

Seminar Provides Glimpses of Russia-China

By Susan Chase



Photo by Martha Cooley

Seminar group gathers in China with the Great Wall winding in the background.

Mingling with the great crowd, last June, a group of twenty-seven Americans shuffled across Moscow's Red Square. The large brick area, a site of famous demonstrations and parades, was filled with tourists, who cast their eyes upon the structures that make up the square's four sides: St. Basil's cathedral, Gum (the world's largest department store), a historical museum, and the intimidating Kremlin wall. Near one corner, the guard was changing at Lenin's mausoleum, a modest black building that was usually the object of a long line of people waiting to enter and view Lenin's body. At the time, however, no line existed. The mausoleum was closed.

Twenty days later, the same group of Americans stood on part

of the Great Wall, a few miles from Peking. The amazing structure, built by the Chinese more than 1500 years ago for defensive purposes, wriggles across a beautiful mountainous landscape. Although only a few of its 2000 miles were visible, the tremendous wall of stone was impressive.

Red Square and the Great Wall were just two stops during an 8-week trip of those Americans participating in the Guilford/UNC-G Russia-China summer seminar. Led by Martha Cooley and her husband, UNC-G professor Jim Cooley, the group was comprised of students and alumni from the two schools.

Two weeks were spent travelling through Europe, yielding visits to Amsterdam, Berlin, and

Warsaw. The three weeks were devoted to the Soviet Union, and another three weeks to the People's Republic of China.

While in Russia, the group stayed in Leningrad and Moscow, before venturing across the country on the Trans-Siberian railroad. The train ride took six days from Moscow to Irkutsk, with one day in the middle spent in Novosibirsk. The group then spent a few days in Irkutsk on Lake Baikal before heading towards China. Back on a train for a few days, the collection of students and alumni went from Irkutsk, through Mongolia to Peking. After Peking, the itinerary included stops in Xian, Shanghai, Nanking, and Canton. Finally, the group enjoyed a few shopping days in Hong Kong before the long flight back to New York.

Although the eight weeks were tiring, the travelers from Greensboro experienced an exciting, unforgettable, and very educational journey. Not only were they learning some of the history of Russia and China, but they also were observing today's life in the two largest communist countries.

In Russia, the group visited various art museums, cathedrals, monasteries; the Kremlin in Moscow; the ancient cities of Vladimir and Suzdal; and Leo Tolstoy's home near Moscow, Yasmaya Polyana. Today's communist control was brought to reality by countless billboards of Lenin, posters of Party slogans, and the carefully guided tours. The Soviets' industrial inferiority to the United States became obvious, as did the lack of personal freedoms we take for granted.

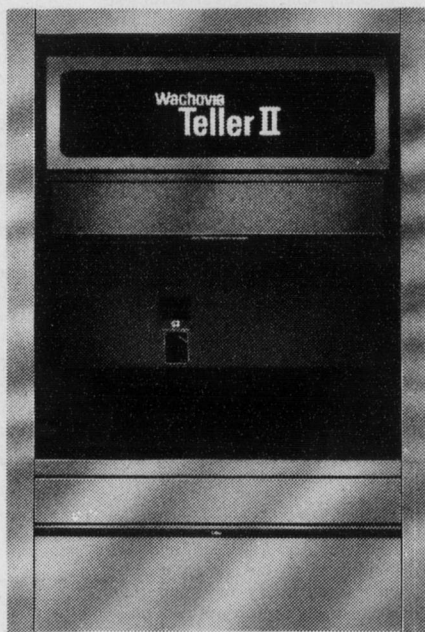
In China, the group was taken to Buddha temples, tombs from the Ming Dynasty, the Forbidden city, the discovery site of Peking man, Sun Yet-sen's mausoleum, and the Peking zoo to see the giant pandas. Factories were also visited. The group was privy to the production of cloisonne articles and silk rugs as well as the carving of jade and ivory. Today's differences between China and the U.S. were highlighted by the Chinese agrarian society, the use of bicycles instead of cars, and the residential areas. Also, the Chinese are still unaccustomed to foreigners and stare unashamedly at them in the streets.

The Guilford/UNC-G group members had opportunities to speak with natives of both Russia and China and learn something about their lives. Even though communication was rarely a problem because the interested natives could speak English, the Americans often found the conversations limited. The Russian youths mostly wanted simply to buy clothing, shoes, back packs, and anything stylishly western, and the Chinese merely wanted to practice their English.

One of the major differences between Russia and China was the food. In Russia, the group ate most meals in the hotels and every day the meals included cabbage, cucumbers, potatoes, and bread. This got understandably monotonous so everyone was glad to get to China. Mea'

Continued on page 8

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