September 1962
Work Report of the Tea Specialist Group Aiding Guinea

Citation:

"Work Report of the Tea Specialist Group Aiding Guinea", September 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, PRC FMA 108-00805-03, 24-30. Obtained by Gregg Brazinsky and translated by Caixia Lu.
https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/121918

Summary:

A lengthy report on the work of Chinese experts in Guinea to start up tea plantations in the country.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from MacArthur Foundation

Original Language:

Chinese

Contents:

Work Report of the Tea Specialists Group Aiding Guinea

In keeping with the spirit of the instructions given by the Central Bureau of Foreign Economic Relations on 2 April in response to our “Work Plan of the Tea Specialists Group Heading to Guinea”, the tea specialists group left Beijing on 6 April and arrived in Guinea on 10 April. Upon arrival, the group briefed our embassy in Guinea and the embassy instructed: “In looking at the possibilities for development, do survey a few more places in Guinea so as to study and compare various options. Take the initiative and be proactive in matters of technical guidance.” On 12 April, we paid a call to Sory Barry, Minister of Rural Economy for the Republic of Guinea. The Guineans requested that we 1) survey the area of Macenta (including Seredou) that would be used for growing tea, and look for large tracts of land (ranging from tens to hundreds of hectares) to be set aside for the purposes of setting up a tea planation; 2) assist them in drafting a development plan; 3) teach them the techniques of growing and producing tea. The specialists group arrived at the work location in Seredou on 25 April at the request of the Guineans and under the instruction of the embassy and returned to Conakry on 10 July, spending 77 days in total. During this time, our work was mainly conducted over two stages. During the first stage, we mainly spent our time in Seredou imparting our techniques, as well as surveying and studying the conditions for growing tea on a wider scale. In the second stage, we were in Macenta mainly to study the possibilities for tea production, conduct planning research for establishing a tea plantation and gather information on setting up a tea processing plant. Our report on our work situation is as follows:

1. The Current Situation of Tea Plantations in Seredou:

The experimental Cinchona (Quinine) station in Seredou has 22 employees in total and 150 or so workers. There are four substations under the main station, and there are 220 hectares of Cinchona trees and 4 hectares of tea in total. The station’s primary business is the production of quinine, and it does not conduct agricultural and tea growing experiments and research work.

The existing 4 hectares of tea were grown by the French five years ago. There are certain problems with the site selection and the method of cultivation. The tea plantation has steep slopes and shallow soils, and there are no drainage facilities. There is relatively serious soil erosion and waterlogging and the tea shrubs are dying in large numbers, with current plant loss rates as high as 30-40%. The tea grown here is the large-leaved Assamese plant (Camellia sinensis var. assamica) with larger buds and leaves. The green leaves are rich in tannin and theine, and can be used to produce good quality black tea.

There is no one specifically appointed to manage the tea plantation, and nobody to till, weed and fertilize the land, or to prune the tea shrubs. The tea shrubs are left to grow naturally. As a result, they are tall and spindly with few branches and narrow crowns. Except in 1961 when the leaves were sunned to produce around 100 kilograms of very poor quality tea, the leaves had not been picked to produce tea since and there are no facilities for doing so. Looking at the current growth conditions of the tea shrubs, it is estimated that this 4-hectare plantation can produce around 10 piculs of dried tea annually, which is too little to warrant the construction of a mechanized tea processing plant.

The tea nursery at this station spans roughly 4 mou, and the seedlings were planted from last November to December. There is someone in charge of the nursery and it is relatively more carefully managed. The tea seedlings are growing well and they have some experience in this area. The person in charge of the nursery has also acquired some expertise in seedling cultivation.

2. Imparting of Techniques:

We have imparted some techniques in accordance with the local circumstances in Seredou after looking at the problems that the station is having with tea production and the specific conditions in the area. A skills-learning group with 8 to 10 participants has been set up at the No. 5 experimental substation, among which one participant had graduated from an agricultural high school, two had been to primary school, with the remaining being illiterate workers. As the members of this group did not receive much education, we sought to combine demonstration with instruction as much as possible when teaching them the techniques of seedling cultivation, tea growing and tea production, such as how to grow new plants from cuttings. In the past, the survival rate of their cuttings was only 18%, while our method of propagation by cutting (the general method) had attained a survival rate of 70% through experimentation. They felt that the method was simple with a high rate of survival, and they learnt the primary processing techniques for black tea, enabling them to produce relatively better quality black tea on their own.

3. Study and Research on the Feasibility of Growing Tea on a Wider Scale:

In the Seredou region, we surveyed most of the land within the experimental Cinchona (Quinine) station in which we examined and analyzed the climatic and soil conditions as well as the ease of commuting and transportation. We felt that conditions were less than ideal for growing tea on a wider scale (with only 4 hectares of unused land suitable for growing tea). The main reasons were:

(1) There were few existing pieces of land that were huge enough. It would require huge investments and a lot of work to clear forested land for growing tea;

(2) We were looking at high altitudes and steep slopes. Much of the land had relatively shallow soils, in which the tea shrubs would not grow well;

(3 Large numbers of temporary workers would be needed for picking and processing tea, but this area was situated high up in the mountains, with few villages nearby and a low population density. This would pose some difficulties in manpower deployment;

(4) The area was not convenient enough for commuting and transportation.

We also surveyed eight sites in the Macenta region, and after careful research and comparison, we deemed a 60-hectare tract of uncultivated land around Da-lei [sic] village 7 kilometers away from Macenta more suitable for growing tea.

Climatic conditions for the Macenta region: The annual average temperature is 23 to 25 degrees Celsius, with monthly averages varying by 4 degrees Celsius at the maximum. It is warm all year around and the annual rainfall is 2,416 millimeters. The annual average relative humidity is 78%. Looking at the above climatic conditions, this area seemed suitable for tea cultivation. However, if we look at the rainfall pattern throughout the four seasons, the region has distinct wet and dry seasons. The wet season lasts for eight months from April to November. During this time, the monthly rainfall varies from 123 to 528 millimeters, and this is suitable for growing tea. The dry season lasts for four months from December to March the following year. During this time, the total rainfall is a mere 67 millimeters, and the monthly average rainfall is 15.5 millimeters. The temperature also reaches a high of 35.9 degrees Celsius. This is rather unfavorable for the growing of tea and anti-drought measures must be implemented to overcome the difficulties posed by the dry weather.

The piece of land that Da-lei-la [sic] has set aside for growing tea has an elevation of 500 meters and is a continuous, unbroken piece of land. It is relatively flat (with a

slope of 3 to 5 degrees) and is a small alluvial plain. A big river and a small brook lie close to one third of its surroundings, which can be used for irrigation. According to measurements, the cultivable area is about 60 hectares with relatively deep alluvial soils, most of it measuring around 100 centimeters deep. The topsoil is sandy loam and the subsoil is clay loam. The soil is rich in organic matter and has a pH value of 4.5-5.5, which makes it suitable for tea cultivation. We think that there are several favorable factors for locating the tea plantation here:

(1) This is a large continuous tract of land with flat terrain and suitable soil;

(2) The land can be cleared mechanically (There are tractors available for use from the tractor-tilled farmland in Macenta). This saves a great deal of labor in comparison with clearing forestland;

(3) There are water sources that can be used for irrigation;

(4) The electricity supply is about 4 kilometers away, making it possible for the future tea processing plant to use electricity;

(5) It is close to Macenta town and is convenient for commuting and transportation, making it possible to employ urban labor during tea-picking season in future.

4. Preliminary Plans for the Tea Plantation and Future Development:

We have drafted some preliminary plans for choosing a site, dividing up the plots and constructing roads according to the specific conditions of the tea planation in Da-lei-la [sic]and given some advice on planting techniques. At the same time, we have drafted the following tentative yearly development plans based on the quantity of tea seedlings that can be cultivated given the current capacity of Seredou to produce 300 to 400 kilograms of tea seeds annually:

□ □□

□□□ □□□

3 hectares of new tea to be planted in 1963 □□□ □□

□□□ □□□

12 hectares of new tea to be planted in 1964 □□□ □□

□□□ □□□

17 hectares of new tea to be planted in 1965 □□□ □□

□□□ □□□

28 hectares of new tea to be planted in 1966 □□□ □□

It is estimated that we will need four years to accomplish the plan of planting 60 hectares of tea and begin to produce limited quantities of tealeaves from 1966 onwards, with normal production of the 60-hectare tea plantation expected to take place in 1969 and annual production of dried tealeaves estimated to reach 900 to 1,000 piculs.

5. Suggestions and Proposals on Future Assistance to Guinea:

Minister Sory Barry of the Ministry of Rural Economy expressed deep satisfaction after we reported our work situation to the Guineans and made the following requests regarding future assistance programs on tea cultivation:

1. That the Chinese take complete charge of establishing the 60-hectare tea plantation in Macenta, from seedling cultivation, tea planting to tea production as

well as the setting up of the tea processing plant;

2. That they have no experience in growing tea and therefore request that we continue to send tea-cultivation experts to provide guidance. They also want us to supply the tractors for clearing the land as well as the equipment needed for tilling and maintaining the tea plantation, etc.

Taking the Guineans' requests and actual conditions into account, we had discussions with our embassy in Guinea and concluded that we should actively help the Guineans build up their expertise in future tea cultivation assistance programs. We propose that this should become the second project to be implemented after the cigarette and match factory project. This is because once we send our tea experts over to help with tea cultivation, it would signal the start of the program, while the tea processing plant would only be constructed 3 to 4 years later. This makes it low in cost but significant in influence at present, which fulfills the principle of making our investment go a long way. Concomitantly, the Republic of Guinea has set aside 50 million francs (about 500,000 renminbi) for the development of tea cultivation in its three-year national economic development plan. They have an urgent need to develop their tea industry. Conditions in Seredou are unsuitable for tea production and the assistance originally pledged for the experimental tea station there should be used in Macenta instead (with a change in location and not in content). To this end, we offer the following suggestions on specific matters and procedures regarding future assistance:

(1) First, we should ask the Guineans to firm up their plans for developing the tea industry as well as the preparation work for organizing the leadership and establishing the tea plantation;

(2) The Guineans should do this mainly by themselves. We cannot adopt the method of taking over the entire project. The Guineans have to resolve the issues of organizing the leadership to build the tea plantation as well as investing in labor to clear and cultivate the land, establish the office of the tea plantation and build employee accommodation all on their own;

(3) Areas in which we can offer our help:

1. Send experts to give guidance in tea cultivation. In March 1963, we sent two technical experts with experience in seedling cultivation, tea growing and plantation management as well as one technician and one interpreter to work in Guinea for 2 to 4 years and we can rotate these personnel during this period. As we have been imparting the skills in planting and producing tea and consistently sending our experts over to Guinea, we do not need to accept the tea-growing apprentices that they wish to send to our country;

2. The tea variety that Guinea currently has is the large-leaved Assamese plant (Camellia sinensis var. assamica), which is suitable for producing black tea. Considering the fact that the Africans are accustomed to consuming green tea, we can supply 100 to 200 kilograms of tea seeds that are suitable for producing green tea to Guinea for trial planting before March next year;

3. Supplying part of the agricultural tools needed for clearing and maintaining the tea plantation:

(1) Two tractors designed to work at a depth of 40 to 50 centimeters. This was requested by the Guinean Minister of Rural Economy. After studying the request, our embassy thinks that we can supply these while we think that we can rent tractors from local tractor-tilled farmland to clear the land and there is no absolute need to supply tractors for the exclusive use of the tea plantation;

(2) Supplying agricultural tools for maintaining the tea plantation: 100 wide-blade hoes, 100 trench-hoes, 100 two-pronged hoes, 100 four-pronged rakes and 100 shovels;

(3) Pruning tools for tea shrubs: 50 sets of shears (50 sets of big shears, 30 sets of small shears and 20 sets of hedge shears);

(4) Tools for pest control: 10 foggers, 10 powder sprayers, and 5 high-pressure foggers.

The above equipment will be delivered in the first half of next year.

4. The designing of the tea processing plant as well as the complete set-up needed for the primary processing and refining of black and green tea is to commence in 1956, with construction to be completed in 1966.

According to the planned production target of 900-1,000 piculs of tea per annum, the suggested size of the plant is 1,500 square meters, with the construction cost at around 150 renminbi per square meter.

6. Some Reflections from Our Experiences

1. The Guinean people were friendly to us. When we were working in the villages, villagers we met would take the initiative to greet us or shake our hands in warm welcome whether we were travelling by car or walking. Local leaders also personally hosted us, such as the governor of Nzérékoré who personally arranged our accommodation. This was because they felt that our country was sincere in helping them. The grand reception that was accorded to President Touré during a visit to our country was recorded on film and widely screened in Guinea and there were exhibitions of our country's achievements in development, all of which had impacted the Guinean people so significantly that they think of friendship at the very mention of China. However, when we needed to understand some matters related to our operations, some of them were reluctant to tell us the facts. Before our arrival, the station manager of the Seredou experimental station had told the entire staff "not to answer the experts' questions directly and to direct them to the station manager for answering." Once, when we were doing a site survey near a village, the village chief invited us for a meal. During our conversation, we casually asked how many households and how much manpower there were in the village. The village chief replied: "I cannot give you an answer without orders from my superior." This created much difficulty for our work. Hence, it was important to pay attention to the method when trying to understand the situation on the ground. We had to rely more on our visual judgment as well as indirect understanding and analysis instead of asking direct questions. It was also possible to get a sense of the situation this way. In summary, the anti-colonialism sentiment in Guinea is stronger among African countries and they are basically friendly to us.

2. We must exercise patience and take the initiative in our work, and refrain from being impatient. In our interactions with the Guinean government and officers, we felt that they did not quite understand and observe the proprieties and they also tended to forget things and were quick to lose their tempers. We arrived in and left Conakry without Guinean government officers to acknowledge our presence, and when our comrades fell ill, no one came to take care of them. When meeting or working with them, we often had to wait for half an hour to an hour. We felt that this was a special characteristic of theirs that arose under long-term imperial rule. We should maintain a friendly and forgiving attitude toward them, be proactive and tolerant in our work and not be impatient. Only then can we build good relations and accomplishing our task.

3. Reliance on the leadership, organization, division of labor and unity are the guarantees for completing our work. When working overseas, we must rely on the leadership of our embassies. By complying with the embassy's instructions, we can accomplish our tasks smoothly, build good relations with the Guineans and avoid making mistakes in our work. We had established a party group so as to be well organized, have a proper division of labor, and study the problems as and when they arise and promptly address any weaknesses. Everyone engaged in frequent discussions and this promoted unity as well as helped us do our work well. Our work and work practices made a relatively good impression on the masses. They said: The white people only talked about some theories and never lifted a finger. They called us stupid when we did not understand what they said. The Chinese experts showed good attitude and they personally did the work and answered all the questions that we had, and we learned from them." These words showed that our work had some degree of impact among the masses and strengthened the friendship of both countries, and this prompted the embassy to make the following appraisal of our work group: "They did solid work despite the difficult living conditions." The above reflections can serve as reference for future experts heading to Guinea.