

Solco W. Tromp, the man who urged us to cooperate

On March 9, 1908, a little boy was born in the Tromp Family. They lived in one of the former colonies of The Netherlands, on the island Java, in what at that time was named Batavia, now Djakarta.

He was named after his grandfather, Solco Walle.

Solco grew up in a family where his father had a job at the Dutch oil company, the Bataafse Olie Maatschappij, BPM, which would later be known as Royal Shell Oil.

At the age of 18, he went to the Netherlands to the Leyden University, where he studied geology and geography. 6 years later, in 1932 he got a PhD in geology.

He left the university and after his military service 1933–1934, he got a job as an exploration geologist for Royal Dutch Shell and Socony oil, the later Exxonmobile. He worked for 6 years, from 1934–1940 in Indonesia and Egypt. During the war, he first worked as advisor on oil exploration to the Turkish Government but became director, economic warfare, Netherlands Army, the Dutch section of MacArthur's Headquarters.

In 1946, after the war, he went back to The Netherlands and took course at the Leiden University in physiology and meteorology.

In 1947, he was appointed for three years as professor of geology at the King Saud University in Cairo, Egypt.

In 1950, he got a position as geological consultant at the UN Technical Assistance programme for Central America and the Middle East, followed by a geological consultancy for the Government of Afghanistan.

In 1955 he went back to The Netherlands. His interests had become more and more focussed on biometeorology and he founded a Bioclimatological Research Centre in Leiden, working in collaboration with his former university.

In the same year, he was co-founder of the International Society for Biometeorology of which he was secretary-general until 1976.

One of his main objectives was to integrate the various fields of biology and meteorology. His knowledge of the classical physiology as an integrating discipline (now also known as system biology) influenced his way on thinking in a more holistic approach; the human being as an integral part of the world in which he lives.

He was remarkable productive in writing. By 1953, he had already achieved a substantial bibliography on topics, which we may refer to as biomedical science or medical geography. He continued writing to the time of his death in 1993.

Solco Tromp was very courteous man, full of humour and with a great zest for life. He became the main promotor of biometeorology for many years after his geology career.

As a person, he combined three distinct qualities, a highly scientific mind, a logical intellect and an excellent organisational talent. During his whole career, he was fascinated by the interaction between humans and the world they live in, considering it as a feedback control system, stable within the limits of control.

A few weeks ago I was in China, Shanghai. From my background as a physiologist as well as a Western trained physician, I was fascinated by the differences between my reductionistic view on Western medicine, and on the other hand the traditional Chinese medicine with its holistic view. After the explosion of basic science during the 17th century, our western research has focussed on more and more details. We know the genetic code of illnesses but we fail to integrate this detailed knowledge on higher levels of organisation. It was Tromp who tried to link both approaches together.

He died in 1993. After his death, part of his legacy was allocated to The Tromp Foundation (Foundation for Biometeorological Research). The aim of the Foundation is to promote BIOMETEOROLOGY.

Considering his views about the interaction of earth and its living creatures, considering the risk of this interaction getting out of control, he would have loved a meeting like this, where experts from many countries will try to give an answer on the question, how can we anticipate on a scenario in which in future we will have to deal with climate change, whether due to human interference or not.

On behalf of the Tromp Foundation, on behalf of its founder Solco W. Tromp I wish you a fruitful conference.

Dr. Wop J. Rietveld
Chairman of the Tromp Foundation