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Colin A. Ronan

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Joseph Needham's Science and Civilisation in China is a monumental piece of scholarship which breaks new ground in presenting to the Western reader a detailed and coherent account of the development of science, technology and medicine in China from the earliest times until the advent of the Jesuits and the beginnings of modern science in the late seventeenth century. It is a vast work, necessarily more suited to the scholar and research worker than the general reader. This paperback version, abridged and re-written by Colin Ronan, makes this extremely important study accessible to a wider public. The present book covers the material treated in volumes I and II of Dr Needham's original work. The reader is introduced to the country of China, its history, geography and language, and an account is given of how scientific knowledge travelled between China and Europe. The major part of the book is then devoted to the history of scientific thought in China itself. Beginning with ancient times, it describes the milieu in which arose the schools of the Confucians, Taoists, Mohists, Logicians and Legalists. We are thus brought on to the fundamental ideas which dominated scientific thinking in the Chinese Middle Ages, to the doctrines of the Two Forces (Yin and Yang) and the Five Elements (wu hsing), to the impact of the sceptical tradition and Buddhist and Neo-Confucian thought.

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