

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

CHGO-33
The Peking Science Symposium

27 Lugard Road,
Hong Kong.

September 20, 1964.

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

Dear Mr. Nolte,

The Peking Science Symposium which took place last month between August 21 - 31, was attended by 367 delegates from 44 countries. These delegates came from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Oceania. Scientists from North America, Europe, and Russia, were excluded, although a few from North America and Europe who happened to be in Peking were allowed to attend as observers. The Symposium was given tremendous publicity in the Chinese press and was hailed as marking the opening of a new era in the history of science. It was claimed that this was the first time that scientists from newly developing countries had held their own conference to cover the entire range of natural and social sciences.

Western correspondents in Peking were allowed to attend only the opening and closing sessions and were unable to interview any of the participants. This report therefore, is based almost entirely on official Chinese sources.

The Symposium was sponsored jointly by the Chinese Association for Science and Technology, and the Peking Center of the World Federation of Scientific Workers (WFSW). This latter organization is one of the few international scientific associations to which China adheres. (Although noted for its leftwing tendencies, it is supported by eminent scientists from most countries, including America, Britain, and the Soviet Union. The current President of the parent organization is the British physicist, Professor C.F. Rowell.) The Federation held its seventh Congress in Moscow in 1962. At this Congress the Chinese delegate, Chou P'ei Yuan, tried to include a political resolution giving support to those who opposed old and new colonialism in under-developed countries. The resolution was rejected, but at the 24th Executive Council Meeting of the WFSW which followed the Congress, it was unanimously agreed¹ that an East Asian branch of the Federation would be established in Peking.

A year later in September 1963, the Peking Center was opened. Its first activity was to host a preparatory meeting of representatives from 22 countries to discuss the arrangements for holding a major symposium in 1964. It was decided that the theme would be "Scientific problems related to the winning and maintenance of national independence; development of national learning; and improvement in the life of the people". One of the delegates to this preparatory meeting perhaps came closer to the real objective

1) This is the Chinese version as reported in an article in Shih Chieh Chih Shih (World Culture), No.20, October 25, 1963.

when he said, "An important task of the Peking Center and the scientific discussion conference of 1964 is to try to rid the peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, of an inferiority complex about their capabilities as scientists".¹¹

The theme which has been developed in the Chinese press about the Symposium can be paraphrased as follows: 'Many of the countries of Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Oceania, were the cradles of civilization, and at one time were world centers of science and learning. But because of imperialism and colonialism their scientific eminence was stifled and their progress held up. Now that these countries have achieved political independence they must also achieve economic and cultural independence. This is where science can help, and emphasis should therefore be given to the development of science. Chinese experience suggests that the best way to do this is by each country relying on its own efforts. This does not mean that a closed door policy should be adopted. On the contrary, developing countries should accept help from friendly nations and should learn from all the advanced scientific and technical achievements and experience of other countries in the world. The Peking Symposium is designed to help promote this co-operation, and to show that the monopoly of science previously held by the developed countries has been broken.'

As finally organized, the Symposium was divided into eight sections (following very closely the divisions of the Japanese Science Council and indicating the influence of the Japanese in the planning of the conference). The eight sections are listed in Table I, which shows the number of papers presented by the delegates from each country in each section. This Table shows some interesting facts. First of all, 67% of all the papers were presented in the sections on natural science, medical science, and agricultural science. Secondly, 80% of all papers were given by Asians, with only 13% given by Africans, 5% by Latin Americans, and 2% by Oceanians (i.e. New Zealanders or Australians). In fact 62% of all papers were given by delegates from Japan, China, Indonesia, North Vietnam, and North Korea.

Since this was the first international scientific conference to have been held in China for many years it is natural that interest should be focussed on the Chinese participation. By all accounts the arrangements for the conference were superb. Simultaneous translation was available in Chinese, English, Spanish, and French. Tours were arranged to universities, research institutes, and hospitals, in the Peking area. The leaders of all the delegations were received by Mao Tse-Tung, and on a mid-conference day of rest the delegates were taken to beauty-spots around Peking. After the Symposium, special tours of China were arranged for many of the foreign delegates.

The 61 man Chinese delegation (plus 32 specially invited delegates) was composed mainly of veteran scientists such as the grand old man of Chinese paleontology, Yin Tsou-Hsun. In addition

11) Ibid.

PAPERS PRESENTED BY PARTICIPANT COUNTRIES AT THE PEKING SYMPOSIUM

AREA	COUNTRY	Number of Papers								TOTAL	
		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H		
A S I A	Afghanistan	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	2	
	Burma	2	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	3	
	Cambodia	-	1	1	-	1	-	1	-	4	A - Natural Science
	Ceylon	1	2	2	1	-	-	-	-	6	
	China	16	11	8	6	-	-	-	-	41	B - Medical Science
	Indonesia	1	9	4	-	1	2	4	2	23	
	Iraq	4	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	8	C - Agricultural Science
	Japan	13	4	6	6	5	9	4	6	53	
	Jordon	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	
	N.Korea	1	4	5	1	1	2	-	1	15	D - Engineering
	Lebanon	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	
	Nepal	3	2	-	-	1	-	1	-	7	E - Economics
	Pakistan	3	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	5	
	Syria	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	F - Philosophy & History
Thailand	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	1	3		
N.Vietnam	4	7	5	-	1	1	4	-	22		
S.Vietnam	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	G - Education & Philology & Literature	
	SUBTOTAL	52	42	41	14	10	14	14	10	197	
A F R I C A	Algeria	1	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	3	
	Angola	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	H - Political Science & Law
	Burundi	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	
	The Congo(B)	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	2	
	Dahomey	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	
	*E.African Acad.	3	1	-	-	-	-	1	2	7	
	Ghana	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	
	Guinea	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	2	
	Malgache	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	
	Mali	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	2	
	Morocco	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	
	Nigeria	2	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	4	* E.African Academy includes: Kenya; Uganda; Tanganyika; Zanzibar.
	Senegal	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	
	Sierra Leone	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	
Somalia	-	1	1	-	1	-	-	-	3		
Sudan	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	2		
U.A.R.	3	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	4		
Yemen	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1		
	SUBTOTAL	11	3	6	1	2	2	4	3	32	
L A T I N A M E R I C A	Bolivia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	
	Chile	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	
	Colombia	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	2	
	Cuba	-	2	-	-	-	-	1	-	3	
	Mexico	1	1	1	-	2	-	1	-	6	
	SUBTOTAL	1	4	1	0	2	1	2	0	11	
O C E - A N I A	N.Zealand	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	
	Australia	3	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	
	SUBTOTAL	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	
T O T A L		69	50	48	15	14	17	20	13	246	

there was a sprinkling of younger scientists who received their advanced training in China under the present Government, and the so-called peasant scientists, such as Chen Yung-Kang.

No Chinese papers were presented in the social science sections. Although the speeches of the Chinese dignitaries at the opening and closing ceremonies were full of anti-American and anti-imperialist diatribes, the Chinese papers at the technical sessions were remarkably free from politics (judging solely from titles). Bearing in mind the Chinese propaganda objective of showing off Chinese science, the choice of papers was masterly. It was a clever blend of the general "state of the art" type of paper, which reviewed the state of a particular branch of science in China today; the practical paper such as those on methods to improve rice production; and some highly abstruse technical papers in theoretical nuclear physics which would have been intelligible and of interest to only a handful of delegates, but which showed that Chinese scientists are working on most advanced projects. The "state of the art" papers were particularly well received in the medical field. Separate papers reviewed Chinese work in trachoma, measles immunization, traumatic surgery, cardio-vascular surgery, trophoblastic growths, colonorchiosis, bilharziosis japonica, malaria, tuberculosis, and syphilis.

The Japanese on the other hand, were much more rabidly anti-American, and many of their papers in the social science sections were political onslaughts against "imperialism". One paper in the medical sciences section illustrated the extent to which the barrel was scraped in an effort to malign America. One Japanese scientist who gave a paper on nutrition, pointed out that many Japanese suffer from malnutrition. He blamed the Americans for this, and said that the danger comes from two sources. The first is nuclear submarines which pollute the waters around Japan with radioactive waste, which is harmful to marine life. The second in the "impure" American non-fat powdered milk which is fed to Japanese children with school lunches. It is impure he said, because it has been found to contain, "rubber boots, golf balls, and spanners"!

At the end of the ten days all the delegates seem to have agreed that the Symposium was a great success. It was announced in a final communique that another full scale multi-disciplinary symposium would be held in Peking in 1968. In the interim it was hoped to hold several specialized symposia in different countries. To prepare for the 1968 symposium a Peking Liaison Office was set up. One of its functions will be to publish circulars for "the purpose of exchanging information and maintaining mutual contacts".

Comment

It is difficult for a non-participant to agree with the Chinese claim that the Symposium was a great historical event. It was however, an important conference, and should not be dismissed as just another propaganda piece. Propaganda there certainly was, particularly at the opening and closing sessions, but a count of titles of papers presented at the technical sessions shows that

only about 7% of the papers were obvious political propaganda.

The Symposium was so broad in scope, and had so many ramifications, that it is convenient to consider it from several viewpoints:

1. As a genuine scientific conference where new work is presented and critically discussed: It is difficult to comment on this aspect without having been at the Symposium or seen the papers. But the range of subjects discussed was so broad that with only 367 participants there could only be very few with any specialized knowledge of any given subject. Hence genuine appraisals of the scientific merits of specific papers by fellow experts must have been few. However, several delegates, especially some of those in the Chinese and Japanese delegations, have well established scientific reputations and there is no reason to doubt the claim that some papers were of a high calibre.

On the other hand it made little scientific sense to exclude scientists from the developed countries. Science is international. There is no such thing as an Eastern science and a Western science, or a developed country science and a less developed country science. For this reason the Symposium must be severely criticized for its schismatic nature. (An editorial in the Peoples' Daily* suggests that the Russians have also criticized the Symposium on this score. The editorial states "The modern revisionists also have a deep fear of the anti-imperialist unity of the scientists of four continents . . . They do their utmost to attack the Symposium as 'schismatic'. This only serves to show up once again their ugly features in serving imperialism. They constantly brand things advantageous to the revolutionary people and disadvantageous to the imperialists' splitting activities".)

2. As a conference on the applications of science and technology to the problems of development: There have been a spate of conferences on this topic beginning with the World Federation of Scientific Workers' symposium in Warsaw in 1959 on "Science and the development of the economy and welfare of mankind", and culminating in the vast United Nations UNCSAT conference held in Geneva last year. The main theme of these conferences was how the science and technology from the developed world can best be used to help the economic and social development of the less developed world. The Peking Symposium differed from these by stressing self-reliance and by suggesting that the best road to development is for each country to develop its own science.

Although several papers discussed such topics as the organization of science in certain countries; new ways to improve rice production; and industrial uses of local plants, there was not the emphasis on development that one might have expected from a symposium of this type. More attention seems to have been paid to

* Quoted in the Peking Review
September 4, 1964. Vol. VII, No.36, p.14.

science itself than to its application for economic and social change.

3. As a propaganda device to extol China and the Chinese way to development: The Chinese pulled out all the stops in order to impress the other delegates with the progress of science in China. There is no doubt that most foreign delegates were suitably impressed. Dr. Karimullah, the leader of Pakistan's delegation, is reported (by the New China News Agency) to have said, "Now we are able to have a Mecca of science in the East instead of in the West".

It cannot be argued that the Chinese were preaching solely to the converted. Some measure of the delegates' political commitment (although by no means conclusive evidence) can be obtained from a study of the delegates who signed a special declaration condemning American action in attacking North Vietnam. Two hundred and seventy delegates signed, but of these, 93 were from China, 43 from North Korea and North Vietnam, and a further 56 were from the Japanese delegation. Sixty two percent of the remaining delegates (representing 40 countries) did not sign.

4. As a manifestation of the Sino-Soviet and Sino-Indian Disputes: Some observers have suggested that the setting up of the East Asian Center of the World Federation of Scientific Workers in Peking is a direct response to the Sino-Soviet quarrel. It is significant that whereas the WFSW was prominently mentioned as one of the host organizations for the Peking Symposium at the preparatory meeting in 1963, it received no publicity or acknowledgement at last month's Symposium. The Russian-dominated parent organization of the WFSW is to hold its own conference on Science and the Developing Countries next year, and it will be interesting to see whether China participates.

The Sino-Indian dispute is also reflected in this Symposium. The Chinese did not invite any delegates from India. The Indian branch of the WFSW organized its own conference on the applications of science to Indian development. They also invited delegates from the Afro-Asian countries to observe the Indian experience, and beat the Chinese to the punch by holding their conference in Delhi just prior to the Peking Symposium.

These WFSW conferences can thus be viewed in terms of a struggle for influence in the Afro-Asian world by Russia, China, and India.

5. As a conference to boost the morale of scientists from the newly developing countries: It is a fact that scientists in many developing countries are poorly paid, have poor facilities for research, and are held in low esteem. They lack incentive and encouragement, and the stimulation of contact and discussions with fellow experts. Also, their countries frequently do not adhere to the International Council of Scientific Unions or any of its affiliated organizations, and so they are cut off from normal non-governmental international scientific activities. It is true that the United Nations and its specialized agencies sponsor conferences which are relevant to the needs of these countries, but for these,

the delegates must be nominated by their government. For those who are not nominated the conferences are a closed shop and sometimes the proceedings are not available to the public.

China has been astute to recognize this situation, and by organizing the Symposium and setting up the Liaison Office they have in effect organized a club for scientists from the poor countries. A club which gives an almost unique opportunity for a physicist from Nepal say, to discuss his scientific work with physicists from other countries. There are several other organizations which stress the applications of science for development, but none which provides this same opportunity for pure science.

Yours sincerely,



C.H.G. Oldham.

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