Ambassador Zdzisław Góralczyk was interviewed by Marcin Jacoby on May 2, 2012.

MJ
Mister Ambassador, first, I’d like us to talk about the moment you became interested in China. Had it attracted your attention before you left for China? Or, perhaps, you went there by accident? Who encouraged you to go away? As far as I know, you started learning Chinese in China.

ZG
Precisely. A lot of important things in our lives happen unexpectedly. When you look at my CV, you will see that I was born before the Second World War, during the period of the Second Polish Republic. I come from a poor rural family from the region of Siedlce. My father sent me to the Bolesław Prus Secondary General School in Siedlce. But after the first year, my father and I realised it wouldn’t teach me any profession. Since I was hopeless at technical jobs, I chose the only school that was neither general nor technical, namely a secondary pedagogical school. After the Second World War, many teachers were killed during the war, and so there were not enough teachers, especially in the Eastern Poland, so it was necessary to educate primary school teachers – that’s why pedagogical secondary schools were created. It was for that reason that I changed my school after the first year because that kind of school offered me a profession. As a result, I had more classes, eight to ten hours from Monday to Saturday because after the war there was no such thing as free Saturdays. I learnt a little about China at school. We knew there was a revolution that ended the rule of Emperors, the Japanese aggression, the Civil War, and the proclamation of the P.R.C. – all of this was part of history curriculum.

MJ
So it was better than when I was at school. I don’t remember studying anything about the history of China.

ZG
We didn’t learn about the ancient of emperors China but we got basic knowledge about the times from the Xinhai Revolution onwards. When we studied about the First and Second World Wars in Poland, we also learned about what happened in Europe and the Far East at that time, about the Japanese aggression against China. During the Chinese Civil War (1945-1949) the political situation in Poland was quite specific, and many people sympathised with the Chinese Communists. I also admired them for assuming power without the assistance of Soviet tanks.

The second moment related to China was the Korean War. Pedagogical schools were set up in order to educate teachers so their graduates were assigned to obligatory work in primary schools. But there was a way out: the best student in every class wasn’t obliged to fulfil that assignment, which happened to be my case. I was a young activist of the Union of the Polish Youth as well as a versatile sportsman: I practised middle distance running, the long jump, and volleyball. Like many young people at that time, I applied to study in the Soviet Union because it seemed the easiest way to get to university: dormitories free of charge and students got quite high scholarships.

MJ
When did you graduate from the pedagogical school?

ZG
In 1953. My parents couldn’t afford to send me to university in Poland. Although some students managed to support themselves by working (for example, there were student cooperatives – students had always been enterprising), I decided it would be easier to study in the Soviet Union. Plus, it was more attractive to study in the largest Socialist state, as people used to say. Besides, rumour had it that scholarship conditions were the best and the level of education and the reputation were good as well, like the Lomonosov State University of Moscow or the Moscow State Institute
of International Relations. After I applied for study at the Soviet Union, I was directed to the Education Department of County Government of Siedlce and accepted by the committee, which sent my application to the regional committee. I was also accepted there, and my papers were sent to Warsaw, to the Ministry of Higher Education at Miodowa Street. I was also accepted and finally sent to sit an exam that took place in the building of the Warsaw University of Technology. I remember it perfectly well because I failed that exam from Russian language. I failed it because they assigned me to the Russian and Soviet Literature Faculty, and the teaching level of Russian in Siedlce was rather poor. Although I had good results in other subjects, I got the lowest possible grade in the Russian exam with its specialised vocabulary. My friends went away to study in Moscow and Kiev, while I came back to Siedlce. I went to the Education Department again, and said I’d failed an exam that would enable me to study in the Soviet Union and although I graduated from the pedagogical school, I didn’t want to be a teacher and asked them for a different job. And they gave me one! I was only 17 and appointed manager of playgrounds and kindergartens in Siedlce County. At the age of 17, I had 200 women and girls under my supervision. I was given an office with staff in the park in Siedlce. Already after two months, in November, I got a telegram from the Foreign Studies Department of the Ministry of Higher Education. They invited me to a meeting. So I went there and talked to Deputy Director – I don’t remember her name – who told me: ‘Dear colleague…’ That’s how you addressed members of the Union of Polish Youth – I couldn’t be a Party member because I was still under 18…

MJ
Did you become a UPY member already in junior secondary school?

ZG
In senior secondary school¹, I was a UPY board member in my class and school. And that lady said: ‘Dear colleague, you failed the exam in Russian but we analysed your results in other exams and I believe you should still study at the university. Go and see Ms Sienkiewicz.’ And Ms Sienkiewicz said: ‘Dear colleague, I’d like to make you an offer…’ and she broke off. Finally, she stammered out that they wanted to send me to China forthwith. I was struck dumb. And she added: ‘Colleague, there are three days left, you still have time to say goodbye to your parents.’

MJ
Mister Ambassador, do you know where that decision came from?

ZG
They were forming a group of students to be sent to study in China – it was the third and the biggest I guess. They informed me at the very last moment. They formed our group of twelve persons according to the governmental agreement with the Chinese Ministry of higher Education, and did it with immediate effect.

MJ
Why in November?

ZG
Probably the agreement was signed at the last moment, and further delay was caused by the Polish side. China still couldn’t pull it together after the war – the situation was worse than in Poland. All twelve of us flew in November – nine persons to study for an MA and three MA graduates to continue their post-graduate studies. When we arrived in China, it turned out that the system of academic degrees had not been implemented yet. The higher education was based on the Soviet model but they didn’t award master, and lower or higher doctoral degrees. We left Poland after three

¹ Polish education system at the time included 7 years of primary school, 2 years of junior secondary school (gimnazjum) and 2 years of senior secondary school (liceum).
days – our journey on a twin-engine Il-14 started on 11th November and finished on 13th November, and lasted 33 hours in the air! The first refuelling stop was in Vilnius, then in Moscow, Novosibirsk, Omsk, and Krasnoyarsk. We spent the night in Irkutsk, where we stayed for one day to rest and see the town, and the Baikal Lake. There, I had my first clash with the Russian guide. She talked in the Baikal Museum about scientists who greatly contributed to the research on Lake Baikal, and she mentioned Polish names. So I asked her in Russian: ‘Why do they all have Polish surnames?’ She replied with displeasure: ‘Well, in fact they were Poles.’ In Irkutsk, we boarded a Li-2, a biplane nicknamed Kukuruznik by Poles, which was used, for instance, for reconnaissance and raking trenches as well as for airdrops during the Warsaw Uprising. After Irkuck, we had two more refuelling stops: the first one in Ulan Bator with a grass airport and a shabby airport building in the middle of a grass plane. Before our plane landed, we had to circle above the airport because they had to chase camels and sheep away on the ground. We were invited for a snack – I remember everything smelled like Mongolian suet – and after a few hours we boarded the plane again. The second stop was in Sainshand near the Mongolian-Chinese border. We moved on after refuelling. There were sixteen passenger seats in total, so the entire plane was taken over by our group of twelve. In Beijing, we touched down at the military airport, still located behind the Summer Palace, called Xijiao Feijichang. Employees of the Chinese Ministry of Education greeted us and took us to dinner right away. We landed at night, in darkness, there were no green belts yet around Beijing to protect the city from the wind, so it was terribly windy. All the Chinese were wearing masks on their faces – we thought they were doctors! Of course, they were dressed in quilted jackets, either green or blue, in fur hats, and the masks – they looked very unusual!

That was the beginning of my studies. We were taken to Beijing University, which was a private American university before 1949, and were accommodated in nice, two-floor buildings, an architectural mixture of Chinese and American style. Now, there are study rooms and libraries, then, some of the buildings were still used as students’ dormitories. All of us were sent to a course in Chinese because none of us could speak any Chinese. There, I was assigned my Chinese name Qi Huanwu (齐奂武), which I’m still using in contacts with China and the Chinese. I have no idea what made my teacher come up with that name, perhaps she couldn’t pronounce ‘Zdzisław’ and that was the result of her attempts; another Zdzisław became Qi Luofu. There were other foreign students allocated there: Bulgarians, Germans from GDR, Hungarians, Romanians, Czechs and Slovaks, and Russians.

MJ
Could we try and reconstruct the lists of students that came to China on governmental scholarships? I know that you prepared a lot of materials.

ZG
Yes indeed, I did some research, and even called some of my old acquaintances from those times. This is what I came up with, I think the list is as complete as possible.

In the first scholarship group there were five persons that I know of:

- Bogumił Dąbrowski – a retired diplomat
- Genowefa Zduń – whom you will also interview, as you told me
- Kazimierz Kramarz – who worked at the foreign department of the Polish United Workers’ Party Central Committee, already passed away
- Jadwiga Jankowska – who later became wife of a Hungarian student Barna Talas
- Roman Maria Sławiński - a renowned sinologist, still active in the field.

The first group left for China in two smaller groups: one at the end of December 1950, the second one at the beginning of January 1951. They studied a one-year intensive course of Chinese at

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2 Qi Huanwu in Chinese and ‘Zdzisław’ in Polish do bear some remote phonetic resemblance.
Qinghua University. All later groups did the course at Beijing University.

The second group was also split into two, leaving for China between second half of 1951 and 1952. The group included:
Edward Rutkowski – who died in an air accident over the Ural Mountains towards the end of the 1950s
Łucja Sobecka – known to all of us as Lulu, later became an expert in Asian art and worked for many years at the National Museum in Warsaw
Józef Łukomski – student of the Academy of Fine Arts
Zdzisław Kucharski (Qi Luofu) – employee of the Polish-Chinese Friendship Association, diplomat, consul, 1st secretary at the Polish diplomatic posts in Peking, Shanghai and Guangzhou. He passed away.
one Węgrowska – who emigrated to Israel after graduation.

The third group began their studies in China in 1953. It was probably the biggest group, as in comprised 12 persons, including myself, and the following colleagues:
Teofila Podsiadłowska – who married Asparuch Papalezow, a Macedonian from Bulgaria
Janina Borkowiak – a student of the Academy of Fine Arts, also married a Bulgarian by the name of Maryn
René Goldman – who did not complete his studies in China, later emigrated to Canada to become a renowned professor of Chinese Studies
Miroslaw Kowalczyk and Józef Berent – two students sent officially to study silk production in Hangzhou – both pursued a military career, working at the military attaché department of the Defense Ministry. Both served at one point as military attachés in Beijing
Teresa Kowalska – after graduation became secretary general of the Main Board of the Polish-Chinese Friendship Association, serving at the post continuously until her retirement
Tadeusz Kowalski – who studied together with me at the Beijing Institute of Foreign Trade, and after graduation and return to Poland pursued a lifelong career at the Foreign Trade Ministry. At one point he served as trade counsellor at our embassy in Beijing. He passed away.
Stanislaw Kuczera together with his wife, Gustawa. They were the only married couple in our group, but went their separate ways and got divorced. Stanislaw after graduation emigrated to the USSR, became a sinologist, and worked at the Academy of Sciences of the USSR
Jan Sierek – who studied painting and the Academy of Fine Arts. After return to Poland he became employee of the consular department of the MoFA, served at posts in Beijing and Shanghai. He has passed away.
Zdzislaw Poleszuk – he was a very diligent student, but just didn’t seem to grasp Chinese at all. He requested permission to go back to Poland in the middle of the course, came back and graduated in Kraków from the school of mining and steel industries. He eventually became an accomplished mining engineer.

I don’t remember everybody from the fourth group, which left for China in 1954, but some of the names are:
Jan Rowiński – whom you have already interviewed
Maria Kalisz – who, after completing her language course in Beijing switched to studying Korean Studies, later worked at PISM (Polish Institute of International Relations), and the Polish embassy in Pyongyang
Leon Gladecki - who emigrated and passed away in the US
Gerard Desput – who studied painting at the Academy of Fine Arts, has passed away. As you can see, there were several Polish students of fine arts. Those studying painting at CAFA were even so lucky as to learn directly from the great master Qi Baishi himself!
Stanislaw Dura – who emigrated to Sweden.
The fifth group, departing in 1955, included:

- Stanisław Tworzydło – another one of your interviewees
- Irena Orlowska – employee of the Foreign Trade Ministry, worked at the trade counsellor’s office in Beijing, has passed away
- Henryk Banaś – studied at the Academy of Fine Arts, became an artist, a painter, he passed away
- Ksawery Burski – diplomat and sinologist, who replaced me at the post of the Ambassador of the Republic to Poland in China in the year 2000
- Kazimierz Sroczynski – student of the Beijing Institute of Foreign Trade, after return to Poland worked in the field of foreign trade, has passed away
- Janusz Sobczak – student of the Beijing Institute of Foreign Trade, but did not complete his studies, after getting back to Poland also worked in the field of foreign trade.

My knowledge of scholarship recipients in the following years is not as detailed. Between 1956 and 1966 the number of Polish students sent to China gradually decreases. Some do not complete the full study programme, and come back to Poland after 2-3 years. These are the names I can recall:

- Joachim Koczy – a geographer, working for the Institute of Geography, he passed away
- Bogdan Kikolski – also a geographer, later working in consular services, he already retired
- Agnieszka Łobacz – employee of the MoFA, on posts in Beijing, Hong Kong and Taipei, also one of your interviewees
- Stanisław Pawelczyk – a senior diplomat, working for many years in China together with his wife, Wanda, née Górnicka
- Bogusław Zakrzewski – a diplomat in Beijing, Ambassador in Thailand and Portugal, retired
- Mieczysław Künstler – stayed in China for less than two years, was summoned to Poland by prof. Chmielewski of the University of Warsaw Sinology Department
- Janusz Stadnik – who died tragically before ending his studies in China
- Krzysztof Gawlikowski – the last Polish student in China before the Cultural Revolution. He was forced to leave China in August of 1966. That’s also one of your interviewees.

MJ
That’s an impressive list, I’m sure you included almost everyone. Thank you very much for that. It makes everything much clearer. So, out of all those people, only the Kuczeras were doing their PhD studies, while the others studied for their MAs, is that right?

ZG
Yes. As for me, I was a sanhao xuesheng (Three Good Student) at the Beijing Institute of Foreign Trade, that is, a top student in learning, sports, and social works (volunteer work). For instance: I participated in constructing Ming Valley Dam. I was also a member of the Institute’s first team in volleyball and light athletics.
In 1955, I was elected as the Chairman of the Society of the Polish Students’ Association (ZSP) in China. It was an inter-university association.
I’ll tell you a story from when I completed the language course at Beida. I was referred to the Chinese History Faculty but I gave it up when I found out that their history had lasted for more than five thousand years... There were so many dynasties and kingdoms and wars, plus I needed to learn classical Chinese for another year. I went to the Embassy and asked the First Secretary, who was responsible for student affairs, to transfer me to a more practical faculty. I chose Department of Economics at the newly-founded Beijing Institute of Foreign Trade. After one year of learning Chinese at Beijing University – those who were to study history and literature did a two-year course with the basics of classical Chinese – in August 1954, I was transferred to the Beijing Institute of Foreign Trade (北京对外贸学院), which is now called University of International Business and Economics – UIBE (Jingmao Daxue, 经贸大学). This is my alma mater, my second alma mater was the Main School of Planning and Statistics in Poland – nowadays it’s called the Warsaw School...
of Economics (SGH) – which nostrified my diploma in 1968 and gave me a Master’s Degree in Economics. I wrote my PhD within two years and got a PhD degree in 1979 from the High School of Social Sciences under the auspices of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party. It was located in the building that now houses the office of Prime Minister Donald Tusk.

In my dissertation, I have presented analysis of relations between the Chinese Communists and the United States, in the years 1920–1950. The dissertation was later published in 1981 by the Polish Scientific Publishing House (PWN), with additional content which I added on mutual relations from the end of the 18th century. I received for it the 3rd prize of the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM) in the field of contemporary international relations.

MJ
I’d like to go back in time to those years in Poland. I’m interested in the perception of China at that time. What came to your mind when you heard you were going away to China? What did China mean to young Poles back then?

ZG
At that time, the pro-Moscow Socialist tendency won in Poland but the Chinese Revolution gained a lot of support. An official Chinese delegation came to the World Congress of Intellectuals for Peace in Wrocław even before the proclamation of the People’s Republic of China. One Polish Jew, Stanisław Flato, was a medical doctor during the Revolution in China. He later became a diplomat. Like Norman Bethune, he worked for the International Committee of the Red Cross, and he was designated to work with the Chinese Red Army (treating wounded soldiers and local population). After that, he was a counsellor at the Polish Embassy in Beijing.

MJ
In your opinion, what did the Poles know about China back then?

ZG
There was a lot of enthusiasm. China was the second Socialist country after the Soviet Union, and this fact was used for propaganda purposes, to prove that Socialism was spreading in other countries. At first, the Chinese option was very interesting: private property was all owed, peasants were given land, and many elements were different from the Moscow option, but Mao Zedong messed everything up later on.

MJ
Leaving Communism aside, do you remember what the general attitude towards China was?

ZG
I can’t speak for the high-level intellectuals and politicians, because I came from a rural background, and at school I had contact only with young representatives of the working class or the lower intelligentsia, because the higher intelligentsia lived in Warsaw, not in the countytown Siedlce. At that time, Siedlce was not even a province capital, although during the rule of the Tsar there was the seat of the Siedlce governorate, with the largest prison in Poland, still operating. A vintage building – worth visiting, but only from the outside. The attitude towards China was generally very positive. But it was different with me because I actually went to China. I was born before the war and my younger brother was born after my father escaped from Świnoujście where he was a German prisoner of war and worked for a German landowner. My father didn’t work diligently so his employer didn’t care to look for such a lazy worker. That was how my second brother came into being. Already retired now, he was the General Manager of a poultry factory in Siedlce. And within
one year after I left for China, my youngest brother, Bogdan Góralczyk, whom you know, was born. All the family knew he was born just in case I’d get killed in China because the Korean War was in progress at that time. Officially, two Poles were killed during that war. My parents were scared – Korea, China, you know. Anyway, historically, it was one huge territory, even a big part of the present Dongbei (Manchuria) was inhabited mostly by Koreans. That’s why the Korean minority is so large over there. The Koreans, the Manchurians, and the Huns from this region all have common roots.

MJ
I’d like to discuss two issues. The first one is education. I’m interested in how the Chinese taught you the language. What was their methodology? What textbooks did they use?…

ZG
We were taught through Russian. Theoretical lectures were conducted in Russian. We learnt practical Chinese in small groups, with assigned assistants who were professional teachers. In my group, there were three Poles and our teacher tortured us from dawn to dusk, from Monday to Saturday. We had no special textbook, only handouts. We used very good dictionaries printed in the Soviet Union. Later on, we had our own dictionaries, Chinese-Russian and Chinese-English. I still have my first Chinese-Russian dictionary, a very good one, of about ten thousand characters.

MJ
How would you assess your language skills after that first year of learning Chinese in China? Were you able to communicate? The studies must have been hard because there were only the Chinese…

ZG
Lectures were very difficult. Putonghua was not popular at that time; many professors came from the south of China. During the first lecture on the economy of foreign markets I understood only one word and that was only because the professor stretched out his hand – ‘five’! Foreign students came from several different countries. Only the Finns were from a non-Socialist country, though they were sent by the Communist Party as well. There were Germans, Romanians, Bulgarians, Hungarians, and Vietnamese. We attended all the classes with Chinese students from the very first day. Since we understood little, we had two ways of overcoming the difficulties. First, we had a Chinese language course after our regular classes. Second, each of us had an assigned Chinese student with above-average grades and a good Beijing pronunciation, who was supposed to explain every lecture to us in simple terms. We lived in dorms but in a separate building, two persons in one room. At first, at Beida, some students tried to share a room with the Chinese but both parties quickly gave up. The Chinese ran away because they wanted to go to sleep at 10 p.m., while our students started their nightlife at that time.

MJ
In your opinion, how did you get on with the Chinese? Weren’t they scared of contacts? Did they feel comfortable enough to talk with you?

ZG
Most friendly and comfortable before 1956. After that, some of Chinese students who were friends with foreigners were considered “rightist elements”, that was in 1957. I was in the Institute light athletics team and the first volleyball team, the majority of which was made up of foreign students. After the war, people from Eastern Europe were in better physical shape than the Chinese youth so our team was one of the top academic teams in Beijing. Foreign students won so many medals at the first student athletic competition that we weren’t allowed to take part in the second one because

3 A well-know sinologist, professor of political sciences and international relations at the University of Warsaw, also diplomat, publishes widely on modern China.
the universities without foreigners felt they were at a disadvantage. That’s why we set up an inter-university volleyball team and even beat the Mongolian team once. I took the second place in the long jump in Beijing then.

As students, we had friendly contacts with some famous Chinese intellectuals and artists from Beijing. Personally, I had such a contact with the well-known poet Ai Qing (father of Ai Weiwei), and female writer Ding Ling. Also, I was well acquainted with the family of former Imperial Chinese Ambassador to Tsarist Russia, who married a Russian. Their children worked as teachers of the Russian language at the Beijing Radio (Russian Section) and several universities in Beijing, and were very eager to keep in touch with us.

MJ
If it’s possible, I’d like to ask you how you met your wife. How did you manage to be together, get married and come to Poland?

ZG
We met in 1954, quite by chance actually. She seemed to like me, we went out on a date, and that’s how it all…

MJ
Was it allowed to go out on dates together?

ZG
Of course, but we needed to appear to the ordinary Chinese as colleagues and friends, not lovers!

MJ
I’ve heard it many times that there was absolute prudishness, people couldn’t go out…

ZG
Rubbish, total rubbish! The atmosphere got prudish only at the time of the fight against the so-called “youpai” (右派), and later during the Cultural Revolution. Sławiński also brought a wife to Poland, it wasn’t as difficult as it might seem. We were allowed to date our colleagues. But, personally, I believed the grass was greener on the other side, so I picked up girls outside my university. Sławiński’s wife, Hu Peifang, was his fellow student. There were another two Polish students who graduated after me, Gerard Desput and Kazimierz Sroczyński, who both married Chinese girls after their graduation. I made a breakthrough by getting married while studying. The first marital law of the People’s Republic of China said nothing about marrying a foreigner but there was no ban either. Life’s life, if there was such a case, the decision was taken individually. For me, it meant the need to obtain permission for marriage. Chinese students weren’t allowed to get married while studying at all. They could go out together, but it was possible to get married only after graduation. The Deputy Rector, responsible for students’ affairs, told me that I had to request permission for marriage individually. That is, my fiancée needed to go through the official procedure in China, and I – in Poland. Her danwei wanted to transfer her from Beijing to Shanghai to end our relationship. That was why we decided to speed up our attempts to get married. We met in 1954 and got married in October 1956. I remember it well because we drank to Władysław Gomułka’s health at the cocktail at the Polish Embassy. I had to go to Poland to get my permission, but we came back for summer holidays every year anyway. I went to the Asian Department, and Cadres Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where I was told it wasn’t up to them and referred me to the Foreign Department of the Central Committee of the Party. I was 20 years old at that time, very brave, not scared of many things. So I went there and met the Deputy Director of the Department, not much older than me. Back then, young people held senior posts, unlike in the final years of the People’s Republic of Poland. He talked to me while sitting at the desk. He looked at me and said: ‘So, young man, what about that Chinese girl? What are you up to? Why Chinese?’ ‘We
met, liked each other, and fell in love.’ ‘As little as that?’ ‘As much as that.’ ‘You’re really young.’ ‘Yes, really, that’s why I’m here, Comrade.’ I called him ‘Comrade’ although I wasn’t a Party member because you couldn’t join the Party when you were abroad. He said: ‘Well, sit down then.’ He pointed to a small table, behind which stood a safe. He took a bottle of Georgian cognac out of the safe and poured two shots: ‘Well, to your health! You have my support. A few years ago, I came back from Leningrad with a Russian wife, so I understand you perfectly well. You have the support of the Foreign Department, go back to China, I wish you all the best.’ It was enough for the Polish officials. He gave an order to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which sent it to the Polish Ambassador in Beijing, so that he would request permission by diplomatic note from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs for marriage between a Polish student so-and-so and a Chinese citizen so-and-so. My wife followed the Chinese procedure and was referred to a department responsible for Eastern Europe at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Actually, it was one meeting during which a high official was persuading her that as she was such a pretty girl, she shouldn’t need a foreigner. ‘Foreigners drink vodka and often cheat their girls, and there are so many fine Chinese men!’ - and such rubbish. However, she didn’t change her mind and finally got permission ‘personally from the Minister of Foreign Affairs’, approved by Zhou Enlai, who was both the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister at that time.

MJ
Did you have a chance to meet him later on?

ZG
Yes, I did. During his visit to the First Polish Industrial Exhibition in Beijing in 1961. However, I was working as interpreter there, and there was no chance to speak to him about my private affairs. For a few years after my return, I couldn’t get employed at a diplomatic post in China because I had a Chinese wife. It was possible only when Jaruzelski was put in charge.

MJ
So, the very Zhou Enlai blessed your marriage.

ZG
It just happened so that he was the Minister of Foreign Affairs. My marriage was famous in China for the permission granted by Zhou Enlai. I wanted to get married as fast as possible, not waiting for graduation. After marriage we didn’t live in the dorm, but in an additional small house built for us next to the houses for the teaching staff. The Ambassador held a big reception for us and there was another party thrown by the Rector of my university.

MJ
I’m surprised how smoothly it all went.

ZG
It seems smooth but we were quite affected by … They wanted to transfer my wife to Shanghai to separate us.

MJ
I was sure the Chinese approved of such relationships reluctantly.

ZG
I was a very good student and a sportsman. The teaching staff and Chinese students liked me.

MJ
And how did you manage to come to Poland later on? Was it difficult?
ZG
No. I always underline that we got married in 1956 and obtained our permission to marry not because of my wife’s pregnancy. Mark that our daughter was born only in 1958, two years after we got married, in Suzhou, in the house of her father. Once during my studies in China I was permitted to bring my wife to Poland in exchange for giving up one of my yearly visits to my homeland.

MJ
You graduated in 1959 and returned to Poland.

ZG
Yes, I came back with my wife and daughter in my arms, going for one week by train through Siberia. Upon my return to Poland, I had not many friends, no job, no flat...

MJ
Did you think of staying in China?

ZG
No. I’m a Pole! My wife always knew that if she wanted to be with me, she’d have to leave for Poland. Her father was a bit surprised: ‘Poland? Where’s that?...’ He was a senior bank official; the family came from Suzhou. Some people said I’d married a banker’s daughter, which is untrue because, first, the Communists took everything away from him, and second, because he took early retirement for health reasons. My father-in-law liked me. When my wife and I went to Suzhou, a bottle of good wine from Shaoxing was waiting for us, along with fine dinner and supper. We all stayed in one place. Before 1957, I had experience of a different, new sort of China, people felt at ease and happy because they had enough of Chiang Kai-shek’s government’s inflation and corruption, which reduced the Chinese to poverty. Before 1949 you carried money in a backpack and had to spend it right away because next day prices were different and nobody could count zeroes any longer.

MJ
How did your wife feel in Poland? How did the Poles treat Asians at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s? Didn’t she feel like a stranger?

ZG
No, Polish people treated her very warmly. Asians are treated with more reluctance nowadays. The attitude has been changing since more and more Vietnamese started coming to Poland. Also, I feel that there is much to blame on the Polish media in their ways of presenting the situation in China. Back then, she quickly felt at home, my family and friends liked her a lot and treated her a bit like a sensational story – that I came back with a Chinese wife. Twenty or thirty people went to study, and only a few of us returned with wives, I was the first one to do that.

MJ
After you came back to Poland, was there a demand for experts on China and the Chinese language such as you? This is one of the topics of our research – how people like you were later employed.

ZG
I was assigned to work in an area completely unrelated to China – at one of the Foreign Trade Enterprises. What’s more, they didn’t want me at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs because I had a Chinese wife. When I returned to Poland in 1959, the ideological conflict between China and the

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4 Until 1989, foreign trade in Poland was centrally regulated and only State-owned Foreign Trade Enterprises were allowed to import to and export from Poland.
Soviet Union was already in progress. It influenced the officials, who – to tell the truth – served the authorities. I had to go Brazil to work at my first diplomatic post, although initially I was to go to Bombay, India, because the Ministry of Foreign Trade wanted me to work there at the Polish Consulate General. But the Indian-Chinese war was in progress at that time and the personal director said: ‘You want to send Góralczyk to Bombay during the war with China?! Give me a break, he must go farther away!’ And they sent me to Brazil, which I was very happy with. We spent four beautiful years in Brazil and our son was born in Rio de Janeiro in 1965, a place which the Brasilians call the most beautiful city in the world. My son was nicknamed ‘carioca’\(^5\), and Brasilians liked him very much – because of mixed blood he was similar to many Brasilians.

After the war, one hundred Chinese from the old immigration lived in Poland. In the Museum of Overseas Chinese History in Xiamen, there was a world map with the numbers of Chinese immigrants in particular countries, and the number for Poland says one hundred. Before the Great Leap Forward, Polish-Chinese relations were very good, but at the beginning of the 1960s it was much worse because the ideological conflict between the Soviet Union and China started to matter. Formally we supported the Soviet Union, but many people privately supported the Chinese.

MJ Coming back to the possibility of building a career...

ZG They found out that I’d written a thesis entitled ‘The world market of soya’, validated by the Main School of Planning and Statistics, so they employed me at the Foreign Trade Enterprise called Rolimpex, and I worked at the Department of Oil Seeds and Vegetable Oils.

MJ Can we say, in this case, that your potential wasn’t used to the full?…

ZG No, it wasn’t. It was caused by the fact that I had a Chinese wife. Those with Russian and Jewish wives were promoted quicker and more smoothly.

MJ I understand. What about the rest of your colleagues who returned from China with diplomas? Was it easy for them to have a career, for instance at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs?

ZG It was. Look, for instance, at Burski, Rowiński, and Zakrzewski – they didn’t encounter any special difficulties. Myself, I was employed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the summer of 1972, and immediately sent to Beijing as a diplomat of the Polish Embassy. My career at the Ministry was not so quick, it was a strictly professional path, and I never got a high-rank post at the Ministry itself.

MJ Were ministries or other structures interested in educating experts on China?

ZG They weren’t, the only exception was the University of Warsaw.

MJ Talking about that, what was your first contact with the Chinese Department of the University of Warsaw?

\(^5\) The term *carioca* refers to a native inhabitant of Rio de Janeiro.
ZG
I kept in touch with my colleagues. I met Xie-Grabowski when he started teaching my daughter Chinese. She had classes partly with him, and later she studied at the Institute of Oriental Languages in Moscow. At that time, when I was an ambassador in Beijing, we couldn’t send our children to studies in China. She did an MA at the Chinese Department at the University of Warsaw under the supervision of Władysław Góralski. He was a lecturer there as well as an employee of the Polish Institute of International Affairs. Earlier, he’d worked as the Director of the Foreign Department of the Central Committee but he fell into disfavour and lost that job. He wrote many books on Vietnam and a few on China. My daughter told me about the Chinese Department. Anyway, now I also know what’s going on – my assistant, Anna Skowyra, is your student. I actually told her to make no secret about it. I know other people related to the Warsaw Chinese Department, for example professor Lidia Kasarello, whom I wanted to take to Beijing and offered her the job of a cultural counsellor but she refused, and Lidia Goldberg was employed instead.

MJ
When I talked to other people from the Chinese Department, two issues kept recurring. First, neither the Chinese Embassy nor the Chinese authorities in China were interested in the Department, and there were no contacts of the Department with China at first. Second, the practical language classes were a big problem since the very beginning.

ZG
Yes, this is true. Professor Künstler played a major role in that. He preferred focussing on classical Chinese and old, rather than contemporary China. He gave preference to contacts with Taiwan, not the Mainland.

MJ
So the Chinese Department was concentrating on Chinese traditional culture, and it didn’t educate staff who could be useful in diplomacy, is that right?

ZG
Yes, the Department was clearly separated from the events in P.R.C. I have nothing against classics. If one likes them, go ahead and teach them. But the Department should also teach about contemporary China. Prioritising Taiwan over Mainland China is not proper either. I’ve never tried to land myself lectures or classes at the Department. I only contacted them on things concerning my daughter, and general issues.

MJ
Coming back to you, Mister Ambassador, after you returned to Poland and started working for the Foreign Trade Enterprise, was your contact with China broken off?

ZG
It was. Later on, I understood that the break was deliberate because of my Chinese wife. I’m not saying I was persecuted, but I did pay a certain price. I had an alternative way of making a career but not the one I wanted to pursue. I was promoted, higher and higher, but when it came to China, I was grounded. I only took short business trips, like the one to the First Polish Industrial Exhibition in Beijing in 1961. I even brought my wife to help me but not as a diplomatic employee. I had some contacts with China but it was me who forced them. Then, my wife worked as a translator for the Polish Chamber of Foreign Trade – nowadays it’s called Polish Chamber of Commerce – but she wasn’t a full-time employee but a freelancer.

This reminds me of one story. Do you know the Polish-Chinese joint-venture Chipolbrok? Back in the early 1950s there was a quite unpleasant event concerning Taiwan. Chipolbrok was set up to
break the naval blockade and embargo imposed on Mainland China through the Strait. The Chipolbrok ships had mixed, Polish-Chinese crews. We lost two ships, “Praca” and “Gottwald”, that the Taiwan Navy hijacked and never returned to us, nor to China, I guess. They tried to bribe Polish crew members but only two were persuaded and emigrated to the US. The rest of them refused and, in the end, they came back to Poland. The Chinese crew members were not so lucky, and were not allowed back to Mainland China.

MJ
That’s an interesting story, never read about it before. Going back to you, looking back at all these years, you did have an impressive career, and you received numerous distinctions from the Chinese, isn’t that true?

ZG
Yes, you could say that. During my career in China I was twice number two at the Polish Embassy, and then the ambassador between 1994 and 1999 – the first ambassador from the whole group of Polish students educated in China, and with a Chinese wife on top of that! Before that, in 1989, I served as chargé d’affaires at the Embassy in Beijing after the then Ambassador, Mr. Marian Woźniak, was discharged from the post, following the change of political system in Poland.

After my retirement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs I was summoned by the Polish President Aleksander Kwaśniewski to serve as presidential advisor for China and East Asian issues. Later, I was appointed advisor to Prime Minister Leszek Miller, PM Marek Belka, and recently to the Deputy PM and Minister of Economy Waldemar Pawlak. At present, I am also a member of the Reflection Group (of former Ambassadors) to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Radoslaw Sikorski.

As for the Chinese distinctions, I was awarded the title and medal of the Honorary Citizen of Beijing by the People’s Government of Beijing. I’m the 16th foreigner to receive this title, and the only one in Poland. I also got a medal of Silver Magnolia from the Government of Shanghai. But speaking about that, I have also received distinctions in Poland before 1989, like the Cross of Renaissance of Poland, and the Gold and Silver Crosses of Merit.

I am especially proud that I succeeded in the project of erecting two monuments of the famous Polish pianist and composer Fryderyk Chopin, in Shanghai and Beijing, serving as chairman of the Polish Social Committee for construction of the monuments. The Shanghai monument of Chopin was the first monument of any foreigner since 1949 to be erected both in Shanghai and in the whole of China. And it was through decision of the Government of the P.R.C.

MJ
That definitely is impressive. Going back to you and your wife, do you speak Chinese at home?

ZG
We do, the same sentence can be uttered in two languages. I’ve never lost my command of Chinese thanks to my wife. When we went to Brazil, I quickly came into contact with Chinese immigrants, important traders and farmers. I used my Chinese insolently because at first, I pretended I couldn’t speak Chinese. Once, I listened to the whole trading strategy that employees of a certain company were discussing in my presence. Finally, when we were saying goodbye, I said in Chinese: ‘Thank you for the collaboration, effective and profitable for me.’ Then, we made friends. In São Paulo, I

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6 According to the recently published Honorary Citizens of Beijing (北京市荣誉市民, Foreign Affairs Office of the People’s Government of Beijing Municipality, Beijing 2013), between December 1982 and December 2012, in all there were 28 honorary citizenships of the city awarded to foreigners. Among those distinguished, Z. Góralczyk is one of only two foreign ambassadors (the other one being Mrs. Ora Namir, Ambassador of Israel to China), and the only person from Eastern Europe.
used to go to a Chinese restaurant where I always got first-rate service, and terrific discounts, after friendly conversations with bosses in Chinese!

MJ
The Chinese have a positive attitude to foreigners who speak Chinese.

ZG
The attitude towards foreigners in China is far better than the attitude towards Asians in Poland. The anti-Chinese propaganda harmed the Chinese – needlessly. It was the Chinese society that suffered the most. Helping the so-called Chinese opposition does not solve major problems, and is not really very helpful.

MJ
Nowadays, there’s a turnabout in China. The attitude to the West has become ambivalent and, especially towards the American authorities, more hostile recently in many issues.

ZG
On the one hand, it’s more cautious than during the Maoist times. Yet, the US still attracts the Chinese strongly, in spite of unfriendly propaganda in P.R.C. itself. Of course, it is not as hostile as during Chairman Mao’s days. The Americal Dream is ever more alive in China now. The authorities have become careful, but they still invest their money in the US, and send their kids there. Yet, in order to make it even more confusing, they often do it via Canada.

I was appointed to a diplomatic post in China for the first time in 1972, after I came back from Brazil. In Rio de Janeiro I completed a course in coffee grading. It never came in handy but I have a beautiful diploma as a souvenir. Later, I was nominated a candidate for FAO at the UN. My documents were sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and I was invited to a meeting, during which I was asked why I wanted to go away and earn dollars in Geneva instead of going to China, which would be relevant to my education. I replied that it was my superior who should be asked that question as he didn’t want to send me there although I was willing to do so. It was fixed that I went to the diplomatic post within three months. I had to declare that I gave up my candidacy for FAO and I wanted to go to China. Once I managed to leave, I made up my mind that I didn’t want to go to other countries as an ambassador, and that’s why I was the number two in Beijing twice – first, as the first counsellor, then, as minister counsellor. When the minister wished to send me to Indonesia as an ambassador, I rejected his offer because I only wanted to be in China. It was that logic of the People’s Republic of Poland – ‘because he has a Chinese wife’. Anyway, they didn’t trust their own people. And that’s why I’ve been to the Beijing post four times, moving up the career ladder. I was first deputy to the ambassador twice, and at the end was appointed ambassador, a post, which I held for six years.

MJ
How many years did you spend at Ritan Lu?

ZG
Nineteen. When people read my biography, they say it’s enough for three persons, considering my wide interests in China. I also know Taiwan. After Poland resumed some contacts with that beautiful island, I visited it twice, first time as diplomat of the Polish MOF in early 1990s together with my wife, invited by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Taiwan. Some time later, I went to Taiwan as member of delegation of Polish bankers.
Mister Ambassador, I’d like to ask you about your travel to China during student years again. Can we please discuss the criteria of sending people abroad back then? I believe the Ministry of Higher Education preferred to send away secondary school graduates, who could attend a complete university course in China.

ZG
It was fashionable at the time to do the entire studies – to go away and come back with a degree – but it didn’t apply to China only but other countries as well.

MJ
I know that later on in the 1950s students of the Chinese Department had the opportunity to leave for one-year apprenticeship.

ZG
Yes, but it was a Polish initiative for acquiring further qualifications and developing language skills of the students learning Chinese in Poland. I was never close with the students and teachers of the Chinese Department of the University of Warsaw, so cannot tell you much about them. But still, I highly respected professors Jabłoński and Chmielewski, and their contribution to the development of sinology in Poland.

MJ
After you returned to Poland from your scholarship, did you keep in touch with other students, including the people whose careers were not related to China?

ZG
I did. I was active in the same circles as, for instance, Rowiński and Burski. I lost touch with some people. A few persons went abroad, for example, René Goldman left for Canada and became a famous sinologist there. Back then, our university studies abroad were a mark of great distinction, studies in China in particular.

I have also been a member of the Polish-Chinese Friendship Association since its establishment in 1958, and I reactivated the organisation in 2001, now serving as its President. The Association is based in Warsaw, and has branches in ten other cities, mostly capitals of provinces. It integrates the milieu of persons interested in China.

Right now, I am still engaged in some activities in Polish-Chinese relations, even including economic contacts with Taiwan. Personally, I think that problems between the Chinese “from the two sides of the Taiwan Strait” should be solved first of all directly by themselves.

At the end, I want to express my hope that relations, mutual understanding, and friendly contacts between Polish and Chinese peoples will develop more smoothly and with benefit to both sides.