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THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY

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Dear David and Josh,

I'm writing a joint letter to you both since what I have to say to each of you overlaps to a considerable degree. We returned from the P.R.C. just a few days ago and I'm still suffering from jet lag. I'll not pretend to have become an instant sinologist and I've yet to try to sort out the details of my notes (if they're readable at all). Anyhow here I'll try to put my search for genetics in China in perspective for you. Prior to our trip we had 6 x 2 hr briefing sessions on China by the fellow who in the middle of the sessions became head of the China desk in Z. Brzezinski's office. He was to come with us, but instead another sinologist joined our group. In retrospect we really were well briefed. Thus when we arrived in Peking we gave our guides a list of names of people and places we'd like to see. I gave them the names T.C. Sheng and C.C. Tan. While in Peking I tried very hard to get to the Institute of Genetics supposed to be there, but was always politely told, "Yes, we know where it is, but we'll see if we have time". Needless to say I never got there. There is some microbial genetics at the Institute of Microbiology, such as the supposed isolation of an RNA synthetase from TMV infected leaves, some derivative in vitro protein synthesis work with TMV RNA, some work on plasmids (antibiotic resistant) in E. coli and Staph and some work on actinomycete phages that affect antibiotic production. A problem I'm sure we solved long ago. By the time we left Peking (5-1/2 days) several points were clear. The cultural revolution had destroyed the universities, affected to a lesser degree the medical schools, and had had an erratic effect on the Institutes where most of Chinese research is done (a la Max Planck Institutes).

Why one Institute survived and another didn't never did become clear. Since they had no undergraduate students, they were

in part automatically protected, but I can only assume there was either a shrewd leader or a protecting angel that preserved some and not others. Although there is an infinite number of crimes that the Gang of Four is accused of committing, they really boil down to their distrust of theory and knowledge for its own sake, as this could only lead to a bourgeois elite. To illustrate this point, we were told innumerable times how they encouraged a student to ^{had} in a blank entrance exam paper, since his years of service on the commune would more than suffice for his entrance to University. The students were also not to respect their Professors and report on their every political deviation. Tim Leary and a 10 year Woodstock en masse! As an aside before going on with my search for genetics, I point out it was a gang of five. Though the Chinese choose to find in Mao's 5th volume (biography), now available in Chinese, not English, the antidote to such rubbish, I feel that they are really de-Maoizing at this moment without castigating Mao himself. This volume, however, does end with the "let 100 flowers bloom" statement. In fact they are turning Mao and Chou En-lai, their "beloved and esteemed Premier", into gods (one more and they'd have a trinity). This may, of course, be only a small window in Chinese history, but I've a feeling not. The campaign against the "Gang of Four" is so intense that it would be hard to reverse. Some of the wall posters are fantastically lurid. (I hope my pictures come out.) Believe it or not they are accused of being ultra-rightist revisionists a la Liu Shao-ch'i, Lin Piao and the Soviets.

Back to genetics. As we visit Nanking and Soochow I remind our guides of my desire to meet with geneticists, now saying that I have greetings from the President of the Genetics Society of America. The more proletarian the state, the more they are impressed by titles. Still no geneticists. We arrive in Shanghai. Staying in the old International Concession, the horrors of the Soviet-built hotels that we've been staying in are relieved. The Shanghai hotels are 50 or more years older, but look 50 years younger. I don't believe Russians know how to make concrete or they sure did take the Chinese for a bundle. In Shanghai as in Peking we've many places to visit, but here there's no pretense of visiting the University. This was the headquarters of the "Gang of Four" and little is left of Fu Tan U. I'm to lecture again (by the by, it's fun to lecture using a translator, very relaxing, one can scratch oneself while the translator hopefully transmits your words of wisdom). The day before my lecture I'm told that T.C. Sheng has been located, but not C.C. Tan. The morning before my lecture I'm told that after lunch at 1:00 pm, I'm to be in my room as T.C. Sheng and C.C. Tan will be there to talk with me and then take me at 1:45 to the lecture hall. They do arrive at 1:00 and then tea and cigarettes are brought in (the Chinese equivalent to a cocktail). The first strange thing that happens is that none of the guides stay. I've never met or known either of these gentlemen. Sheng is a mass of nerves, merely skin and bones. He says nothing. C.C. Tan does all the talking. I recount my difficulties in seeing geneticists and Tan says that since the C.R. the Peking Institute has nothing left. He then

recounts his story since he returned in 1948. When he first came back to China, the Soviets were in control and only Lysenkoism was allowed to be taught, etc. This was maintained until 1956 when Mao made "the Hundred Flowers Speech" and they built up a genetics group at Fu Tan University with 40 people. They had microbial genetics, radiation genetics and population genetics (studying some inbred areas for genetic diseases). This lasted until the C.R. when all genetics work was moved to the field or factory. He really implied that it effectively ceased. Now since the "Gang of Four" have been "smashed" they are working at building up again. Sheng says little, just nods and agrees. Before we leave for the lecture I broach your question, David, about an exchange of delegations. Tan says this might be a good idea and he will bring up the matter in Peking as he is on the National Committee (my ears perk up and I write in my notes Central Committee?). He tells me he has had a letter from you, Josh, sent about 2-1/2 years ago, but because he has had a partial colectomy for cancer and a gastrectomy (I assume from the medication), he hasn't answered it. He fingers this air letter as if to show it to me and then pulls it away. He does this again several times during the talk. I don't believe his reason for not writing. (See below.) We go to the lecture. It's kind of fun as I said. I lecture \bar{c} translation 1-1/2 hours then a 15' tea break, then back for questions. Again I'm asked to discuss our favorite subject "recombinant DNA". I'll describe the attitude of the Chinese I met on this later. After this there's another tea break then a picture taking session, all in all about 3 hours. The following night we are given a large banquet. Tan and Sheng attend and flank me at the table. Tan is dressed in a "bespoke" Chinese grey uniform and all eyes are on him. Our sinologist sitting at another table is drooling \bar{c} envy. He really is Central Committee. Their earlier inability to find him was probably to find out whether I was worthy of his time, etc. Just a ploy. Again, as I said, he carries Josh's letter and shows and doesn't show it to me. He gives me the cards which I've enclosed. I ask if there's any message and he says to tell you, Josh, he'll write you at Xmas time. Why then I don't know. The drinking goes on, as does the banquet. Sheng still says nothing. With regard to Tan if ever, I had the impression of a man who'd like to join our group and come to see the U.S.A. again. He asks after numerous geneticists he knew when here. Unfortunately, most of them are dead now and he is saddened. I don't know if it's due to his potentially fatal disease (still on chemotherapy), some political complication, or both, but he seemed to be reaching out in an attempt to recover a long lost past through me, as Josh's letter goes in and out of his pocket. It's sad, for I feel we might have been really able to talk were the others at the table not present. I finally do screw up my courage and ask him about Teng. He seems to misunderstand and vehemently describes Hua's strengths and that Teng has had nothing to do with the Gang of Four and should be back in power in a year or two.

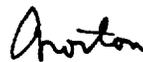
David, your sense of the asymmetry in an exchange of delegations is right, as I hope my words above have made clear, but that's

only if you conceive its purpose as immediately substantive. My own view is to try to reopen connections now that might be substantive in time. Tan said you should write to him at Fu Tan University Institute of Genetics, but I'd not mention such specific concerns of yours as germ plasm, environmental carcinogens, etc., until a subsequent letter and then only if buried in a group of potentially more mutually beneficial genetic problems. I'd let his reply, if any, to the idea of an exchange or even only an American delegation dictate the next move. If anyone can open channels, he can, and would love to do so if it's deemed appropriate and useful in Peking. Although it may sound arrogant and paternal, it is my feeling that at this time the mere establishment of real contact with their peers on the outside, serves a useful purpose for the Chinese who have been tethered these many years. The particular composition of the American delegation, as mutually agreed on, could lead to more substantive exchanges in time. I think that you should also write to Sheng, but as an old friend, acknowledging, for instance, my greetings to you from him and any other trivia that seems appropriate. However, don't be surprised if you don't receive an answer. The source of his fear was not clear to me but afraid he was.

The Chinese get Science and Nature about 3-4 months late. Thus despite the fact they have only N. Wade and C. Norman to read on "recombinant DNA" (those two think they write for the National Enquirer and in a way Norman does... he also writes for D. Greenberg's Science and Government), they consider it a tempest in a teapot. Their general attitude, if I understand correctly, is that man must be correctable and genetics is one of the ways--sometimes they sounded like Sinsheimer ca. 1970--and they certainly believe in genetic engineering for agriculture, etc., since food is their greatest need and they don't want to miss any bets. They just loved it when in my discussions I drew an analogy between Shanghai and the gang of four and Cambridge and the "gang of four". The parallel of these negative influences really struck home. I wonder what our leftist colleagues would make of this.

I've babbled on too long, but I do hope I gave you both an impression of one aspect of the China trip. David, you decide on the feel you get from my letter what to do next.

Yours,



Norton D. Zinder

NDZ:ck

P.S. The enclosed picture of Tan must be at least 10 years old.