

examination, highly competitive, and those who fail at the first attempt often try again in successive years. Families lay great stress on schooling, on learning, on getting on, and in a society where jobs are allocated, not chosen, success in exams leads to better employment prospects for life. Some kind of housing is almost always allocated with the job.

One of the many things I did not learn in my short stay was what happens to the work misfits who in England might present as psychiatric problems. Is there any regular attempt to reallocate them, is psychiatric assessment taken into account? From the patients I saw I got the impression that questions of work suitability or capability were not considered by the psychiatrist, and it was not expected that the employer would receive advice about easing the patient back into work or improving the prognosis. If this is not present practice, it is likely to come in time. I was interested that forensic psychiatry, especially in dealing with arson and sex crimes as well as homicide, has recently become important. Professor Liu told me he has two or three such referrals a week in Chengdu, and that a group of police, magistrates and other officials meets with psychiatrists to discuss such problems. Psychiatry may have a low status in medical circles (even more so than with us), but it seems to be appreciated in the Sichuan official world.

Its status in the teaching hospital may improve as the research groups in the department of psychiatry begin to be better known, since most of them are in the field of biological psychiatry—but they only began in 1980. Platelet monoamine oxidase in schizophrenia, the dexamethasone suppression test in severe depressive illness, sleep EEG in depressive illness, chromosome studies in mental retardation and abnormalities induced by psychotropic drugs are some of the topics. Equipment is sparse but adequate, the enthusiasm and ability of the workers striking. The difficulty is how to find the time and energy to think through the problems and complete the studies fully when there are so many pressing problems of new out-patients and need for new facilities flooding in.

Generalizations about China in all its vastness and variety are likely to be absurd or mistaken when based simply on two weeks in one place. I had also spent two weeks in North China in 1979 and done some reading, but this hardly alters my inevitable limitations. I offer my

impressions with due reserve, as a fragment of possible truth.

Where I was, things were developing very fast, with an air of increasing confidence, in the direction of material prosperity and high technology. Psychiatry is sharing in this development, with big plans for expansion. It is firmly medically based, somewhat conservative, and slow to experiment with new approaches and new ideas. I think this is because of a cultural difference between East and West. In Britain at least we have a long tradition of individual enterprise, of striking out in some direction on our own responsibility, perhaps in defiance of higher authority, and getting our successes eventually officially approved. One thinks of Francis Drake, Nelson, Florence Nightingale—but such behaviour is not acceptable in modern China, and I suspect never was acceptable before. Responsibilities are more defined and hierarchically limited, stepping out of line not tolerated. Although Chinese psychiatrists know about lithium and about modified ECT, it is difficult for them to try them in their practices unless an instruction to do so comes from higher up. This has its good side in preventing dangerous treatments and as a stabilizing social force, but it also slows real advance.

As for the patients, it seemed to me that in spite of a very different history and philosophical background, and different social customs, they suffer from the same range of neurotic, psychotic, organic and personality ills as we do, in very much the same ways. It will be interesting to see, when complete epidemiological surveys are made, whether there are quantitative differences as compared with the West, and if so, whether these relate to the different attitudes to sexuality, or to work, or to the family which still continue.

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psychiatric tutors and consultants would refrain from contacting them regarding results.

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