coloration of his services for British intelligence in pursuit of the historic British policy of preventing the development of China as a strong, modern nation.

An autobiographical note is in order. As I began serving my first prison term in January 1989, I decided to devote my time and energies as a political prisoner to the history—past, present, and future—of Asia, an area of the world that has, since my school days, held a special interest for me. I soon discovered the crucial work of G.W. Leibniz, in collaboration with the Jesuit missionaries in China, in building a grand alliance between Europe and Asia, drawing on the extraordinary agreement between the ideas of the Christian Renaissance in the West and the Confucian traditions in China, especially those of the Neo-Confucian master Chu Hsi of the 12th century. I pledged to continue that work of Leibniz, in league with Lyndon LaRouche, for whom Leibniz had provided the primary inspiration for his own life’s work and

for his own scientific discoveries.

I began covering Chinese and Asian affairs as a journalist for *EIR*, while working through the classic works of Chinese antiquity. I shared with Leibniz the tremendous joy of discovery in reading the rich and cultured writings of Confucius and Mencius, and in confronting the enemies of Confucius among the Taoists and Legalists. I soon recognized that there were very close similarities between the fundamental divisions within Chinese philosophy and the parallel divisions in the West—i.e., on the one hand, the humanism of Plato and the Christian worldview of man as a creative being in the image of God, and, on the other hand, the Aristotelian view of man as a sensual beast, to be ruled over and controlled by an oligarchical order. As I began to study the works of Chu Hsi, I saw that his ideas reflected the discoveries of his contemporary St. Thomas Aquinas, and even pointed toward the great discoveries of Nicolaus of Cusa in 15th-century Europe, whose work launched the Golden Renaissance. Again, I found that Chu Hsi’s enemies amongst the Taoist and Buddhist sects—and especially the “pseudo-Confucian” Wang Yangming of the 16th century—were of the same “type” epistemologically as the Aristotelian sects associated with Venice, including the anti-Renaissance romanticism of the Enlightenment.

I wondered why this powerful truth about the universal nature of the great ideas of history had been lost or ignored (with only minor exceptions) since the time of Leibniz. The broad answer to this question lies in the history of Venice, but the 20th-century aspect can be largely accredited to the evil work of Needham, who, together with Bertrand Russell, served as the British Empire’s primary agents of ideological containment and destruction against China in the modern era.

‘The Needham Question’

Why did China, despite the fact that its economy and culture in many ways matched or excelled that of Europe before the 13th-century Mongul invasion, fail to develop modern science as it developed in Europe? This has come to be known as “The Needham Question” among China scholars, as it was the question Needham posed to himself in compiling the 16 volumes of his encyclopedic *Science and Civilization in China*. Needham did not really attempt to answer the question. Rather, he profiled Chinese history and



Joseph Needham in his younger days. "One of the most liberating aspects of the whole of my life," he said, "was when I went to China and found that a quarter of the human race doesn't find the need of believing in a benevolent and creative god."

thought in such a way as to assure that China remained incapable of rectifying the problem.

Needham acknowledged that the Confucian tradition was that of rational thought, based on the concept of man as fundamentally good, endowed by Heaven with certain virtues, the foremost being the love of truth (*jen*), whereas the opposite, Taoist tradition was one of mysticism, magic, and the belief that man is no more meaningful in the cosmic reality than a rock or a worm. And yet, Needham held Confucianism responsible for the retardation of science in China, while the great scientific developments of the earlier ages were credited to the alchemy of the Taoists!

Needham wrote: "Rationalism proved itself less favorable than mysticism to the progress of science. . . . Science and magic are in their earlier stages indistinguishable." He even admitted that this is the fundamental basis of the empirical method of the British: "Rational theology was anti-scientific, mystical theology proved to be pro-scientific. . . . Thus, the interest taken in the early Royal Society in what we now can see were magical claims." Taoists, like the alchemists in the West, launched "real science" through the empiricist, directionless mixing of chemicals in search of magic potions. Needham insisted that "modern science" was the result of such pure empiricist dabbling, coupled with the rejection of any search for reason in the universe, which he disdained as "metaphysics." He praised the Taoist guru Chuang Tzu for his "characteristic distaste for metaphysics; the ultimate beginning and the ultimate end are the Tao's

secret. All that man can do is to study and describe phenomena; it [Taoism] is indeed a profession of faith in natural science."

Needham was thus falsely portraying western science, at the same time that he was profiling the Chinese, with the intention of preventing any renewal of the 17th- and 18th-century efforts to unite the actual western scientific tradition of Plato, Cusanus, Johannes Kepler, and Leibniz with the scientific method discovered by the 12th-century Confucian sage Chu Hsi. It should be noted in this regard that Needham's work is referenced regularly by the British Royal Family's environmental mafia, as well as the terrorist apologists of the Liberation Theology variety, not only in regard to China per se, but as an "authority" on science and religion. Needham's overt embrace of Taoism against either Christianity or Confucianism serves as theoretical support for the anti-science and anti-human cult belief structures propounded by these New Age soldiers of the new feudalism.

The evidence is overwhelming that Needham did not simply wander into this work by chance, but was deployed by British intelligence to that purpose. Needham has been associated with Cambridge University for the last 70 years. He began his career as a biochemist in the circles of geneticist J.B.S. Haldane, Bertrand Russell, and Julian Huxley (with whom in 1945 he collaborated in the creation of Unesco, which from the outset was an occult-infested British intelligence nest within the United Nations Organization). He wrote extensively on the connection between biochemistry and embryology, and he and his biochemist wife, Dorothy Moyle, were both Fellows of the Royal Academy.

His own account of his dramatic shift into China studies in the middle of his career claims that a group of Chinese students at Cambridge so fascinated him that he gradually became preoccupied with all things Chinese. The truth lies more in the fact that Needham was a member of the Communist cell set up by British intelligence at Cambridge, which included J.B.S. Haldane, who doubled as editor of the Communist Party paper the *Daily Worker*. Needham was also an associate of Bertrand Russell and the Fabian Society circles around Beatrice and Sydney Webb. He was most likely appointed to the "China desk" by this Communist/Fabian network, with the assignment to establish links with Mao Zedong's Communist Party of China, following up on the work of Bertrand Russell, who had trained the emerging Chinese Communist leadership in the early 1920s. Needham did in fact become a dedicated friend of Mao's China and of Mao himself, defending the murderous regime even during the peak of the Cultural Revolution.

The most infamous incident of Needham's role in sponsoring Maoism came in 1952, toward the end of the Korean War (a war, it should be noted, instigated by the British to prevent any potential rapprochement between China and the United States, while draining the People's Republic of the strength needed to rebuild their economy, shattered after 100

years of colonialism and civil war). Mao called on his friend Needham to head a team of western “experts” to investigate the Chinese claim that the United States had used biological warfare agents against the North Koreans. Needham did the job and reported that the evidence was genuine, which earned him public ridicule in the West for his supposed “gullibility” before the Chinese Communists. His report succeeded, however, in further dividing Washington and Beijing, while firmly establishing Needham as a trustworthy friend of Mao. Needham was barred from entry to the United States for a period following that incident.

Besides being a Communist, Needham was also an Anglo-Catholic who served as a novice lay brother for two years, and considered entering the priesthood. But that should not be misinterpreted to mean that he was a Christian. Proudly calling himself a Taoist, Needham ended Volume 2 of his *Science and Civilization in China* with the following statement: “Modern science, since the time of LaPlace, has found it possible and even desirable to dispense completely with the hypothesis of a God as the basis for the laws of Nature, and has returned, in a sense, to the Taoist outlook. . . . This is what accounts for the strangely modern ring in so much of the writing of that great school.” It was on this atheistic basis that Needham condemned Confucianism in favor of Taoism. His favorite passage from the *Tao Te Ching* by Lao Tzu reads:

Heaven and Earth are without benevolence,
They treat the 10,000 things as straw dogs.
Nor is the Sage benevolent,
To him also are the hundred clans but straw dogs.

The Chinese word for “benevolence” here is “*jen*,” a term which in Confucianism carries a similar connotation to the term “*agapē*” in the New Testament (often translated as “charity,” referring to the love of God and love of mankind). Needham’s rejection of God and his rejection of the Confucian “*jen*” were, in his mind, not incompatible with his belonging to a Christian church, since, like Alice in Wonderland, words to Needham mean whatever he wants them to mean—or, as he liked to put it, words have different meanings in different contexts. Thus, Needham held as his “philosophy of life” that there are five distinct forms of human experience—religion, science, history, philosophy, and aesthetics—and, he said, “I don’t think there is any necessity to reconcile them.”

Leibniz and Chu Hsi

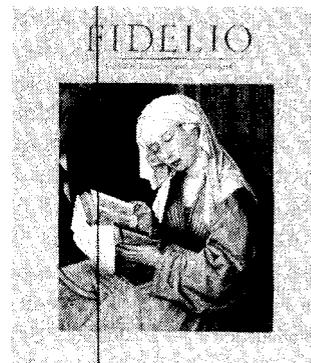
Needham’s most difficult challenge, and the subject of his most serious intellectual crime, was the necessity to explain the following question: If Taoism, alchemy, and empiricism were the sources of scientific discovery, how is it that the greatest leaps in scientific progress came as a result of the work of Leibniz in the West and Chu Hsi in the East, who

were profoundly Christian and Confucian (respectively), and resolutely anti-empiricist? Needham simply declared both of them to be the opposite of what they were. Leibniz, in his later life, Needham said, “went over to Lucretian-Cartesian mechanical materialism, a system of thought which had always tended, however disguised, to atheism.” Then Leibniz the “atheist” proposed his theory of monads, said Needham, which, he falsely asserts, portrays the world as a “vast living organism,” without the need of a God.

Chu Hsi is treated in a similar way. Chu Hsi, the preeminent leader of the Sung Dynasty Confucian Renaissance, propounded the concept of a universal principle (*Li*), such that all created things reflect the principle of the Creator, while man’s nature is defined by this universal principle, as made manifest in the creative power of the mind. Leibniz recognized in this a view similar to the Christian concept of man created in the image of God, and as closely parallel to his own monadology. Needham, however, praises Chu Hsi as a Taoist! He ignores both Chu Hsi’s repeated denunciations of Taoism and his extensive development of the concept of “*jen*” as the essence of the universal principle connecting man with Heaven. In fact, Needham argues that Chu Hsi did not really mean “principle” by the Chinese term “*Li*,” but merely meant the “organization” of the material world. Chu Hsi, too, becomes an atheist! Needham told *Scientific Ameri-*

For further reading

Michael Billington, who is serving a hideous 77-year sentence in Virginia state prison as a result of the political railroad against Lyndon LaRouche and his associates, has, during his incarceration, published several groundbreaking articles in the quarterly journal *Fidelio*. In the Fall 1994 issue, he wrote “The Taoist Perversion of Twentieth-Century Science,” which includes a lengthy discussion of “Joseph Needham: Ideological Triple Agent.” Of related interest is “Toward the Ecumenical Unity of East and West,” in the Summer 1993 *Fidelio*.



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can magazine in 1992, "One of the most liberating aspects of the whole of my life was when I went to China and found that a quarter of the human race doesn't find the need of believing in a benevolent and creative god." This must not be seen as merely an observation by Mr. Needham, but as a statement of his intended policy and program for the Chinese.

One humorous note: Needham is renowned for the thorough nature of his scholarship, with extensive cross references and documentation of his facts, including prolific and erudite footnotes. However, he often hides within this method his intentional use of overt lies. Two classic examples emerged from his falsehoods regarding the beliefs of Chu Hsi and Leibniz. To portray Chu Hsi as a synthesizer of Taoism and Confucianism, he had to explain Chu Hsi's repeated and virulent attacks on every aspect of Taoism. Needham's footnote: "In Chu Hsi's writings there are polemics against the Taoist conceptions of the word [*Tao*], which rested on complete misunderstandings of Lao-tzu [the founder of Taoism]." Needham's "synthesizer" knew nothing of the essence of his subject! In the case of Leibniz, Needham contended that what Leibniz really meant by his monads was physical "organisms" (just as Chu Hsi's *Li* really meant "organization"). This hardly fit with the definition of monads in the very first sentence of Leibniz's *Monadology*, which states that a monad is a simple substance "which has no parts." Needham's footnote: "It is at first sight disturbing to find that monads are defined as without parts, but Leibniz used the word 'parts' in a rather special way." This "special way" was certainly beyond Needham's ken.

Needham has continued to be honored not only by the People's Republic of China (which only last year made him one of the first foreigners to become a Fellow of the Chinese Academy of Science), but also by Taiwan and other Chinese communities. While serving as Master of Gonville and Caius College at Cambridge, Needham created and ran the Needham Research Center, with funds provided by a revealing assortment of sponsors: the Singapore banker Tan Chin Tuan, Hongkong tycoon K.P. Tin, the Kresge Foundation in the United States, and the Beijing government. Beijing should note carefully the praise bestowed by one of Needham's Cambridge associates in the October 1986 journal *The World and I*, who wrote: "Some become legends in their lifetimes, their toils honored by foreign peoples before their own recognize them: Clive of India, Lawrence of Arabia, and Mountbatten of Burma spring easily to mind. Needham of China now must be added, and only time can hail his achievement as the greatest of all." Those Chinese who are monitoring the continuing British efforts to divide and destroy China will certainly be aware of the evil done by Clive, Lawrence, and, especially, Mountbatten, in the service of the British Empire. Overturning the distorted profile of both the East and the West which Needham fashioned in the service of that same Empire will be a worthy and necessary contribution to China's future, and to the rest of us as well.

British scandal could signal end of Thatcher politics forever

by Dean Andromidas

A scandal hitting a British Conservative Party minister could signal the sinking of the government of British Prime Minister John Major, along with the political apparatus that has supported Tory politics for the last 20 years. The scandal is targeting Jonathan William Aitken, the chief secretary of the treasury who could become the 20th minister in the Major cabinet forced to resign because of scandals. Aitken is the grandnephew of Lord Beaverbrook, the famous Canadian-born British press baron and mouthpiece of the British Empire. The accusations range from illegal arms deals with Iran and Iraq, to questionable relations with Saudi princes, Middle Eastern arms dealers, and shady businessmen.

While scandals of this nature, particularly when they hit those who deserve it, can be greatly appreciated, this and others hitting the Major government must be seen in the context of the strategic and political fight raging between the Clinton administration and the British elites. The latter are starting to realize that the Major government and much of the Tory apparatus cultivated over the last 20 years, no longer serve their interests. This scandal goes to the heart of that apparatus.

Dining with Kissinger

The scandal broke on March 29, when the *Independent*, a London liberal daily, ran an article linking Aitken to illegal arms deals between Britain and Iran and Iraq while he served on the board of directors of the British Manufacturing and Research Company (BMARC). News of the scandal reached Aitken via his personal fax, interrupting a private dinner. His guest was Henry Kissinger, who was in London for a conference at the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House). Also at that dinner was Defense Minister Malcolm Rifkind, Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd, and Allen Clark, a hard-core Thatcherite who, as a former industry minister, played a key role in selling British arms to Iran and Iraq. This was followed by articles in the *Guardian*, a daily which traditionally speaks for the Labor Party, detailing Aitken's ties to the Saudi royal family, particularly Prince Mohammed Bin Fahd, son of King Fahd. These connections included Saudi deal-maker Wafic Said, the man who broker-