

1759 Glenneyre Street,
Laguna Beach, California.

August 23, 1960.

Mr. R.H. Nolte,
Executive Director,
Institute of Current World Affairs,
366 Madison Avenue,
New York, N.Y..

Dear Dick,

The Twelfth General Assembly of the International Union of Geodesy and Geophysics met in Helsinki from July 25 to August 6, 1960. For Professor J. T. Wilson it marked the end of three years as President of the Union. Three years in which he had travelled over the ends of the earth trying to promote scientific understanding and good will. Before the meeting convened, it appeared that his efforts had been eminently successful - nations which found it difficult to co-operate politically had agreed to meet together to discuss scientific questions of mutual interest. Both East and West Germany were to send delegations, but more important, the Peoples' Republic of China were to be represented and there was a possibility that Formosa might also send some scientists.

It appeared that this convention would provide an excellent opportunity for me to discuss with Professor Wilson and the Chinese delegation the chances of my spending a year or so in China studying Chinese science. It was with this end in view that I went to Helsinki to attend the Twelfth General Assembly. En route I planned to visit Sir Joseph Needham to seek his advice and to determine the best location for learning Chinese. This report summarizes my findings.

The Results of the I.U.G.G. Meetings

Unhappily, the pre-assembly optimism proved unfounded. At the last minute the Peoples' Republic of China cancelled their travel arrangements and did not come to Helsinki. In a four-hundred word cable to the Finnish Arrangements Committee they gave as their reason the fact that Formosa planned to send a delegation. They had discovered that Professor Wilson had invited the Formosans, and much of their cable was devoted to a personal harangue of Wilson. They accused him of committing an unfriendly act to the Peoples' Republic of China and expressed surprise that after the reception they had given him in China, he should subsequently associate himself with the Chiang Kai-shek clique.

This was all most disappointing. While having lunch together one day, Wilson himself expressed pessimism about the probability of anyone getting into China to study science within the next two years. He gave as additional evidence the fact that

the Chinese had just evicted a Canadian reporter for the Toronto Globe and Mail who was actually getting on rather well with the Chinese. It would seem that the Chinese do not want to be friendly with the West. Wilson did think, however, that it might be possible to make periodic trips through China of about a months duration.

Meeting with Sir Joseph Needham

As you know, Sir Joseph Needham is perhaps the greatest Western Sinologist. The three volumes which have so far been published of his seven volume work "Science and Civilization in China" have established him as the leader in this field. In addition he is a foreign member of the Academia Sinica. He was probably the man best qualified to advise me on the feasibility of my project. I had therefore written to him requesting an interview and he had agreed to meet me in Cambridge on my return from Helsinki.

The meeting was an interesting one. He had invited me to lunch in his rooms at Gonville and Caius College. Also present were his wife (a distinguished biochemist and a Fellow of the Royal Society) and a Chinese lady who appeared to be Sir Joseph's assistant. I began by telling the group of Professor Wilson's journeyings as President of the I.U.G.G., how he had visited China and had been surprised how different things were from what he had been led to believe by reading the Western press reports. I explained how he felt that the West should be better informed and that one way was by promoting travel and study by Western scientists in China. I then mentioned that Professor Wilson had written to me and asked if I was interested in first learning the Chinese language and then studying science in China. I explained that it was at this point I had come to seek Sir Joseph's advice. My questions were:

1. Did he think this a worthwhile project?
2. If so, did he think there was any chance of its success, i.e. would the Chinese let me into China?
3. Where would he recommend that I learn the language?

Sir Joseph gave all of these questions a great deal of thought. He asked several questions about Wilson's book, "One Chinese Moon", which he had not seen, and suggested that my fate was pretty well bound up with whether the Chinese regarded it as friendly. (I felt this to be ominous in view of the Helsinki cable in which Wilson has distinctly been called unfriendly!).

After discussing the matter for about an hour and a half, he finally summed up his answers to my questions as follows:

1. Yes - he thought the project to be worthwhile. Two years spent learning Chinese could be extremely valuable. He felt that it was only a matter of time before the West realized the importance of Chinese science. He mentioned as evidence the recent

decision by United Steel to set up scholarships for the study of the Chinese language in Sheffield. He said however, that the student should have a real motivation and should not just tackle it as a job.

2. No - he did not think the Chinese would let me into China within two years. In fact he felt that it would be at least five to ten years before anyone from the West would be able to go and study in China, unless that person could contribute some talent that China actually wanted. He also believed however, that it should be possible to make periodic trips through China and suggested using Hong Kong as a base to visit not only China, but also such countries as Japan as well.

3. The best place to learn Chinese would be either the University of London or Hong Kong. Cambridge was certainly not suitable since only the written language was taught.

Dr. Twittering and Mr. Chung Tsi

As part of this fact-finding trip I had hoped to talk with Professor Pulleyblank, head of the Chinese department, about the possibility of my studying Chinese at Cambridge. However, he was on vacation and so I talked with Dr. Twittering instead. Dr. Twittering had just been appointed to the Chair of Chinese at London University and so was particularly well qualified to discuss both Cambridge and London. He confirmed Sir Joseph's statement that Cambridge was quite unsuitable as a place to learn contemporary Chinese. It specializes entirely in the written language and gives no courses in the spoken language. The School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London does have suitable courses, and I believe would be a good place to learn the language. Dr. Twittering also mentioned that Yale has an excellent school for the study of Chinese.

Mr. Chung Tsi is another member of the Cambridge faculty who is about to transfer to the University of London. He had just spent a few months in Cambridge after eight years at the University of Hong Kong, and was able to tell me a lot about the University life in Hong Kong. Apparently the Chinese Department at the University has deteriorated somewhat in the last year, and in Mr. Chung's opinion the best way to learn Mandarin in Hong Kong is by means of a tutor. He will recommend suitable ones should the need arise. Mr. Chung also thought that the University of London might be a little better than Hong Kong for getting an initial start on the language, although he thought Formosa would be the best place.

Letter from Peking

I had been interested for some time in whether it would be feasible to take any of our children to China, and had also wondered about the type of accommodation we would have in Peking. I therefore wrote to the British Charge d'Affairs and asked him a number of

questions. In reply I was told that a Convent school in Peking did provide a "British type" education and that it was mainly attended by children from different foreign embassies and legations. Accommodation would be a problem, one which they urged be settled in writing with the Chinese before I entered. The letter also suggested that every library, laboratory, or University that I hoped to visit also be specified in writing before I went. Finally they recommended that before deciding whether to go to China, I should talk with someone at the Foreign Office in London who had recently returned from Peking.

Conclusions

After a careful consideration of all the facts gathered on this trip, I now propose the following plan:

1. Spend one year at the University of London learning Chinese. I select London because it is the best place to learn Chinese in England, and I select England for the following reasons:
 - (a) In order to get into China, whether it be for several years or only several months, it will probably be necessary to have made a break from the United States. I think this reason largely rules out Yale, and makes an academic approach from England highly desirable.
 - (b) From the point of view of childrens' education it is not wise for them to have too many moves. For this reason it would be good for them to start with a "British type" education as soon as possible.

2. The second year should be spent based in Hong Kong. I would continue learning Chinese with the aid of a tutor. I would also study the Chinese scientific literature and would try to get into China, perhaps first for a visit, and then if conditions permit, for a more extended stay. If, as seems likely, an extended stay is not possible, I think the project should change its orientation from just Chinese science to a comparative study of science in South East Asia, paying particular emphasis to a comparison between China and India. This would be partly based on the literature and partly on visits to China, India and Japan.

I would like to express my appreciation to the Institute of Current World Affairs for financing the trip to Helsinki and Cambridge. I should also like to thank both Mrs. Nolte and yourself for so kindly entertaining me on my return to New York. I certainly hope you had a most successful and enjoyable camping trip.

Finally would you please thank Mrs. Murkland for her letter and for sending me the cutting from Mr. Parkin. If I go ahead with the project I would like to take advantage of his offer to introduce me to someone from United Steel.

Attached are my expense account and a refund of \$478 from my travel advance.

With very best wishes,

Sincerely,

Geoff
C.H.G. Oldham.