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Nathan Sivin: A Man for All Seasons

Almost without exception, every fellow academic I know with a sinological competence has heard of Nathan Sivin.¹ Not infrequently in my experience his name comes up even in discussions of my own writings, in part at least because I have quoted him so often. No contemporary scholar has had a greater impact on how I think about Chinese thought,² and I am therefore pleased as well as honored to be writing this introduction to an issue of *Asia Major* devoted to paying collective tribute to Nathan Sivin on the part of some of his many students, colleagues and friends.

Lacking depth in several of the scholarly areas in which the honoree has worked, I will focus in this introduction on what I perceive to be the manifold philosophical contributions his writings have made to the study of *all* things Chinese (not Chinese science alone), to the study of science *qua* science, and not least, the contributions he has made to a more open and deeper understanding of the political, social, and moral dimensions of the contemporary Western society many of the readers of this *Festschrift* inhabit with him.³

¹ Some remarks about both the form and content of this introduction should be made at the outset. First, electronic advances – if they can be called such – have made superfluous the inclusion of a personal brief biography in *Festschriften*. Nathan Sivin's full (16 pages) *curriculum vitae* can be obtained from <<http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/~nsivin/curr.html>>. Additional information is contained in his entry in *Who's Who in America, 2000*. Second, as an "interests declared" I must note that my wife JoAnn and I have enjoyed deeply an ongoing friendship with Nathan and Carole Sivin for almost four decades, beginning in the late 1960s at MIT, and continuing with (too infrequent) visits in downtown Philadelphia and Chestnut Hill, Cambridge, and the shores of the Chesapeake; I surely make no claim to non-partisanship herein. Third, in the course of drafting this work I became convinced that referring to the honoree as "Nathan Sivin" repeatedly would be stilted and overly formal, "Sivin" all the time too impersonal, and "Nathan," despite my long temporal warrant for using his Christian name, too familiar and "in-groupy" unless used sparingly. I have consequently intermingled the three forms of address as I thought narratively appropriate.

² Along with Herbert Fingarette, David Keightley, and Roger Ames, I have quoted from Nathan Sivin's writings in over a dozen of my essays, written over a span of almost three decades. I would be hard pressed to describe adequately what I have learned from him because I have learned so much. A few examples are sketched later in this introduction.

³ In these pages I have quoted Nathan regularly and at length on the latter, because much of my own work is in the same vein, and I want show that I am not merely reading ideas into his writings by which I have already been seized. Moreover, I could not improve on the clarity and wit with which he advances a great many of the claims we would both defend.

I do not follow the philosopher's path herein solely because I am one myself, however. Among many comparative philosophers I know – and among some other scholars as well – Nathan Sivin is simply the worthy successor to Joseph Needham, who pioneered the study of Chinese science in the West; both of whom have struck telling blows to the stereotype of Chinese inferiority in intellectual accomplishments, especially scientific (and technological) endeavors. Needham is surely an intellectual giant, and just as surely Sivin is Needham's successor in this fundamental sense, but there is an originality to the latter's thinking that makes the differences between the two historians of Chinese science of much greater import, to my mind, than the clear similarities, especially in terms of the social, philosophical, and religious significance of their writings.

For both of these reasons, then, it seemed most appropriate for me to devote these introductory remarks to sketching out, in broad strokes, the intellectual vision(s) of Nathan Sivin as I have understood (and largely shared) them. Hence what follows must be read simultaneously as both intellectual biography and autobiography; which I make explicit to insure that he is not blamed for any claims, philosophical or otherwise, that I mistakenly attribute to him.

In a modern European history course taken as an undergraduate, one of the required readings was Herbert Butterfield's *The Origins of Modern Science*.⁴ It was a fairly easy and enjoyable book to read, in part because it filled in well an outline that had been presented and reinforced in every science book I had read since I was a child: science was cumulative, with beginnings in ancient Greece (but owing little or nothing to any other civilization), in limbo during the "Dark Ages," leaping forward in the time of Copernicus and Galileo, and largely responsible for the modern world.

I did not, however, take as seriously as I should have the claim Butterfield made about the rise of modern Western science being less due to new discoveries than to what he called "transpositions" in the way the scientists thought about the facts that everyone already knew. I was thus not at all prepared initially for Thomas Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.⁵ Even though "paradigm shifts" is in many respects similar in connotation to "transpositions," Kuhn's narrative fundamentally differed from Butterfield's in that he focused on the specific social

⁴ London: G. Bell & Sons, Ltd., 1957. The book is still in print.

⁵ Chicago: U. Chicago P., 1962.

and intellectual contexts in which the science of the several periods was conducted, especially the details of the theories being employed, and the metaphysical views underlying them. While Butterfield situated his scientists temporally, he basically asked why it was often so conceptually difficult for them to place the facts within the “correct” theory, with “correct” being measured by contemporary scientific standards. Kuhn looked at the subject matter from a very different perspective, and thus asked a different question: what did the scientists of the past themselves think they were doing?

By the clear answers Kuhn gave to his question I came to have a new respect for phlogiston theorists, “heaters,” hypotheses about the aether, and other dimensions of the history of science that are no longer in use; practitioners using these models were quite intelligent, and surely as “scientific” as the physicists, chemists and astronomers of today. He also made it clear that major accomplishments and much understanding came from these now discarded theories.

Thus Kuhn could pave the way for people who wished to learn something about Chinese thought: if discussions of the aether can be made credible, so, too, perhaps can discussions of *qi* – not to mention *yin*, *yang*, the *wu xing*, moxibustion, fire phasing, *feng shui*, and much more; not just as elaborations of the occult, but as *science*. Such credibility requires, however, the historian of Chinese science to ask the same kind of question that Kuhn asked, and answer it with both rigor and originality. Happily for everyone of a sinological bent the honoree of this volume did just that, seeking answers to “...a large question I find boundlessly interesting: How did Chinese scientists in traditional times explain to themselves what they were doing?”⁶

Before turning directly to the way(s) in which Nathan Sivin has addressed this question in greater detail, however, we must return for a moment to his predecessor Joseph Needham. For myself, the former is to the latter in the history of Chinese science as Kuhn is to Butterfield in the history of Western science. The parallels are by no means exact: Kuhn and Butterfield never collaborated, for example, and Butterfield was better known as a philosopher of history and historiographer than as a historian of science, with *The Whig Interpretation of History* his most famous book.⁷ Butterfield wasn’t trained in science, as Needham was, and he did little original research in its history.

⁶ Sivin, “Why the Scientific Revolution Did Not Take Place in China – Or Didn’t It?” in Li Guohao, Zhang Mengwen, and Cao Tianqin, eds., *Explorations in the History of Science and Technology in China* (Shanghai: Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing House, 1982), p. 91.

⁷ Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1931.

Further, Needham's *Science and Civilisation in China* has been since its inception a monumental landmark in the field,⁸ much more so than Butterfield's *Origins*. It must be studied, and studied closely, by everyone interested not only in the history of Chinese science, but in Chinese history more generally. Although not the founder of the study of Chinese science in the West, Needham has surely been its preeminent spokesperson, with the manifold honors accorded him richly deserved. He and his colleagues put paid once for all to the question of why China didn't develop science, by showing in incredible detail that it did, and for a millennium and a half developed technology to points far beyond what could be found in Europe.

With that accomplishment behind him, Needham took up the seemingly most significant implication of the large body of evidence he adduced for highly sophisticated sciences and technologies in early and imperial China. This implication can be put in the form of another question, one that must have seemed to Needham to be the most important for the field not only of Chinese science, but perhaps for science *tout court*, a question fairly analogous for China as the one Butterfield asked about the West: Why did *modern* science not develop in China, but *only* in the West? The question has an almost irresistible pull (even though it is by no means clear what would count as a satisfactory answer to it), because we feel certain that we will learn important things about both China and the West by asking it. Needham himself answered the question by describing the nature of the bureaucratic state in China, and how it militated against the rise of modern science.⁹ Surely this is an incisive hypothesis, even though Needham uses it to consistently blame the Confucian persuasion specifically for the failure of the scientific temperament as we understand it today to flourish in imperial China. I personally believe he is just mistaken in this regard, but the issue is a larger one: Chinese historians might well be puzzled by Needham's asking of the question, and would probably want to turn Needham's answer into a related, but very different question: why didn't Europe begin developing a bureaucratic state until

⁸ Published in several volumes and many parts by Cambridge U.P., beginning in 1954. The only work in the series I will cite herein is volume six, *Biology and Biological Technology, Part 6: Medicine*, by Joseph Needham and Lu Gwei-djen, and edited by Nathan Sivin, 2000.

⁹ See especially his "Thoughts on the Social Relations of Science and Technology in China," in *The Grand Titration* (Toronto: U. of Toronto P., 1960), pp. 177–89. The question permeates much of the discussion throughout the book, and is explicitly raised on the first page (11) of the Introduction to the volume: "Why, then, did modern science, as opposed to ancient and medieval science (with all that modern science implied in terms of political dominance) develop only in the Western world?"

the mid-nineteenth century? (Has any historian of either China or the West ever asked why most European states developed laws of primogeniture and China didn't?)

In this way we can begin to see the great difference between the approaches of Needham and Sivin to the study of Chinese science. According the greatest respect to the research of his predecessor, Nathan Sivin also thought Needham's question a good one, but temporally constrained: "[It] encourages exploration of a fascinating topic and provides some order for thinking about it. It is, in other words, heuristic. Heuristic questions are useful at the beginning of an inquiry... [but] ... lose their interest compared with the emerging clarity of what did happen."¹⁰

In my opinion no one is more responsible for "the emerging clarity of what did happen" in Chinese science than Nathan Sivin. By his careful and detailed research, prodigious writing and editing, by his teaching of succeeding generations of scholars in the field – a number of whom are contributors to this volume – by regularly utilizing his creativity and playfulness of mind, Nathan Sivin ranks directly alongside his illustrious predecessor, even though they differed significantly in their approach to the "same" subject matter.

Returning now to my claim that in many respects we can see that Butterfield is to Kuhn as Needham is to Sivin, let me turn from the differences between Needham and Sivin to what I see as many and close similarities between Sivin and Kuhn.¹¹ In the first instance, and of significant explanatory import with respect to their influence, they are both equally willing to step beyond the borders of the discipline of history into philosophy, and in Sivin's case, into the area of religion (at least in part because he believes the nature of the subject-matter demands it). Equally important, they both reject the view that science is strictly cumulative, that it can be sharply distinguished from non-science among and between intellectual activities, and that its practitioners can be understood apart from the context of the cultural milieu and time in which they lived. To see the close parallels in the thinking of Sivin and Kuhn, consider the following four statements, and attempt to ascertain the author of each one:

¹⁰ Sivin, "Why the Scientific Revolution," p. 94.

¹¹ I do not place much significance on the parallels, but should note that they were also both Harvard graduates, were trained in science, and taught at MIT. What is important is the way they both contributed to shaping current approaches to the study of the history of science, technology, and medicine that a number of philosophers, and most sinologists, do not yet appreciate.

1. If modern knowledge is the end of all striving everywhere, it becomes the only obvious criterion of value. "Modern" is, of course, a broad word, and historical writings seldom define what period they mean by it. Some of the criteria of assessment in this book are based on practices long since abandoned.... Historians today are more likely [than their predecessors] to aim for an integral understanding of technical phenomena in the time and place they are studying, and to define their criteria as this aim requires.¹²
2. People who think about science without having practiced it often assume that it progresses by a steady accretion of knowledge. That this belief is so widespread testifies to the enduring influence of Francis Bacon, who argued ... that people ought to do it bit by bit, in groups, according to a rational division of labor. But this is not an adequate description of what scientists do. ... [A] new pattern makes sense of otherwise anomalous knowledge. ... After the transition, it sets the standard until the need for a still more comprehensive pattern can no longer be ignored.¹³
3. If out-of-date beliefs [i.e., Aristotelian dynamics, etc.] are to be called myths, then myths can be produced by the same sorts of methods and held for the same sorts of reasons that now lead to scientific knowledge. If, on the other hand, they are to be called science, then science has included bodies of belief quite incompatible with the ones we hold today.¹⁴
4. The result... is a historiographic revolution in the study of science, though one that is still in its early stages. Gradually ... historians ... have begun to ask new sorts of questions and to trace different ... developmental lines... Rather than seeking the permanent contributions of an older science to our present vantage, they attempt to display the historical integrity of that science in its own time.¹⁵

Just as Kuhn's writings make clear that Tycho Brahe was not the astronomical inferior of Canon Copernicus because the latter's views are the more accepted today, so, too, have Nathan Sivin's writings made clear that Chinese qualitative and quantitative scientific accomplishments are not to be seen as inferior to those of the modern West just because they have not survived to become part of it. They have their own scope, beauty, efficacy and integrity. Their alternative view of the world, and the place of human beings in that world, invite our contemplation today.

¹² Sivin, ed., *Biology and Biological Technology, Part 6, Medicine*, p. 16.

¹³ Nathan Sivin, *Medicine, Philosophy and Religion in Ancient China* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1995) 7, p. 1.

¹⁴ Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, p. 2.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 3.

Many readers of the works of both Kuhn and Sivin will initially share a similar uneasiness, I suspect, at not being able any longer to dismiss a scientific view in either China or the premodern West as superstitious, silly, or simply wrong; such may indeed be the case, but these views can no longer be dismissed as superstitious, silly, or simply wrong *just* because they do not accord well with the science that is accepted today.

Going a bit more deeply, Sivin and Kuhn do not use the word “true” or “false” in describing the scientific views they describe, analyze and evaluate, which has been – especially in the case of Kuhn – highly troubling for many people, not least philosophers of science. Instead of “false,” as Sivin and Kuhn see it, the most that can be said is that the view under consideration is conceptually weak, and does not enhance our understanding.¹⁶ Put another way, why should we believe there are no such “things” as phlogiston or *qi*, but there *are* borons and pi mesons, entities surely no less queer conceptually to the nonspecialist? Because physicists tell us to, that’s why.

Well, yes, the (neo)-positivist (and/or Europhile) might say, but so what? Surely it is better to trust the theories of contemporary physicists, mathematicians, chemists and astronomers than the beliefs of ancient Chinese astronomers, astrologers, alchemists and numerologists. The latter’s views of the world simply cannot be given any credence today; antiquarian interest they may have, but they cannot otherwise have any purchase on us.

To this objection a number of replies may be given. First and most basically, even if the premiss is true (the ancient Chinese views cannot be considered seriously today as viable candidates for describing the world correctly) the conclusion does not logically follow (if it did, no one would ever read a novel); even confining ourselves to the West, philosophers have given such variant accounts of the world that it is impossible for any more than one of them to even *conceivably* be true, yet we believe courses in the History of Western Philosophy wherein these accounts must be studied in depth are of key importance in a liberal arts curriculum.

¹⁶ In the case of Kuhn, many of his critics, beginning with Sir Karl Popper, accused him of being a thoroughgoing relativist, with all the evils attendant thereon. Kuhn provided his response to these accusations in “Reflections on my Critics,” in Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, eds., *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1970), esp. pp. 260–65. Nathan has told me that most historians of science find a weak form of relativism a useful conceptual resource, but he must think the issue of a strong relativism too absurd for comment, for I have not come across any he has made in conjunction with his work.

More specifically, but in the same vein, Nathan Sivin often anticipates such an objection in his writings, and meets it directly by reference to our own culture, in this way bringing home to us forcefully that we are no less culturally situated than the Chinese, and if they have foibles, so do we. And we are certainly no more capable of seeing the world as God does, *sub speciae aeternitatis*:

Chinese alchemical theories were essentially numerological. It is not at all unusual for measured quantities to be combined with symbolic numbers in such schemes, nor for the results of numerological manipulations to be treated as though they were quantitative.¹⁷

Is Sivin serious, defending *numerology*? His next sentence continues,

(These complexities may be seen in the grading systems prevalent in American universities, the most influential survival of numerology in modern society.)¹⁸

Clearly we are in the presence here of a scholar as keenly aware of his own *milieu* as the one he makes come alive from the books he studies two millennia and ten thousand kilometers distant from us (who has a sophisticated sense of humor to boot), and who is concerned to insure that we attend carefully to both. Finding analogies in contemporary Western society for what might otherwise appear to be bizarre cultural artifacts from the “mysterious East” is a common narrative strategy in Sivin’s work, and is highly effective because of its logical force. Another witty and equally *apropos* example of this technique is:

The calendar, issued in the emperor’s name, became part of the ritual paraphernalia that demonstrated his dynasty’s right to rule (a function not entirely different from that of economic indicators in a modern nation). Astrological observations could easily be manipulated and thus could be dangerous in the hands of someone trying to undermine the current dynasty (the analogy with economic indicators is again obvious).¹⁹

For anyone with sinophobic inclinations – not a rarity, unfortunately, especially in the ranks of the U.S. military and government policy-makers – these quotes will almost surely be dismissed simply as *tu quoque* arguments, which is technically what they are. But although a formal “fallacy,” Sivin’s repeated use of this type of argument is ra-

¹⁷ Sivin, in Nathan Sivin, ed., “Chinese Alchemy and the Manipulation of Time,” in *Science and Technology in East Asia* (New York: Science History Publications, 1977), p. 117.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ “Science and Medicine in Chinese History,” in Paul S. Ropp, ed., *Heritage of China* (Berkeley: U. California P., 1990), p. 174.

tionally the most appropriate one for him to employ for the points he is attempting to make, and consequently I believe he intends his references to contemporary Western society to be taken seriously, in part simply to make his readers more open and sympathetic to the Chinese materials he is presenting, and equally, as I read him, to overcome an ongoing Western chauvinism. In the midst of his explications of the Chinese ideas and practices, we consistently find critical parallels and asides having to do with contemporary Western society, sufficient in number and quality that I have always read Nathan simultaneously as historian and philosopher, and as both an exceptionally rigorous scholar and perceptive social critic.

At times the criticism is acute. In one of his several challenges to the usefulness of asking the question of why China didn't develop modern science, Sivin argues that the question is almost always based on the assumption that all cultures should have done so, and wanted to do so, and he then goes on to say:

These assumptions are usually linked to a belief – or a faith, if you prefer – that European civilization was somehow in touch with reality in a way no other civilization could be, and that its great share of the world's wealth and power comes from some intrinsic fitness to inherit the earth that was there all along. Many of those like myself who reject this assumption argue that the privileged position of the West comes instead from a head start in the technological exploitation of nature and the political exploitation of societies not technologically equipped to defend themselves.²⁰

Unfortunately for many of the world's peoples, and the environment, these assumptions have not gone the way of phlogiston or the aether, but are still held by many of those who have the power to continue the exploitations, with murderous consequences for those, as Sivin says, ill-equipped to defend themselves from neo-imperial depredations.

By stringing together critical quotations like these from Sivin I do not wish to suggest that his writings should be construed simply as a defense of Luddite principles; he is well aware of the manifold accomplishments of Western civilization in virtually every field of human endeavor, not least in science. But despite some postcolonial and feminist critiques, the modern West continues to have a surfeit of relatively uncritical champions, not least in science, and a dearth of Nathan

²⁰ Sivin, "Why the Scientific Revolution," p. 94. The parenthetical remark by Needham quoted in n. 9 suggests strongly that he would agree fully with the thrust of Sivin's point here.

Sivins; hence my applause for both the critical stance he regularly assumes toward his own culture when explicating the Chinese sciences, and the skill with which he makes the latter credible.

This stance is equally salutary when he applies it to the practice of Chinese medicine no less than to alchemy/numerology or astronomy/astrology, for – apart from some exponents of “alternative” medicine – it is probably in this area that it is easiest of all to assume the superiority of a Europhile, unwittingly or otherwise: doesn’t *everyone* want to go to as modern and well-equipped a hospital as possible when they are seriously ill?

That is to say, it might be argued against Sivin (and myself) that while there are indeed problems that have been brought on by a Western imperialism that could not have been successful without the development of modern science and attendant technology, nevertheless, modern science and technology can be put to productive no less than destructive uses. Specifically, this argument would continue, along many dimensions the practice of modern Western medicine cures illnesses and pain; it “works” in a way its ostensible Chinese counterpart does not. Hence again, now more softly, we can say to ourselves “QED for the superiority of Western civilization overall.”

The way Sivin presents his materials, however, makes it very difficult to reach this conclusion; again, he has a number of replies to make to the premisses.

First, he consistently points out that the comparison is only unfavorable to China when it is *traditional* Chinese medicine and *contemporary* Western medicine that are being compared; when the Chinese doctors are compared with their premodern counterparts, they hold their own most of the time, and excel much of the rest.²¹ Second, and more substantive philosophically, Sivin examines closely and carefully what it means for the practice of medicine to “work” for the patients who submit to it. In one of his several discussions of the social construction of illness he says:

Definitions of illness vary enormously, because no two cultures slice up the spectrum of human suffering (as manifested in signs and symptoms) in the same way, or agree about what suffering (much less discomfort) is illness. In modern south China... there is a belief... that what modern doctors would consider the symptoms of measles in small children do not constitute a disorder. The rash

²¹ Among many sources, much of the first chapter of his *Traditional Medicine in Contemporary China* is devoted to this theme (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, U. of Michigan, 1987).

is considered a normal eruption of toxicity formed in the body before birth, and a potential source of serious lifelong sickness if not expelled or expelled too soon. In other words, *failure* to have measles at the proper age is a disorder.²²

In such circumstances, efforts to cure the measles clearly won't "work."

Still a third reply Sivin frequently makes that discourages feelings of cultural superiority when reading his works on Chinese medicine and its practice is to remind us that the social construction of illness is a feature of every culture. He brings this point home by calling our attention to something in our own milieu that we must confront, usually with discomfort. Discussing hyperkinesia, for example, he writes:

Transmutation of social deviance into disease can have remarkable social consequences. In several American states parents consent to "therapy" of their children, often in school buildings, with habituating stimulant drugs that the children would incur criminal penalties and parental wrath for using themselves.... There is no evidence that [these drugs] cure hyperkinesia. This redefinition of docility as health, reflecting community values and relations between parents and their children, has not been carried out despite scientific medicine, but with the serious and willing participation of physicians.²³

I believe we may safely conclude from these several passages I have quoted, written in different contexts, describing different phenomena, and published over a period of a quarter-century, that there are consistently recurring themes in the writings of Nathan Sivin, that these themes pertain equally to the Chinese (past and present) and to ourselves (past and present), and that these themes have normative implications which he does not shrink from calling to our attention. All of which, in my view, is in the best tradition of historical and philosophical scholarship.

²² "Social Relations of Curing in Traditional China: Preliminary Considerations," *Japan Journal of the History of Medicine* 23.4 (1976), pp. 10–11. In China, the body cannot be viewed in isolation. Linking it and its disorders with both the state and the natural world is the theme of "State, Cosmos, and Body in the Last Three Centuries B.C.," *HJAS* 55.1 (1995). See also "Boundaries of the *ti* Body" by Deborah Sommer in this volume.

²³ Ibid. p. 15. The discussion of dyslexia and hyperkinesia as Western disorders occupies over 5 pages in this article, more than a fifth of the whole. My wife JoAnn, who worked with such children for two decades as a learning disabilities specialist, read Nathan's account in this article and concurred fully with all that he said about her field.

Thus far I have concentrated on the many and varied contributions that the scholarship of Nathan Sivin has made to intellectual life writ large, and it would not be meet to close these remarks without at least some brief mention of what, more narrowly, he has brought to his fellow sinologists. This I cannot do without some embarrassment, however, for many of his scholarly conclusions secularize many cows in the history of Chinese thought I had always thought indisputably sacred.

When, for example, he argued conclusively that “A Chi-hsia academy, in any normal sense of the last word, is simply a myth,”²⁴ he might not have been claiming anything extraordinary to many other scholars in the field. But it certainly arched my eyebrows when I first came across it, and – having heretofore included remarks on the “academy” when lecturing on Xunzi – was saved from being totally red-faced only because Nathan was kind enough to enter the qualifier “normal sense of the last word” in his remark. Scholars at Jixia there were; an academy there was not. Closely related to this claim is another. I had congratulated Angus Graham for the apt choice, in my opinion, he had made for the title of his survey of early-Chinese philosophy, *Disputers of the Tao*.²⁵ I later learned that Nathan did not agree: “One school might respond to issues raised by another; but it just might as well ignore them. Dispute was not a pivotal activity in Chinese philosophy.”²⁶

Others of his iconoclastic observations I am still attempting to reconcile with my own past training, respect for my tutors, and the Chinese historical tradition, include one on the Lao-Zhuang school of Daoism: “I know of no evidence that [the *Zhuangzi*] and the *Lao-tzu* were regularly transmitted by a single group of initiates in the Han.”²⁷ Similarly, more than once in the past I had conjectured to students that one reason the contemporary Chinese government (since 1949) has been deeply suspicious of private organizations, especially those that might have Daoist links, is because all, or at least most prior dynasties had been overthrown by movements that had their genesis in Daoist secret societies. I now need other reasons: “Far from being politically revolutionary, orthodox Taoist sects after the Han period played no

²⁴ Sivin, *Medicine, Philosophy and Religion* 4, p. 28. I use “conclusively” because it appears to me, from the commentarial literature following, to be such. While his claim has been ignored by some, it has been refuted by none, and accepted by a growing number of scholars in the field.

²⁵ Chicago: Open Court Publishing Co., 1987.

²⁶ “Ruminations on the Tao and its Disputers,” *Philosophy East & West* 42.1 (January, 1992), p. 27.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 29, n. 13.

active role in rebellions, messianic or otherwise, and never represented rebellion as desirable.”²⁸

There are a number of other sweeping generalizations about the several dimensions of ancient Chinese thought that Nathan Sivin has swept aside akin to those I have just cited, but it is time to conclude this introduction. As will be clear from the essays that follow, Nathan Sivin’s manifold scholarly accomplishments are not confined to his challenges to conventional wisdom in the history of Chinese philosophy and religion any more than in science, nor to his incisive commentaries on the intellectual follies and moral laxness of contemporary society, the themes on which I have focused herein. He has in the first instance provided an abundance of new wisdom in the field of Chinese science,²⁹ and by extension, added measurably to our understanding and appreciation of Chinese civilization overall. Although confining herself to Nathan’s *Traditional Medicine in Contemporary China*, Judith Farquhar ends her review with a summation I believe applies to the entire body of his work: “[It] provides a courageous, thoughtful, and meticulously erudite foundation for all subsequent research... .”³⁰

The essays that follow in this issue of *Asia Major* all build on that erudite foundation in one way or another, and their authors join me in offering a hearty *Wan sui*, good friend, *Wan sui*!³¹

²⁸ Sivin, *Medicine, Philosophy and Religion* 6, p. 323. See also Sivin, ed., *Biology and Biological Technology, Part 6, Medicine*: “Nor have specialists in recent years found a single case in which Taoist organizations after the +2d century were responsible for rebellion or other political activity directed against the government” (p. 11). This claim also vitiates further the claims of Needham that the Daoists had the scientific temper because they were rebels, as against the Confucian bureaucrats. (See also n. 9.)

²⁹ Here I must also note the incredibly large amount of work Nathan Sivin has done to aid the research of his fellows in the field, unparalleled in its scope, depth and unselfish dedication to the study of things Chinese. These efforts range from the bibliographies of Chinese science and medicine he has compiled in Chinese and Japanese as well as in Western languages, to founding and serving as editor of the journal *Chinese Science* for its first twenty years; and much more.

³⁰ *Isis* 81.2 (1990), p. 317.

³¹ I am deeply grateful to Michael Nylan for the perceptive comments she made on the penultimate draft of this introduction; the present version has been much strengthened thereby. I am also grateful to the honoree of this volume for reading the penultimate draft at my request and not demurring from my claims that the citations herein accurately reflect his work and its thrust overall, asking only that I note that he has modified slightly a few of the claims I have highlighted, which changes can be found in the work he jointly authored with Sir Geoffrey Lloyd in 2002, *The Way and the Word* (New Haven: Yale U.P.).

