

# Impressions of China

*To see something once is better than to hear someone talk about it one hundred times.*

—Ancient Chinese saying

Arrival in Beijing is much as one would expect — a massive air terminal building, only one or two planes on the ground, soldiers and officials everywhere, large paintings of the Chairman looking down on everything. It's like arriving at a giant summer camp. And the bus ride into town adds to this impression. New construction is going up on all sides. Thousands of similarly dressed people on bicycles, buses, trucks, wagons and carts are going about their business industriously. Everything is orderly, organized and functioning smoothly. The Communist Party certainly seems to have the situation firmly under control.

But first impressions don't always last. The farther south we traveled the looser things seemed to be: The spotless streets of Beijing gave way to the litter of Shanghai, the blue and gray clothes of Beijing to the pink and orange of Guangzhou. Even the language changes, from the straight-forward-sounding dialect of the north to the almost poetic sounds of the south. Our northern interpreters sometimes had trouble making themselves understood in the south. It is difficult to believe that any government will ever control completely a country as populous and as diverse as China.

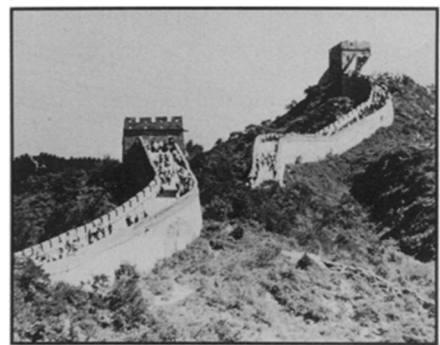
China may have a long way to go, but it is clear from what we saw that much has been accomplished since the 1949 liberation and the days of the "man eating society" described by Mao's favorite revolutionary writer, Lu Xun. A 54-year-old brigade leader at a tea plantation outside of Hangzhou told us how his parents were forced to sell two of their children to the landlord in order to buy food for the rest of



the family. Only two of six children survived, but the brigade leader now oversees tea production on what was the landlord's property.

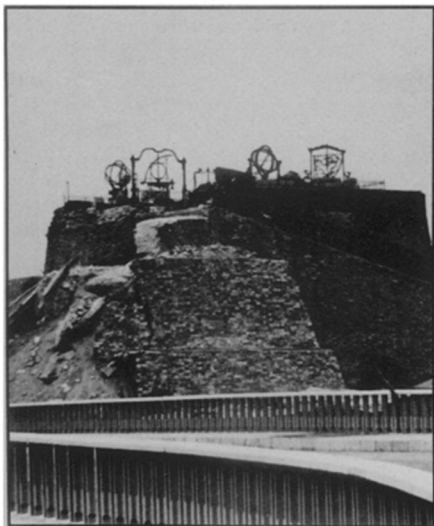
The crowds make a great impression. Everywhere we went there were people. Thousands of bicycles fill the streets (there are no private cars); long lines form at movie houses at 8 a.m.; book stores, department stores and shops are jammed from morning till night every day of the week. And we made some sort of impression on the crowds. They stared at us with interest, communicated when possible and followed us up and down streets, in and out of shops.

The overwhelming impression was one of friendliness. The recent normalization of relations between China and the United



States probably had something to do with this. The party line now says "Americans are our good foreign friends." But beyond this, and on a more personal level, we did make friends. And these friends dispelled any feelings that China is strange or even exotic. It is a nation of many people working hard to achieve a common goal — and succeeding.

—Robert J. Trotter



*Saying goodbye. Di Xiaojing of MODERNIZATION magazine; Wang Zheng, who arranged our tour, and Zhu Baochen of the Scientific and Technological Association; Huo Shih-liang of the State Commission for Science and Technology: our guides, interpreters and friends.*

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