



THE ROYAL SOCIETY

Sir Paul Nurse, President of the Royal Society's speech on the occasion of the award of the King Charles II Medal to His Excellency, Premier Wen Jiabao

Your Excellency, Premier Wen Jiabao, distinguished guests, Fellows, welcome to the Royal Society, Britain's National Academy of Science. It is an honour to welcome the Premier of China to the Royal Society, and it is a pleasure to welcome Wen Jiabao, a fellow scientist and an engineer.

The Royal Society was founded 350 years ago to improve our knowledge of the natural world by experiment and observation. We promote a spirit of scientific enquiry summed up in our founding motto, still in use today, 'Nullius in Verba' – 'Take nobody's word for it'. A similar sentiment is expressed in the Chinese saying: "Reading ten thousand books is not as useful as travelling ten thousand miles'. In other words, rely on your personal experience rather than on received wisdom.

Even in those early years the Royal Society recognised the importance of sharing knowledge from around the world, reporting these exchanges in the world's first scientific journal 'Philosophical Transactions' – which The Royal Society still publishes today.

These international exchanges included China. It was well recognised in the 17th Century that China led the world in certain scientific applications. Most notable among these were the discoveries of the magnetic compass, of gunpowder and of paper and printing.

In Philosophical Transactions the Society also noted other exchanges: on seeds and plants, on map making, on surgical instruments and on a shared Chinese and British obsession, Tea.

The Royal Society has always promoted science as a great humanising influence in our world. It contributes greatly to our culture, to our knowledge of the natural world and to our understanding of ourselves.

Science is truly revolutionary, changing our views of the world, the universe and of what it is to be human. It can also bring great benefits to humanity. Scientific knowledge leads to better applications and technologies that can help:

To eliminate poverty

To improve our health

To promote economic growth

And to improve overall quality of life

This is recognised in today's China, where Premier Wen Jiabao has overseen one of the most ambitious national research investment programmes the world has ever seen. Science and technology have been placed at the heart of China's planning and national development and it is recognised as a common value to human kind through school and university education.

Applications of scientific knowledge and technology are an important way to improve the condition of humankind. Science is effective because it has attributes which make it a very reliable way to generate knowledge

- Science respects reproducible experiments and observations
- It constantly tests hypotheses, trying to disprove them
- It encourages a sceptical and doubting approach similar to the Chinese saying 'Deep doubts, deep wisdom; small doubts, little wisdom'
- It needs freedom of thought and openness to new ideas
- It needs the freedom to express and debate those thoughts and ideas

- It thrives on transparency and co-operation

These attributes, necessary to drive effective science, are shared by scientists around the world. That is why international co-operation is important and why science can help break down barriers between peoples and between nations. A good example of openness and co-operation was seen with the human genome project in which China and Britain were both involved.

The British Government is a great supporter of UK/China scientific collaboration. David Willets, UK minister for science recently visited China and saw the establishment of various joint initiatives on climate change, low carbon design, plant science, microbiology and on joint high tech facilities.

Co-operation based on openness, the free exchange of ideas and mutual respect, allows a shared sense of purpose in addressing global problems. It increases enlightenment and leads to a better quality of life for all.

China and Britain both have long traditions of science and its application. We have much we can learn from each other and much we can gain from collaboration. The Royal Society is as committed today as at its founding 350 years ago, to sharing knowledge from around the world and rejects the barriers that some countries are placing to reduce scientific co-operation.

We wish to promote scientific collaboration and exchanges between our two countries. This is seen with the Royal Society Newton Fellowships which allow two year post-doctoral research in the UK and I am pleased that we have a number of young Chinese scientists availing of this opportunity.

China's strength in engineering and technology is reflected in the fact that 1 in 20 academics in the UK in these areas are Chinese Nationals. Such connections and exchanges lead to mutual benefit and should be encouraged and expanded.

I have spoken of the benefits science can bring to humanity and under your leadership, Premier Wen Jiabao, China has fully embraced science as a major driver for national development. That is why the award to you today of the Royal Society's King Charles II Medal is so fitting. The medal is given in recognition of heads of state and of government who have displayed commitment to science and a belief in what it can achieve for all of their people.

Wen Jiabao, Scientist and Premier of China, it is my honour and my pleasure, on behalf of the Officers of the Royal Society, to award you the King Charles II Medal.