



## CHINA—SUMMER 1981

China is people. Old people out on the sidewalk at 5:00 a.m., in courtyards practicing Tai Ji Quan, a slow-motion exercise. People with small birds in cages taking their pets for an outing, letting them hop about on the pavement. Nursery school children colorfully dressed, laughing free spirits, singing about being kind to grandfather, being helpful to the bus driver, and about loving the children of the world.

The Chinese are not only friendly, inquisitive, and cheerful, they are eager to learn and to improve their lives and futures. Education is very important to them—not a new value, but more attainable now for the masses.

Everywhere our China study tour went (a tour sponsored by Phi Delta Kappa and Kent State University's Center for the Study of Socialist Education) people were learning or practicing English; they read English books on trains, in parks, and on

doorsteps in fading light.

A man we met in his early thirties whose academic studies had been interrupted by the Cultural Revolution taught himself English by listening to radio programs (like Voice of America and the B.B.C. Overseas Service) and by studying on his own. Informal education is an important component of the Chinese educational system and takes up the slack for those not able to continue formal education.

Mao's idea of the "Open Door"—allowing academically unqualified or underqualified students into secondary and post-secondary education—has been discredited. Educators and students still refer to the excesses and mistakes of the Cultural Revolution and its adverse effect on education.

Today, after the sixth year of schooling, examinations determine if a student will progress to the next level and even which school the student will attend. These exams nar-

row the student body at the secondary and post-secondary levels. According to our guides and current literature, efforts are made to provide technical education for those culled out of the system by examination.

Three weeks isn't long enough to learn much about a country, especially when one depends on interpreters to ask questions and translate answers. But people's faces and body language convey a great deal about how they feel, and there were many external indicators—material possessions, Chinese tourists, and well dressed, well fed children—that indicated the Chinese are vibrantly alive, proud of their past, and working for the future. ■

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