This paper is a record of interviews and observations made during a visit of nearly three months to the People's Republic of China. In the introductory paragraphs, the educational problems faced by the new government in 1949 are briefly described. A discussion of the educational problems that arose during the first two decades of the People's Republic, problems which led to the Cultural Revolution, follows. Observations of pre-school education, primary, secondary, and university education are given. The focus of the paper is upon the ideological core of the contemporary Chinese educational systems and its integration with the purposes of a society committed, so far, to the practical implementation of egalitarianism and cultural unity.

JOSELEYNE SLADE TIEN*

Everyone Getting Ahead; Nobody Left Behind: Education In The People's Republic of China

Every term, I ask my newly arrived freshmen and women students why they have come to the university. "So that I can get ahead" is the reply that nearly all of them give. That familiar response reveals the ideology of individualism, still pretty rugged, that dominates the American educational system — the drive for personal success, for self-fulfillment, for fortune making. My students always look baffled, slightly disturbed, some even a little insulted when I ask them to pursue this question a little further. "Who," I then ask, "is left behind?" After all, the rhetoric of equality is very familiar to them and pausing just a moment in the race up the ladder of success does mean turning your head around slightly. This philosophy of individual success, of *self*-fulfillment, is completely antithetical to the whole spirit of education in the People's Republic of China today, as I discovered during my two-and-a-half-month visit. I saw day-care facilities and kindergartens, primary schools, middle schools, and universities. "To serve the people" or "to serve the revolution" or "to build socialism" are the replies one receives to questions like, "What are you studying to be?" or "What are you studying for?" whether the queries are posed in the first grade or in the university. Chinese educational policy is directed, not only at the eradication of illiteracy and the promotion of knowledge among the people, but also, and more centrally, at the creation of new men and women who think and act in a socialist way, who will find fulfillment and meaning in service to the community. It is the attempt to achieve this latter goal while simultaneously constructing a viable modern economy that gives the educational system of the People's Republic of China its distinctive character and dynamism.

THE EDUCATIONAL PROBLEM IN 1949

When, in 1949, the People's Republic of China was proclaimed in Tien An Men Square by Mao Tse-tung, more than 80% of the people of China were completely illiterate. Those who could read and write were concentrated mainly in the cities and even there constituted a minority of well-to-do people. In the countryside, only a few scattered officials and the more wealthy landholders were literate. For two thousand years, Chinese society had been dominated by the Confucian theory that "those who work with their minds rule, and those who work with their hands are ruled." In no other culture did the ability to read and write carry with it such enormous prestige,

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confer such superior status. Ravaged for more than a century by foreign invasion, civil war, and economic disintegration, the enormous task of transforming a devastated country into a viable social order had to be undertaken by the new government. In organising for this task, the Chinese Communists intended to rely upon the ideology and practice which had carried them to their victory over the whole Chinese mainland. They believed in the total involvement of all the people in their own salvation. Mao Tse-tung's comment that "our people are poor and blank but the most beautiful poem can be written on a blank sheet of paper" expressed the Chinese Communist belief in the untapped genius and potential of the illiterate and long-repressed Chinese masses.

THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, which began in 1966, and the present campaign of criticism of Confucian ideas demonstrates that, of the two imperatives in their programme — the construction of a modern economy and the transformation of the Chinese mind — it is the latter which has been given priority. The whole edifice of the Chinese education system today illustrates the commitment to the goal of making life rich in spirit and meaning for all the people.

The present triumph of this principle was not achieved, however, without a sharp struggle against the tendency for a new elite to arise, utilising the needs of China to advance its own interest. This was being done particularly through the manipulation, conscious and unconscious, of the educational system. The very scarcity of literate people in the early days of the People's Republic meant that all those who could teach and perform management tasks that depended on literacy were invaluable, regardless of their commitment to the ideology of an equalitarian and socialist society. In the period between 1949 and the Cultural Revolution, the tension between the two educational goals — the training of skilled personnel and the education of people in a new social spirit — gradually pulled most institutions towards the realisation of the former, and careerism became a predominant concern. For example, the teachers at New China Primary School in Peking with whom I talked described the organisation of the school before the Cultural Revolution. Then, the school had taken children from all over Peking, selected by a competitive examination. The students openly discussed their ambitions to become diplomats, engineers, artists and scientists. Many of these children came from middle class backgrounds, their parents having been educated even in the days before liberation. The same thing was occurring in the universities, the "know-how" of the formerly well-to-do ensuring that, in disproportionate numbers, their children were passing examinations with distinction and entering institutions of higher learning. The proportion of students from working class and, particularly, from peasant backgrounds remained far above that of the pre-liberation period, but it was gradually diminishing. Whatever advantages to the economy, if any, were resulting from these developments, they indicated the neglect of the bridges that were being attempted between city and countryside, between one class of occupation and another, and, above all, between those who worked with their minds and those who worked with their hands. Another elite seemed to be in the making, ready to assume the privileges, prestige, and power which traditional China had always accorded the learned. As Mao Tse-tung perceived it, the primacy of the need to develop a socialist consciousness was giving way to opportunism and revisionism. "The correctness or incorrectness of the ideological and political line decides everything," Mao asserted. When a vigorous student movement at Peking University began, in June 1966, to attack the exclusivist nature of the examination system, the content of the courses, the lecture method, and the political orientation of some of the professors and administrators, Mao lent timely support to these protests. The subsequent interruption of higher education, the rigorous discussions of the meaning of socialist educa-

tion, and the resulting transformation of educational institutions demonstrates the ascendancy of Mao's theory. This is that it is the masses of the people who are "all important" in creating a sound society, not a select few. Releasing the huge reservoir of energy, creativity and wisdom that resides in the common people who were formerly neglected and abused will produce an "infinitely powerful atom-bomb," Mao believes. It is this theory which the Chinese people are trying to incorporate into the organisation and practice of education today.

It should be emphasised that the Chinese see the process of transforming the psychology of both individuals and society as long and difficult. Mao predicts that it will take one to two centuries to complete the transition to communism. Discussion of capitalism as an alternative way of life seems as anachronistic to the Chinese as a discussion of chattel slavery would be in American politics. In talking with teachers and students in China, one becomes aware of the struggle firstly to acquire new attitudes towards work and life-goals and secondly to carry these into practice in discrete spheres of activity . . . in the factory, the fields, the home, the school.

EARLY EDUCATION

The provision of a nourishing educational environment begins in China with its successful birth control or (as they prefer to think of it) planned population programme. As a result of this, it can be said that almost all children born in China today are planned. Free birth-control pills, contraceptive devices, sterilisation, abortion and education in the advantages of a small family to mother, child and community are all a part of China's planned birth-rate programmes. The encouragement of late marriage (25 years the desired minimum age for women, and 28 for men) means that most children are born at the height of a woman's reproductive life. Anomalous births are therefore increasingly rare. One or two children are seen as the ideal family size. Three are acceptable if the first two are of the same sex, but the idea (still somewhat persistent in the countryside) that sons are more valuable than daughters is regarded with scant sympathy as a remnant of backward feudal ways of thinking. Before conception, then, the preparations for healthy childhood begin. Regular pre-natal care is furnished. Births in the cities usually take place in hospitals, and in the villages in clinics well-stocked with western and traditional Chinese medicines. Pregnant working women are assigned lighter tasks in the last two months of pregnancy and have fifty-six days of full-paid maternity leave after giving birth. Institutional day care in factories and in neighbourhood centres is available beginning at 57 days, with the mothers receiving time out for nursing. Many babies are cared for at home by grandparents and older relatives. This is one of several ways in which older people in China contribute their services and are made to feel essential to the success of the community's efforts. It was interesting to notice that institutional day care does not have the same negative connotations as it often has in the United States. Speaking with a young foreign language professor at Peking University whose wife is a medical doctor. I found that his two children, both under the age of six, spend from Monday morning to Saturday noon in a day care centre. On Sundays, the whole family goes on outings to the park, zoo, or to visit relatives. This couple thought that institutional day care was a positive experience for their children, providing them at an early age with a programme that was both educational and socially valuable in teaching them to share and live with other children.

Toys are few and physical equipment minimal, in the street or neighbourhood day care centres particularly, but the programmes are far removed from baby sitting operations. Even the little nurseries that one comes across walking along the *hutungs* (side streets) are well staffed with adults (always women). The children are sometimes playing freely, but more often one sees them seated in circles, listening to a story teller, singing songs, or playing group games. Strings of little children linked together

hand in hand are a frequent sight in the parks and playgrounds, while open bamboo baby carriages transport two or three or even four toddlers on walks along city streets accompanied by their nurses. Young Chinese children seem to be surrounded by interested, affectionate and solicitous adults. Throughout the two and a half months I spent in China, wandering at will in back streets, riding on public buses, cycling around a variety of neighbourhoods in Peking, and sitting in parks just watching people. I never saw an angry, screaming child. I did watch, with amusement, while one young fellow in Kwangchow resisted, rebelled against, and lost to, his grandmother. The old lady chased him down the block, outmanoeuvred him, literally backed him up against the wall, and proceeded to chop-stick a lightning bowl of rice, vegetables and meal into him. His open-mouthed surprise at noticing me as audience assisted her victory.

PRIMARY EDUCATION

In contrast to the period before liberation, virtually all children in China receive an elementary school education. One of the great accomplishments has been in bringing educational services to the masses in the rural areas. Even villages with only ten children of school age have their own elementary schools. All over China, five years' schooling is now the rule. In the village called Big Gold, in Shantung Province, I visited a production brigade school about ten kilometres west of the city of Jinan. The classrooms there resembled those that I saw in the primary school which my husband had attended as a child in Peking, and the pupil-teacher ratio was about the same. In the primary schools, every child studies Chinese language, reading and writing characters, arithmetic, drawing, music and physical training. In the fourth grade, political studies are added to acquaint the children with Marxist-Leninist ideology and the Thought of Mao Tse-tung. General knowledge of science is also started in this grade. In most schools, an alphabetical system called *pinyin* is being taught along with Chinese characters to familiarise students with a phonetic system. This, many Chinese believe, will have to replace the beautiful, but cumbersome, character writing as its application is perfected. In as many primary schools as possible, depending upon the availability of teachers, the study of a foreign language is begun. English is the most common since the end of the Sino-Soviet entente. Another significant accomplishment is the ability of the younger generation to speak and understand *putung hwa* (the national dialect) as well as their local dialects. This is contributing to feelings of national unity, making interaction and exchanges of personnel possible between all regions of the country, and assisting the diffusion of knowledge and information through radio and television.

The content of lessons and text-books is infused with ideology. The songs have revolutionary and heroic themes, pay tribute to Chairman Mao, celebrate great victories in production, or reminisce about the cruelties of the past. Similarly, stories for reading aloud and analysis tell of sacrifice, struggle and the victorious emerging of a new society. In an art class I visited, the fifth-grade children sat in their neat rows of desks, diligently painting in water colors. Their subject was a vase of pink roses placed on the teacher's desk at the front of the room. Not much room for political content in this, but on the walls of the room were displayed a variety of drawings and paintings which showed the ideological concerns of the students . . . a boy shouldering a peasant's loaded baskets, a girl rescuing a pig from a flood, a group of children weeding, red flags planted beside them in the fields.

PHYSICAL FITNESS AND PRODUCTIVE LABOUR

Throughout China, there is tremendous emphasis on physical fitness. At 5:30 in the morning, the park in front of our hotel on Nanking Road, in Shanghai, was teeming with people of all ages. Hundreds, in groups (happily they were matched for age and agility) or singly, were tumbling, somersaulting, leaping, bending, stretching, sword-

dancing, shadow-boxing while lively revolutionary airs from the loudspeakers drifted through the trees. The schools participate fully in this passion for exercise. The morning begins with setting-up exercises in the schoolyard, and the day thereafter is regularly punctuated with short routines carried out in classroom aisles and in corridors, not to mention the regular physical education classes. Ingenious devices like the rotating barrels in the playground of New China Primary beckon students to invigorate hitherto unassaulted portions of the anatomy. No part of the human body is neglected. Classes are interrupted twice daily by a series of eye exercises. Everyone in or near the school house — teachers, administrators, students, workmen and uninitiated foreign guests — massage, blink, roll, rub their eyes this way and that while a pleasant but determined voice supplies the appropriate exhortations. One morning, strolling along an alley in Kwangchow in South China, one whole small primary school abandoned classes, erupted onto the street, formed sections, and proceeded to drill to the relentless commands of eight-year-olds. The accuracy and earnestness of this miniature performance made credible those spectacular human tableaus that we have seen broadcast from Tien An Men Square on festive occasions. Basketball nets and ping-pong tables (concrete construction with bricks for nets) abound in the parks. Soccer posts were very much in evidence too, though participants in that sport had evaporated in the 90° heat of mid-summer. The city swimming pools, however, were teeming with youthful patrons of both sexes.

Undoubtedly, the most fascinating feature of Chinese schools to the foreign observer is the application of Mao's principle that "education must serve proletarian politics and be combined with productive labour." From primary school to graduate school, this integration of the educational programme with manual labour and the production of useful goods is taken very seriously. Where land is available, in the case of city schools, vegetables are cultivated and used in the school lunch programme or sold. Exploring the village school at Shao-shan, birth place of Mao Tse-tung, during the rest period, we found both teachers and students fast asleep on and around their desks. (It was an unofficial visit — we found Mao's primary alma mater and crept in while the gatekeeper dozed.) We discovered here and there occasional insomniacs who goggled at us in disbelief, but we also were surprised to find a whole huge courtyard bristling with rows of beans, cabbages, corn and sunflowers. At the New China Primary in Peking, the school "factory" was organised for the production of Chinese chess sets. In the first workshop, students were engaged in punching out circular pieces of wood and then stamping the symbols on them with manually operated machines. In the second workshop, the chess pieces were being sanded, varnished, and painted. In the third, the finished pieces were being packed in boxes. In the same room, other students were constructing and labelling the boxes. Later, I managed to buy one of these chess sets in a store in the city. Most are sold in China itself, but some also reach the export market in South-East Asia. At another primary school, small plastic animals were being moulded, painted and assembled by the student-workers. I did not see myself, but watched a film about another primary school, where small electric light bulbs were assembled and packed by the children. All the children in the primary school were involved in this labour, which is a regular part of the curriculum. Manual dexterity, patience and some familiarity with machine processes are thus taught and real contributions to the economy are also made in this way, so that the work was taken seriously and meticulously executed. It is the lesson in the dignity and significance of physical labour, however, which the Chinese consider the most important element in these school factory programmes at the primary school level.

MIDDLE SCHOOLS

All urban middle school students spend from four to six weeks living in the country during June, July, or August helping to bring in the harvests. With a few items of

clothing and toilet articles attached to their bed rolls, which they carry tied across their backs, long crocodiles of these students can be seen marching out of the city. They often walk twenty or thirty miles out to the villages to which they have been assigned. Destinations further away than that are reached in buses or standing in the backs of trucks. Sometimes these marching processions are preceded by a small band, nearly always by a red flag bearer. Arrived in the villages, the students stay with the peasants and work alongside them. One of my husband's young cousins, Tien Hsin-ling, who is fifteen, was given leave from his *lao-dung* (physical labour) to come into Peking to spend time with his relatives from America. Another cousin, Chen She who is sixteen, had just come back to Peking from her month of working in the fields with her classmates. Both were brown, rugged and full of smiles, anxious to talk with us and to ask and answer questions. During our numerous visits at their respective homes, I asked to see their notebooks. They were filled with meticulous work in mathematics, Chinese language and science. Chen She studies Russian as her foreign language, Tien Hsin-ling, English. The choice of foreign language seems to depend on the school which you attend, rather than being a matter of personal choice. Another cousin, Tien Shih-jen, attends Peking University Middle School. This, it should be pointed out, is not a special academic school, but is for the children of those employed in various capacities at or near Peking University. Shih-jen gave us a detailed description of her schedule. She is in her second year at Senior Middle School and she attends school six days a week. She has one month's vacation in the summer, in July, and one month in mid-winter. Morning classes begin at 7:30 and last until 11:30 a.m. Afternoon classes are from 2:30 p.m. until 4:30 p.m. There are four class periods in the morning and two in the afternoon. Every day, there are classes in Chinese and English; Algebra, Geometry, Physics and History are each taught three times a week; Geography and Physical Education (swimming) twice a week. The remaining time is for independent study (doing homework). One month is spent in the country doing physical labour.

Reading is a favorite pastime with younger people, as is card playing, and *wei-chih* ("go," as it is called in the U.S.). Young people often sit out on the front doorstep or sidewalk playing games and reading. Book-fare is limited, but solid: stories by Gorki, biographies of heroic revolutionary figures, and, above all, the tales of the great Chinese essayist and novelist of the 'twenties, Lu Hsun. Among all young people, what might be described as pocket - 'comic' books are great favourites. With black and white illustrations, they look very restrained by American standards. Moreover, while pictures and captions tell the stories of supermen, *women* and children, their superiority derives not from magical powers, but from their dedication to socialist principles, as interpreted in the thought of Mao Tse-tung.

At the middle school level, the physical labour may involve quite difficult and complicated projects. Wandering around the area of the former British concession in Tientsin, I came across Middle School No. 59, housed in what had clearly been the mansion of a formidably successful British tycoon. The building was battered now, but still imposing, with lovely woodwork and architectural detail. I was discovered in the school yard by a woman who embraced me affectionately upon learning I was American. She turned out to be one of the English teachers. We went to meet the revolutionary committee of the school — teachers, workers and students who are responsible for the school's government and operation. Unfortunately, they would not let me visit the classrooms. It seemed that this was partly because they considered these old and shabby, and partly because school was not actually in session, although there were students everywhere. Instead, we proceeded to the school yard to inspect the huge piles of new bricks and lumber which lay there. The summer work project for Middle School No. 59 was the construction of a new school building. It was to be built

by students and faculty who were being instructed, advised, and assisted by a team of construction workers. The new school, they hoped, would be ready for the fall. The revolutionary committee urged me to come back then and see them at work in their new classrooms. The fulfillment of this task, it was clear, would serve, not only to meet the need for a modern building, but also to break down the barrier between mental and manual labour, to unify teacher and bricklayer as their joint effort benefitted their community. In this case, there would be an additional psychological lesson, the symbolic rejection of the remnants of foreign dominance.

In both primary and secondary education, certain revolutionary convictions determine the organisation and methodology of learning. Most significant of these is the belief that every child can acquire competency in every subject taught. In Chinese schools, therefore, there are no ability groupings, no tracks, and no learning problems. Now that the opportunity is available, everyone is expected to learn and does, the teachers assert. Those students who have learned a task help others who have not yet grasped it. Progress is collective, not individual. The theory of innate genius and ability, or of inborn stupidity, is perceived as a reactionary vestige of Confucian thought, useful only to those who would seek to justify the rule of elites and the destruction of democracy. Real knowledge and meaningful ability, it is thought, come not from the womb, but from social practice and from the marriage of education to socialist ideology. The Chinese bookstores are filled with "How To" manuals — how to repair bikes, how to raise tomatoes, pigs, chickens, apples, how to sew, to build and to keep fit.

Painted in vivid reds, greens, blues, and yellows on the outside school wall of Big Gold Production Brigade is a huge picture of a boy and girl side by side, each diligently reading a book. The characters say, "Study hard and learn something new every day." Inside Chinese schools, a serious and purposeful atmosphere prevails. Classes are formal. Desks are in neat rows. Students sit up straight, the majority of them wearing red scarves in primary school and red arm bands in middle school. These are the insignia of the Little Red Soldiers and the Red Guards, respectively. With forty or more students to a teacher and with much to be learned, including thousands of intricate Chinese characters, disruptive behaviour seems to be non-existent. More and more schools are finding that a five-year course is sufficient to cover the elementary studies that used to take six years.

While Chinese children are very gracious and polite in their behaviour towards adults, unquestioning obedience to teachers and elders is not encouraged. Socialist ethics take precedence over the traditional Confucian delineation of superior and inferior relationships. Self-reliance, community spirit, imagination and initiative are the objects of admiration rather than the observance of prescribed roles. A new Chinese heroine is Huang Shuai, who wrote to the People's Daily questioning the correctness of her teacher's refusal to allow student discussion of study materials in the classroom. Teachers at the New China Primary mentioned that, since the Cultural Revolution, it is quite common for students to criticise their teachers. Students, they said, are encouraged to do this so that the principle of learning from the masses can be carried out and instruction improved.

The channels for this method of critical interaction between teachers and students exist in the systematic use of mutual criticism. Meetings are held regularly in all institutions for this purpose, though I have never heard of foreign guests or outsiders being invited to such meetings, which are considered strictly "family" business. These sessions for mutual criticism make it possible not only for students to criticise teachers and vice versa, but also for students to deal with each other's attitudes and behaviour, measuring these against the attainment of the socialist goals which the whole society is

struggling to realise. Disciplinary problems are also handled by means of criticism and persuasion. There is absolutely no reliance upon physical punishment. The existence of any serious behaviour problems was denied in every school I visited. Certainly signs of even minor misdemeanors were absent. Perhaps this stability and harmony can be partly explained by the fact that the lives of Chinese children are not invaded by any of the emotional and physical horrors that assault American children through commercial television and film. Most of their entertainment is provided by Chinese children themselves. There are ballets with boys as well as girls participating (including one celebrating the ping-pong match between the United States and the People's Republic), plays, choral groups, small orchestras of Chinese instruments, acrobatic troupes and the occasional virtuoso on the violin or piano. It is also true that Chinese children are regarded as everybody's business and this principle applies both to caring for them and correcting them.

SOME PROBLEMS IN RE-ORGANISING THE UNIVERSITIES

After completing secondary school, all graduates spend at least two years performing some kind of manual labour. Most likely, this will be in a rural area, for agricultural production occupies 80% of China's population. Many young people, however, go from the big cities to undeveloped areas like Inner Mongolia, Tibet and the South-West. Tien Hsin-ro, our nineteen-year-old cousin, travelled from remote Yunnan-Province to meet us in Peking. Graduated last year from middle school in the capital. Tien Hsin-ro and many of his classmates are at work there developing rubber plantations. Some of these young men and women will later enter universities and technical colleges.

The great problem in higher education is how to run a socialist university so that you will not produce an elite of leaders, but servants of the people. While the population of the middle schools has increased steadily, the numbers of students in the universities and technical institutes has remained low, only 350,000 in 1973. Entrance requirements have been changed radically. Now, the most important requirement for university entrance is the recommendation of a person's work unit. The applicant must have a good record for his two years or more of work. Many students now are men and women in their late twenties and thirties who have worked for years and have received glowing recommendations from their workmates. Older students with families receive their full pay while studying at universities and colleges. Though adequate knowledge of Chinese is necessary, it is the ideological, political, practical experience and commitment which has taken the place of academically exacting entrance examinations. A huge sign at the entrance to Nankai University, in Tientsin, says, "The direction of our education must enable everyone who receives it to develop morally, intellectually, physically and to become a worker with both socialist consciousness and culture."

At Peking University, I watched an economics class at work. Men and women students, wielding pickaxes and shovels, were breaking ground for the foundations of the new university library. The students also link up their studies with the work of local factories. It is relatively easy to see how this is done in mathematics, chemistry, physics and engineering. How is this carried out in subjects like history, literature and philosophy? Professor Chiang, Hsiang-cheh, a Ph.D. from the University of Washington who teaches history at Chung Shan University in Kwangchow, explained one approach. His Chinese history class went out into the city and surrounding villages finding, interviewing, recording and writing up the accounts of people who had heard their grandparents' stories of the Opium Wars. These memories the students then contrasted with the histories written by scholars, comparing sources, points of view and the interpretation of events. There is no space here to record the

many other experiments and debates that are going on in the effort to produce graduates who are not only expert, but red. Mao Tse-tung has started the basic problem succinctly, "When theory is separated from practice, the more we study the stupider we get. The only way to turn the philosophy books into living and useful philosophy is to practice it personally." How long should a university course be? What proportion of time should be spent on: individual study, class study, non-professional study or manual labour? These questions involve the attention of everyone concerned with higher education. One principle of university education, however, is clearly affirmed by all those who participate in it. Nearly all the graduates will go back to the work groups which sent them to the university, for the students believe that the learning that has been acquired belongs to those people. A society which wishes to get ahead cannot leave the masses of the people behind, is to Chinese educators both experience and faith.