

## INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

CHGO-17  
Conference on Asian-Pacific  
Science Information Centers

27 Lugard Road,  
The Peak,  
Hong Kong.

June 21, 1963.

Mr. R.H. Nolte,  
Institute of Current World Affairs,  
366 Madison Avenue,  
New York 17, N.Y..

Dear Mr. Nolte,

Last week in Hong Kong, 35 delegates from 13 countries met to discuss Asian-Pacific science information centers. It was not an exciting meeting in the sense of generating many new ideas, nor was it about a subject which is likely to have much interest for the non-specialist. Therefore I do not intend to summarize the proceedings of the conference, although I enclose a copy of the draft resolutions as an appendix to this letter. There were however, a few aspects of the meeting which are of more general interest and I will pick out a few of these.

First of all there is the question of why this conference was convened. The principal sponsor was the East-West Center at the University of Hawaii. This organization was established recently with funds from the U.S. Congress and its objective is "...to promote understanding amongst the countries of Asia, the Pacific area, and the United States". One of the ways it attempts to promote this understanding is by sponsoring conferences, and it ultimately hopes to sponsor about ten conferences annually. According to Mr. E. Weidner, a Vice Chancellor of the East-West Center, conference subjects are selected which will "promote international development and world peace". It was decided that science information fell into this category. There had been discussions on this subject at the 1961 Pacific Science Congress in Hawaii, and to some extent this conference was a follow-up of these discussions. It is a policy of the East-West Center to find a conference co-sponsor whenever possible; the National Academy of Science agreed to co-sponsor this particular conference and the University of Hong Kong agreed to act as host organization.

The question of country participation is of interest from the point of view of why certain countries were not invited. The policy of the organizers had been to invite two people who were known to be working on science information problems from each country in the area. The delegates were invited in their private capacity and not as official representatives of their governments. Delegates actually came from: Pakistan (1); India (2); Australia (1); Canada (1); Hong Kong (2 plus 4 observers); Indonesia (1 plus 1 observer); Japan (2); S. Korea (2); Phillipines (2 plus 1 observer); Taiwan (2); Thailand (2); S. Vietnam (2); U.S.A. (7); and International Agencies (2). Delegates were also invited from Malaya, Burma and Ceylon, but none came from these countries. The organizers

did not know of any individuals working in scientific documentation in the Ryukus, Cambodia, Laos, Nepal, North Borneo, Sarawak, or Singapore, and no delegates were invited from any of these countries, nor were delegates invited from any of the Communist countries in the region. It would have been interesting if someone could have attended from Mainland China since the Chinese are doing more scientific documentation and information work than any other Asian country, except perhaps for Japan. For example, a recent advertisement in the Peking newspaper, Peoples' Daily, asked subscribers to place their orders for any of 169 abstract and review journals, dealing with nearly all branches of science. Many of these journals are new, they will be published at monthly or two-weekly intervals, and all will describe foreign scientific results. Yet there was no mention at the conference of scientific literature exchanges with the communist countries.

The third point concerns the real aims of the conference, and the subjects which were discussed. It is one thing to decide that scientific documentation plays an important role in economic development, and that an international conference on this subject should contribute to understanding between nations, but it is quite another thing to decide what specifically should be discussed. I felt that some of the topics were well within the competence of the delegates and the discussions on these subjects were informative and useful. Among these I would include the mechanics of data storage, including the role of the computer in storage and information retrieval problems; the training of documentalists; and the advantages and disadvantages of a regional documentation center. But when the discussions got away from this type of subject they seemed to flounder and lack any real sense of purpose or direction. This seemed to be the case when the delegates talked about what was required from a documentation and information center; the pros and cons of starting an abstract journal to abstract scientific papers published within the region; the language of scientific publications; and the translation needs of different countries within the region. I think perhaps the reason why the conference failed to come to grips with these questions is because they are all basically questions which must be answered by the scientists in each country. They are not questions which can be answered by librarians or documentalists. Perhaps what is required is a survey in each country of the scientists' needs. As far as I know there has not been a detailed study in any newly developing country of what the prime information needs of scientists, engineers or industrialists really are.

Perhaps one of the most encouraging features of the conference was the way the delegates tried to find areas for co-operation on a regional basis. That they did not find many was not for lack of trying, but was mainly because most of their problems are national ones, and what co-operation is called for is best achieved on a world-wide rather than on a regional basis. There were a few exceptions to this, and while there was little support for a regional documentation center or a regional translation center, there was agreement that some sort of a regional co-ordinating agency might be useful. Its responsibility might include a clearing house for scientific translations, and the development of a directory of

information services in the Asia-Pacific area. The delegates also agreed to exchange national documentation center publications and several offers of training facilities were made. In fact one non-Asian delegate remarked to me that he thought the efforts to cooperate were more sincere and impressive than he had seen at many conferences of European nations.

One criticism of the conference organizers was voiced to me privately by an Asian delegate, and since the objective of the East-West Center is to promote understanding between countries, I think it is worth recording here as an example of misunderstanding. He said that several of the Asians had been greatly offended by the patronizing attitude and speeches of one of the American organizers. Having heard these speeches I am quite sure no offense was meant, but at the same time I could understand and sympathise with the Asians' reaction.

To close on a lighter note: The conference took place in Hong Kong during the present water crisis. Water was available from the taps in the hotel where the visiting delegates were staying for only two hours every fourth day. In consequence, the conference can claim the unique distinction of adjourning early one day so that the delegates could have the opportunity to take a bath! As the chairman of the local organizing committee remarked, flaunting his Italian, ... "Its not only Britain that has its profumo scandal".

Yours sincerely,

*C.H.G. Oldham.*

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## RESOLUTIONS PASSED AT THE CONFERENCE ON ASIAN-PACIFIC SCIENCE

### INFORMATION CENTERS - (Preliminary draft)

#### A. Government attention:

1. That governments should provide increased support to national science and technology information and documentation centers or their equivalent, as a basis for improving economic development in the countries served by such centers.
2. That each government should enact and enforce a depository law.

#### B. Regional attention:

1. That each national science and technology information and documentation center or equivalent should deposit one copy of its own publications in each of the corresponding centers or national depositories of the region.
2. That consideration be given to establishment of a regional international co-ordinating agency in co-operation with an international agency. Responsibilities for such a regional agency could include a clearing-house for science translations, and the development of a directory of information services in the Asian-Pacific area.
3. That exchange of national center periodicals be on a cost-free basis, but that document procurement be on a cost-service basis (that will be charged for.) Government documents deposited in each center will be exchanged on a cost-free basis.

#### C. Publications:

1. That each nation in the area report annually on research completed and published, research completed but not published, and research in progress.
2. That each nation in the area increase publication of its scientific work in English and that all articles in professional journals in the area have abstracts in English and in the national language, so as to reach the greatest number of scientists.
3. That the region should take more vigorous action to bring its publications and reports to the attention of international journals and international abstracting services.
4. That professional societies and individual scientists be encouraged to increase their efforts toward standardization of nomenclature and terminology, and to use the metric system in their publications.
5. That action be taken to standardize the form in which microfilms are prepared and distributed.
6. That national centers be encouraged to develop specialized bibliographies pertinent to the needs of their areas.

D. Training: That bi-lateral arrangements be reached for training of personnel of science and technology information centers, and that the main task for scientific information workers lies at present in facilitating the work of national centers and promoting interchange among them.