

Sunday, 4 August 2019

Subject: A letter from Beijing

Dear All:

The queue was very long and merry but disciplined, waiting in the heat of the day to enter the National Museum at Tiananmen Square in Beijing last Saturday. It is holiday time, and many families with small children from all over the country flock into the capital. Ancient China and its technological leadership at the time, witnessed in early printings long before Gutenberg, or beautiful and timeless ceramics, is part of identity and pride of the country. Children are proudly taught about it and spend the time with their parents in the cool halls of the huge museum. As everywhere, what they enjoy most is an ice-cream well deserved.

Dr Jianqiang Nie, Professor of international Economic Law at Wuhan University and a WTI PhD graduate, runs an annual training programme for some 40 Asian and African diplomats and lawyers in Beijing for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The topic was dispute settlement in international law, and I was asked to talk about the reform of the WTO dispute settlement system. The two weeks course is hosted in one of the most modern Business Schools with all facilities to think off, located within a new science park where China is developing, this time again, its technological leadership. Impressive investments are being made from which we can learn.

On Saturday evening, we met a number of MILE and Wuhan alumni for dinner. It was a touching moment to see former students and to learn about their fond memories of MILE and Berne and what it meant and means for their lives. One particularly mentioned the ability acquired to think in context, taking into account law, economics and politics. And one fellow particularly recalled the first day when they were shown the city of Berne and felt a warm welcome. Today, they all work in the field of trade and are partners or associates in law firms or in Mofcom, or teach international economic law in Universities.

The trade war with the Trump Administration looms large in Beijing and keeps them all busy and on their toes, mainly in the field of trade remedies. It was interesting to learn that China no longer seems to be afraid, but resilient and facing up to the challenge. One colleague said that negotiations with the US now are even-handed, and it is assumed that the imposition of a new 10% tariff on consumer goods will help to inform the US public that they, and not the Chinese, are taxed and bear the burden of this war. Another strongly argued that China now needs to develop leadership in the multilateral system, overcoming the more defensive attitude of the past.

I return home enriched and sent you all my best regards,

Thomas