

死生学・応用倫理センター

Death & Life Studies and Practical Ethics

English Lecture Series No.16

東京大学大学院人文社会系研究科

Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology

***From “Needham’s Question” to the Conundrum of
Medicine in Ancient China:
An Interdisciplinary Journey with Joseph Needham***

Speaker : **Professor Wen Hua Kuo**
 (National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University, Taiwan)

Time : **22 July 2025 (Tuesday) 10:30-12:00**

Location: **Room 315, Faculty of Law and Literature Building No. 1.**
 The University of Tokyo

Online: **ID: 829 280 0028**
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Abstract

Witnessing the emergence of East Asian STS and the growing prominence of East Asia in the global STS landscape, this talk reflects on my academic journey from the history and philosophy of science to science and technology studies (STS), guided in part by the iconic figure of Joseph Needham (1900–1995)—a renowned biochemist who dedicated his later career to understanding Chinese science and technology. Through close readings of Needham's work and archival studies on medicine, the talk offers an assessment, with critical eyes of STS, of this towering figure and examines how Chinese medicine was represented in *Science and Civilisation in China*, the intellectual enterprise he founded. I argue that Needham's STS legacy is multilayered: it must be understood not only in the context of Cold War-era science diplomacy, but also in light of his distinctive approach to Asian medicines—an approach shared by many of his historian and medical peers. Only by grappling with these dimensions can we begin to appreciate Needham's vision of medicine's future, one in which, following a Kuhnian perspective, understanding the past is both essential and indispensable.

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