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TV: Valuable Documentary Studies the New China

Briton's November Tour on WPIX Sunday

By JOHN J. O'CONNOR

And now it's China. A ping-pong tournament, a startling announcement by the President of the United States—and the threatening colossus has become an object of intense, startlingly friendly curiosity. With primary sources on China itself limited, some media have gone so far as to breathlessly "re-discover" Chinese communities in America. For the moment, evidently, any Chinese will do.

For television viewers, as the networks scramble to arrange coverage of President Nixon's planned trip to China, there does happen to be available one valuable 50-minute documentary recorded last November by an English-speaking production team. Being distributed here by Time-Life Films, it has been purchased in recent months for showing by about 40 TV stations across the country, and can be seen this Sunday evening, at 7:30, on a WPIX (Channel 11) 90-minute news special called "Nixon's Long March."

Produced for the British Broadcasting Corporation, the documentary was the unanticipated result of a reporter, Julian Pettifer, getting a visa to follow Western businessmen to a trade fair in Canton. Mr. Pettifer found himself allowed—under strict supervision—to take his cameraman and sound engineer outside the fair building and to film various facets of Chinese life in Canton and, in the case of a farm com-

mune, as far as 60 miles outside the city.

Still geographically confined, the documentary offers less a window than a peephole on Chinese life, but its contents are fascinating, and Mr. Pettifer is convinced that they are "truly representative." Glimpsing what has been described as the most astonishing social-cultural experiment in this century, if not in history, the Western viewer can't help but be impressed, whether favorably or unfavorably—most likely a churning mixture of both simultaneously.

At the top, of course, there is Chairman Mao, his image carried on posters and badges, his thoughts endlessly recited from the famous Little Red Book. From that point down, all is constant regimentation, perhaps the ultimate social expression of law and order.

Within that regimentation, however, the emphasis is on achieving equality, of eliminating differences—between the farmer and the city dweller, the intellectual and the manual laborer, industry and agricultural. The thrust is toward urbanizing the farms and ruralizing the cities. Barefoot doctors make their rounds on bicycles. Factory foremen take their place on the assembly line. Scientists share their knowledge with the workers. No "passports to privilege" are allowed.

The documentary includes numerous sippets of cultural events, performances by children and skilled entertainers, all geared to boosting productivity or attacking the United States "imperialist aggressor."

Comparisons are to ge

made, not between China and the West, but between the New China and the Old China. "Never for a moment," says one lecturer, "Must the Chinese be allowed to forget the past." The New China can say that the menace of famine has been virtually controlled and that 60 per cent of a once woefully backward population can now read and write. The Chinese family unit is still remarkably intact, but today there is a new and higher allegiance. As one kindergarden class chants, "Chairman Mao is more dear to us than our parents."

Over-all, the documentary provides an intriguing portrait of an admirable people. For commentary on that people and their leaders,

Comment on the People and Leaders Follows

Channel 11 is presenting interviews with Prof. John K. Fairbank of Harvard University, William Atwood, publisher of Newsday, and Echeng Loh, adviser to the Nationalist Chinese delegation to the United Nations.