

**1956****Letter, Deputy Chair of the Far Eastern Branch of  
the Soviet Academy of Sciences Aleksei Vasil'evich  
Stozhenko****Citation:**

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**Summary:**

Stozhenko, a geography professor, writes to a friend concerning komandirovka (work-related travel), science education in China, and the sometimes bad behavior of Soviet advisors in China. He warns that "gluttonous eating, sleeping in luxury rooms, and traveling in the international car at the expense of the PRC is not helping things."

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LETTER TO PROFESSOR DOCTOR OF GEOGRAPHY, DEPUTY CHAIR OF THE FAR EASTERN BRANCH OF AN [ACADEMY OF SCIENCES] OF THE USSR Aleksei Vasil'evich Stozhenko – to his scientist friend, a worker at the INSTITUTE OF EXCAVATION A.M. Chekashillo

Dear Andrei Markovich,

Yet again I wish you a fine holiday. I have offended you again. In spite of your wishes I was not able to answer not one of your last letters, as I was on foreign komandirovka for 1 ½ months. I told you about this komandirovka in Moscow and, to the extent that you remember, I wrote about it in letters. It's true, lately I am not sure I could or did communicate to you any information. Then I am guilty and I beg your forgiveness. From China I did not write anyone—even to home I was limited to just one letter, telling them of my flight. It was a situation there where there was not even time to dream. We indeed traveled not as a tourist venture but to work, and there was always an extraordinary amount of work. Our trip was: Vladivostok-Grodekovo-Harbin; after ten days of work in Harbin:

Harbin-Mudanjiang-Mishan-Huling-Jishi-Muling-Mudanjiang-Harbin (this was a circular route); after a 3 hour break in Harbin (I didn't even manage to bathe) the new route was Harbin-Mukden-Tianjing-Beijing; after ten days of work in Beijing a new route: Beijing-Chanchon-Girin-Fongman-Changul-Harbin, and, finally, after a two week stay in Harbin—home via Mudanjiang and Suidinhe. The purpose of the komandirovka: to acquaint Chinese comrades with their work, materials, blueprints, and plans for the future; to acquaint them with materials and work with collections, to establish connections with hydro-technicians, geologists, soil scientists, forestry specialists, agricultural specialists and their institutes, both scientific and educational ones engaged in planning; and the main thing was to establish personal contact with scientists and specialists in the PRC. After a break of one month after our trip B.T. Bykov went with similar objectives to [North] Korea.

The Presidium of the AN [Academy of Sciences] of the USSR presented me with the task of establishing the strongest scientific ties with our neighbors, and of summarizing the plans in diverse areas of science, and if necessary, to look over completely our programs and plans. In China we traveled under the flag of the Amur expedition. We became convinced [in China], however, that such a flag looked shabby and faded, and changed to the flag of the DV [Far East] branch, that is to their flag. For the Chinese comrades this meant the completely unexpected presence in the Far East of a branch of the AN USSR working almost entirely with them. Our manuscripts (unfortunately because of their printed condition we could not take them with us), but all the same all the copies were literally snatched up and torn into sections and quickly translated. We had the opportunity to publish our work in Chinese with a translation and re-publication in Russian.

In general the Chinese of Mao Zedong made an enormously astonishing impression on us. They have placed before themselves the task of catching up to global science (including our own) in 12 years. But everything suggests that they will accomplish this even sooner. They are beginning first with construction projects and the building of institutes, and in this regard to such an extent that our heads were simply spinning. In 4 years they have constructed several times more than what Akademstroi has done in 20 years of its existence. Just in Dongbei ANKNR [the Northeast section of the Academy of Sciences] they have built some tens of institutes, including: a construction institute (we still do not have one, but in the PRC they do, and how!) with a frozen-soil study laboratory; a metallurgical institute, soil studies, forestry, and so on and so on. Each institute covers several hectares in territory, and many of the constructed buildings are tens of thousands of meters.

Inside the buildings they have the most contemporary equipment, about which our institutes can only dream, including even those in Moscow. Most of the equipment has been ordered either from the two Germanies or from Czechoslovakia. There is our [equipment] as well, but only the newest and most contemporary, like we ourselves have still not seen. What is most extraordinary [pikantnoe; picquant] about all this is that all of these institutes have been built and equipped and set up under the leadership of our advisers. Our scientists have realized their dreams on foreign soil.

The situation is analogous with the bigger institutes, the institutions of higher education, and the planning institutes. Regardless of what is generally a nightmarish crowdedness, even from the perspective of a Muscovite, in the social and cultural buildings, in the institutes, and the spacious [institutes of higher education], the number of workers and students is simply cosmic. If it's a [institute of higher education], then they have some 7-8 thousand students and 500 teachers, and if it's a "branch" planning institute—then there are some 2000 engineer-technicians and workers. The [vast] dimensions [of everything] truly are striking. Even when they take a collective photograph, they [assemble] at least some 500 or 1000 people. In the Northeast there is not one single large city where they have not built tens of institutes. Therefore they build them very quickly (with the main building at a size of some 20-30 thousand cubic meters, built in ½ a year, including all work relating to the interior), they are very pretty and durable (the walls and structure are ours, the roofs are Chinese), and inexpensive. At one plant there are concentrated 500-600 workers, each of whom receives 30-40 yuan monthly (60-80 rubles at the official rate or 300-400 rubles on the black market). The mechanization of the plant is minimal: there is a mine shaft and concrete mixer and that's it. Discipline and organization are excellent. Just one technician administers these 500-600 workers. The planning documentation is also minimal, and production plans reside in the head of this single technician.

But the most valuable thing in China is the Chinese themselves. They are hard-working and disciplined (in some 40 days I saw not a single loafer or drunkard or gambler, even as I was among the most provincial people), highly talented in all the sciences, decisive and active, with initiative, polite and courteous not only to us Russians but to each other, and the main thing is that they are honest to the very last one of them. You can forget your camera in a store or a coatroom (as happened with us), and they will return it to you within an hour, a day, a week, or whenever they find you. All internal financial accounting is done orally. Someone going on komandirovka is given money without receipts. They spend it as they choose. When they return they turn in the remaining [money], attaching the report as proforma. No one criticizes them for the amount they spent. But the main thing is that not one person on komandirovka would think about wasting a single ruble. Professor Lu Zuzhu was given 60 thousand rubles for an expedition (he went for two months). He spent 4600 rubles. The remainder was 55,400 rubles. A indeed the "expenditures" were calculated precisely according to our norms.

The only area where they do not practice economy is in their meetings and care of the Soviet comrades. Unfortunately many Muscovites do not want to understand the simple fact that the PRC is still a young and poor republic, and that their economic regime is not a matter of idle talk, and gluttonous eating, sleeping in luxury rooms, and traveling in the international car at the expense of the PRC is not helping things. We, it is true, before the trip among Muscovites discussed the fact that any other way is impossible, as the Chinese in this regard make no effort to economize and literally forcibly foist luxurious hospitality upon us, and to reject this hospitality would threaten to complicate things internationally. But all that turned out to be a lie. When we told our host that we really liked Chinese cooking, but by habit prefer our own Russian cooking not from 20-40 different fancy dishes but simply from 2-4 basic dishes, they right away believed us and let us alone. We ate separately and paid for everything...in our dinner. When we said that in the USSR in the international cars [of trains] there are only ministers, and in the soft seats only directors, and that we could

travel in hard seats, where it would also be more interesting to travel with the public and get to know the Chinese comrades than to sit in luxurious prisons; they believed us and were relieved, as for them too it is more interesting to be among the public areas and play cards, rather than be bored with us. Soon we quickly learned the rules of their games, and taught them some of our own.