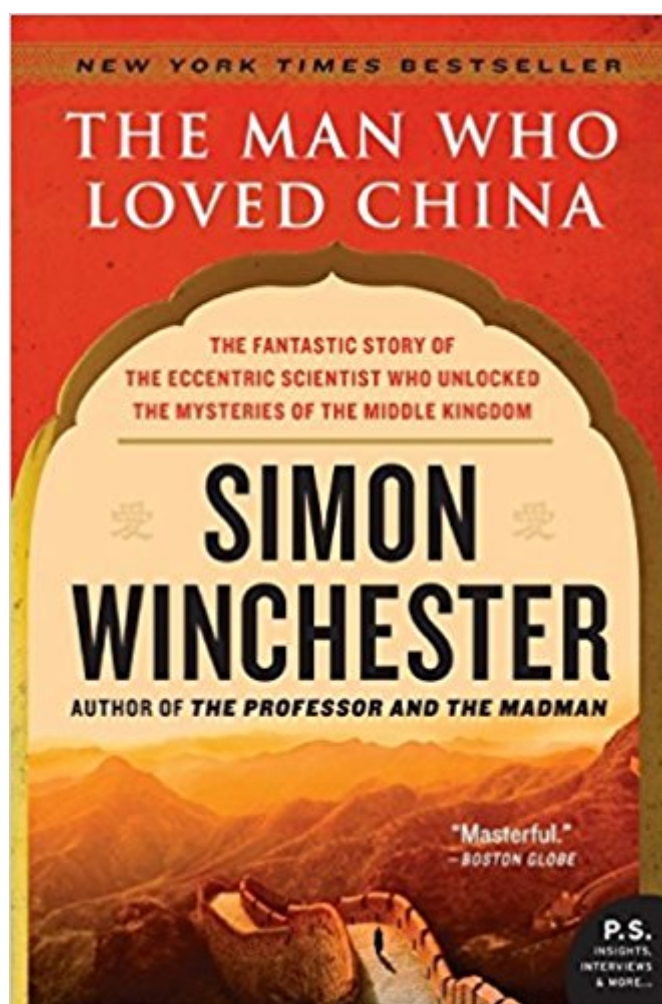


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The Man Who Loved China: The Fantastic Story Of The Eccentric Scientist Who Unlocked The Mysteries Of The Middle Kingdom (P.S.)





Synopsis

In sumptuous and illuminating detail, Simon Winchester, bestselling author of *The Professor and the Madman*, brings to life the extraordinary story of Joseph Needham—the brilliant Cambridge scientist, freethinking intellectual, and practicing nudist who unlocked the most closely held secrets of China, once the world's most technologically advanced country.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Simon Winchester's reading, like his clear, concise, graceful writing, reflects his endless fascination with his subject—the British scientist Joseph Needham—and with his subject's subject: Chinese scientists' every invention and contribution to every field of science over five centuries (before the West began to think of such things as the printing press and gunpowder). Winchester reads rapidly, but his diction is so precise (yet never stuffy) that not a word is lost. The vocal warmth and charm mirror his endless awe of Needham's lifetime work on his multivolume magnum opus on Chinese scientific thought. Winchester's tone reveals his delight with Needham's love affairs, his unconventional marriage and relation to his lifelong inamorata who first inspired his love of Chinese language, people and thought. As with every book he's written and narrated, Winchester makes abstruse subjects available and fascinating for every reader and listener. A Harper hardcover (Reviews, Mar. 10). (May) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

With *The Man Who Loved China*, Simon Winchester turns out another compelling, readable, and relevant tale. Any good storyteller will embellish his subject, and Winchester effortlessly keeps readers interested in Needham's adventures "even when they flag a bit. For the most part, though, Needham's life is one that relatively few readers will know "and one that Winchester brings to life with a passel of research and an ever-present sense of wonder for his unique subject. Despite some errors and repetition, the book is also a good starting point for any reader who seeks another path to understanding the roots of Chinese civilization. Copyright © 2004 Phillips & Nelson Media, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Simon Winchester does a terrific job of bringing his subject to life. This is a fascinating biography of a Brit who became intrigued with Chinese culture. I couldn't put it down (even though I usually prefer literary novels). You'll learn about innumerable things that Chinese people invented centuries before the West. But perhaps the most unforgettable thing I learned from the book is how naive very intelligent people can be, and how easily fooled. A humbling insight into human nature.

Such stunning revelations about scientific discoveries in China a thousand years ago and more, long before similar inventions were made in the "West". There is a long list of foreign eccentric characters who devote their lives to discovering these innovations and to keeping this knowledge alive all the while dealing with the hordes of humanity and the futility of dealing with the bureaucracy that has marked China forever. Their love and understanding of China and its people and the many anecdotal stories throughout the book will keep you smiling and entertained throughout this heavy going book. But keep plodding through, it is well worth it.

Fascinating and fantastic story about an Oxford don, Joseph Needham, who met and fell in love with a Chinese woman in England during the 1920's. Her love for him inspired him to not only learn to speak, read, and write the Chinese language, but also at Churchill's request go there during the 1940's to help the Chinese universities save their collections and archives from the advancing Japanese. Needham went on to write a massive opus which is still being written today, an encyclopedia of Chinese history, language, and culture published by Cambridge University.

I enjoyed reading on subjects (the history of China, and of China and the West) of which I had been

largely ignorant, and on another (Joseph Needham and his magnum opus) of which I had been totally ignorant. If I were to get too lengthy here, I'd likely begin to confute my thoughts on the book (mostly positive) with my thoughts on Joseph Needham (less positive), so I'll stick to the book. Although the book was lively, informative, and descriptive in the main--a good way for a relative novice to get a start on knowing China better--I thought the Epilogue was weak, somewhat self-contradictory, and (with respect to a modern renaissance of China's peerless ancient culture anytime soon) Pollyannish. Another significant criticism I have is a common one for books dealing in any way with geography: insufficient maps, either in quantity or quality. Although there were possibly [barely] enough maps (I dog-eared the map pages to minimize the time it took to refer back to them) there could have been more, even in this paperback edition. Those maps that were provided lacked the detail I'd have liked, and (a more serious no-no) failed to include some of the place names referred to in the text. These shortcomings notwithstanding, I'd recommend this book highly to anyone having only a modest understanding of China and its history as a good place to jump in. Even if you already know a lot of this stuff, you'd probably learn something new. It was fun, for instance, to review Needham's list of Chinese "firsts" that was included at the end of the book, although it seemed to me a little forced--and somewhat chauvinistic. Who knows? It could be perfectly accurate.

Winchester really is a magnificent writer. Although I am a bigger fan of some of his other works, this certainly fits well into the rest of his life's opus. Somehow he manages to cover bits of science, technology, philosophy, history, (his love) geology, archaeology, culture, politics and even uses his flair for travel writing with great ethos and pathos to tell an interesting story. Aside from the breadth of topics he covers while telling the story of one man's life's work, he writes about and discusses topics which should be part of everyone's personal cultural knowledge. As a small example, he makes mention of one of the real life archaeologists who served as a model for Indiana Jones - though sadly he only makes the direct connection in a footnote which many may not likely read. Though I had originally picked up the book out of general curiosity (not to diminish the fact that I'm on a quest to read every word Winchester has written), I find that it also neatly fits into providing some spectacular background on the concept of "Big History" (see [Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History \(California World History Library\)](#)) as it relates to China's place in the world. In particular "Needham's question" (briefly: Why, given China's illustrious past, did modern science not develop there after the 1500's?) turned around becomes an interesting illustration on the course of human history and the rises and falls of cultures and societies since the holocene. For

those who may miss the significance, I was particularly impressed with the overall literary power imbued to the book by the use of the bookended contrasts of Needham's Chongqing at the opening of the work and modern day Chongqing at the close. This is one of the few times that the mechanics behind how Winchester, the master of telling often non-linear stories, has been patently obvious to me. I hope one day to unravel all of his other secrets. I can only imagine that in his heavy research of his topics, he somehow internally sees the ultimately magical ways in which he will present the information. I will note that, in contrast to some of his past works, this one had some better physical maps and photos to go along with the text, although I was highly disappointed in their unusable presentation in the e-book version of the book. (Higher dpi versions would have gone a long way, particularly with the ability to zoom in on them in most e-readers.) For those unfortunate enough to have the e-book copy, I commend picking up a physical copy of the book for better interpretations of the photos and maps included.

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