

P-106/I/D-2/81  
Rector

Note for the FILE

The Conference on Development and Population in China

26-31 October 1981.

The conference was sponsored by the UNFPA. It was especially significant because it was held in China, whose fertility rate is bound to have an impact on the total population growth rate of the world. It was the sponsorship of the UNFPA that made possible the participation of a large Indian and a five-member Indonesian delegation of parliamentarians. The most significant result of the meeting was the adoption by the conference of 1% growth rate for Asia as a goal to be achieved by the year 2000. In addition the establishment of a temporary committee to eventually establish an international forum of parliamentarians in Asia, on population and development problems which in turn could lead to linkages with other problems of social significance in Asia. Secondly, the Japanese support and contribution to the conference was significant. The role of former Prime Minister Fukuda demonstrated this, as well as the fact that a large part of the cost of the conference had been underwritten by the Japanese side. In my view it reflects the capacity and the willingness on the part of Japan's Non-Governmental organizations to play an international role in the area of social problems, peace and culture.

Finally, the conference, in my view, reflected the uncertainty China seems to feel with regard to their own effectiveness in their population programme. Although they have been experimenting with new contraceptives for instance, a monthly pill and a paper contraceptive, they have done so only on a limited scale, and have apparently been reluctant to apply them more broadly. From a few personal conversations I gained the impression that while crowdedness and lack of dwelling place have contributed to a significant drop in the population growth rate in the urban areas, the picture in the rural areas may well be quite different. It is here where the problems seem to lie for the Chinese. Of course the size of the country and the scale of the problems and the solutions required are tremendous. This made the Chinese experiment so extremely significant. It is also interesting though to note how much difficulties they seem to have in explaining how their delivery system works and why it seems to work to the degree that it has. My impression is that their effectiveness is



linked with the manner in which their political system operates and that they have difficulty in explaining that linkage. It should be noted that in 1984 a national census is going to be held with preparatory money from UNFPA.

I used the occasion of the conference also to meet with a number of leaders of institutions with which the UNU has a collaborative relationship. The overall impression I gained was the high degree of compartmentalization in the organization of the scientific establishment. There seem to be difficulties in horizontal communication between the compartments. In a few cases, when people from different organizations met, they seemed to be uncomfortable together. I tried to find out whether there is a discernable overall single thrust in their science policies, but I failed to do so. It is clear that they have a large exchange programme which apparently they finance in part themselves. Their estimate is that about 10,000 scholars, exchange scholars and graduate students are abroad at the moment.

In developing its own programme there is, of course, a danger for the UNU, mainly the fragmentation of its activities reflecting the compartmentalization of the Chinese scholarly establishment. And the possibility that our own perception of the problems and their priorities will be very much influenced by the perception of our own associated and collaborating institutions in China. All this showed to me the need to be able to make our own assessment of China's scientific or research and training needs, in so far as they relate to our themes. It is only then that we should be in a position to see how we can determine, in consultation with our Chinese counterparts, the direction of our activities and the overall nature and focus of our presence in China. I have got the impression that the priorities in our mission reports on visits to China no longer reflect their own sense of priorities. It suggests the need to make regular visits in order to keep up with their shifting sense of priorities. It also requires a much clearer perception and consistency on our own part as to the nature of our programme and presence in China. I came away with the feeling that their expectations with regard to the UNU are a bit overblown, with the attendant risk of pressure on us to do things beyond our capacity. There is however, a need for us to expand our activities, but with a clearer focus, on the basis of a more consistent strategic assessment of needs and possibilities on both sides. I raised the question of the most urgent needs in the area of scientific and scholarly work with

Nessim Shallon, the resident representative of UNDP. In his view there were two central problems, one was the rapid deterioration of the soil in China as a result of the total compartmentalization of efforts to increase agricultural production between plant-biologists, soil and irrigation specialist and others. He felt that there was a serious problem of agricultural management. When asked whether some UNU courses in agricultural management would be adequate, he replied that the problem was rooted in the political system and could not be remedied by a simple course. The second major problem he saw was a serious energy crunch. He referred to the World Bank report on China. When I mentioned that Mrs. He Liliang had urged me to read that report, he was quite surprised, because apparently the Chinese government had indicated that it would not want to see that report widely distributed, and that it should remain confidential. But apparently, the report shows the likelihood of a major energy crisis looming ahead. These two issues seem to me to warrant further investigation towards the definition of our role and presence in China.

I also had some interesting conversations with the Academy of Social Sciences, apart from a brief discussion about their participation in the workshop with the members of the Olof Palme Commission in December. I asked them about their interest about the problems of Youth in light of the UN Year of Youth in 1985.

On my previous visit some of the officials I met had expressed their bewilderment about what to do with their youth. Now, I was told that the Academy had established an institute for the study of youth and juvenile delinquency. It is clear that they have assigned great importance to this problem area, and it seems to me obvious that they would be quite interested in participating in a major study on Youth.

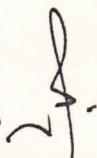
One of the meetings I cherished most was a lunch with the Chairman of the Chinese Society for Science and Technology, Professor Zhou Pei-yuan. He was a man closer to 80 than 70, who turned out to be a theoretical physicist. He spoke excellent English. After his exposition about the manner in which the scientific establishment in China was structured, we came to speak about his present work. It seems that he is engaged in an effort to debunk the "warp" in the time-space continuum in Einstein's general theory of relativity.



He is working with a few younger people who do most of the calculations for him, and he was hopeful that he could still publish something about this problem. He felt that the time had come to make the point that Einstein's warp was a concept that was not essential to the understanding of the phenomena he wanted to describe. And he felt that the time had come to dismiss this particular element in Einstein's theory.

It was amazing to see a man who most likely has gone through rather painful experiences in the Cultural Revolution, to be so vigorous and cheerful.

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Soedjatmoko   
Tokyo, 10 November 1981.