

NEWSLETTER

New Concepts In Global Tectonics

No. 1, December, 1996

Editors: J. M. Dickins and D. R. Choi

THEME AND AIMS OF THE NEWSLETTER

Geology became the science we know it today in the early part of the nineteenth century when Lyell completed a realistic geological time-scale by providing a subdivision for the Tertiary. Already great advances had been made by many workers but perhaps especially by Sedgwick and Murchison using the principles of William Smith applying relationships based on the recognition of strata from their contained fossils. At this time, Geology enjoyed great prestige but in the twentieth century Physics, perhaps now displaced by Mathematics, became the elitist science which overshadowed all others. Geology became regarded often as a second rate science.

Although enormous strides have been made in our knowledge of the earth and much has been added to Geology by Physics and Chemistry, we need to acknowledge that we are only at the beginning of tabulating and understanding what is at the surface of the earth, let alone what is underneath. In these circumstances, it is not surprising that theories on the structure and historical development of the earth have been rather conjectural, unsatisfactory and unfortunately often dogmatic.

In this context, in the 1950s and 60s the new theory of Plate Tectonics, was propounded by "Geophysicists" (Physicists) and mainly young Geologists with little experience, depth of understanding or respect for existing geology. The theory, although admittedly simplistic and with little factual basis but claiming to be all embracing was pursued by its proponents in an aggressive, intolerant, dogmatic and sometimes unfortunately an unscrupulous fashion. Most geologists with knowledge based locally or regionally were not confident in dealing with a new global theory which swept the world and was attractive in giving Geology a prestige not equalled since the nineteenth century.

The ideological influence and strength of the Plate Tectonic Theory has swept aside much well-based data as though it never existed, inhibited many fields of investigation and resulted in the suppression or manipulation of data which does not fit the theory. In the course of time the method has become narrow, monotonous and dull: a catechism repeated too often. As new data has arisen there is a growing scepticism about the theory. Most recently for example, the theory has failed to explain the nature of major earthquakes and their tectonic relationships.

Despite the claim of undisputed and universal validity, many individuals, groups and publications have examined alternative explanations. This Newsletter arises from the discussions following a symposium at the 30th International Geological Congress in Beijing in August, 1996, Alternative Theories to Plate Tectonics. A report on this Symposium is contained in the Newsletter.

The theme New Concepts in Global Tectonics is taken from an earlier Symposium held in association with the 28th International Geological Congress in Washington, D.C. in 1989. The proceedings of this symposium have been published (see later in the Newsletter).

Contents

Themes of the Newsletter.....	1
30th IGC Conference Report.....	2
A Cultural Renaissance.....	3
Report from Japan.....	6
Geopolitics Corner.....	12
New title.....	13