

One-third of the prisons in China have been made special schools. Education in prison inmates. Through education, they are expected to 'clean' their criminal way, earn proficiency in various skills, and turn over a new leaf—former criminals become view correspondent LI NING reports

The inmates of Hebei No. 1 Prison are undergoing reform through labour and through education: evening classes. There they study politics, literacy law and skills such as welding, machinery design, tailoring and rabbit breeding. The prison has recently been made a special school.

In the last two years, close to one-third of the prisons has recently been made a special schools.

According to Shao Guixin from the Labour Reform Administrative Bureau under the Ministry of Justice, education in the special schools aims to reform the students. Through education, they are expected to "clean" their criminal ways, learn about and abide by the law and turn over a new leaf.

In the past, prisoners received only political education in the hope that they better reform themselves. But now China's Ministry of Justice has decided to couple the traditional practice of reform through labour with skills in order to produce people useful to society and the state.

In these special schools, political study takes up 40 per cent of the time, general culture and skills courses divide the rest of the time equally.

Political education is an established part of the reform through labour programme in New China. But not until recent years has it been carried out systematically. It now includes education in the legal system, in outlook on life morality policies and current events. "In 1987 all the political courses of the special schools focused on upholding the socialist road," said a Beijing official in charge. "All the prisoners are required to take the courses."

General Culture. All those who have not had an education beyond high school and who are not too old or sick must study primary or middle school courses which are the basis for their studies of politics and skills. Illiteracy can be a cause of crime. Of the prisoners in

China today, one-sixth cannot read. A total of 15,000 literacy classes have started up catering to over 70 per cent of the illiterate prisoners.

Finally Xi began devoting himself to classes, and learnt to operate a lathe in five months. He could read newspapers and write letters after six months' study. Because of his diligence, his sentence was reduced by three years. This served as an excellent impetus for others in the prison.

Like Xi, Zhang Xiaowei refused to study when he was first put in jail. The officers asked his family to take to him. "We hope you will repent and make a fresh start, and work and study hard in order to get your sentence mitigated," said Zhang's brother. The truth came home to Zhang as he watched other people being let out early. "I have no reason to waste my time in prison," he said. "I should study hard."

The Hebei No. 1 Prison was named the Peicai (training

people) School in 1985 by the Hebei Provincial Educational Bureau. The school is a three storey building, complete with an audio room, a video room and a library with over 20,000 volumes.

Political courses are taught on two evenings a week through a cable television system. The students watch in the classrooms, and receive guidance from the teachers in their study after the screenings. This is common practice in many prison schools. Generally, however, these schools do not have adequate facilities. Often the technical courses must be taught in the cells. The government is making effort to change the situation.

PRISONER TEACHERS

Some of the better educated prisoners are appointed teachers of these behind bars schools. Of the 170 teachers at the Peicai School, 140 are prisoners eight of them full-time teachers.

Zhang Guoyu is one of the eight. Before he was sen-

tenced to death with two years' reprieve for rape in December 1984, Zhang was a high school teacher in Qinhuangdao City with 26 years' experience.

Soon after his arrival at the prison, Zhang was made a fulltime teacher. "This was a surprise to me" he said. "Now I teach middle school maths and tutor some higher maths. Although I don't have freedom, I have my own world — an office and books. I'm happy to share my knowledge with my students in this special school."

In the last two years, Zhang has devised many teaching books running to 1.47 million words. His death sentence was withdrawn and 18 years' imprisonment imposed instead. "I must work harder for a further cut into my sentence," said Zhang with conviction.

The No. 1 Prison runs a college-level programme for some of its prisoners. The class teaches 24 courses on machine tools, and the tea-

chers come from a university. In the last three years, 37 students averaging 23 years of age, completed their 3,200 hours of study, and 36 of them graduated with good grades. Three have been recruited as teachers or technicians at the school, the rest have been assigned to work in various workshops as technicians.

The prison has a hospital in which eight of the doctors are inmates themselves.

BENEFITS

These studies have allowed prisoners who have reached the level of middle school or high school graduate to receive a diploma from the government-run Adult Educational Bureau. Those who have passed technical examinations receive a certificate. Having most prisoners working towards a diploma or certificate is good for order in the prison.

The prisoners' families respond too. In the past, they often brought food and cigar-

rettes; now they send books and stationery.

Creating social wealth. The Hebei prison is a comprehensive labour reform camp complete with a motor plant (annual capacity of 1,000 C-620 lathes), a printing house specialised in printing university examination papers, a ceramics factory, a furniture factory and a farm where pigs, rabbits, deer and chickens are raised. Under the guidance of the warders, the prisoners apply what they have learnt in the classrooms to production, and make products as advanced as any in the province. Some even introduce technical innovations.

Li Guijun works in the foundry at the prison. With the support of the shop director, he implemented improvements in the smelting materials. It was a success leading to harder machine tools with longer service lives. The renovation also saved 111,000 yuan a year in production costs. Between 1984 and June 1986, the prisoners made 312 innovations earning 1.57 million yuan in the process.

Employment on the outside. Assigning ex-prisoners to jobs is a problem because units tend to reject them and more importantly because many of them know almost nothing about technology. But those who have studied culture and technology in prison find they have many more opportunities.

Ma Zhengang was quite illiterate when he was incarcerated. He studied and laboured hard. After he became head of a machine tool maintenance group, the group made some 100,000 yuan in profits that year. In February 1986, he was released eight months early and employed right away by a county factory as a grade-seven worker (the highest being grade-eight).

"It is the prison school which has rehabilitated me into a useful member of society. I must work hard in the future to contribute to the four modernisations," said Ma with tears in eyes when he left prison.