

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

CHGO-39
Visits to Chinese Schools

27 Lugard Road,
The Peak,
Hong Kong.

January 6, 1965.

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

Dear Mr. Nolte,

The Chinese Communists are worried that the younger generation now in school will be lacking in revolutionary fervour. They fear that unless the youth are thoroughly indoctrinated politically, capitalism will gradually work its way back into the Chinese society. They also place a high regard on education for the purely pragmatic benefits that accrue. The result is a burgeoning program of education which aims to provide universal primary education, and a growing percentage of students with secondary and higher education. In this letter I will describe my visits to a number of primary and secondary schools, and in a subsequent letter follow this up with a description of some Chinese universities. In order to try to convey the atmosphere of the visits I will describe two in detail, and give summary accounts of the others. The introductory speeches are repetitive and sometimes appear naïve, but I reproduce them in full because they are indicative of the mentality which permeates Chinese education.

Soochow Experimental Primary School

I went to the Soochow school accompanied by two guides from the Soochow branch of China International Travel Service. We were met by Miss Parn, the Director of the school, and Miss Wei, the Vice-Director. Miss Parn was extremely sure of herself and most precise. She was, I'm sure, a dedicated Communist. Whenever she spoke of "the Party" her eyes shone and her references to Mao were in the same tones of adulation as those of an ardent evangelist speaking of Christ. We went into the committee room



Kindergarten class in
the Soochow Experimental
Primary School

STATISTICS ON SOME CHINESE SCHOOLS

	: Soochow : Primary : School	: Shiang Ming : Middle School : Shanghai	: Peking No.15 : Municipal : Middle School	: Soochow Senior : Middle School
Date founded	1905	1940	1952	1904
No. of Students	918	2,174	1,900(¹ / ₅ girls)	997
No. of Teachers	40	172	130	76
No. of Classes	20	42	35	24
Approx. age of children	7 - 12	12 - 18	12 - 18	15 - 18
Time in labor per year	-	1 month	1 month	20 days
Length of school year	40 weeks	?	9 months	?
School hours	7.45-11.40am 1.30- 4.15pm	?	8 - 12am 2 - 4pm	?
Subjects taught (Figures in parenthesis show no. of periods/week)	Chinese lang. Arithmetic History Geography Nat.science Agriculture	Chinese lang. Foreign lang. Mathematics History Geography Physics Chemistry Biology Politics (Jnr.3 snr.4) Music * Painting * Physical ed.	Chinese lang.(6) Foreign lang.(6) Mathematics (6) History Geography Physics (4) Chemistry (4) Biology (2) Agriculture * Politics (2) Music * Painting * Physical ed.	Chinese lang.(6) Foreign lang.(5) Mathematics (6) History(e0-2-0) Physics(e4-3-5) Chemistry(e2-2-4) Biology(e2-0-0) Politics (2) Physical ed.(2)
No. of lessons per week	29	30	31	?
Length of lessons	45 mins.	?	50 mins.	?
Homework	-	Mostly none. Some classes maxm. 1hr/nt.	110mins/night	8hrs. study/day. Can be 6 at school, 2 at home.

e First figure relates to 1st year. Middle to 2nd year. Last to 3rd year.
 * Junior middle school only.

and over innumerable mugs of tea she gave her introduction. Her speech was translated and this gave me ample opportunity to take verbatim notes. She began:

"This school was founded in 1905. We have a history of 59 years. Formerly the school served capitalist exploitation. Liberation marks the turning point. After it, the school began to serve the workers and peasants. We now carry out the policy of the Communist Party and educate the students morally, physically, and intellectually.

We are a socialist country and know that it is the workers and peasants who will construct our country. Our socialist revolution must be carried on incessantly and we must educate our children to have a social consciousness. The students are educated with internationalism, and are taught to love all the people in the world. The children listen to the words of Chairman Mao and learn the internationalism of the Canadian, Dr. Bethune. The students are taught that they must strive for the liberation of all the people in the world.

In this school the children pay attention to international affairs. They know that our enemies are the United States' imperialists. They also know that all people who love peace can be united. Our children love their country, love Mao, and love the Communist Party. All the students listen to Chairman Mao's words and study hard.

Last Friday when the children heard about the atom bomb they were very happy and cheered. Next morning in assembly they shouted out 'Long live Chairman Mao, long live world peace.' They know we have the atom bomb to safeguard world peace. The students know that by studying hard now they will be better able to work for the construction of the country when they grow up.

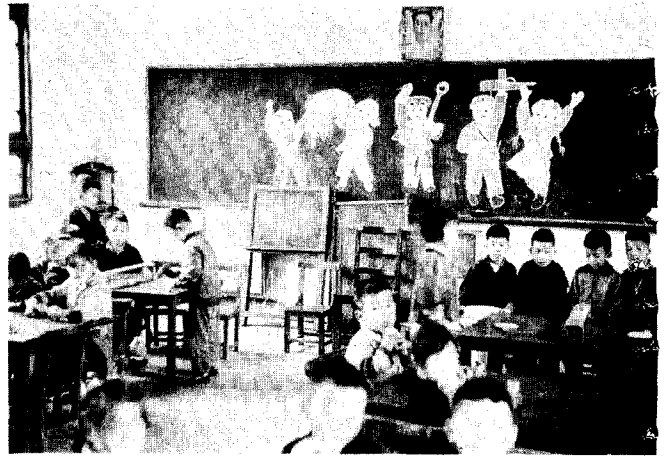
Most of the students do study hard. The teachers educate the children to listen to what they are saying. The students themselves use mutual aid whereby the good students help the backward students. They love their group achievements and also love to do manual labor. The students also do things for themselves, and help their parents at home. At school they plant vegetables and help with school cleaning. The school teaches them to have the habit of manual labor.

The teachers take their jobs seriously. This is because their work is not only to construct our country, but is for the final victory of international communism.

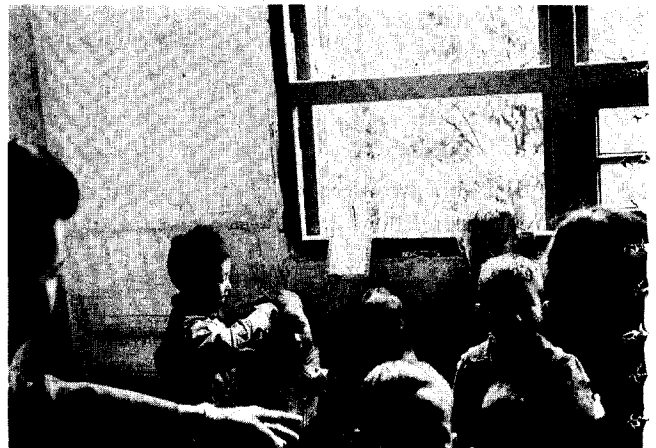
The teachers themselves study politics for half a day each week. This week we have been studying the Ninth Comment on Revisionism. Previously we learnt the educational principles of the Communist Party. Also, one evening a week all the teachers meet to discuss teaching methods. They feel that since they have the full responsibility of teaching the new generation they must work hard to raise their own teaching standards. The old teachers who taught before Liberation can really feel the difference. Some teachers



THE KINDERGARTEN AT SOOCHOW
EXPERIMENTAL PRIMARY SCHOOL



Right: Playing at
"Barber Shops"



are members of the Peoples' Political Consultative Conference for this Province, some are Peoples' delegates on the City Council, some are delegates of the Women's Federation, some have been elected as advanced workers, and one was sent to Peking to attend a meeting of teachers from all over China -- and she met Chairman Mao.

Since Liberation wages have been readjusted five times. In this school wages vary from ¥39 to ¥84.9 a month (U.S.\$16 to \$35 a month). If the teachers health is poor they are sent to a sanatorium to recover. Eleven teachers have already benefitted from this program. If teachers become ill they are given free medical treatment and their salary is paid as usual. If a teacher has a baby she has 56 days holiday with full pay. In their spare time teachers enjoy recreational activities such as visiting cinemas, operas, and joining or listening to choirs."

At this point I was asked if I had any questions. I began by putting some general factual questions about the number of students, hours of work, age of students, etc.. The answers to these questions are compiled in Table I. Last year 98% of the graduating students from this school went on to junior middle schools, and in Soochow city 99% of all children of primary school age are at school. The remaining 1% are either crippled or have mental diseases. There is, however, a school for the deaf and dumb in Soochow. In one district 99.9% of the children are at school.

I then asked about the use of the romanized script. I said I knew there was a controversy in China about the extent to which the Han characters should be replaced by Latin script, and asked Miss Parn for her opinion. I found most Chinese reluctant to give their own opinions on almost any subject and Miss Parn was no exception. She happily told me the facts about her own school, "We teach romanized script for the first two years," but only after considerable prodding did she say that in the long run she thought the Han characters would be completely replaced.

I also asked about the number of characters that are taught to the primary school children in one year. I was told that the first half year (i.e. at 7 years of age) they learn 337, and at the end of the first year they are expected to know 850. By the end of primary school they should know 3,000.

I enquired about the teaching of politics. Miss Parn said that there were no special classes in politics at primary school but the Chinese language classes had a high political content. Also, every morning there is a school assembly and the children are told the news and current affairs. "Whenever we have visitors we explain something about their country, for example today the children were told about Canada." (Since my tour had been arranged by a Canadian travel agency it was often assumed I was a Canadian). "At the morning meetings we also tell about American aggression. We told them about the poor people of Vietnam suppressed by the United States imperialists, and the children know who should be hated. But we also teach the spirit of internationalism exemplified by Bethune."

I asked what details the children were taught about Bethune.

Miss Wei went out of the room to fetch a copy of the second year students' (8 year olds') Chinese language textbook, and showed me the passage on Bethune. I translated it and made notes. It read:

Bethune

Bethune was a member of the Progressive Labor Party of Canada. He was also a famous doctor. In 1937 the Anti-Japanese War broke out. Bethune led a medical brigade through mountains and rivers in order to help the Chinese people resist Japan. He came from 30,000 li away to China and worked in Shensi and Herbei Provinces in the front line against Japan.

He gave aid to the wounded. He was not afraid of difficulties, and sometimes walked more than 10 li in one hour. When in Herbei in the middle part of the front line, gun bullets fell before him. He still calmly carried out operations on the wounded. He considered his own life cheap. Sometimes he even gave his own blood to the wounded. He frequently said, "The wounded are more my relatives than my own brothers, because they are comrades."

In 1939 when he was giving treatment to the wounded, he himself was poisoned and died in a village in Wan County, Herbei Province. In order to remember this great international friend, (I did not translate the name) .. Military District Public Hygiene School changed its name to "Bethune School".

Questions:

1. Why is Bethune a great international friend?
2. Listen to, and write down the following words. Write two separate sentences using the two words with asterisks:

* help	lead	international
* survivors	famous	

3. Learn this essay by heart.

When we toured the school I was taken to several kindergarten classes and we looked through the windows at others. I asked to be able to enter one of the senior classes and listen to the lesson. After consultation between themselves I was taken into the back of a second year class. There were eight rows of six desks in the class, all occupied, and as I entered the teacher was teaching the character li (to separate). She wrote the character as a series of strokes and then put the romanized li above it. The children in unison then chanted the order of strokes (each stroke in a Chinese character has a name, e.g. dean - dot; piee - down stroke to the left; herng - horizontal stroke, etc.) and at the same time traced the character with their fingers in mid air. The word li was the last word in a sentence which the children had been learning that morning. They were then required to repeat the sentence first with the romanized script still on the board and then with it erased. Finally the teacher called for a volunteer to read out the sentence.

A Note on Dr. Norman Bethune

Dr. Bethune was an enigmatic Canadian chest surgeon who, in 1936, took a medical team to Spain to help in the Civil War against the Fascists. He returned to Canada but could not settle down. In 1938 he went to Yen-an in China to help the Communists in their fight against Japanese Fascism. He took with him a large supply of medicines, an x-ray machine and a set of surgical instruments, and carried out operations on the wounded close to the front line.

He died of an infection incurred while carrying out an operation, on November 12, 1939. Since then he has been made an international hero of China. Mao Tse-tung's essay, written in memory of Bethune shortly after his death, has been incorporated in Volume II of the Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung. As such, it is required reading for virtually all Mainland Chinese. One corner of the Museum of the Revolution in Peking is devoted to Bethune, and a film has been made of his life.

Early in 1964, Dr. Elliott, a neuro-surgeon from McGill University, gave a series of lectures in Peking in his capacity as the first Norman Bethune Exchange Professor.



Main entrance to Shiang Ming Middle School. Slogans extol students to rely on their own efforts, etc..

Immediately a dozen hands shot up. A girl was chosen and she stood up and read out the sentence, loud and clear. I found it particularly interesting that the children spoke with an excellent putung huah, the Mandarin dialect which the Communists are making the lingua franca of China. At home the children would speak Soochow dialect, but at school all the lessons are in Mandarin.

Afterwards we returned to the committee room for another mug of tea. I thanked Miss Wei and Miss Parn and said I hoped that in their politics they would stress even more the positive features of internationalism as shown by Bethune, rather than the negative one of teaching children to hate American imperialism.

Shiang Ming Middle School

The visit to Shiang Ming Middle School* in Shanghai was organized only after I complained to the China International Travel Service about the program they had arranged for me. I asked to see universities and research institutes, but after four days I had seen none of these and instead had been taken to museums, children's palaces and industrial exhibitions. I said that if I was not to be allowed to see universities and research institutes perhaps I could see something of the schools. If this were not possible I said I intended to cut short my proposed week in Shanghai. The following day I was taken to Shiang Ming Middle School and Fu Tan University.

Students at Hong Kong University who were originally from Shanghai tell me that Shiang Ming is not one of the best middle schools, but at the top of the second string of schools. I made the visit accompanied by Mr. Wang, the secretary of China International Travel Service in Shanghai (a dedicated young man who knew his Communist politics better than any other person I argued with in China!), and Mr. Yu, my interpreter whose command of English was excellent.

We were met at the entrance by Wang Tze-shiu, the Principal of the school; Shan Ping, the Dean; and two secretaries. We went into a committee room and all seven of us settled down around a table. Tea was served and Mr. Wang began his welcome and "brief introduction"

"There are 42 classes at Shiang Ming, 2,174 students and 172 teachers and staff members. Before Liberation the school was attached to Zen Jann University run by the French Catholic Mission. It had only 12 classes and 510 students. When Shanghai was liberated the school had a history of nine years. During that time 1,100 students graduated, i.e. 130 per year. After Liberation under the leadership of the Party and Government we have carried out great reforms. In the past 15 years 11,200 students have graduated. But

* A middle school is the Chinese equivalent of a high school and the age range of children is from twelve to eighteen years.

the most outstanding change has been in quality and character. Before Liberation the school was a center for imperialist cultural education. It was a slave education. Landlord's children and bureaucrat's children studied in the school. They went on to become the tools of reactionaries and imperialists and were the lackeys of China. Now, after Liberation, the students in my school are the sons and daughters of peasant families.

"After they graduate some of the students join agricultural work, some volunteer for military service, some join in Sinkiang construction*, some go to universities, and some become advanced workers. For example one of our students, Chang Ken, went to Anhwei to join in agricultural work and now he is a representative in the Provincial Peoples' Congress. This year many of our senior students wanted to go to Sinkiang, and 35 have already gone.

"This has become a socialist school. We carry out Party policy and use Mao's instructions to run the school. Education must serve the proletariat class and must be combined with labor. Students must develop morally, intellectually, and physically. We educate them in class consciousness and teach them to be the successors of the Revolution. First, we emphasize political education. We teach the students to be revolutionaries and to love labor. They study Mao's writings and learn from the great revolutionaries. We invite old cadres, workers and peasants to tell the students about their own sufferings in the past. We also invite representatives from the Peoples' Liberation Army to visit and give the students revolutionary tradition. The students make exhibitions comparing the past with the present. Their class consciousness has rapidly increased, and they know they must help to raise the standards of our poor backward country. They are taught that two-thirds of all human beings are yet to be liberated. We also give education in current affairs. For example, we told the children about the Vietnam Tonkin Gulf incident.

"Secondly we emphasize labor education. We want the children to have the viewpoint and habit of labor, and have the laborer's feelings in their hearts. The students spend some time in the school's own workshops and join workers for summer and autumn harvests in the country. We also educate the children to do housework at home, so they get the idea that labor is honourable. Last year 26 classes joined in labor in the countryside, 7 classes were judged as advanced classes, and 260 students judged as model workers.

"Thirdly we emphasize science and the arts. We emphasize the combination of practice with theory. We also stress quality rather than quantity, and encourage students to study on their own. In the sciences emphasis is placed on laboratory work, and each student must do individual experiments. There are also clubs

* Sinkiang is the far western Province of China. The Chinese are attempting to develop the area and encourage young people to work and settle there.

where students make models, such as transistor radios, in their spare time.

"The political and economic condition of the country is good and technical education is improving. However there are still some problems. For example a few students are influenced by the old society. They think that to study only is good, and they look down on manual labor, they would prefer to stay in Shanghai rather than go with the others to the countryside. Another problem is that some teachers lack experience in how to combine practice and theory. They stick to theory too much. Thirdly, nearly a quarter of the children in the higher classes are near-sighted, and we are trying to find a remedy. Mao's writings are proving to be a big help with this."

I thanked Mr. Wang for his introduction and said that it had raised some questions, and in addition there were other questions which I had prepared before I came. I requested permission to ask the questions. Mr. Shan, the Dean (and presumably a Party man) asked me to put all my questions at once. This was annoying because I preferred the more informal back and forth discussions. However I complied and asked:

1. You say that the children at your school are now sons and daughters of peasants. Does this mean that children of other types of parents are excluded?
2. Would you give me the percentage of students who, when they graduate, do manual work, join the army, go on for higher education?
3. You said that two-thirds of all human beings require liberation. Would you please explain what you mean. Do you consider the peoples of Europe and America need "liberating"?
4. Would you also elaborate on your comment that some students are still influenced by the old society. How many students fall into this category?
5. I don't understand how studying Mao's works has helped you find a solution to the problem of near-sightedness. Could you tell me which passage of Mao you used?

I said that these were the questions arising from the talk. I wanted to ask others and enquired if these could wait until the first ones had been answered. At this point Mr. Shan suggested we look around the school first and then afterwards he would answer my questions.

I was shown the physics and chemistry laboratories, the library, the auditorium, sports grounds, classrooms and the well-equipped work shops. I took photographs, and many are reproduced on the adjoining pages. We then returned to the committee room and settled down again with more tea. As in most other institutes, one of the secretaries made notes of all that was said.

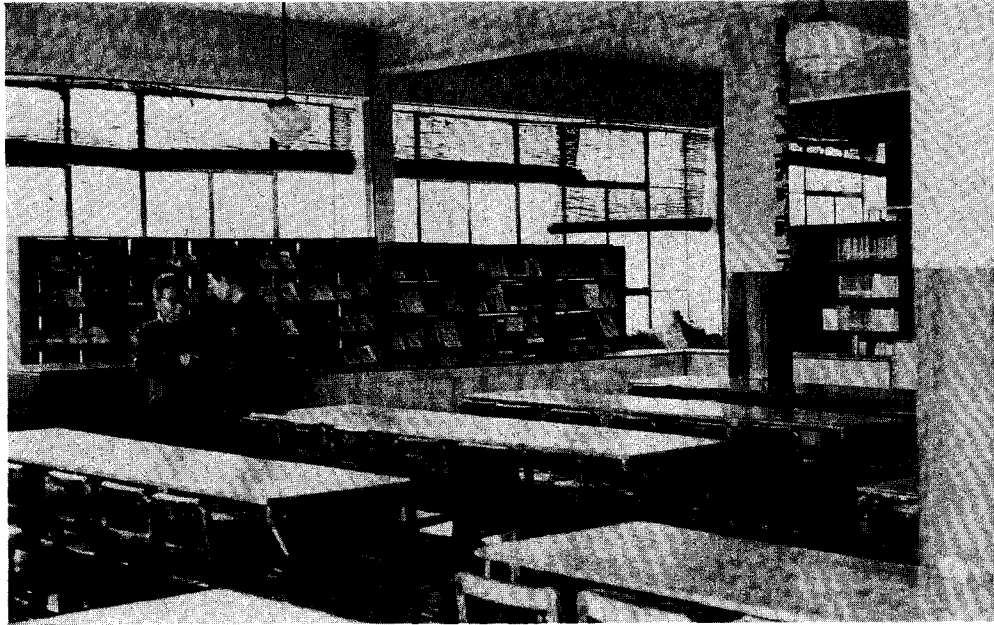


Chemistry teachers and laboratory at Shiang Ming Middle School.

The characters near the clock say "Quiet". Instructions on right hand board are rules for behaviour in chemistry laboratory - presumably written for students having their first chemistry lessons

Mr. Shan replied to my questions, not Mr. Wang who had given the introduction. He said, "Let me take your questions one by one:

1. Yes, there are still children of landlords and bureaucrats at the school. But the State takes special care of those from the laboring class, they are provided with subsidies and such things as free spectacles. Also we provide room in the school in the evenings for those with poor working conditions at home. So the students from the laboring class feel very grateful to the State and study hard.
2. The percentage varies from year to year and from school to school depending upon the needs of the State. Last term at this school 90% of the students went from junior middle school (for children of 12 to 15 years of age) up into senior middle school (for children of 15 to 18 years of age). Eighty percent of the graduating class in senior middle school went for some form of higher education.
3. It is the people of Asia, Africa and Latin America who are still oppressed by others that need liberating. The students are taught to support peoples' liberation movements in those countries.
4. There are only a few students who are influenced by the old society and who still look down on labor. Most students are keen to take part. For example, this year's winner of the mathematics competition wanted to go and help with Sinkiang construction.
5. Mao helped the teachers to look after the children's eyesight because he told us to take care of the children and give them our all-round attention. In the past we did not pay enough attention to the children's all-round health. Now we are improving conditions. We educate the children not to work in very bright or very dim light.



Mr. Wang, the Principal (on left) and Mr. Yu, interpreter, in the library at Shiang Ming Middle School



Basketball at Shiang Ming Middle School

We tell them not to read in the tram; not to read and walk; and to take a rest after every hour of work. We also teach them eye training, so that now the situation is improving.

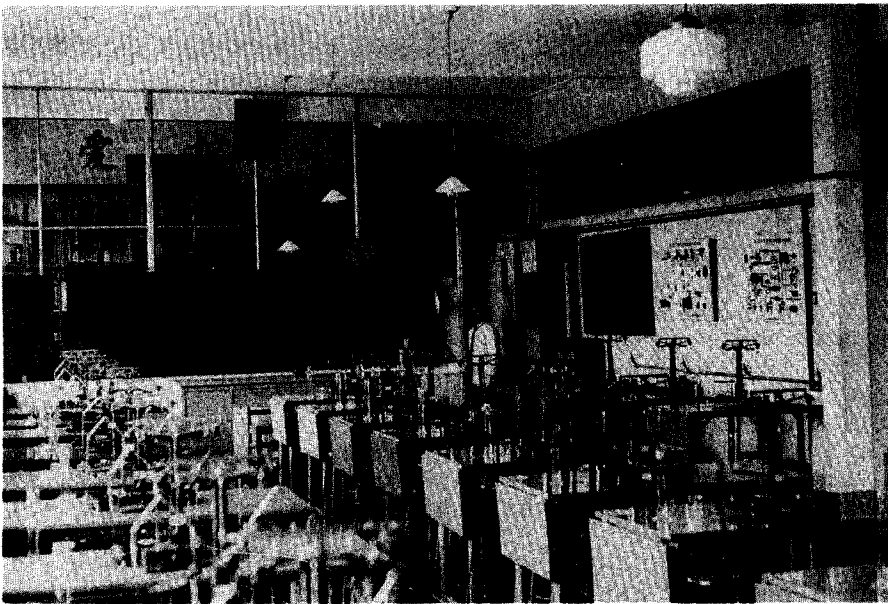
Mr. Shan then asked me to put the other questions to him. I wanted to know about the courses the children take. He replied, "In junior years the children take politics, Chinese language, foreign language, mathematics, music, physical training, painting, physics, chemistry, biology, history, and geography. In senior years they have the same subjects with the exception of music and art. I then asked about the time which must be spent in labor and politics. In answer to this question I was told that one month a year is spent in labor, but in addition the students take it in turns to clean their classrooms after school. The junior students have three periods of politics each week, and the seniors must study politics for four periods a week. (For the seniors this accounts for 14% of class time).

I asked about homework and was told that most classes did not have homework and for those that did, it was limited to an hour a day. In answer to a question about university entry and job assignment, Mr. Shan admitted that a student's political views counted, he said however, that no student had complained about the job assigned to him and he did not know of any who wanted to change. However, if a talented student particularly wanted to join labor he could do so, and he would receive "special attention".

I then asked about how the school enforced discipline. Mr. Shan replied, "We teach the children the reason for the school rules. If anyone breaks a rule we say there must be a reason. It is our job to find the reason and then resolve it. We also establish some students as advanced students and we get the poor ones to follow their example. But we have very little trouble with discipline. In the old society there were evil things distracting the students, but now things are much better."

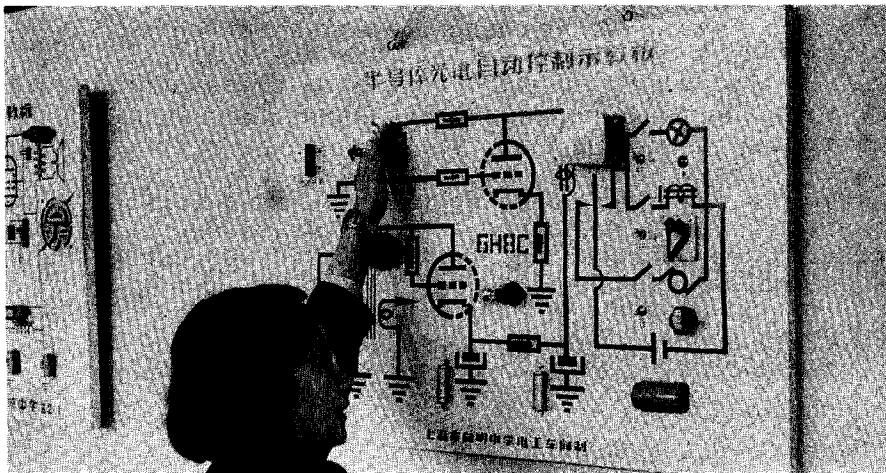
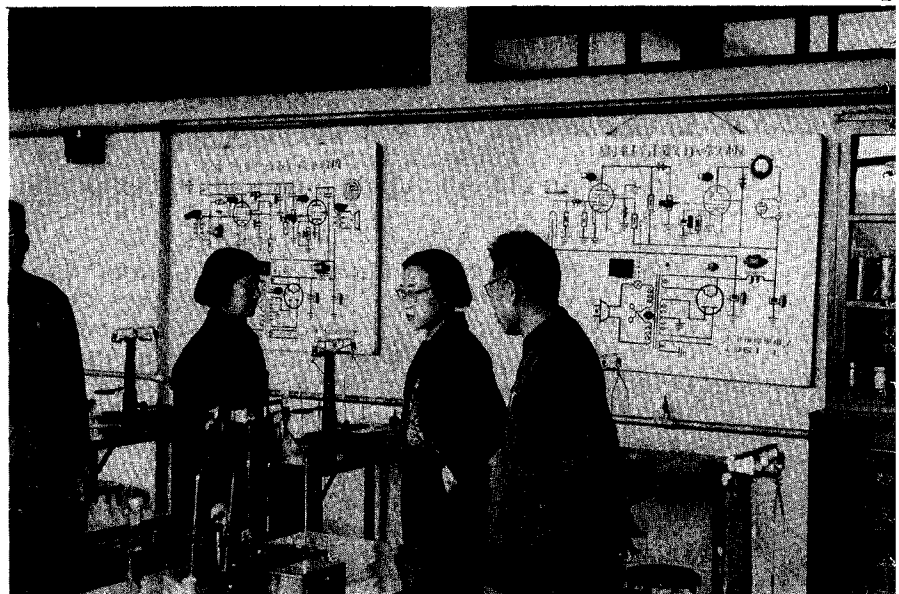
By now it was almost 1 p.m. and I had been at the school for almost four hours. I thanked Mr. Wang and Mr. Shan for their hospitality. But before I went Mr. Wang who had not spoken since his official introduction, said, "I don't really know who you are, or where you are from, but you have asked many questions. We have shown you over the school and we would like your impressions and opinions and criticisms." There was nothing unusual about being asked for my criticisms, but I had never before been asked with such sincerity. I felt that something more than mere pleasantries was required and so, choosing my words carefully, I replied, "Without doubt this has been a most enlightening visit. I was particularly impressed with three things. First the alert attitude of the students, secondly with the advanced level of the science laboratories, and thirdly with the facilities for sports. Education is one of the most important features of any society and frankly I did not expect to find China so well developed in this regard.

On a short visit such as this it would be presumptuous of me to make specific suggestions. If I were here for several weeks



Left: Specific gravity experiments set up in the physics laboratory of Shiang Ming Middle School, Shanghai

Right: Physics teachers (left), and Principal and a secretary in the physics laboratory at Shiang Ming.



Left: Physics teacher demonstrates electronic warning device constructed by senior students at Shiang Ming Middle School.

or months I would have more basis for giving my opinions." (At this there were nods of approval.) "But one thing has struck me in visits to schools and universities in China and that is the extent to which students are only exposed to the official Communist Party line. There are at least two sides to most questions. I have often thought that when politics are discussed in schools in the West it should be possible for all sides, including the communist's, to present their different views. In the same way I think education in China would be much healthier if a person sympathetic with Western views could explain our viewpoint. The world is not black and white, and it is important that children of both sides realize this. You are not always right and us wrong, nor are we always right and you wrong."

There were no comments after this little speech, but I was pleased to note that the secretary had recorded all I said. A few minutes later we went down to the car. It was lunch time and with two or three hundred children applauding, we said our goodbyes. Mr. Wang, the Director, clasped my hand far harder in farewell than on arrival. There seemed to be real emotion in his face as he said, "Please convey my warmest wishes to all your colleagues in England." Perhaps wishfully, I would like to think that I had said just what he wanted me to say in front of the Dean, who was so obviously a "Party man".

Peking Number 15 Municipal Middle School

I got roughly the same story in the Peking school as I got in the Shanghai middle school. A story of improved quantity and quality, of hard work, of the importance of politics, and productive labor. A few things were different. First, it was admitted that the rapid expansion (from 400 students and 30 staff in 1952, to 1,900 students and 130 staff now) had meant problems both in the quality of teachers and in the discipline of the children. However, Mr. Chan, the Director, said that both these problems were now well in hand. Many teachers had gone to the District Red Banner Spare Time School and now all teachers had reached the level of university trained staff. With the improvement in teachers the problem of discipline had decreased.

The subjects studied were the same as at Shiang Ming, with the addition of agriculture in junior middle school. Mathematics included analytic geometry, trigonometry, solid geometry, and calculus. The students could take either Russian or English as a foreign language, and the majority of students elected to study English.

I made the mistake of asking whether corporal punishment was used. Both Mr. Chan and his assistant were clearly shocked by this suggestion. The answer was an emphatic "No! ... do you mean to say that there are still some schools in the West which do use such punishment?" I had to admit that on rare occasions at my own children's schools it was still used.

Neither the physics or chemistry laboratories were as well equipped as those in the Shanghai school, but they had a good supply



Botany experiment at the Number 15 Municipal Middle School in Peking. Writing on blackboard says:

Experiment 4: Texture of Plants.

Purpose: To recognize several structural characteristics of plant texture. Further, to become skilful in cutting slices manually. Further, to become skilful in making slides for a high powered microscope.

Material & Equipment:

Microscope, cover glass, glass slide, blade, forcep, evaporating dish, scissors, etc..

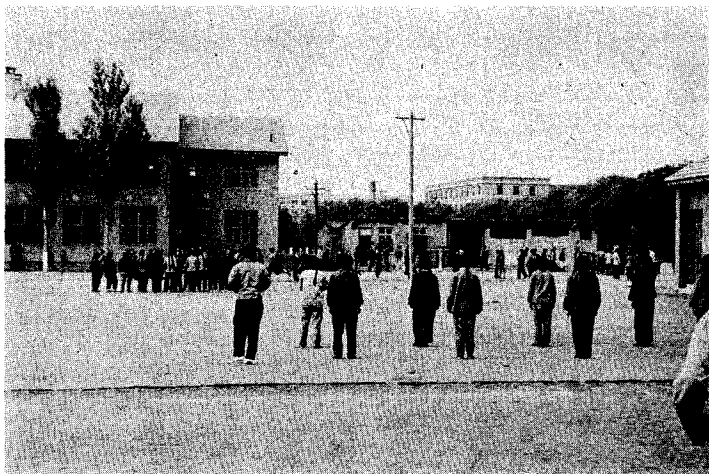
Vegetables, fruits, stems of squash, leaves, cabbage leaves, sawdust of pine tree, potassium hydroxide solution, hydrochloric acid, distilled water.

Method & Procedure: (1) Make slides using veins of cabbage leaves. Observe different kinds of tubes, make drawing of tubes.

(2) Make slides manually using stems of squash cutting longitudinally. Draw sketch of cell.

(3) Cut slides manually using end of celery leaves. Observe certain texture of plants and draw sketch of cell.

Right hand diagram is labelled "Form of sketches".



Number 15 Municipal Middle School, Peking.

of basic apparatus. In the physics laboratory for example, there were plenty of balances, ammeters, voltmeters, and rheostats, all made in China. There was also a fairly good supply of demonstration models. Judging by the amount and variety of apparatus, emphasis was placed on electricity. The chemistry store room had a good supply of chemicals. The only experiments I saw in progress were in the biology laboratory. There, 15 year old students were using microscopes to study the cellular structure of plants. There were 48 students, divided into pairs and each pair had one microscope. They had textbooks which I looked at which gave clear instructions on procedure and significance of the experiments. I stopped by one couple and asked to see their work. They let me peer down the microscope and study their report book. It was all extremely sound for 15 year old students.

Later I saw the current affairs room and heard the daily political broadcast, both of which I have commented on in an earlier letter (CHGO-36).

Soochow Senior Middle School

The headmistress of the Soochow Senior Middle School was another precise, erect woman, extremely self-confident. Much of her introduction was similar to that given in the other schools but a few passages are worth quoting. For example, she said, "The method of our education is heuristic. We use truth to make the student convinced. We do not use coarse, rough or simple methods. Also since it is the students who will join in the construction of the country they must have a sound basic knowledge. If a building has a poor base it cannot go high -- so with education." Later she said, "None of the students wander in the street, gamble, or smoke. In their spare time students like to write essays, make radios and build model aeroplanes. However, we are now in the socialist period of our country. In our society there are still proletariat and bourgeois classes. Bourgeois thought still influences the students and causes difficulties for the teachers."

After the introduction I asked her to elaborate on this last point and she said, "There is an old saying in China that 'to study is the highest thing in society.' It was said that if you studied hard and got good marks you could be an official in court. This idea still remains in the minds of the new generation and in the minds of their parents. Because of such ideas they look down on manual labor and do not want to join in agricultural production. This is different from what our Government wants. If a student has such thoughts then he is separate from manual labor and is not carrying on the revolution. The teachers must educate the students and let them know that to love to do manual labor is the finest characteristic of the proletariat class and that only through manual labor can socialism be constructed."

Later we looked around the school. There were many students at study and play, and some working in the school vegetable plots. The school dining hall was a converted temple. I was shown some of the science laboratories which were not quite as good



Middle school students doing 'productive labor' on the grounds of Nanking Agricultural Research Institute.

as those in the Peking school. In one laboratory I saw twenty sets of the basic Ohms Law experiment set up. The headmistress said there were other laboratories upstairs but they were being enlarged and I was not shown them (there were building materials in the entrance hall).

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I also saw middle and primary schools in several of the communes, but these were brief visits compared to the ones described above. In all cases the schools had science laboratories, and in all cases the physics equipment and laboratories were better than the chemistry. Even the poorest commune school had a supply of demonstration models and equipment and all had some simple apparatus so that students could perform experiments individually.

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Conclusion

It would be wrong to make general conclusions about schools in China, but it is useful to summarize the common elements from the schools which I visited.

First, the Communist approach to education is to give a combination of a sound basic education with a thorough political indoctrination -- probably in the reverse order of priority as far as the Communist leaders are concerned. Informal instruction at middle school level, primary emphasis is placed on Chinese language, foreign language, and mathematics. Well over 50% of the students' time is devoted to these subjects. Secondly comes the emphasis on science, with roughly 30% of study time devoted to physics, chemistry, and to a lesser extent, biology. History, geography, art and music are relatively neglected.

The amount of time in formal political study (2 periods a week at most schools, 4 periods a week at the Shanghai school) is not however, a true measure of the influence of politics on school life. In previous letters I mentioned the vicious anti-imperialist propaganda, the constant reminders of the bad old days and the emphasis on "the correct leadership of the Communist Party". Almost every action seems to have a political motive and I never failed to leave a school without a queasy feeling in the pit of my stomach.

It would not be right however, for the revulsion which the average Westerner feels when he encounters this political indoctrination, to detract from the Communist achievement in providing what seems to be a solid education for so many students in the basic subjects. Granted that presumably I was only able to visit those cities and schools with good records, it is nevertheless remarkable that 99% of all children in a city such as Soochow should be in primary school. It is even more remarkable that so many students in all the schools I visited went on to the next grade of education. Fifty to 60% of graduating students at the Peking and Soochow middle schools went on to some form of higher education and 80% in Shanghai. It can of course be argued that these figures were false, I have no way of knowing, but I think not.

Yours sincerely,

C.H.G. Oldham

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Nanking middle school students (and one foreigner) take part in "productive labor" at the October Commune, Nanking.

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