[ANNEX E]

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FOUNDATION OF A CHINESE RESEARCH INSTITUTE IN WASHINGTON

By Berthold Laufer

The desirability and necessity of having scientific research detached from teaching and administrative obligations has for a long time been recognized in the medical and biological sciences. The Carnegie Institution, the Rockefeller Foundations, and the experiment stations of the States in cooperation with the U. S. Department of Agriculture are the best-known examples of highly organized research institutions, not to speak of the numerous state and private laboratories throughout the country devoted to chemical, botanical, mineralogical, pathological, and other technical investigations. Several universities have seen fit to endow research professorships, and some of our leading museums have appointed research associates who have no other duties than devoting all of their time to the study of specific problems. In the line of Oriental studies there is in this country but one research organization in existence,—the Oriental Institute founded by Professor Breasted in 1919 in connection with the University of Chicago, and now so well developed and organized that it has grown into a staff of 54 workers. In his last report issued in August 1928, Professor Breasted defines the Institute as “a transformation of the Department of Oriental Languages into an investigative body—a research group to whose ranks have been added other specialized groups of investigators having no teaching duties and appointed solely to carry on a series of related research projects in the vast field of early human development upon which modern human life has been built up. Geographically, this field is the ancient Near East, where the Institute has dispatched six expeditions and is now still maintaining five.”

The ancient civilizations of the Near East are extinct, while China’s civilization and the Chinese nation are still alive, with an
immense literature and an unbroken record of a history covering a span of several millenniums.

The French have always taken the lead in all matters pertaining to sinology, and Chinese studies have been generously supported by the French Government for more than a century. The Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient, founded at Hanoi, Indo-China, in 1898, by Governor General Doumer at the instigation of the Institut de France, is the only Chinese research institute now in existence. The 27 volumes of the Bulletin and a solid series of special monographs issued by the School stand out as splendid monuments of French scholarship which have signally advanced our knowledge of China, Japan, Indo-China, and India in almost all lines of scientific endeavor as philology, historical geography, folk-lore, ethnology, epigraphy, archaeology, numismatics, and bibliography. While it seems hopeless that anything on such a stupendous scale could ever be accomplished in this country, there is no reason why, in the interest of American scholarship and the progress of sinology, a modest start should not be made which may augur well for the future and which may lay the foundation to a structure that coming generations will complete.

A vast amount of material bearing on China has been stored up during the last quarter of a century in several of our museums and libraries, but unfortunately it is utilized by only a few, and research has not kept pace in proportion with the quantity of material that confronts us and with the number of problems awaiting solution. This deplorable situation is not due to apathy or indifference on the part of our scholars, but has its primary cause in the lack of opportunities and facilities, as hardly one of us is free to put his heart and soul in his own favorite studies.

For the advancement of American scholarship in the domain of sinology it is herewith proposed and recommended that steps be taken to found a Chinese Research Institute as an independent organization in Washington, D. C., which in view of the vast treasures of Chinese and other oriental literatures accumulated in the Library of Congress appears to be the logical centre of its location. It would be premature at this moment to discuss in detail the organization of such an institution, which would largely
depend on the endowment that could be raised for this purpose. It seems advisable for the moment to start with a comparatively modest endowment and to endeavor to raise further contributions by degrees, as the work of the proposed Institute will advance and public interest in it will grow. As a beginning, provision should be made at least for two and, if possible, three incumbents, one of whom should be a scholar of Chinese or Japanese nationality. These men should devote all of their time exclusively to intense research and to the study of specific problems that fall within the scope of the science of East-Asiatic civilizations, without having any teaching or other encumbrances. An Institute of this character may also function as a sort of clearing house, suggest problems or research projects to outsiders, and assist those who desire advice or look for guidance in their own investigations.

The ultimate ideal goal would be to see this Chinese Research Institute gradually evolve into a general Oriental Research Institute embodying the whole of Asia to the exclusion of the ancient Near East, which is adequately taken care of by the Chicago Oriental Institute. It is needless to emphasize that Chinese research holds the key to the entire scientific situation in Asia and that the interrelations of the Chinese with the other nations of Asia and the mine of information existing in Chinese records on all Asiatic countries make sinology an exceedingly complex, many-sided, and fascinating science. No other philologist at present requires a knowledge of so many languages as a sinologist: as the case may be or as his inclinations may lead him, he must be familiar with Japanese, Manchu, Mongol, Turkish, Tibetan, Sanskrit, Prakrit, Persian and other Iranian languages, and even Arabic, not to speak of the newly discovered languages revealed by the manuscript remains of Turkistan. For this reason it is clear that it would be an ideal combination and make for excellent teamwork to have a representative of each of these fields coördinated with the labors of the Chinese Research Institute. The scheme would be approximately as follows:

3 men for Chinese
1 for Japanese
1 for Korean
Promotion of Chinese Studies

1 for Mongol and Manchu
1 for Turkish
1 for Tibetan
1 for Sanskrit
1 for Iranian
1 for Arabic
1 for Malayan and Javanese

Total, 12

There are numerous problems of vital interest that might advantageously and successfully be pursued by such a body of specialists through well-organized and intelligently directed teamwork, and in addition each number of the Institute individually would be able to make novel contributions to science that will serve as a stimulus and an inspiration to his fellow-workers.