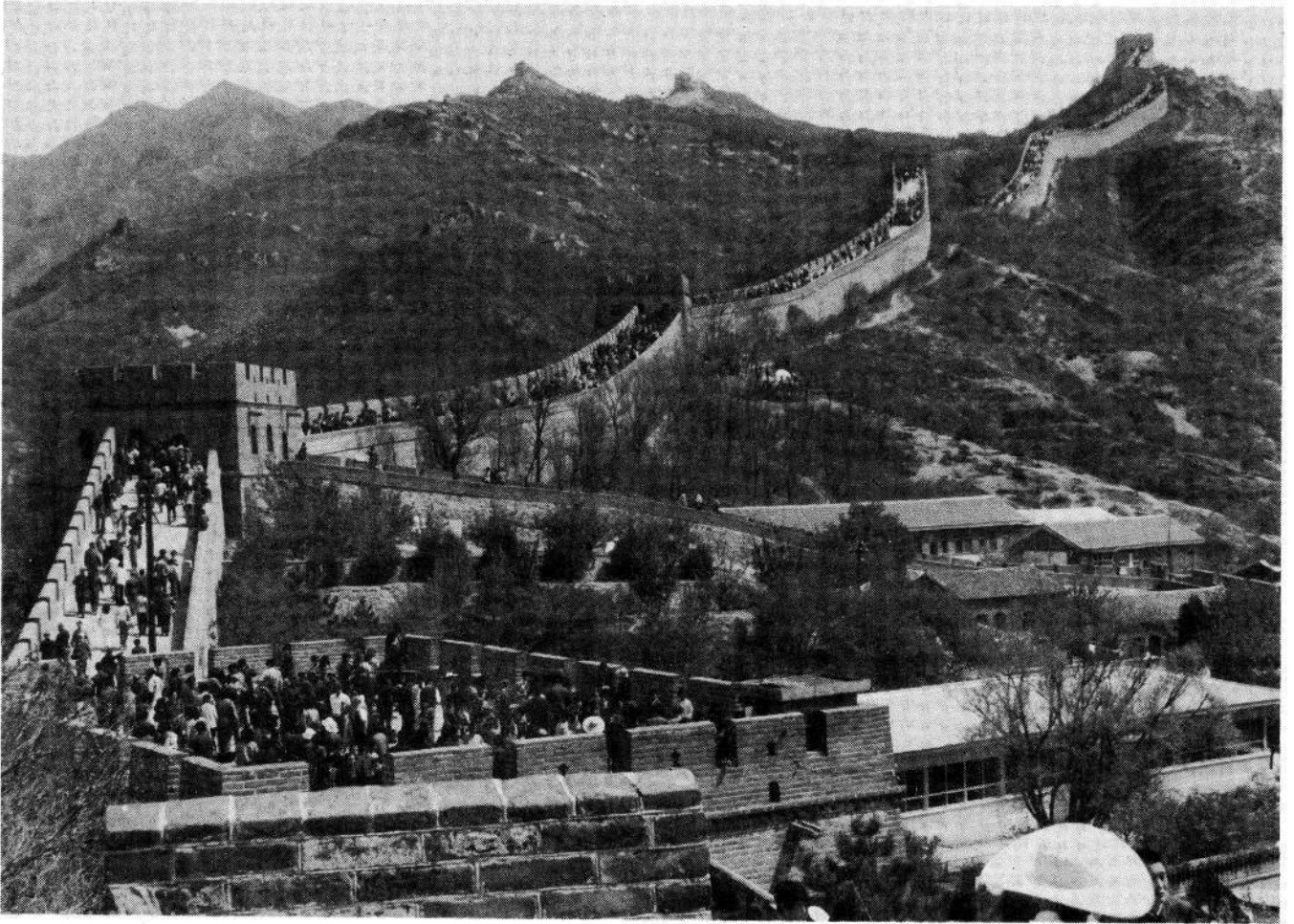


A DOCTOR VISITS CHINA

by Alan Friedman



● The Great Wall of China near Peking. The total length of the Wall is something like 2 000 miles and it is the only man-made structure visible with the naked eye from the moon. It was erected about 900 years B.C.

In 1980 I visited China on a group package tour but I had been invited by the Chinese Medical Association to give some lectures whilst I was in Peking and this resulted in my being invited back again this year as a guest of The Chinese Medical Association and to give a series of lectures. The article summarises my experiences and impressions of these two trips together with some "facts" I gleaned in conversation with the Chinese people with whom I spent some time. The facts may not be absolutely correct, but, I believe, are reasonably so.

FACTS

1) The total population of China, as everyone knows, is one thousand million.

2) RETIREMENT AGE

Women in heavy industry and on the land retire at the age of fifty.

Women in white-collar occupations retire at the age of fifty five.

Men retire at the age of sixty.

However there is no age limit for the retirement of Professors.

PENSIONS

- 1) Anyone who participated in the revolutionary struggle retires on a pension equal to their salary.
- 2) Anyone who is employed for over thirty years retires on a pension equal to about 90 % of their salary.
- 3) Anyone who is employed for less than thirty years gets a pension of between 70% to 80% of their salary.

Everyone in China is on a salary, and every industry or service, such as hotels or restaurants, is owned by the state. Nobody

can run a business in which he employs someone else, but anyone, especially a young person, who has a skill such as tailoring is encouraged to open a "one man" business. There is a large "bulge" of young people somewhere between 20 and 30, because there was little contraception during the cultural revolution, and there are not enough jobs for all such young people.

Now the official approved number of children per family is one, and there is an allowance for this child. Should there be a second child, not only is there no allowance for the second child, but the allowance for the first child must be paid back to the state. I think the whole nation accepts that this population control is essential if any real progress is to be made.

Artists get salaries and something of the profits of, say, books or musical performances. Similarly farmers are on salaries and most of their produce goes to the state, but they are allowed to keep some of the produce and sell it on the free market. The Chinese are very keen on fresh vegetables, and as most do not have refrigerators, they shop almost daily for fresh produce.

Rent costs about five percent of the monthly salary. There is a large housing shortage, but wherever I went I saw very large blocks of flats being built. Everyone in China receives a rice allocation and a cotton allocation. Medical treatment is free, and school education is free.

University entrance is by an examination system. If the suc-

cessful candidates' parents cannot afford to contribute anything to their child's higher education it is free, otherwise they make some contribution.

I am informed that something like 80% of city households have a television set, black and white. The hotels for tourists are fairly comfortable, with nice bathrooms, comfortable beds, and excellent colour-television sets made in Japan.

So far there are virtually no privately owned motor cars, although I believe these are just beginning to appear. The cars on the roads are either official cars or taxis. Most cars I saw are made in China, but Japan is beginning to make inroads. Urban transport is either by buses, or trolley buses, of which there are large numbers, and usually very full. The main individual form of transport is a bicycle, and the streets where everyone goes are simply packed with cyclists. There are now considerable traffic jams developing in the larger cities, due to the large number of buses and the large number of commercial vehicles. Trains in China are very comfortable, and undoubtedly the best way to see China except perhaps for the longer journeys. All the larger cities and towns appear to be well served by air service.

These introductory facts give no real picture or impression of what China is like.

Yes, most people are dressed in their blue jackets and trousers, men and women of all ages. Children are colourfully dressed, and younger girls are beginning to wear beautifully coloured



● The Lake at Wuxi, near Shanghai.



● The main urban transport: buses and bicycles. This is the main street in Peking which runs between the People's Square which holds 1 million people, and the Imperial Palace or Forbidden City.

knitwear. Everyone I saw was cleanly and neatly dressed, with never even a sign of a patch on either a jacket or a pair of trousers.

China has a six day week, and most people have Sundays off, but in many industries, the "day off" is staggered so there are always Chinese people on the streets, in the shops, and in the sight-seeing areas of which China has probably more beautiful ones than any other country in the world.

The Chinese are "family" people in that they are out and about with their children and their parents. They are an outgoing extrovert people, like so many peoples in the East. They laugh and joke and smile and chatter, and everywhere I went there was a casual carefree atmosphere.

Young Chinese men who speak English will not hesitate to come up and politely ask one of them if they can practise their English, and then discuss world politics, Chinese politics or anything else one cares to discuss. They show no apprehension about speaking to foreigners. There is an openness and friendliness that the Chinese people show which is very difficult to describe, and for me forms the most exciting and exhilarating aspect of China. Everyone is very polite in a friendly way, and the younger ones, say twenty to thirty years of age, have an impressive confidence. Young hotel workers, for instance, treat one as

an equal, not as a superior or an inferior. In a large hotel dining room they cheerfully call across to each other, which in no way could be construed as anything but natural, and never rude.

On my first visit, my son and a friend were with me on a car trip. We stopped near a farming village and the two of them went in. They were asked through our interpreter if they would stay for the evening meal, and when they explained that they had to return there and then to Peking, they were invited to spend two weeks on the farm later when time permitted.

CHINESE HOSPITALS

I saw a number of hospitals in different parts of China, and they are housed in either very old buildings, or moderately old buildings, or in fact some very modern buildings, something like the situation in England say fifteen or twenty years ago, and not so very different from hospitals I have seen in Japan.

As far as I can ascertain from what I have seen, learnt from discussions, or read in the excellent newspaper the China Daily, the whole of which is written in very good English, this large nation has the clearly stated aim of becoming a modern state in all senses of the phrase by the end of the



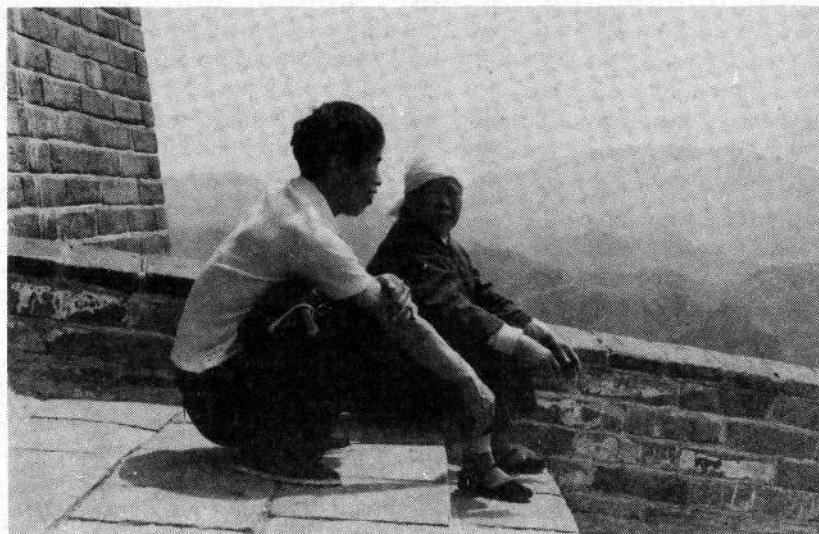
● In parts the Wall is very steep. It is said three armed horsemen could ride abreast on it.

century, and this undoubtedly applies to the medical services and expertise.

China is one of the many countries short of foreign capital, and this of course has its effect on the availability of foreign equipment. However they are manufacturing more and more of their own equipment, including for instance lasers for eye surgery. I saw some departments that had virtually all the equipment and expertise one would find in a really up-to-date western hospital, whereas I also saw in a very old hospital in a fairly small room, first class eye surgery being done on three operating tables at the same time.

The Doctors I met are up-to-date on literature and practices, and more and more doctors from the West are making the pilgrimage and imparting their expertise to their Chinese colleagues, whose enthusiasm, dedication and warm-hearted friendship simply overwhelm all I have met who have made the visit.

Although the general standard of living is low by Western standards I could see some noticeable changes in the eighteen months between my two trips, and one cannot but be enormously impressed by the progress this country has made since the revolution about thirty-three years ago. □



● Resting on top of a high part of the Wall. The fascinating hills in this region can be seen.