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Joseph Needham

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The second volume of Dr Joseph Needham's great work Science and Civilisation in China is devoted to the history of scientific thought. Beginning with ancient times, it describes the Confucian milieu in which arose the organic naturalism of the great Taoist school, the scientific philosophy of the Mohists and Logicians, and the quantitative materialism of the Legalists. Thus we are brought on to the fundamental ideas which dominated scientific thinking in the Chinese middle ages. The author opens his discussion by considering the remote and pictographic origins of words fundamental in scientific discourse, and then sets forth the influential doctrines of the Two Forces and the Five Elements. Subsequently he writes of the important sceptical tradition, the effects of Buddhist thought, and the Neo-Confucian climax of Chinese naturalism. Last comes a discussion of the conception of Laws of Nature in China and the West.

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