

and a willingness to put theory into practice

matchboxes, detaching the cork from old bottle tops, putting buttons in plastic bags, and performing other simple tasks which would help develop a positive attitude toward work. (One older professional woman from Toronto was horrified at this child slavery, and wondered out loud what "our parents back in Canada" would think of that sort of thing.) Outdoors the teachers had prepared a garden where the children planted, watered and cared for their own vegetables and flowers.

A Middle school (high school) in Hangchow, in addition to its academic programme, provided vocational training and labour experience for all in its workshop, where students spent a month a year producing small electric motors and supplementary components for supply to a local factory, and on its three acre farm, where students and faculty worked for three hours a week cultivating rye, wheat and rapeseed. In addition this school maintained contacts with eight factories and several rural production brigades where students would be sent to work and learn. In literature courses the integration of theory and practice would be achieved by sending students down to the farms and factories to tell stories, and to record the local oral tradition in writing.

A teachers' college in Canton, the Canton Normal school, also had its workshops, where students of physics, for example, produced marketable radios and oscilloscopes and a farm where students and faculty grew rice and other vegetables, and raised (and house-trained!) pigs. (If the pigs could be encouraged to relieve themselves in the appropriate part of the pigpen, this would ease the collection and distribution of manure.) The students then, participating in these concrete projects to augment production, are able both to come to a greater awareness of the political importance of the education, and to develop their technical expertise. In History and Politics at this college students were sent to the fields and to factories to make an investigation into conditions of labour past and present.

Similar work was being done in a more sophisticated way in the universities, for instance the University of Peking, where History students have recently completed on-the-spot research into the development of a chemical refinery just outside the city, particularly, by means of interviews and consultation of archives, the evolution of the situation of workers from the period before 1949 to the present day.

My third observation about education in China is that it shows evidence of a curious (to Western eyes) blending of discipline and student-teacher rapport. Students are very diligent, they appeared to take their studies seriously, and not, I think, just for our benefit. On not one occasion did we witness rowdy or noisy behaviour, and students stand to answer questions, even in university. Victorian? Not necessarily so. At middle school and higher, students address their teacher as comrade, and are addressed this way in return. Instructors invite and receive from their students criticism of their teaching techniques. The students we saw had a



This is Wuhan university located in an important industrial centre 600 miles up the Yangtze river from Shanghai.

tremendous rapport with one another, and with their teachers, and seemed genuinely to enjoy their hours in the classroom. Perhaps the key to this "curiousness" is to appreciate that discipline is so internalized as children grow up in China, that after a certain stage has been reached, (which is, incidentally, quite early), discipline is no longer imposed from above but rather becomes self-discipline in the cause of socialist construction, and thus can go hand in hand with rapport with teaching staff.

A fourth and final characteristic which I would perceive in Chinese education is the importance attached to self-criticism and what I would term the consensus approach to problem solving.

What happens when differences arise, over an issue of interpretation, a decision on curriculum, a question of marks, or anything else?

The normal procedure is for an assembly of all interested parties to be convened to discuss the pros and cons of the matter at hand until a consensus emerges. But, it may be argued, in our own experience this sort of

procedure has seldom worked; how is it more likely that a consensus can be reached in the Chinese case?

In my view it is possible because if discussion is the machinery, then the oil to make it work is self-criticism — a humility, a willingness to compromise based on a recognition of one's own human frailty. I feel it should be stressed that this readiness to confess one's weaknesses is not the sick and repressive reaction of individuals beaten into submission by a tyrannical regime, as has so often been suggested in the West, but rather as I witnessed it positive and constructive, and rooted in a consciousness of the overall harmony of interest or workers in the intellectual realm striving together to build socialism. Since the Cultural Revolution particularly the Chinese have sought to put behind them the old idea of vested interests of faculty and administration against which students must struggle. Contesting lobbies are alien to the present Chinese experience in education, by means of discussion and self-criticism confrontation is largely avoided.

How applicable are these four concepts, the inculcation of social consciousness, the integration of theory and practice, the internalization of discipline, and the consensus approach to problem-solving, to education in North America? While I would not wish to discourage any attempt to translate some of these ideals into practice here I nonetheless feel obliged to suggest that in the present context in North America, where the prevailing ethos has for so long been competitive individualism where so often there has been a distinction between theory and practice, even among radical intellectuals, and where the revolutionary tradition has of necessity stressed dissent rather than discipline, struggle rather than consensus, simply because a revolution has not yet been even partially won, that the applicability of these principles may be somewhat limited.

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