

women's concerns in the far east

Dr. Julinda Abu Nasr

Founded in 1975, the Asian Women's Institute represents a consortium of nine Asian Colleges and Universities concerned with women's education. Eight of the members have women students only while one is coeducational. These colleges and universities stretch from the Middle East to the Far East with three colleges in India, two in Korea, one in Japan, one in Pakistan, one in Iran and one in Lebanon.

The seed for the establishment of the Asian Women's Institute was planted in 1972 when the administrators of the above-mentioned colleges and universities met in Seoul, Korea, to discuss issues of concern. It was then decided that centers for women's studies would be established in their respective colleges and universities.

The first center to be established was the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) at Beirut University College (BUC). This was made possible through a generous grant from the Ford Foundation in 1973. Following the initiative of IWSAW, the other colleges and universities, with assistance from the Association of North American Cooperating Agencies of Overseas Women's Christian Colleges, established their own individual centers between 1975-76. To coordinate the work of these nine centers, Dr. Eva Shipstone was appointed and her office located in Lucknow, India*.

In May of 1978 the AWI sponsored four different Functions that took place in the Far East, namely, Japan, Korea, and India. A brief account of these activities follows.

The first meeting was the Triennial conference of the Presidents of the nine colleges, and the Directors of the respective centers were invited to attend this conference held in Tokyo. Tokyo Women's Christian University hosted all the delegates and made our stay there most enjoyable. The highlight of the conference was the keynote address given by Dr. Kiyoko Takeda Cho on "Women's Education in Asia in the next Twenty Five Years," and the role the university should play in bridging the cultural gap and promoting world peace. (A summary of this address is given on page 9 of this issue of *Al-Raida*.)



Mrs. Tahrim Dass, Executive Director, Centre for Women's Studies & Development in Lucknow, India and Dr. Julinda Abu Nasr, Director, IWSAW.

DIRECTORS' WORKSHOP

From Tokyo to Seoul for a Directors' workshop and an Asian Women Scholars' Seminar. Ewha University hosted the delegates with the most gracious hospitality of the Orient. The workshop centered around possible joint projects that the nine centers may consider. The compilation of basic data on women, the introduction of women's studies to the college and university curriculum, the student travelling seminar, comparative research, and career counselling were the most important issues discussed. The next major issue to be considered is funding which would enable the centers to proceed with their plans.

ASIAN WOMEN SCHOLARS' SEMINARS

The Asian Women Scholars' Seminar attracted some 55 Asian scholars from Hong Kong, the Philippines, Indonesia, India, Japan and Korea, the host country, in addition to the AWI family. The theme of this conference was "The Role of the University in Changing Women's Consciousness." The keynote address was given by Dr. Sang Chang of Ewha University who discussed the significance of the Women's movement and the role of the University in its enhancement. She singled out three of these roles for particular attention: "1) to raise women's consciousness, 2) to provide ideological bases or models for the women's movement, 3) to develop a feminist perspective in all areas of academic discipline."

Dr. Ruby Daniel of Madras Women's Christian University presented a detailed study on the historical perspective of the role of the University in the Women's movement. She pointed out that "women had been relegated to a very low status in the family and society, their primary fulfillment in life being that of wives and mothers. Century-long traditions and ingrained practices governed male/female relationship, i.e. male superiority and female inferiority."

"Throughout history we find that there has always been disparity between the life options of men and women, the former receiving the best religious, artistic, vocational scientific, technological and industrial

* For further information about the Institute and its work, write to Dr. Eva Shipstone, Asian Women's Institute, c/o Lucknow Publishing House, 37 Cantonment Road, Lucknow, India.



Directors of Women's Centers of the AWI from left to right: M. Phanuel, India; Ch. Kim, Korea; Daniel, India; Riahi, Iran; Y. Kim, Korea; Singha, Pakistan; Matsukawa, Japan.

education that provided them with more salable skills to meet the challenge outside their homes. As a neglected human resource, the women in the developing countries of Asia, started getting their education as late as the middle of nineteenth century through the Christian Missionaries who introduced modern (western) education, by establishing primary, secondary schools and later teachers' training colleges and other higher educational colleges in these countries. University education has been one of the most important means of transforming society."

Extension programs and adult education were two issues in the address of Dr. Mirabai Phanuel of St. Christian's Training College, Madras, India. Her focus was on the responsibility a university should assume in bridging the gap between the university graduates and illiterate women of their societies. She also discussed the significance of adult education and the retraining of married women to enable them to take an active role in the process of development.

The role of the university in planning concrete programs for the integration of women in national development was the theme discussed by Dr. Angelina C. Almanzor of the Philippines. The gist of her paper was "...that women's universities and colleges in Asia undertake research on the education of women and experiment on programs not exclusively on and for women, but preferably in terms of women in the context of the whole family. ... every country in Asia should now formulate and implement a national policy to promote the integrity and solidarity of the family." She claims that "the quality of relationship in the family can be predictive of the quality of community life."

To conclude her presentation, some considerations for research and implementation by the university were suggested. These included relevance of educational programs to national development policy, continuing education for women, collaboration with existing agencies

in economic projects, studying family relations and the developing role of men and women to ensure attitudes and practices indigenous to the Asian socio-cultural milieu.

Dr. Emerita S. Quito of Manila emphasized the importance of women's studies programs in universities for consciousness raising. She said, "Women's Studies in Asia must be faced without illusions. Our problems are different, our cultures, varied and complex. We could maintain a unity in diversity, based on mutual respect, but I doubt whether we can import the whole Western scheme and apply it to Asia even after making the necessary adjustments."

Supporting Dr. Quito's argument was the paper presented by Dr. Soon Young S. Yoon of Ewha University's Women's Institute. After giving a brief historical survey of the feminist movement, he went on to describe the experience of Ewha University in introducing a women's studies program into their curriculum and the questions raised in its implementation. A summary of the method used in teaching and evaluating was also presented. The Ewha experience is very challenging and worth exploring. We, at BUC, will be introducing a course in Women's studies, (on Arab women), in the coming academic year.

The recommendations that resulted from this conference may be summarized as follows:

The university has the major role in changing women's consciousness by sensitising them to the importance of their role, status, responsibilities, rights, and potentials, to laws affecting them, to social and religious taboos in the community that hinder their developing concept of themselves, to society concept of them as reflected in the mass media. This and a number of other related issues were brought up as topics of concern for the university to study with its male and female students.

One of the highlights of our visit in Korea was meeting Dr. Tai-Young Lee who is the first and only woman lawyer in Korea and the founder of the Legal Aid Center. (Read about it on page 10 of this issue.)

CAREER COUNSELLING

Our next and last stop was India. In New Delhi the Coordinator, Dr. E. Shipstone, Mrs. Phoebe Gregorian*, Mrs. M. Riahi, Director of the Center in Iran, Mrs. T. Dass, Director of the Center in Lucknow, Ms. Nance Tobin, Ms. Patricia Meaney of Wellesley College Career Service Office and myself met to plan for a career counselling conference to be held in 1979 in Asia. The aim of this conference will be to study ways through which women may be motivated to select new careers and to learn how to make choices and take decisions. Funds are now being solicited to make this conference a reality:

Taking part in these conferences was a very enriching experience. The challenge for Asian women is tremendous and the task ahead is tough. However, with perseverance, wisdom, faith and unity, mountains may be moved.

* Chairman of Committee of '75.