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25 October 1966

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director of Central Reference
SUBJECT: Comments on SKAN Index
REFERENCE: Your memorandum dated 6 October 1966, Subject:
New Publications on CHICOM Receipts (SKAN)

1. The experimental SKAN index dealing with Communist China has been carefully reviewed. We are deeply interested in all systems or techniques that promise to improve the file and retrieval of documents, and the work of the [redacted] Task Force is of particular importance to us. We are not sure, however, that the SKAN index as yet represents a broadly useful tool for dealing with the retrieval task. Our specific comments are below: 25X1A2g

a. The list of subject categories should include an area breakout. This is a normal component of most established indexing systems, and would be welcomed in use by other offices besides GRI. For present purposes, a breakout by provinces and cities would be sufficient. The present category of "Geography and Area Description" should be replaced with "Area Description" for reports containing miscellaneous information about local areas. Photographs, maps, sketches, and plans, as received, should fall into a separate category of "Graphic Materials." "Documentation" also deserves a separate category, as long as political and technical documents continue to come in [redacted] since FID issuances do not tabulate them.

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b. Analysts are not yet convinced that they can find something by the use of SKAN that they cannot find more easily by another means. The method of keyword selection and use clearly needs revision to match more nearly the character of the documents being received. To the extent that keywords appear useful in the sample SKAN here reviewed, they are mostly familiar classificatory words under which several reports accumulate. Those words found in only one or two

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GROUP 1
Excluded from automatic
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reports, if not classificatory words, names, or locations, seems to us to be of dubious value.

c. SKAN's built-in repetitiousness is an obstacle to fast scanning. It has conceivable usefulness as a backup for document dissemination, but there is no indication that our analysts intend to use it thus. They may use it in the future in order to spot the marginal documents they might otherwise miss.

d. SKAN could be useful to Map Library procurement officers as a checklist of intelligence reports having map enclosures, or documents with maps. This would require an addition keyword, such as "MAPS", whenever appropriate. It might also be useful in selecting intelligence reports of possible interest for map collection leads, but the lack of depth of SKAN indexing limits this usage.

e. SKAN might also be used as a medium for disseminating information on new maps, supplementing existing Map Library "Acquisitions Lists" and similar publications. The Map Library has already discussed this possibility with the [redacted] staff, but code conversion problems, and a lack of manpower, have precluded any cooperative arrangement to date.

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(Signed)

JAMES A. BRAMMELL

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Director of Basic Intelligence

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