

A Non-Darwinian in the Darwin Year

JS: Jim SECORD

Professor

Department of History and Philosophy of Science

The University of Cambridge

HY: Haiyan YANG

Assistant Professor

Department of Medical Humanities

Peking University

HY: The year 2009 is a very busy one for the Darwinian people. Shall we begin with this tremendous celebration? Why Darwin after all?

JS: It has been busy for everyone involved in studying Darwin, even for somebody like myself, who is not primarily a Darwin specialist. I think Darwin has achieved this huge importance at the present time for two reasons. One reason derives from current work in science. Research in genomics, and the ability to trace evolution at the molecular level, have made Darwin more important than ever before. Evolutionary biology was often seen as too speculative by certain types of scientists, say biochemists, but it is now seen as more central to what they do. The other reason has to do with concerns about fundamentalist religion and its potential impact on scientific education. Many people, in different parts of the world, are concerned about the way in which Darwinian evolution seems pitted against religion. So Darwin's increasing importance for science, at a time when many people deny evolution outright, has combined to make this the largest celebration of its kind ever seen.

HY: So these are two main reasons. You must have attended a lot of activities, say, giving lectures, speaking on BBC programs, being interviewed by media, even by the Channel 10 of China Central Television. Could you share with us your personal experiences of some events most memorable to you?

JS: I have been involved in a lot of activities, though not as many as some of my friends, several of whom have been around the world at least once. I would rather be attending to things here locally, and in many ways, my most memorable experiences have been here in Cambridge. One I enjoyed especially was the birthday party for Charles Darwin at Christ's College, which is my own college and Darwin's as well. The event was a special one, to raise funds for the Galapagos Trust. Normally you have to pay five thousand pounds, although I didn't have to pay anything like that. And I got to meet all sorts of interesting people there. There were speeches, including one by Prince Philip on his own trips to the Galapagos. It was a wonderful occasion. For me, the highpoint was sitting almost directly opposite David Attenborough, who was very entertaining, telling a lot of funny stories.

For me, another memorable experience was visiting the 'Parallel Roads' of Glen Roy, a puzzling series of terraces extending for many miles along certain Scottish glens in the West Highlands. This

was a field trip organized by Martin Rudwick, who is the leading historian of geology in the world. He took a group of about two dozen people to the sites where Darwin conducted his main geological research after he got back from the *Beagle* voyage. And this was one place where Darwin thought he had been wrong in his research. It was fascinating to go where Darwin visited and to see the same places, walking in his footsteps and attempting to understand the problems he faced. Darwin was eager to interpret the terraces at Glen Roy as ancient sea margins, along the lines of similar phenomena he had seen on the west coast of South America. This put him in opposition to earlier visitors, who had argued that the Scottish terraces had been produced by dammed-up lakes. The excursion was attended by a wonderful group of people and we had a lot of fun, going to different places, and then eating good Scottish food in the evenings. It was an excellent time and I really enjoyed it.

HY: I know you are involved with some exhibitions on Darwin as well. Which one is most important for you?

JS: Intellectually the most exciting thing during the year was being involved with the exhibition in Fitzwilliam Museum, which was called 'Endless Forms: Darwin, Natural Science and the Visual Arts'. I was the principal academic advisor, particularly on the history of science side, so I was responsible for helping the curators (Diana Donald and Jane Munro), making suggestions, and checking for problems.

I found it was fascinating to see how art historians and museums work, and also to think about Darwin and visual culture in new and different ways. And although a lot of what I did was simply to help to avoid mistakes, I appreciated the opportunity to have a broader impact on the exhibition as well. For example, in the section on competition, I encouraged the curators to think not only about competition between animals, but between people as well. This turned out really well in the final exhibition, with a painting (Hubert von Herkheimer's *On Strike*) that showed what the theories of Thomas Malthus meant for ordinary people. It was a very powerful exhibition. It was also very successful, the largest and best-attended in the entire history of the Fitzwilliam Museum. So we have all been pleased about the way it worked out. The exhibition also was shown in the United States, at the Yale Center for British Art at Yale University. I visited there in April to give a lecture. The exhibition was basically the same in the two venues, but it was extremely interesting to see some different paintings, and the effect of the different settings was in some cases very dramatic.

All in all, 2009 has been a fantastic year, but a little bit exhausting, I have to say.

HY: Yes, I think it is true. During the Darwin Festival at Cambridge this July, you chaired two afternoon sessions. What are your overall impressions of this important commemoration at Darwin's Alma Mater?

JS: I think nearly everyone who attended would agree that it was successful. Compared with the celebration they had in here in 1909, when many heads of state attended (including the King of Tonga) it was less international. We did not have any figures like the King of Tonga this year, I am afraid, yet people did attend from around the world. It was fascinating to see forms of discussion very different from those usually found in an English university. Some of the plenary debates surrounding the religion and science, I found quite disturbing, as they were more like a revival meeting in favor of Darwin than an academic conference session. People were shouting 'Go

Darwin', 'Yes, you are right, man!' Things like that, which I found strange and not particularly thoughtful. On the positive side, the meeting was unusually successful in combining the arts and humanities with the sciences. There were many meetings in this Darwin year; some just for scientists, or just for historians. The Cambridge Festival was a real attempt to bring different disciplines together. Sometimes it was uncomfortable when some people wished to talk only with their own friends. It was revealing, however, to bring together different subjects through the use of Darwin's reputation. From my perspective, that was much better than yet another specialized meeting about Darwin.

To be honest, although some new work has been done, Darwin studies *per se*, with few exceptions, aren't in a particularly lively phase, certainly not compared to other points in the last fifty years. If you look the development of scholarship in this field, there was a period, particularly around the celebration of his death in 1982, when a lot of new things were discovered and new interpretations provided: for example, how Darwin discovered natural selection, the role of his visit to the Galapagos, and the influence of Malthus. Today two areas strike me as fruitful for future Darwin research. One is the study of Darwin and fine arts (as the Fitzwilliam and other exhibitions in Frankfurt and Melbourne demonstrated); the other is the global reception of Darwin. People have much better sense of global history right now than they had twenty years ago. Historians of science can take advantage of that to get a much broader picture. It is not just those same old figures in British history or American history discussing the *Origin* and *The Descent of Man*, but readers from throughout the world. I think these are the fruitful areas for the exciting new work during this Darwin year. They are moving things forward. But studies of Darwin's biography, for example—here I don't think there has been much new work this year compared to the main things we already know.

HY: We will go back to the global reception of Darwin later. Now could you please give us a brief picture of the development of Darwin studies?

JS: It is fascinating if you turn to the 1930s, when the leading biographer of Darwin (Geoffrey Wells, writing under the pseudonym Geoffrey West) claimed that the story known then was virtually complete and would remain so. From this perspective, and throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the *Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, plus Darwin's autobiography, plus the additional volumes of correspondence and drafts of his theory, pretty much told the story of the life, work, and influence. What was striking is how this changed in the period after World War II. There are a couple of reasons for this. One is that the reputation of Darwin himself rose hugely because of the success of the modern synthesis of evolution, which brought together mathematical population biology, natural history, genetics, and various other fields in science, to say that natural selection is the main mechanism for evolution. Effectively Darwin was right, which for a long time had not been the case. So by the centennial year of 1959, Darwin's reputation was pushed very high, as part of the triumph of natural selection.

Another reason why people became more interested in Darwin was the rise of history of science as a discipline. One important reason for this was the cold war, in which science was seen as crucial to the position of the great powers. History of science was deeply embedded in debates in the West about scientific education in the wake of the success of Soviet technology and military development. So many universities began to support learning about science through its history. By the 1950s and 1960s, it was becoming increasingly clear that Darwin was worthy of careful studies.

It is a long story after that, but one question has remained absolutely central: who should write the history of Darwin and Darwinism? In the 1960s, as history of science became more prominent and independent, controversy began to develop about whether the subject should be dealt with by evolutionary biologists, or by historians and philosophers? This is clearly exemplified in the debate about how far Malthus's theory of population, which was basically a theory in economics, influenced Darwin. Biologists want to sanitize Darwin, but the historians and philosophers said, you know, Darwin himself says Malthus was crucial for the origins of his theory. So there was a big debate around that question. At the time when I entered into this field as a graduate student in 1976, that kind of question was very much on the agenda.

In the late 1970s through the 1980s, the situation was transformed by studies of the Darwin manuscripts and correspondence at Cambridge, and especially the species notebooks, in much greater detail. Two developments stand out. One of them, in which the key figure was David Kohn, is the question of how Darwin came to his theory. Kohn's work showed that the ideas of reproduction, generation, and embryology were much more important than scholars had suspected from the beginning of Darwin's theorizing. These issues had, in fact, played a constitutive role in the discovery of natural selection. So Darwin had not just collected facts and then come up with general theories; nor had he started with artificial selection and then discovered an analogy for it in nature. The process in a sense was completely the reverse. He was looking for a reproductive theory, read a lot of breeding literature, and then read Malthus's *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (first published in 1798). And Malthus shows him that in fact the superfecundity, the power of reproduction, is the key to the origin of species. It was only after that the analogy with artificial selection became important. Darwin began to see that he has an analogy between how nature works and how man works. The two things can be seen together. But initially, the superfecundity of massive over-reproduction of new individuals combined with the incredible power of environmental circumstances and competition between individuals is crucial. The other crucial historiographical issue was serious work on Darwin's correspondence, which grew out of the discussion of the reception of Darwinism. And that is basically how Frederick Burkhardt started the Darwin Correspondence Project in the mid-1970s.

Through these developments emerged the core body of people who are collectively identified as central figures in the so-called 'Darwin Industry': Jim Moore, Sandra Herbert, Jon Hodge, Michael Ruse, Frank Sulloway, and many others.

HY: What are your opinions about 'Darwin industry' and 'Darwin community' then?

JS: The Darwin industry is by any standard a very small industry; to call it an 'industry' is to express a rather negative view of the extraordinary work that the people in it have done. I myself am not card-carrying Darwin scholar, which is probably one of the reasons why I spent most of 2009 in Cambridge. Most of my research is not on Darwin; I have done some work on Darwin and pigeons, on Darwin's relation to earlier evolutionary disputes, and on Darwin's geology, but I have never published a big book about Darwin, and I am not regularly invited to Darwin meetings. The reason is quite simple—I have always tended to study Darwin in relationship to other people and other issues. Too much of a focus on recovering the way Darwin thinks inevitably tends to reinforce the idea that he is a genius who transformed history singlehanded. In my opinion, this is a bad idea. If I have doubts about the 2009 celebrations, they center on a concern that Darwin's status as a genius

will just be reinforced. People don't actually see that there are so many other people and institutions involved, and that science is a group effort. Darwin himself and his work depended upon a whole range of informants, interlocutors, and enemies.

As for a Darwin 'community', it is rather factious and diverse, more of a set of intersecting fields than a group of people with common goals and methods. The extraordinary scope of the 2009 celebrations make it clear that the idea of a scholarly community of specialist Darwin historians is becoming even less convincing than it was when first proposed by Michael Ruse. Personally, I think it would be better if 'Darwin studies' was dissolved into a range of other questions. I think most people, rightly, have very different ideas about what they are doing, and that the most creative work comes from many different directions. Many people are examining Darwin in relation to with other subjects, for example, the reception of Darwin, or his relation to visual culture. It is no coincidence that these questions are not strictly part of Darwin studies as originally formulated in 1970s, when the pressing questions were about the man and his work.

HY: You mentioned the importance of the Darwin Correspondence Project in Darwin studies. You have been the director of it for 3 years. How was it founded? And what is new about this big project?

JS: The Darwin Correspondence Project was started by Fred Burkhardt, who was an American academic administrator and a philosopher. He was convinced of the significance of Darwin, but was surprised while preparing a paper for a big conference on the comparative reception of Darwinism (organized by Thomas Glick at Austin in Texas) to learn that there was no collected correspondence of Darwin, in a way that there was, say, for most American founding fathers, people like Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and so forth. So he thought he should start it. He teamed up with a Cambridge zoologist, Sydney Smith, who had an unrivalled knowledge of the Darwin archive. And together in 1974, they began to search out Darwin letters, and to find out what the scope of such a project would be. When I first heard about it, which was about 1976, they were projecting eight volumes and as I understand it, were planning a selection of the most significant letters, mostly from Darwin. Pretty soon after that, they made the decision to do all the letters. I think that was a great decision, particularly to edit letters to Darwin. As a result, the edition provides not just more facts about Darwin's own biography, but a vast array of information about how others use and debate his theories. The Darwin Correspondence Project places Darwin in society.

The first volume, covering the years 1821-1836, and *A Calendar of the Correspondence of Charles Darwin*, with summaries of over 14000 letters, appeared in 1985. Since then a new volume of Darwin Correspondence Project has appeared pretty regularly. The series will be thirty volumes in all, some in two parts. Volume seventeen just came out this summer, and volume eighteen will be out in 2010. We are planning to finish in 2025, which seems a long way away, but that is how long it takes for the remaining volumes. Besides the published books from Cambridge University Press, we also issue all the letters (after they have been in print for four years) for free on the internet. So it is quite an extraordinary project and a model of team work as well. I am fortunate, and very honored, to have been appointed as Director. I do it as a part of my work as a professor of the history and philosophy of science at the University of Cambridge. I do not edit the letters myself, but I do help with organisation and fundraising. The Darwin Correspondence Project is important, not only because it opens up a whole range of new issues in Darwin studies, but also for many general issues in nineteenth century history.

HY: Would you like to introduce your own background? First of all, why history of science? I know your BA majors are Geology and English Literature, before you got a Ph.D. degree in history of science from Princeton University.

JS: One interesting feature of history of science as a subject is that almost everyone comes to it from very different realms; yet one common trait among those who do so would seem to be an inability to follow strict disciplinary paths. For me, it was hard to decide between going on in science or in the humanities. I have been interested in both for a long time, and I was fortunate to go to university in the United States, which has a great tradition of liberal arts education. You have a major but you can also study other subjects as well, unlike the British system, which is very narrowly focused. So I have two majors, as you noted: one was in Geology and the other in English Literature. This made it possible to explore different aspects of both subjects in depth. This double major provided a broad exposure to a range of different sciences, while at the same time teaching me how to read texts closely. When I finished my degree, which was at Pomona College in southern California, I had to figure out what to do next. I was interested in the history of geology, and also in the relations between science and literature. I have always been fascinated by disciplinary boundaries, how to cross them and use them.

I was lucky at that point, for there was a special fellowship program called Thomas J. Watson Fellowship, which provides for one year of independent travel and study in any country you want, to look at particular issues of interest. My project involved examining the relationship between geology, the aesthetic appreciation of landscape, and English literature during the Romantic period. This was a very important year (1975-76), because it allowed me to be away from regular academic studies, while making it possible to think through how to put together the different subjects in which I was interested, in a period when they were much closer than they are now. So for twelve months I traveled around Britain, and visited all the places associated with romantic tourism. I lived for three months in Lake District, and went up to the northwest of Highlands; I spent time in Derbyshire, and spent a week walking on the coast of the Isle of Wight. It was fantastic; I used great libraries, like those in Cambridge and London, where I lived for several months during the winter. During the course of that year, I became convinced that I needed to find a subject that would allow me to combine science and humanities. Science was attractive to me in certain aspects, especially in terms of teaching, but I knew I didn't want to write a Ph.D. thesis on some granite batholith in southern California; it didn't attract me, for it was too specialized. Literature attracted me also in terms of teaching, and to some extent in terms of research. But I didn't want to just study well-known novels and poems; I want to understand a wider range of texts. So for me history of science was a real way to bring together different subjects.

With this in mind, I decided to go to Princeton to start my graduate study in the United States. Princeton was a wonderful choice, for reasons that I had no understanding of when I was in England, traveling as a romantic tourist. In particular, Princeton was the place where, in the mid-1970s, just at the time when I went there, that cultural history was really invented in an American context. It was a new thing, and many wonderful historians were there. People like Lawrence Stone, Robert Darnton, and Natalie Davis, were discovering the works of cultural anthropologists, particularly the work of Clifford Geertz. It was a fantastic place to be. I also had the chance to work with well-known people in science studies, such as Thomas Kuhn and Charles Gillispie. People such as Peter Dear and Ted Porter were my immediate contemporaries. So there was very much a sense in the air

that it was possible to do a new kind of history of science, which was not just the history of ideas, or even social history, but much more a cultural approach. So coming out of that, with the tools I learnt to use in Princeton, proved absolutely crucial for everything I have done since then. That was a formative moment.

HY: How about here in Cambridge? How does it fit into your career development?

JS: I have lived in Britain since 1980. As my experience at Princeton suggests, I have been fortunate in terms of being the right place at the right time. One of places to mention in this respect is Cambridge, where I moved in 1982 after finishing my dissertation and a fellowship year in London. When I first came to Cambridge as a Junior Research Fellow at Churchill College, the Department of History and Philosophy of Science was very good, but it was also a very different place from what it is today. From the perspective of the history of science, the transformation is widely acknowledged to have occurred with the appointment of Simon Schaffer. That was absolutely fundamental. A lot of work done by the first generation of students who worked with Simon, not to mention his own writings, has been vital to the development of social and cultural approaches to history of science in Britain and the United States. Much of it resonated with what I had been doing in Princeton. In many ways, I think I have been lucky in my intellectual life to have those two moments, one in 1970s in Princeton, and then the other in 1980s in Cambridge. Both were important times at lively intellectual centers. So it is wonderful to have experienced this kind of constant interaction, which has strongly shaped my work.

As for Cambridge and Darwin studies, looking over a long period, Cambridge itself has been a centre for work about Darwin. In terms of the Department of History and Philosophy of Science, much of this dates back to the years when Bob Young was teaching, as he had a remarkable range of students (including Roy Porter, Peter Bowler, and many others). At present, the work is centered both in the department and also in the Darwin Correspondence Project.

HY: You mentioned that in the 1950s and 1960s scientists in the field of history of science would disagree with historians and philosophers. How about now, especially with the cultural and social approaches to the history of science?

JS: Yes, there are obviously disagreements and discussions about this. But I have been impressed here in Cambridge that a number of scientists, though not all of them by any means, are willing to consider a broad range of perspectives. The Darwin Festival, for example, owes a great deal to Patrick Bateson, John Parker, and David Norman, all of whom in different sorts of ways have supported the idea that the Darwin Festival shouldn't just be a narrowly specific science festival, but should be something much broader. It is a real contrast with 1982, when there was a big evolutionary biology conference in Cambridge and a separate meeting in Florence, Italy for historians. Two completely separate meetings, and no interaction between them. But this time it has been different. Based on my own experience, I don't think participants learned that much new about their own subject, but they did learn a lot about other disciplines and other approaches.

I was encouraged by some to organize a separate meeting, but in the specific circumstances of 2009 this didn't seem appropriate. In planning any conference you need to think about where the subject is, what is needed most to make it move forward, and how can it change. One thing I have learned from the Darwin year is that engagement with general public discussion is really important, even

when the framework is not of your own making. In dealing with television producers and newspaper editors, you obviously don't have control over in the way you do in, say, *British Journal for the History of Science*, but you are speaking to a much wider public audience.

HY: Usually people will think that such discipline as history is useless to address current issues. How do you respond to this opinion?

JS: It seems to me a clever strategy to say history is useless in that way, as it appeals to an intuitive sense among the public about the importance of the future. But history is certainly far from useless. In fact, I often tell students at the end of my undergraduate history of science course, that I and the other lecturers have been telling them things that a lot of people would rather not have them know. It is a convenient fiction that science has no history, that the political and social realities we face have always been that way. But we live in a historical world: why do we have separate countries, why do we conduct debates in the way we do, why do we think science and religion are inherently separate? These questions all have historical answers, and have occurred through historical processes. Unless we understand that, there is no way we can change the future. It is important to give students a sense of history, and hard for most of them to get it these days because everyone is continually presented with the idea that the world is continually re-invented on the twenty-four hour news cycle. Clearly, it is not. I think we need to reinforce an understanding of the significance of history.

Take the case of Darwin that we were discussing earlier. It is evident that Darwin is an important symbol in our society, so that what we think about him actually matters, in many ways and for many people. The views that historians can offer have consequences, though it is often hard for these to reach the public at large. On the one hand, you can believe that natural selection was accepted at the moment of Darwin put it forward; or on the other you can understand that it took a century of careful research and discussion. The former view involves a completely inadequate picture of how science develops, and it doesn't reflect the difficulties in what Darwin was attempting to accomplish. Similarly people will claim that religion and science are inevitably at war, and then they have to confront the fact that Darwin mentions the Creator several times in the *Origin*. You know, people don't want that to happen, but it is important to think about why the words are there. What is going on? So I think historians do play an important role, simply in pointing out these kinds of issues and making sure people understand them in a realistic way.

I think everyone has a picture of history. The question is whether that picture is going to be useful or helpful in thinking about how to change things, or whether it is misleading or simply false. Quite often, the historical pictures we have block understanding rather than helping—in fact it may even be the case that Darwin is such a potent symbol of the conflict between science and religion, that using his anniversary as a way of combating creationism has actually backfired. Skeptical audiences may simply become more opposed to evolution the more Darwin is identified as its founding father. But that is a question for the institutions (such as the BBC and the Natural History Museum in Britain) that set the media agenda for the anniversary on such a large public scale.

HY: You once mentioned that your name and reputation are built on showing that Darwin was less important than we actually thought. That is quite interesting. Could you say something about your earlier work on *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*? And your current work on global Darwin? What are your main concerns in this specific field?

JS: Yes, we have been talking about Darwin so far, but my own research is not primarily on Darwin. As I already mentioned, I have spoken much less about Darwin in 2009 than many of my friends, because people generally don't see me as a Darwin scholar. In some sense, you could say I am in an odd position, for I am in charge of the Darwin Correspondence Project and I teach Darwin courses here, and I probably gave 30 or 40 public talks and podcasts this year on Darwin. All this is deeply problematic for someone attempting to show that Darwin was less important than we thought. The work I am probably best known for is called *Victorian Sensation*, which is a study of the main pre-Darwin evolutionary work in Britain, entitled *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*. *Victorian Sensation* is focused on the reading and use of *Vestiges* by a huge array of different people, across the social, religious, political, and academic spectrum. The book shows how different groups use *Vestiges*, making it into something that really changes Victorian society. It is not just a book by an anonymous author, Robert Chambers, but a focus for reading experiences, for working through discussions of the role of progress, science, and faith. *Vestiges* was the one book on the origin of species that Darwin assumes everybody had would know, and he is probably right.

My current work is on the communication of science. I am looking at science in Paris, New York and London, to see how it was regularly reported in the newspapers, to see how this changes the ways science was done and the ways people thought about it. So that is actually what I do (or would like to do) most the time.

As for global Darwin, I thought it is important—particularly in connection with the 2009 celebrations, but also a part of my general interest in communication—to think about how Darwin's significance and reputation are not confined to any one country, particular by the end of the nineteenth century, but are spread across the world. It is important for us to try to understand how to think about this kind of question in a way both that can take account of details, but also doesn't get bogged down in them. The historical literature on the reception of Darwin is useful, but tends to be done country by country. In some way it looks like a meeting of the United Nations. Each nation state is there, but only to talk with one another in a formal way and only across national boundaries. I don't think national boundaries are the only way Darwin and Darwinism actually spread. So I am interested in trying to get other ways of thinking about ideas, information, and practices as things that spread across the world in many different countries and many different language groups, and how that process takes place.

The recently published *Reception of Charles Darwin in Europe*, edited by Eva Marie Engels and Thomas Glick, is a good example. This two volume set is extremely useful, with many new countries discussed that have never been studied before in English, including Finland, Lithuania, Poland and others in eastern and central Europe. It is great to have, and a useful basis for further work, but it doesn't end up by providing a bigger single picture.

So I want to think about other dimensions to this problem, which means drawing on the existing literature on national receptions, but bringing out different features. One thing I want to explore is how material forms of communication, particularly newspapers and weekly journals, became important in making Darwin a global phenomenon. My argument here is quite simple. Weekly intellectual periodicals need something to debate and discuss: that something is Darwinism. As these journals are themselves symbols of technology, science, and new ideas, they typically favor the idea of progress. Darwinism, in that sense, is like a secretion of the weekly newspaper. You can

see this in many different countries. It is striking from the Chinese case, in that the founder of the newspaper industry in China, Liang Qichao, is also among those responsible for introducing Darwinism. Similarly, Marwa Elshakry has shown that the main weekly periodicals in the Arabic-speaking world for discussing science are full of Darwinian debates. I also think an approach based on periodicals of this kind helps to explain features of the situation in England and the United States, where weekly publications become a kind of publication matrix for these debates. It is a question of thinking about the global intellectual history in relationship to the global history of communication and technology, to see how these two feed back and forth. It is not just the technology forcing Darwinism, or Darwinism forcing the technology. But they go back and forth, hand in hand.

That is something I am thinking about during this year, not least because we can watch the Darwin 2009 celebrations today from a similar perspective, by understanding our own mechanisms—especially the internet—for world-wide communication and intellectual exchange. I am looking forward to 2010. I am very pleased that the British Council has approved our application for a network between Cambridge and China on the subject of Darwin and Darwinism. The purpose of this is to make a dialogue possible. From our side it is to learn more about Darwin in China and the cultural issues arose in that situation, which has many features of wide interest and application. From the Chinese side, I think, it is to learn more about western scholarship on Darwin, and current issues in history of science and medicine as studied here. So the two sides are learning from each other. There will be a symposium ‘Darwin in Communication’ in Beijing next August and several of my colleagues from Cambridge and I will be there: we are all excited about that. I think it particularly important because the only way to understand the issues—about how differently Darwin was used in different cultures—is by mutual exchange and discussion. Inevitably language is always going to be a barrier, but there are ways of talking through these issues and learning about them. And we are hopeful on the other side it is the same way.

HY: Thank you so much, Professor Secord. And I am really looking forward to meeting you again in Beijing at ‘Darwin in Communication’ symposium.