



EDUCATION IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

by FRED L. PINCUS

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The author is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County; the Associate Director of Research Group One; and a staff member of New China, published by the U.S.-China People's Friendship Association. The basic data for this pamphlet were collected during the author's visit to China in November, 1972. In addition to having discussions with teachers and students in six different cities, the author met with two members of the Scientific and Educational Group--Shao Ching-Ro, Administrator of Primary and Secondary Education; and Lin Min-Wing, Administrator of Higher Education. Unless otherwise specified, the data for this paper were obtained from these discussions and from the author's observations during his trip.

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At the end of 1973, the Chinese educators and the Chinese people were still trying to put into practice the educational policy that emerged from the Cultural Revolution of the late 1960s. Formal education had come to a complete halt during the Cultural Revolution. Educators were criticized by their students, by political officials and by "ordinary" people; and, they were sent to work in factories and in agricultural areas. Most students were also sent to work in factories or in agriculture. Important questions about the role of the schools in China and the type of education that should be offered were discussed throughout China -- on the campuses, at political meetings, in the press, in factories and on communes.

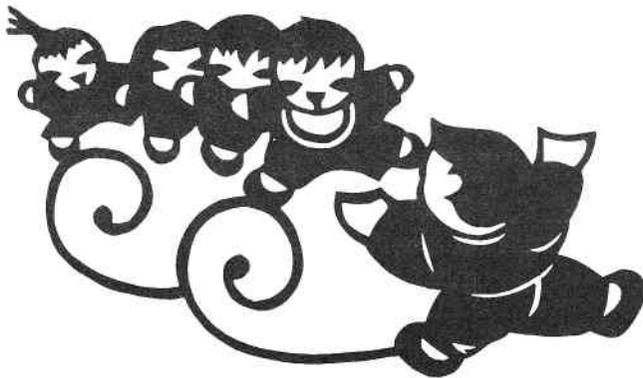
The schools began to re-open in 1968, after being closed for up to two years. Colleges and universities didn't re-open until 1970 and 1971, some of them having been closed for over four years (Hinton, 1972). Most Chinese agreed that the schools had two basic goals: (1) to teach students the political and cultural ideology of socialism and (2) to teach students the theoretical

and practical skills necessary for economic growth. Few Chinese, however, were certain about the concrete way in which these educational goals should be implemented.

This paper will examine the educational system in the People's Republic of China at the end of 1973. First, a brief outline of the different types of educational institutions will be presented. Second, the educational philosophy and the way in which this philosophy is put into practice will be analyzed. Finally, some criteria for evaluating the success or failure of the Chinese schools will be discussed.

Types of Schools

Nurseries: About half of all urban children and a smaller percentage of rural children are placed in nurseries at the age of eight weeks. Nurseries are generally located in the factory where the parents work, or in the production team of the parents' commune. Working women generally receive eight weeks paid maternity leave, and are then given paid time-off each day to nurse their children. Since the children stay at the nursery for eight hours or more each day, the nursery staff plays a major role in weaning, toilet-training and introducing children to the group-life that is so prevalent in China (Sidel, 1972).



Kindergartens: At the age of three or four, 80% of the urban children and a somewhat smaller percentage of rural children enroll in kindergartens in their neighborhoods or on their communes. In addition to participating in general recreational activities, kindergarten children also begin their political education by learning revolutionary songs, dances and stories.

Primary School: At the age of seven, about 80% of all Chinese children are enrolled in primary school, and remain there for five years. The 1972 primary school enrollment of 120 million was five times larger than it was in 1948, just prior to the revolution (Tsang, 1968). The entire Chinese population increased by about 1/3 during this same period (Whitaker and Shinn, 1972), so most of the gain in primary school enrollment was due to the construction of new schools, and not to population growth. Subjects taught at the primary schools include Chinese language, mathematics, music, physical education, politics and, in the larger cities, foreign languages.

Middle School: After graduating from primary school, many Chinese students enroll in junior middle school, which lasts for two years, and then in senior middle school which lasts for another two years. Middle school enrollment was 36 million in 1972, about eighteen times larger than in 1948 (Tsang, 1968). Although precise data are not available, one author estimates that between 75 and 90% of primary school graduates enter junior middle school, and between 50 and 75% of junior middle school graduates enter senior middle school. Urban students are more likely to receive middle school educations than rural students (Mauger, et al, 1974). Prior to the Cultural Revolution, students had to pass entrance examinations to enroll in middle school, but no such requirement existed in 1973. Subjects taught included Chinese language, foreign language, politics, mathematics, music,

physical education, chemistry, agriculture and physics.

Higher Education: The government assigns all middle school graduates to some form of work, usually in agriculture or in industry. Only after working for at least two years is it possible for a student to apply to an institution of higher learning. Applicants first must be approved by their fellow workers who consider the applicants' political attitudes, attitudes toward work, social class background, and intelligence. Next, applicants must be approved by the leadership of their factory or commune, and finally by the institution itself. Students must also pass a special type of college entrance exam. These entrance exams were reinstated in 1973 after being banned during the Cultural Revolution. The exams are intended to be measures of the applicants' "cultural level," their level of "practical experience...and their ability in using basic knowledge to analyze and solve practical problems" (Chu Yen, 1973:19). Entrance exams are still considered to be provisional and are highly controversial. For example, a letter that was critical of the exam, written by a student who failed the exam, was recently publicized in the major newspapers in China (Burns, 1973).



Prior to the Cultural Revolution, applicants applied directly to the colleges and could be admitted without ever working. Although college ad-

missions committees were supposed to have considered political attitude and social class background as well as intelligence, they tended to stress grades and scores on the entrance exams above all else. The Chinese believe that the post-Cultural Revolution procedure will insure that grades and test scores will be only one of a number of criteria for college entrance, and that only students who want to use their educations for the collective good will be permitted to attend.

Institutions of higher learning include universities, colleges, technical institutes, teachers colleges, research institutes and medical schools. Enrollment in 1973 was 350,000. This figure is twice as large as the 1948 enrollment, but only half the enrollment just prior to the Cultural Revolution (Tsang, 1968; Whitaker and Shinn, 1972). When colleges and universities re-opened in 1970 and 1971, they admitted only small freshmen classes. Junior and senior classes were to be admitted in succeeding years, and the number of students to be admitted was to be gradually increased.

Graduate education had not been reinstated at the end of 1973. Even though Chinese educators and government officials realize the need for skilled people, they are not yet certain how these people should be trained (Fann, 1973). This will be discussed in more detail below.

Other Schools: In addition to the institutions already mentioned, there are other types of schools in China. Peasants and workers can attend "spare time" schools which are located throughout the country. These institutions offer courses in literacy, politics, industrial technology and agricultural technology. Courses are also offered by radio. Although precise enrollment figures are not available, it appears that the majority of adults are enrolled in these spare time schools.

In some rural and mountainous areas, where no schools exist, "mobile teaching teams" travel from village to village in order to hold classes. This often occurs in areas where the population concentration is low and/or where it is difficult for students to travel to a school.

Finally, there are vocational middle schools that emphasize skills relating to health care, teaching, industry and agriculture. These schools are short-term schools, with courses lasting from six months to two years. They can be either full-time or part-time institutions. These vocational middle schools seem to be located mainly in the rural areas of China.

Educational Policy and Practice

Chinese educational philosophy has rejected or modified many of the basic ideas held by Western and traditional Chinese educators. This is especially true in the role of politics, in the combination of theory and practice, and in the administrative structure of the schools.



Politics in Command

The most significant factor in Chinese education is the emphasis that is placed on politics. One of the basic goals of all Chinese schools is to teach students the currently-accepted political and cultural values as they appear in the writings of Mao Tse-tung and as they are interpreted by the Chinese Communist Party. All schools have classes

in politics that teach students the following values and beliefs:

- cooperation is better than competition;
- collective goals are more important than individual goals;
- equal respect should be given to manual and intellectual work;
- peasants and workers should participate in making the decisions which affect their lives;
- people should try to solve technical problems through their own efforts, when possible, and should not depend solely on experts;
- members of the Chinese Communist Party should be respected for their leadership qualities and their political consciousness, but should be criticized when they are wrong.

This set of beliefs pervades the entire curriculum of all Chinese schools. At the kindergarten, for example, at least 15 minutes each day is spent discussing principles such as cooperation and self-reliance. These theoretical ideas are put into practice by encouraging children to help each other get dressed without the aid of adults, and to play games involving two or more children rather than playing alone.

In primary schools, classes in politics take up a few hours each week. Students learn some of the important political slogans and the principles behind them. They hear what life was like before liberation by listening to the experiences of retired peasants and workers. The introductory reading books stress the difficulties that existed in China prior to liberation and encourage students to conform to the cultural norms of Chinese socialism.

As children grow older, the amount of time spent in political study increases. They begin to read some of the articles written by Chairman Mao and others, they discuss important current events both inside and outside of China, and they learn a-

bout their own roles in building Socialism. This political education continues in the colleges and universities. Even at Tsinghua University, a very prestigious technical school, 15% of students' time is spent in political study.

In addition to these classes in politics, students at all schools have classes in "revolutionary art and culture." These classes consist mainly of learning the songs and dances that are seen and heard throughout China. Most of the songs and dances have political themes such as patriotism, hard work and group solidarity. Each school has a group of students that performs these songs and dances for visitors to the school and for the general public.



Many people outside of China tend to see this emphasis on politics as a form of "brainwashing" or "indoctrination" since they believe that education should be "value-free" and "apolitical." But the Chinese do not believe that education can be apolitical. They believe that the schools necessarily reflect the cultural values and the social class interests of the people who control the schools. Therefore, the Chinese continue, it is important that the schools be run by people (1) who have the "correct" set of political and cultural values and (2) who represent all of the people of China.

This fundamental rejection of a "value-free" educational system is basic if one is to understand the Chinese schools. Prior to the Cultural Revolu-

tion, the Chinese schools were based on an educational philosophy that appeared to be apolitical. Chinese educators believed

- that they should teach students the "body of knowledge" that existed in particular fields;
- that they should do research to advance this body of knowledge;
- that political study was irrelevant and took time away from more "important" intellectual work;
- that educated people were better able to make important decisions due to their superior knowledge than uneducated people;
- that schools should be meritocratic; i.e., those who were able to meet high academic standards should be allowed to be educated, while others should receive only minimal education (Nee, 1969; Bastid, 1970; Mauger, et al, 1974).

Since the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese have argued that this apparently apolitical educational philosophy was not only political, but was politically incorrect because it resulted in a set of conditions that were inconsistent with the Chinese model of socialism. First, working class and peasant students were getting less education and were less likely to attend college than students from aristocratic, landlord or capitalist families. Second, educated people believed that they were better than uneducated people and lost respect for manual labor. Finally, educated people were often unwilling and unable to use their skills and knowl-



edge to help build a better society; instead, they became interested in personal gain (Nee, 1969; Bastid, 1970; Whitaker & Shinn, 1972). The Chinese believe that the current emphasis on having the "correct political line" will result in the creation of a group of educated people who believe in using their skills to help develop an equalitarian socialist society consistent with the writings of Chairman Mao.

Of course, teachers as well as students must receive political educations. On May 7, 1966, Chairman Mao issued a directive that all teachers, students and administrators were to go to the factories and the rural areas to participate in "productive labor" and to "learn from the masses." Consequently, the May 7th Cadre Schools were formed.

At the end of 1973, "students" in these schools were teachers, party members, bureaucrats and other white collar workers. Teachers are required to spend six-month terms at a cadre school every three to five years. Half of the day is spent working in the fields or in the small workshops at the school, and the other half is spent in political study. At the Peking "East is Red" Cadre School, for example, teachers harvested rice, raised pigs, worked in machine shops, prepared meals and participated in the maintenance of the school. After work, they read books written by many socialist writers, discussed current events and participated in "criticism and self-criticism" sessions. While attending these schools, the teachers live away from their families and receive their regular salary.

When not attending the cadre-schools, teachers participate in political education at their regular schools. They have study groups with their colleagues, and have criticism and self-criticism sessions with their students in which both students and teachers are encouraged to criticize others as

well as themselves. In this way, students and teachers can learn from each other.

The Western concept of "academic freedom" is viewed with a great deal of skepticism in China. Teachers are not free to teach their students to be competitive, or to think of themselves as superior to uneducated people. The Chinese believe that these "freedoms" will result in the restoration of capitalism or in the development of an unresponsive technocratic form of socialism. In either case, the majority of the people would be deprived of their own freedom since major decisions would be made either by a capitalist ruling class or by a small elite group of government officials and specialists. It is necessary, the Chinese continue, to restrict the academic freedom of teachers in order to protect the equalitarian socialist revolution and to insure the freedoms of the majority of the population. If teachers accept the cultural, political and educational philosophy of Mao Tse-tung, however, they are encouraged to experiment with different teaching methods, books and classroom activities.

Collective Administration

Each school is administered by a Party Committee and a Revolutionary Committee. The Party Committee consists of members of the Chinese Communist Party, some of whom are teachers at the school. It is the Party Committee that sets general educational policy for the school.

The Revolutionary Committee is the major administrative body and is in charge of the day-to-day affairs of the school. Some of the members of the Party Committee are also on the Revolutionary Committee. The majority of the Revolutionary Committee is made up of non-party people including teachers, students, workers, peasants, retired people and soldiers. The concept behind the Revolu-

tionary Committee is simple: since the schools exist to benefit the entire society, all segments of the society should be involved in educational decision-making. The size and composition of the Revolutionary Committee depends on the size, location and type of school. They can be as large as 30, and as small as 3.

In addition to the school-wide committees, different departments within a school often have a Party Committee and a Revolutionary Committee. This is particularly true at the larger middle schools and colleges. Thus, collective leadership exists at all levels of education.

Party members and army members are appointed to both Committees by their respective organizations. Teachers, students, workers and peasants are elected by their respective constituencies. There is no formal voting in these elections. Instead, a series of discussions take place where the qualifications of the candidates are evaluated until a consensus is reached.

Revolutionary Committees did not exist prior to the Cultural Revolution, when the schools were controlled by the educators themselves, some of whom were members of the Communist Party. However, many of these educators did not agree with the political ideology and cultural values of Chinese socialism. Consequently, the schools reflected the ideas of the educators and not the ideas of Chairman Mao. The Chinese hope that the Revolutionary Committees will guarantee that the schools will be run according to the "correct" political, cultural and educational philosophy.

The system of education is coordinated at both the provincial and national levels. The provincial Revolutionary Committees have ultimate authority for the educational systems in their respective provinces and are responsible for communication with the Revolutionary Committees at the

particular schools. They also call periodic provincial conferences to evaluate the development of education in their region.

The Scientific and Educational Group coordinates education for the entire country and is responsible for communication with the provincial Revolutionary Committees. National educational conferences are also held. Successful innovations in a particular province that are relevant to other provinces can be adopted as national policy.

In summary, the Chinese educational system is decentralized insofar as local areas can develop curricula and pedagogical techniques suitable to their particular needs. At the same time, local areas can learn from each other through provincial and national conferences. However, once a decision is made at the national level, all provincial Revolutionary Committees and all individual school Revolutionary Committees must conform to it. For example, no school could refuse to use the thoughts of Chairman Mao as the basis for its curriculum. In this way, there is national leadership in the area of education.

Shorten and Simplify Curriculum

Since the Cultural Revolution, the length of time a student spends in school has been shortened. By the end of 1973, primary school was five years rather than the traditional six, and middle school was four years rather than the traditional six. Higher education was shortened to three years or less.

This was accomplished by thoroughly reevaluating the curriculum at all levels of education. Rather than teaching subject matter because it was part of the traditional "body of knowledge," the Revolutionary Committees began to decide which part of that body of knowledge was most essential for

their students. What was thought to be irrelevant material was then eliminated. For example, middle schools teach Chinese geography to all students, and world geography to those who want to specialize in that field. Prior to the cultural revolution, all students spent more time on world geography than on Chinese geography. Revolutionary Committees are still trying to determine the most effective way of shortening the curriculum without sacrificing quality.



In addition, the process of simplifying the Chinese language itself has been going on since 1958 (Wen Hua, 1973). The Chinese characters now require fewer strokes and they are written horizontally rather than vertically. A Phonetic Alphabet has been introduced to help students learn the language, and discussions are taking place about whether the Chinese characters should be abandoned altogether. The Peking dialect is taught throughout the country so that people from different regions can communicate with each other.

A number of benefits result from this shortening and simplifying process. First, students with basic skills will be able to enter the labor force sooner. Second, students from all back-

grounds will have a more equal chance of receiving the same basic education. And, third, the limited number of teachers will be able to educate greater numbers of students since they spend less time with particular groups of students.

Combine Theory and Practice

Since the Cultural Revolution, there has been a concerted effort to combine theoretical study and practical experience. Science and mathematics courses are sometimes held in factories or in agricultural areas where students can see concrete examples of the principles of chemistry, physics or geometry. Workers and peasants are encouraged to give lectures in schools about their areas of expertise. Workshops and gardens exist on the school-grounds where students are encour-



aged to put their knowledge into practice. English is learned by translating common phrases that students might hear while working in a factory.

The July 21 Workers University, located on the grounds of the Shanghai Machine Tool Factory, is considered to be a "model university." Students

are recruited from factory workers to complete a three-year course in machine design, and then return to their factories to apply their skills. The physical location of the university on the factory grounds promotes the combination of theory and practice in the educational process.

During the Cultural Revolution, Chinese educators were criticized for being too theoretical and isolated from the problems experienced by common people. As a result, teachers were sent to the rural areas to "integrate with the masses." Great emphasis was placed on the achievements made by people with little formal education but much practical experience, and many stories were told of the lessons that were learned by educated people while doing manual labor.

In spite of their pride in the achievements of uneducated people, the Chinese believe that even more can be accomplished by an educated population. During the Cultural Revolution, some in China said that a theoretical education is worthless and that practical experience was all that counts. This attitude was seen as incorrect by the Chinese in 1973 since they believe that only limited success can be achieved without a broader understanding of theoretical principles. Theoretical and practical knowledge were thought to be equally important.

Productive Labor

In order to further emphasize the combination of theory and practice and to teach students to have respect for manual work, all students must participate in some form of productive labor as part of their schooling. Educational institutions arrange for students to do some work in conjunction with a commune or a local factory. The products that are produced by the students are either sold to the factory or commune, or used by the stu-

dents themselves. Although productive labor acts to increase production and adds to the school's income, the educational value of the work is considered to be the major factor.

At a kindergarten in Shanghai, children spent one-half hour per week packing flash light bulbs into shipping cartons. These bulbs were made in a nearby factory in which some of their parents worked. At a primary school in Nanking, students spent one full day per month assembling ball point pens at the school workshop. At a middle school in Nanking, students spent one-half month per year sewing quilts on a foot-treadle sewing machine. At universities, where students have more specialized skills, this productive labor is done in conjunction with their studies. For example, at Peking University, chemistry students work in the school pharmaceutical factory and agriculture students work on an experimental farm.

In addition, most schools have vegetable gardens in which the students work. In some cases, retired peasants teach students how to tend the garden. This not only teaches students the value



of agricultural skills, but also emphasizes self-reliance since the food is used in the school dining room where the students and the faculty eat.

In addition to this productive labor as part of the curriculum, students and faculty spend up to two months during their vacations working in factories or in the fields. This serves to increase production, but also serves to remind teachers and students about the type of life that most Chinese people live. It is hoped that students and teachers would also gain practical experience that will help them in their theoretical studies.

Prior to the Cultural Revolution, students and teachers were also required to participate in manual labor. However, this was often viewed negatively by students and teachers since time was being taken away from intellectual work. Thus, the time spent in manual labor decreased, and the time spent in intellectual study increased.

At the end of 1973, the Chinese believed that productive labor would remain as an integral part of the educational process. The Revolutionary Committees would prevent the de-emphasis of productive labor, and the continued political education of the teachers would stress its importance.

Student Fees

Although education is not free in China, it is considerably less expensive than it has ever been. Nurseries and kindergartens are free, with a small cost for food. The 24-hour nurseries do have fees, however. Primary schools and middle schools cost between two and four dollars per year per child.

Higher education is free, with all tuition, books, rent and medical care provided by the gov-

ernment. In addition, students receive a stipend equivalent to one-third of the average worker's salary to cover food and expenses. Students who had worked for over five years before attending the university continue to receive their normal salary instead of the stipend.

When asked why there should be any fees for education, the Chinese reply by saying that China is a poor country that cannot yet afford free education for everyone. They also stress the fact that the fees are much less than they used to be, that they are within range of almost all families, and that they can be waived if the family can't afford them.

Discussion

How effective are the Chinese schools in educating their students? This is a difficult question to answer since much of the information necessary to evaluate the schools is not available to foreigners. However, the available data indicate that the Chinese schools have been making tremendous progress.



First, the curriculum at all levels of education does reflect the political, economic and cultural values of Chinese socialism. Almost all visitors to China, including this author, report an extremely high degree of value consensus and commitment to socialism among the Chinese people at all age levels (e.g. Whitehead, 1972; Galbraith,

1972; Phillips, 1972). Undoubtedly, the educational system plays a large role in achieving this sense of group solidarity.

Second, enrollment at all levels of education has increased dramatically and the rate of illiteracy has dropped from over 80% in 1948 to less than 20% in the early 1970s. Universal primary school education is almost a reality.

Third, greater numbers of working class and peasant students are attending college than ever before. Prior to the Cultural Revolution, less than half of the college students came from working class and peasant families, even though people from these families comprised over 80% of the total population. In the early 1970s, the overwhelming majority of college students were from working class and peasant backgrounds (Nee, 1969; Whitaker and Shinn, 1972; Mauger, et al., 1974). This is one example of a specific post-Cultural Revolution policy that has been successfully implemented.

Fourth, the status of women at all levels of education has improved since 1949. Just prior to the revolution, for example, less than 1/5 of all students in higher education were women (Sidel, 1972). By 1973, over 1/3 of all college students were women. These figures indicate progress, but not total equality.

A fifth goal of the schools is to provide students with the theoretical and practical skills necessary for the continued economic development of China. This is the most difficult to evaluate since it is necessary to have longitudinal standardized test scores or some other equivalent measure of progress. Travelers hear many stories of technical "breakthroughs" achieved by young Chinese, and there is ample evidence that indicates continued economic growth in China (Robinson,

1973; Whitaker & Shinn, 1972). The real answer to this question will come in the future as the country becomes more dependent on the people that were educated since 1949.



In spite of these advances, there are many problems that still exist in the Chinese educational system. There are not enough schools or trained teachers, so it is not unusual to see classes of 40-50 or more in the primary and middle schools. Urban children generally spend more years in school than do rural children, in spite of the massive efforts by the government to equalize educational opportunity throughout the country. The urban-rural gap is narrowing, but it still exists (Mauger, et al., 1974).

Although the new college admissions procedure has been operating reasonably well, it is still possible for some students to circumvent this procedure. Early in 1974, for example, the major Chinese newspapers carried stories about a student who resigned from Nanking University because he had been admitted through the efforts of his father, a high-ranking army officer. The papers published the self-criticisms of the student and his parents in order to demonstrate to the country that the children of government officials should not receive special privileges (Renmin Ribao, 1974).

In spite of the tremendous improvement of the position of women in the educational system and in the general society, they have not achieved positions of complete equality. The percentage of women on the schools' Revolutionary Committees is

frequently lower than their numbers on the faculty or in the student body. Nursery and kindergarten teachers are exclusively women, and the percentage of women on the faculty decreases as one moves from primary school to middle school to higher education.

Although the Chinese schools have adopted the principle of combining theoretical knowledge, practical experience and political education, the optimal balance between the three is not yet known. One of the reasons that graduate education has not been reestablished since the Cultural Revolution is the fear that theoretical knowledge may take a higher priority than practical experience and political education. However, having no graduate education most certainly deprives the country of skilled people-power that is badly needed. Although it is easy for Western educators to criticize the Chinese schools on this issue, at least the Chinese are struggling with trying to find the optimal balance between academics, politics and practical experience. Western educators have given up the struggle in favor of a professional ideology that is theoretical and often self-serving.

Western educators frequently object to the role of politics and the lack of "academic freedom" in the Chinese schools. They argue that Western education is "value free" or "objective", and that Western teachers have the right to dissent from the dominant political and cultural values.

However, there is ample evidence to indicate that American education is inherently political. The system of education trains students to enter a highly stratified labor force in order to meet the needs of large corporations. White middle class males have the best chance of completing college and, therefore, are the most likely to enter the better paying more prestigious jobs.

Other jobs are generally left to working class and non-white students, and to women of all classes and races. The American schools perpetuate the system of inequality that exists in our country (Bowles, 1973; Pincus, 1974).

The curriculum in American schools reflects the political and economic stratification. The Black Studies Movement has shown that most American historians have not accurately discussed the role of racism in our society, and that most social scientists use ethnocentric criteria in studying the black community today. The Women's Studies Movement has documented the way in which social scientists have justified the oppression of women. These are not simply historical accidents. They are examples of the way in which American scholars use the political and economic status quo as their point of reference. Value-free education does not exist in our country.

The American schools also perform a number of direct services for the American elite. ROTC programs in high schools and colleges train young men to fight for American imperialism. Large research grants are provided by government and industry in a number of strategic areas -- weapons development, domestic and foreign intelligence, public opinion and attitude change, industrial relations, etc. Although some scholars working in these areas are doing so for "intellectual" reasons, their work is being used to strengthen American capitalism.

American educators also talk about "academic freedom" in the schools. However, American schools do not practice absolute academic freedom. Public school teachers are often fired for bringing "controversial" material into the classroom and for "deviating" from the approved curriculum, reading list or pedagogical techniques. How much employment security does a high school teacher

have if he or she refuses to lead the class in the flag salute?

Absolute academic freedom is not practiced in American higher education either. Radical faculty members are frequently denied tenure in spite of documented evidence of their abilities as teachers and scholars. The administrations of public institutions can generally veto any action taken by the faculty. Editors of scholarly journals can reject any article that is inconsistent with their professional and political prejudices.

Both Chinese and American schools are political, and neither practice absolute academic freedom. Chinese schools reflect the values of egalitarian socialism, and American schools reflect the values of corporate capitalism. Chinese educators are explicit about the role of politics in their schools, while American educators try to deny the political nature of their schools. The Chinese are explicit about the lack of academic freedom in their schools, while the American educators still try to perpetuate the myth of academic freedom. It is true, however, that there is more chance for American teachers to disagree with the dominant cultural and political values than their Chinese counterparts, but this freedom is far from absolute.

Of course, the ultimate evaluation of the Chinese schools must take into account the social system in which they are located. If one agrees with the basic Maoist principles of egalitarian socialism, it is easy to be sympathetic toward the Chinese educational system that is trying to implement those principles. It is possible to make constructive criticisms of the schools, but it is also clear that the present progress could not have been achieved without Revolution of 1949 and the Cultural Revolution of the late 1960s.

On the other hand, an individual who believes

in competition, individualism, meritocracy and capitalism will probably not feel comfortable with the Chinese schools because they reinforce a different set of values. The type of criticism made by these people will probably be directed ^{at} Chinese socialism as well as at Chinese education.

It is certainly possible to learn many lessons from the Chinese educational experience -- a national system of nurseries and kindergartens, real progress toward equal educational opportunity, rewarding students for public service as part of their educational experience, an attempt to break down status differences between teachers and students, and the like. These are some of the areas where American schools have failed, and some reformers may look to the Chinese schools as a model for change.

But a national system of child care centers would be difficult to achieve in American society because corporation and government officials do not want large numbers of women to enter the labor force which already shows high unemployment rates. Equal educational opportunity is impossible to achieve as long as economic inequality exists to such a large degree. Public service will be seen as an extracurricular activity as long as American schools are dominated by the ideology of meritocracy. And status distinctions will not be eliminated as long as educators control the limited access to social mobility. Fung Yu-Lan, Professor of Philosophy at Peking University, said

Some foreign visitors are impressed by some of the specific measures in our educational system. They say "this way of doing things is not bad; we should try it when we go back." But this is nothing but daydreaming. What we are doing in China cannot be done in a capitalist society (Fann, 1973: 136).

The Chinese were able to improve their educational system only after successfully defeating feudalism and capitalism in 1949. Next, they had to "reeducate the educators" during the Cultural Revolution by helping them to realize that their skills should be used to benefit the entire population, and not just for individual gain. American schools will not "serve the people" until the political and economic structure of the society is restructured to "serve the people". We should fight to reform the schools, but we must organize for the revolution that is necessary to achieve economic and social equality for us all.



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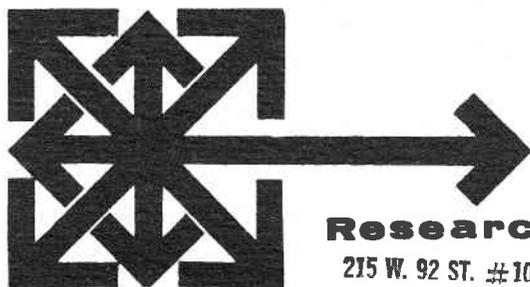
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Research Group One

215 W. 92 ST. #10F, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10025

2743 Maryland Avenue

Baltimore, Maryland 21218