

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

CHGO-32
Japan & International Science.
Opposition to the Japanese:American
Co-operation Project

27 Lugard Road,
Hong Kong.

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

Dear Mr. Nolte,

Japan's commitment to international science is out of all proportion to the size of her scientific community. She is one of the few countries in the world which adheres to all the member unions of the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU). She has played an important role in the International Geophysical Year, in Antarctic Research Programs, and in the International Indian Ocean Expedition. She is preparing a full program of activities for the forthcoming International Year of the Quiet Sun. In fact it is hard to find a truly international scientific project in which Japan does not have some involvement.

Most of the impetus for this participation stems from the Japanese scientists themselves, partly out of a genuine spirit of scientific enquiry, and partly for reasons of national prestige. (I recall an incident which took place at the meetings of the International Union of Geodesy and Geophysics in Helsinki four years ago which illustrates the latter point. At one of the business sessions nominations were invited to form a technical committee. There was only one Japanese scientist at this particular session and he was obviously getting worried that no-one from Japan would be on the committee. He finally stood up, nominated himself, and was duly elected.)

In addition to the scientists' wish to belong to the international scientific fraternity there is a new, and potentially harmful factor which is having repercussions in international science. This is the realization by politicians, that science can be a useful instrument of foreign policy. It has the result that support is given for certain co-operative scientific ventures not for their scientific merit but for their political merit. Many Japanese scientists are worried about the significance of this trend, which they find repugnant and contrary to the ideals of science. In particular, concern was voiced over the joint Japanese:American science co-operation project.

I began to hear objections to this project shortly after I arrived in Japan. Usually mention would only be made of the opposition when it was realized I am not an American. Then people would give the project as an example of how politics can interfere with the progress of science. I became interested and began to question other Japanese scientists about their reaction to the project. I was astonished to discover that not a single person that I met was unreservedly in favour of the co-operation agreement. A few were benefiting in one way or another and gave partial support for this reason.

A few opposed the program because they were socialists and would have opposed any form of U.S.:Japanese co-operation, but the majority opposed it because, they said, it was a political gimmick and was not conceived in the true scientific spirit.

The joint Japanese:American science co-operation program was first proposed at a meeting between Prime Minister Ikeda and President Kennedy in 1961, as a way to improve relations between the two countries. It was then handed down to the scientists of both countries to arrange a specific scientific program. There was some resentment by the scientists on both sides at being told to dream up something scientific on which to collaborate, but the resentment has been most articulated in Japan. To handle the administrative side of the Japanese co-operation the largely inactive Society for the Promotion of Science was revitalized and attached to the Ministry of Education. Projects were devised in six scientific disciplines ranging from cancer research to geophysics, and work has now been in progress for several months. But, as one of the Japanese members of the joint co-ordinating committee told me, "There has been a lot of opposition. Frankly, there are some scientists who do not like the United States, and most scientists, regardless of feelings towards the U.S., resent being told what to do by politicians. However, I decided that there was some scientific merit to the program and decided to support it."

Biologists at Kyoto University were not so logical. They denounced the whole program in a proclamation published last November calling the project a piece of "cultural imperialism". They argued that science and military affairs are so closely linked in the United States that it was the American military who would profit most from the Japanese research.

The concern on the part of the scientists about this bilateral agreement has had a curious response from the government. It is now trying hard to enter into other bilateral science co-operation agreements with other countries. This is, apparently, an effort to prove that there is nothing special about having a co-operative program with the United States. Only this time it is seeking to identify the scientific problems first, before proposing an agreement. The Science and Technology Agency has been acting as a matchmaker, trying to match projects with countries.

This issue raises an interesting and new problem which must be faced by scientists in all countries. To what extent is science an international endeavour above the realms of political manoeuvrings? In the past when science was considered of no interest to politicians the problem did not exist -- French and British scientists could meet freely during the Napoleonic Wars! In the future with the growing preoccupation of politicians with science, they are likely to want to use science more and more as a political tool. Scientists need to consider the implications for science of this trend. The Japanese are doing so, and are clearly worried.

Yours sincerely,

C.H.G. Oldham

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