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perpetual line-ups, is now only open at certain hours on certain days, and even then the line-ups are relatively short.

This new freedom from 'personality cults' shows very clearly on the faces of the people. What we consider normal and healthy social behaviour was formally forbidden. Consequently, the atmosphere in the streets was glum and oppressed. It may seem facile, but one of the most startling changes I noticed was the way people now smiled and laughed more.

The most obvious indication of that is the slow profusion of colour in dress. 'Mao suits', de rigueur three years ago, are now a rare sight. Freedom of individual taste in clothing means that such things as hot pink T-shirts and patterned blouses are being worn instead. Truly, after seeing millions of women in baggy trousers, nothing looks as good as to see one in a dress.

The government may well have had doubts about loosening its controls. For one thing it is no longer immune from criticism or

sarcastic jokes. They say crime is on the upsurge. The streets are no longer clear by nine o'clock, but instead are dotted by groups of men squatting under lampposts gambling at cards until late at night. I saw fist-fights on two occasions, although considering the way everyone disregards the most basic traffic rules, it's a wonder I didn't see more.

People are now free to talk to foreigners, something once strictly forbidden out of fear of the contagion of foreign ideas. They approach you on the street just to say hello and practice their rusty English. Far from its recent xenophobia, China is frantically covetous of foreign knowledge (and money) in order to speed its modernization. Most Chinese are still unaccustomed to the sight of Westerners, but the floodgates are now open to tourists and businessmen. English is taught as early as Grade Four.

Economically, China is pursuing what is coming to be known as 'pragmatic socialism'. Farmers have their own private plots and are free to sell their produce at markets in town. Factories and communes keep

the profits of their work above a pre-determined quota. In an effort to cope with the many unemployed, the government encourages them to open small private enterprises. Restaurants and repair shops are the most common. Somewhat to the embarrassment of the government, these often make it possible to earn more than professionals.

Whatever doubts the govern-

ment may have had about relinquishing so much of its power have no doubt been subsumed by the revitalization of the economy that has resulted. Trade statistics and a construction boom are two dramatic indicators of that.

The goal of developing China into a modern nation by 2000 is an immense one. The government has won itself the people's loyalty and gratitude by giving

them back their personal share in accomplishing it. A buoyant sense of optimism pervades China where previously there was a profound malaise.

Those of us who witnessed this remarkable change joked that the next time we returned, Beijing would look as industrialized and as affluent as Tokyo. If China can maintain its present course, there is every reason to believe it eventually will.



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