

A STUDY

The Systems Of Education

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In this last instalment of his article, the author examines the system of education in China.

IN old China eight out of ten people were illiterate. But since 1949 people on an immense scale have been receiving education at all levels. Education has been popularized not only on the plains but also in the mountainous regions, pastoral areas, remote frontier regions and places where the minority peoples live in compact communities.

New China runs a great variety of schools to meet actual conditions. Apart from higher educational institutes and creches, kindergartens, primary and middle schools, there are a great many workers' colleges run by factories, colleges run by farms, short-term training courses run by Universities, correspondence courses, vocational schools, part-work-part-study schools, technical schools and political night schools for the farming people. There are "mobile schools" with travelling teachers who make the "house-teachers" who make the rounds of remote villages composed of only a few families. There are also "horseback schools" in which the teachers move from pasture to pasture along with the herdsmen and their children.

Another important and attractive feature is that none is unemployed in China—educated or illiterate. But unemployment was a serious problem in old China. The number of unemployed workers and intellectuals in the cities in 1949, the year of liberation, exceeded four million.

Education is almost free and universal. Tuition fee is relatively low, within the reach of all. Children in the primary schools each pay a fee

of 2.50 Yuan plus 0.48—0.80 Yuan for books and stationery each term. Gone are the days when a family could not send their children to school for lack of funds. The major expenses of the schools are paid out of the national budget.

More than 99% of school-age children are in school. There are 7 times as many primary school students and 24 times as many middle-school students compared with the highest number in pre-liberation days.

Before the cultural revolution, a student spent 18 to 20 years from primary school through middle school and university. Now primary schooling covers five years, middle school four to five years, and University three years. Primary education is from 6—7 years to 12-13. Primary schools take children at about the age of 6-7. After the primary school education they are accepted into the local middle school. The next stage is the University.

Under the 1951 regulations the organisation of kindergartens for the 2 to 6 years age-group was outlined. Industrial plants employing women workers provide creches. The aims of kindergartens are to provide education for the all-round development of the children and at the same time to help mothers of young children to join in productive work as well as in the political educational and cultural activities of their communities. In re-

cent years, with the increase of women workers, kindergartens have been vigorously developed.

The old teaching material has been thoroughly replaced. Before Liberation its teaching system, curricula, teaching materials and methods were copied from the foreign countries. But now new texts have been written for primary and middle schools. A great deal has been made to infuse the new teaching material with Chairman Mao's thinking in revolutionizing education and the political line that guides it. Since the foundations for a child's attitudes are laid in primary school, China gives first place to ideological education. New teaching material, compiled since the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, is used by the colleges of arts, science, engineering and agriculture and by medical and teachers' colleges. This is also the case for all subjects and all grades in the primary and middle schools.

Education is no longer confined to the classroom. Students acquire more practical and theoretical knowledge than in the past because superfluous subjects and redundant or useless teaching materials have been discarded. More important political and ideological education has been strengthened; book learning is closely combined with practical production, and theory with practice. Primary and middle schools in town and country have established close links with nearby factories etc.

Where conditions permit, many primary and middle schools have opened small factories and farms and invited workers, peasants and army men in as part-time teachers. The Universities have instituted a new system of combining teaching, scientific research and production labour. This means that regular contact is established with factories and schools run their own factories and farms. To become closer to the workers and peasants, teachers and students take part in collective labour for a given period. Instead of giving lectures to cram the students' heads full of information, the teachers encourage them to think things out independently. In universities, opportunity is given for students to take the rostrum and expand their own views.

A comradely relationship exists between teachers and students, who argue and exchange views freely. The teachers regularly get together to exchange experience and talk about ways to improve their work. They often discuss how to bring the textbooks to life, how to relate learning to what the pupil has learned from life. This is, instead of just pouring knowledge into the pupils' heads, the teacher stimulates them to use their brains and develop their ability to think and to analyze problems.

In fine, the education system helps the Chinese pupils develop the idea of wholeheartedly serving the people. China's education policy "is to develop students morally intellectually and physically and become a worker with both socialist consciousness and culture."