

Life in rural China changing to carts from shoulder poles

By DAVID LOUIE

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(A June graduate of Occidental College, David Louie is employed in a bank in South Pasadena.)

The Chinese boy taunted me as he balanced the bamboo pole on his shoulder, a full basket of rice at each end, and headed for the village. "Hey!" he shouted. "See if you can carry as much as I can."

He looked only 12 or 13 years old. He was at least a head shorter than I. Amused at the contest, Chinese men and women twisted under their 100-pound loads to watch their foreign visitor try this ancient carrying method.

I bent under the pole, and straightened up, the heavy baskets swaying. My first few halting, uncertain steps sent the Chinese into laughter. Unpracticed in the rhythmic, hip-swiveling gait that keeps the flexing pole steady, I could hardly keep up with youngsters half my size.

There were many things to learn during the two and a half months I spent among my relatives on the big river commune, 65 miles from Canton in southeastern China. The commune includes the village where my grandfather grew up before he emigrated to the United States. My stay there was a high point of my 4½-month visit to China on an international fellowship for independent study abroad, provided by Occidental College, where I was a student.

Shoulder poles are a common sight in the Chinese countryside, where people used them for carrying rice, wood, water, bricks and other goods along roads and narrow paths.

But carrying heavy loads with them is hard even when you are accustomed to it. Once, as I sat drinking tea with several cadres (Political leaders) from the area, I was told that they had asked the people at district-wide meetings to name the hardest part of their work. Carrying things by shoulder pole, the peasants had answered unanimously, and so the cadres had decided to encourage the construction of hand carts to take over some of the hauling. Eventually, they hope to have enough carts to be able to dispense with shoulder poles.

The thing that amazed me most about China was how rapidly things are accomplished. A couple of months after this conversation, when the rice harvest was over, we turned to the problem of the carts. I went with several of the mechanically-inclined young men from house to house to examine the old carts that some people had, to see if they could be rehabilitated and then purchased by the village. Finding most of these carts is sad disrepair, the villagers decided to build some. The young men and I went out

behind the village to fell trees. We dug around the trees with a pick, cut the roots and with a great heave pushed them down. We carried them to the front of the village where they were cut into boards. Carpenters from a neighboring village came and set to work constructing the carts from the wood. We laughed and joked as we put together the seven sets of recently purchased wheels from Canton. Then, with the spirit of self-reliance, we gathered around a bellows and an urn full of glowing charcoal, fashioning discarded metal into the fittings needed to hold the carts together. It took us only 2½ weeks after the decision to construct the carts. The task of moving great amounts of straw fell to us with our handcarts, since motor vehicles, which are owned by the state, were rare in the countryside. I hardly ever saw trucks as I worked in the fields. The commune owned several tractors, and the production brigade had only recently purchased one. But these were needed for hauling more important materials and supplies. Now and then they were used for plowing, but



Tobacco, cotton sales may signal breakthrough in U. S.-China trade

(From UPI dispatches)

Major sales of tobacco and cotton to the People's Republic of China by United States companies were announced this month.

The sale of \$55,000 worth of U.S. tobacco "may represent a breakthrough" toward reviving the once-substantial American tobacco trade with China, the Agriculture Department said.

The Foreign Agricultural Service was not aware of the sale, negotiated through a Hong Kong trading firm, until the U.S. Liaison Office in Peking was informed on June 15. About 200 metric tons of tobacco, worth over half a million dollars, was reportedly sold.

The final shipment of a 400,000-bale cotton contract between the Plains Cotton Cooperative Association of Lubbock, Tex., and the Chinese government was scheduled to arrive in Shanghai last week. The sale, negotiated last December, marks the first time U.S. cotton has entered China in 20 years.

Cotton officials said China may be the largest buyer of their product in the world today. Reports indicate that the cotton the

nation has purchased totals more than 1.6 billion bales from worldwide sources this year.

The PCCA transaction is believed to be the largest single sale of cotton by one organization to a single buyer in modern history. The value of the sale is estimated at \$60 million.

Chinese purchases of more than four million tons of U.S. grains and soybeans for the past two years have been more widely publicized than either the tobacco or the cotton deal.

Before World War II, China was the second largest importer of U.S. tobacco. But even before U.S.-Chinese trade halted when Communist forces took control after the war, China was gradually increasing its own production and reducing imports.

China now ranks as the world's second largest producer of tobacco, trailing only the United States, officials noted. According to the U.S. Foreign Agricultural Service, it seems likely that China will be interested in selling to U.S. firms the cheaper grades of flue-cured tobacco raised in that country, in exchange for the higher quality tobacco raised here.

Millions take to water to fete Mao's swim

By RENE FLIPO
AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

PEKING — Millions of Chinese, more than a million in Peking alone, celebrated the seventh anniversary of Mao Tse-tung's Yangtze swim July 17 by swimming in rivers, lakes and swimming pools

near their homes. The New China News Agency reported the demonstrations but without specifically mentioning that the demonstrations commemorated Chairman Mao's July 16, 1966 exploit of swimming about 10 miles of the river at Wuhan in 65 minutes.

He was 73 years old at the time.

the lay of the land, with its terraces and small rice paddies, will have to undergo great transformation before tractors can be used extensively for cultivation.

Bicycles are the most common vehicles. Privately owned, they are the main form of transportation. My relatives owned a bicycle, which my cousin took with him while he was living away from home attending high school. When he was on vacation, we would ride it to the market place early each morning to do the daily shopping.

People in Jung Seh rose each morning usually before sunrise, to do their daily chores. There were clothes to be washed, a private vegetable garden to be tended, children to be sent off to school, clothes to be mended, wood to be chopped, and food to be bought. All of these had to be done before 7 o'clock, when the workday began.

Before each session of work, we would gather under the big tree by the fish pond in front of the village, and sit on hewn stone benches while one of the team leaders called the roll. It was up to the individual whether he wanted to work. Of course, if one didn't work, one got no pay.

We usually began working at 7 a.m., but there was no problem with punctuality. The rural atmosphere was easygoing. If somebody didn't appear until after the rollicall, he had only to tell the team leader. It was whether he worked that was important.

Before we went into the fields, my relatives would say to me, "You don't want to work now. It's too hot out there, you'll get all sweaty and dirty. You should rest and relax." But I wouldn't let them treat me as a guest. I went out with the rest of the young men to harvest rice, plant vegetables and dig canals, sharing the 8-hour workday. The people seemed to appreciate this, and spent much time explaining their lives to me.

Life at Big River commune is not easy. It is filled with work, physical labor, struggle, often without the help of complex machines and technology.

Yet, the times are changing, and the story of their carts is an example of this. Of course, shoulder poles are a well-established method of transport, still used for much of the hauling, and it will take more than seven carts to lift the loads off the shoulders of the people. But those few carts are a step.

And that small change will be repeated over and over—until eventually there will be enough carts to make shoulder poles unnecessary. Then the quality of life will be improved at Big River commune and its counterparts throughout China, and on a return visit I will be spared the embarrassment of little boys challenging me to shoulder-pole contests they will always win.

Early harvests up despite drought, hail

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

HONG KONG — China, fighting hard to beat a drought, has scored initial success by reaping good early wheat harvests this year in three key regions of the country, Radio Peking reports.

Despite drought, hail-storm and insects, communes in the Wenchang region of southwest Szechwan province, the Shih-chiachuang region of Hopei province, and the Uuncheng region of Shansi province in the north reported a 10 per cent rise in wheat output over 1972.

Earlier, Premier Chou En-lai had disclosed that China's grain production for 1972 fell by 10 million metric tons, or about four per cent from the 246 million metric tons of 1971 because of inclement weather. As a result, China had to import wheat from Canada, Australia and America to cope with the demand.

In all cases, commune members extended wheat acreages by either improving the soil, increasing the frequencies of irrigation or making use of underground water, the broadcast said. Whether China has won the battle against the unprecedented drought remains to be seen when reports from other parts of Chinese grain-producing areas pour in to make the picture more complete.

French leader notes Chinese independence

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

PARIS — China has deliberately chosen a plodding pace of economic development, former French Premier Jacques Chaban-Delmas reported this month after a rare 5,000-mile trip through that country as a guest of the government.

China's motive is to avoid depending on foreigners in any way, Chaban-Delmas wrote in an article entitled "The Price of Independence", published in the Paris newspaper "Le Monde".

So strong is the desire for complete independence that the Chinese government refuses to buy machinery on credit like other countries, he explained. The Chinese take only as much as they can pay cash for.

China expelled thousands of Soviet industrial advisers in 1961, the article recalled, "because Chinese leaders felt that Moscow's behavior tended to assure Soviet control of China, a historical habit that Peking attributes unhesitatingly to the Russians."

The Russian exodus left many factories half built, and hurt China's industrial development. The Chinese don't want to run that risk again, the French visitor said. They only envisage using foreigners' technological lead.