

China and her growing people



By URSULA WAWER

China, is a conjurer of red flags, revolution and unapproachability.

China; a conjurer of laughing children, inquisitive hardworking people, a growing nation. Between the idea and the reality lies a sea of stereotypes in the West.

This summer, Anne MacLean, a UNB history graduate visited Red China for three weeks as a member of a study tour organized by World University Services Canada. She went to learn more about the Chinese people and their growing aspirations.

Following a brief orientation at U.B.C. in Vancouver, the group of 20 Canadians flew to Tokyo for a day and then on to Peking.

For five days, Ms. MacLean found Peking a mosaic of ancient and modern sights. The ancient walls and Summer Palaces were interwoven among visits to handicraft factories producing traditional pottery as well as jade and ivory works destined for sale abroad.

"We also visited a Neighbourhood Revolutionary Committee" said Ms. MacLean, "They function as municipal organizations looking after housing, and nursing-medical care. Besides being a source of political information, they provide opportunities for educational upgrading such as technical skills."

Ms. MacLean found China to be a highly organized society: "The Chinese are highly organized but, they're not covered with red tape or bureaucracy. You get a feeling of direct communication between group leaders and the rest of the community. They're all working for each other."

In between preplanned excursions, the Canadians were given the freedom to roam and discover Peking alone.

Ms. MacLean found the Chinese people open and friendly. "It took nothing to create a crowd" she said. "They were curious to see Westerners and wanted to know what attracted us in their streets and stores." Wherever the Canadians went, the story of Norman Bethune would hover like a ghost. "Most Chinese have heard of Bethune because of Mao's writings and were fascinated to meet someone from his country" said Ms. MacLean. The feeling was reciprocated: the Canadians were thrilled to meet the Chinese.

After having feasted on history, politics and Peking duck washed down with Chinese beer, Plum wine and White Lightning, the study group flew North to see Industrial China.

A prerequisite tour of hydro-dams and oil refineries was followed by an examination of the Phonex Dragon Coal Mine: to the very core, so to speak. "They dressed us like coal miners and took us to the bottom of a 700 foot shaft. The technology was fantastic" said Ms. MacLean.

"There's a greater immediacy between what is produced in a factory and the people outside. The clothing that's sewn by the workers is seen everywhere. There's no middle man and prices are cheaper. There's a one to one ratio between producer and consumer," said Ms. MacLean.

The merchandise she saw in stores was both plentiful, useful and well made. And everywhere they went, the people in the factories acknowledged them with smiles and hand clapping.

A different technology and approach than in the West appears in health care.

The group visited a medical college where traditional acupuncture and herbal treatments were taught. They also witnessed the extraction of two teeth without the use of Western anesthetics. Only pressure points on the jaw were manipulated. The patient suffered no pain or after effects.

Surgery was brought to China from the West since the cutting of the body was anti-Confucian. But again, only acupuncture is used in all but the most serious of operations. A cyst removal from an ovary is done only with acupuncture.

It is impossible to visit China and not visit a commune. Ms. MacLean found them to be self contained units and brought up the question of minority groups within China.

"We visited a Korean agricultural commune. The people were free to celebrate their own particular holidays without disrupting other communes." She felt that each commune was able to maintain its identity of language and culture and still fit into the Chinese framework.

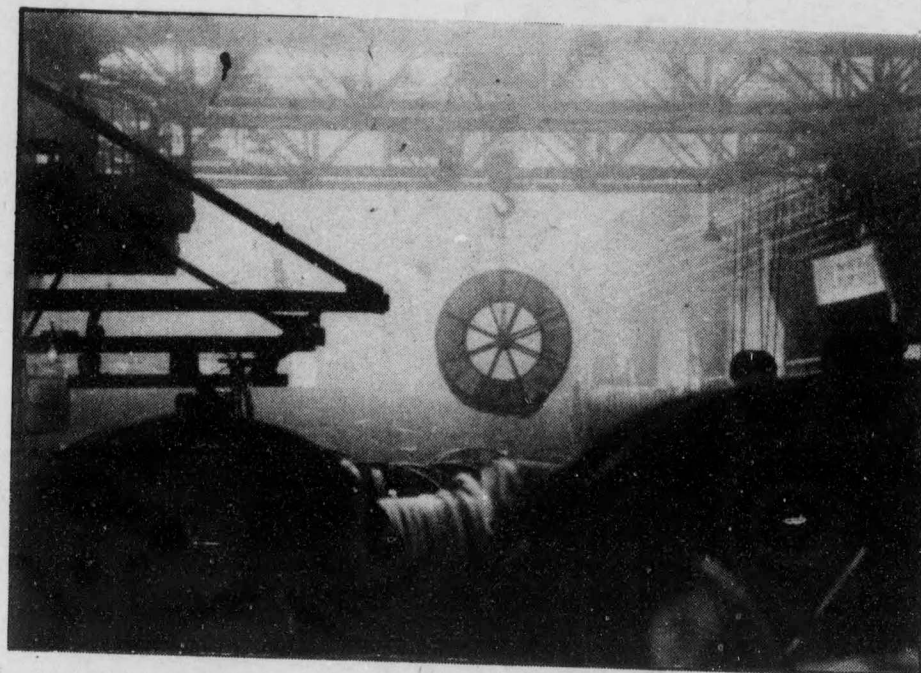
Like people everywhere, the Chinese like to be entertained. Spectator sports such as basketball and other diversions like movies and theaters are always packed.

"Going to the movies in China is a learning experience" said Ms. MacLean. "Entertainment, politics and education all in one package!"

The behind the screen action was just as revealing. While visiting a movie studio, Ms. MacLean observed "the universal energy and ego that belongs to actors" even in a country where the individual performer is not glorified. After finishing a scene, an actor lit up a cigarette and continued to look as dramatic and aloof as any blue blooded star.

But everywhere she went, Ms. MacLean found that the people were warm and that a sense of community existed. "Always on the streets there were people riding bicycles or people talking. When I returned to Tokyo everyone was running around in cars. You didn't see people. It seemed cold and insular."

"The feeling in China for the future is optimistic. The Chinese feel they've gone through two revolutions. The first, the coming of Mao and the second, the purging of the Gang of Four," said Ms. MacLean. "With the Gang of Four, the mood had been oppressive and new social and economic developments were held down. Things just weren't discussed freely." But now, the situation seems to be changing. "I'd love to go back in seven or so years, to see how far they've progressed" said Ms. MacLean. When I look at us in the West — everyone going his own way for only a profit and I look at the Chinese and what they've done for themselves together, I feel hopeful that we'll learn too."



Photos by Anne MacLean