

SAW Conference on Writing histories of ancient mathematics – Reflecting on past practices and opening the future, 18th-21st centuries

24-28 Octobre, 2016

organized by Karine Chemla, Agathe Keller, Christine Proust and the SAW group
Université Paris Diderot, Condorcet Building room 366A Klimt- 9:30 am to 5:30 pm

Actors in early histories of mathematics and astral sciences

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Creating a New Paradigm: Mei Juecheng (1681-1764) and His Use of European Algebra in the Interpretation of Chinese Traditional Mathematics

Abstract – Mei Juecheng (1681-1763), the grandson of Qing mathematician Mei Wending (1633–1721), was a renowned mathematician and astronomer during the Kangxi reign. In 1712 he was recruited to the court as a mathematician and in the following year joined the Mengyangzhai (an imperial bureau created to synthesize Western and Chinese scientific knowledge) as one of the chief editors of *Lüli yuanyuan* (1713-1722), a compendium on music, mathematics, and astronomy. Studying European algebra enabled Mei Juecheng to decipher older Chinese mathematical treatises from the Song (960–1279) and Yuan (1271–1368) dynasties whose methods had been lost. This led him to expound a theory of the Chinese origin of Western knowledge, which was proposed by the Kangxi emperor in 1703. Mei Juecheng's way in appropriating European algebra created a new paradigm and helped to revive interest in traditional Chinese mathematics and remained highly influential for many decades.