

# Trip contrasts China, Russia

By Richard Leach  
staff writer

Geraldine Kiesel describes China as a country of material poverty but spirited people.

"The people are so open, so candid," the Garden City resident said. "They always came up by the tour buses to show their kids."

Kiesel, the principal of Garden City Junior High School, toured China and Russia during this summer with a group of Michigan educators.

The contrast between the outgoing Chinese and the repressed Russians could not have been greater, she said.

An everyday experience such as riding the Russian subway turned out to be an eerie experience for Kiesel.

"I heard not one person talking to another person. They don't smile. They don't react. They have no curiosity about you," she said.

"It's kind of an eerie feeling. It must be the fear that they don't want to be seen talking to us (Americans)."

THE 19 EDUCATORS toured the two Communist giants through People to People, a program established by President Dwight Eisenhower to foster understanding between people of different nations. Kiesel said she was invited because she is a member of the executive board of the Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals.

The educators were there to take a look at the school systems of both countries — but they also got an education in their cultures.

The group first went to China for

nine days, visiting Shanghai, Peking and Xian, an ancient capital of China. Then they spent seven days in Moscow and Leningrad.

In China, Kiesel felt free to walk the streets and had no problem meeting and talking to all sorts of people.

"No. 1, if you're a tall woman, and if you don't have black hair, everyone gathers around you. They just want to see you. You're just an oddity."

The people she met were very interested in trying to speak English and were very receptive to Americans.

IN SHANGHAI, a city of 12 million, Kiesel saw no litter because the people there "have nothing to waste." Personal automobiles and refrigerators are unheard of in China, and homes are spartanly furnished.

But Kiesel said it seemed as though China had left far behind the ravages of the Cultural Revolution of the late 1960s. She saw only one picture of Mao, and that was a giant image in Peking's Tiananmen Square.

The scars of the revolution, and its attack on the human mind, still remain, however.

Kiesel and other tour members met one Chinese couple who had suffered greatly during the revolution. The husband is an English teacher at the foreign language institute, and his wife had been a writer.

During the Cultural Revolution, they were persecuted because they were intellectuals. Their three children were taken away from them and sent to the Burmese border. The couple themselves were sent to an agricultural commune, where they toiled at back-

breaking manual labor.

Later, they were "rehabilitated" and returned to their former professions. But when the wife reached retirement age of 50, the husband advised her to retire from writing and take up painting as a hobby.

"He got her into painting because, as he said to us, 'It's easier,'" Kiesel said.

She gave several of her rice paper artwork to relatives. Although Kiesel got a trunkful of souvenirs on her trip, from a Cossack doll to Jade statuary, she prizes the two paintings the most.

KIESSEL DID NOT see a single gun in China, but firearms — and the menace behind them — were much in evidence in the Soviet Union.

Tour members had a taste of Russian repression and pain when the outside world took the Americans 4½ hours to get through customs as guards minutely searched their luggage.

"I'll never forget this one Russian soldier's face because he stared at me for 10 minutes. There was not an expression on his face."

Kiesel said she had no preconceived opinions of Russia before her trip.

"Going in I was so optimistic. I thought, 'Russia is just like any other country. People are the same everywhere.'

For part of the season, the Chamber Players will use rare violins from the Henry Ford Museum collection including a Stradivarius, Guarneri Del Jesu, Bergonzi and Ladolphi violins.

For information about the coming season, call 62-MUSIC.



Geraldine Kiesel of Garden City displays one of the most treasured souvenirs of her recent trip to China and Russia — a rice-paper painting made by a Chinese woman. The woman and her husband had been persecuted during China's Cultural Revolution. Kiesel, principal of Garden City Junior High School, toured the two Communist giants with a group of Michigan educators through the People to People program. Kiesel found China to be a beautiful place full of charming people, and she hopes to go there again. But the repressed atmosphere of Russia was not her cup of tea.

tacts the parent at the workplace, Kiesel said. Then it is the parent who is disciplined with a loss of wages or some other punishment.

Russian authorities would not let the tour visit Soviet schools because they said the children were taking tests. But the Americans did get to talk to Russian college professors about the Soviet Union's educational system.

The Soviets do a few things American schools probably should consider, Kiesel said. The Russians require teachers to attend college for five years before becoming teachers and to update their skills every five years.

But Kiesel said both Russia and China base a student's record for the entire school year on one test.

"Everything in both countries depends on the test, whether going to next grade or going on to future training. Your future can be shaped by one test."

BESIDES THE official stops, the tour group also got to do some sightseeing.

Kiesel climbed the Great Wall of China, where vendors sell "I climbed the Great Wall" T-shirts, and saw the recently uncovered emperor's tomb in Xian, where thousands of terra cotta

statues have been unearthed.

In the Soviet Union, she toured the Hermitage Museum, saw a concert at the Tchaikovsky Concert Hall, and sneaked a quick visit to a functioning Russian church.

Kiesel's return trip couldn't have come too soon for her husband, Bud, who had stayed behind. The tour group had left on their trip right after the hijacking of an American airliner by Shiite Muslim terrorists.

The Chinese press gave full coverage to the hijacking, Kiesel said. But neither the Russian media nor their tour guide mentioned it at all. The tour members did not learn the hostages had been released until they visited the American embassy in Moscow.

Kiesel and her slides of the trip have been in high demand by her neighbors, clubs and church. Next fall, the slides will be made part of the seventh-grade geography and world culture class at her school.

She hopes to return to China one day, this time with her husband. But as for Russia . . .

"I wouldn't want to put myself through that horror again. It's a really strange feeling not to be free."

## Renaissance Concerts given \$40,000 award

The Renaissance City Chamber Players' parent organization, Renaissance Concerts, has been awarded \$40,000 from the Hudson Webber Foundation.

The funds are for the establishment of two administrative positions, director of marketing and assistant to the general manager.

A job search is currently underway to fill the positions.

"It was great news to come home to," said artistic director/founder Masha Rachlevsky. "We were thrilled by the overwhelming response of French audiences to our playing. Artistically we have been receiving tremendous applause, for us the Hudson Webber grant is a great administrative round of applause."

The Chamber Players leave Aug. 7 for Vassar, Finland where they will perform as chamber ensemble in residence at the Vassar Festival.

The 1985-86 Renaissance City Chamber Players' season begins Oct. 11 at Orchestra Hall. In addition to that series, there will be 12 Tuesday evening concerts at Oakland University's Varner Hall and another series in Ann Arbor.

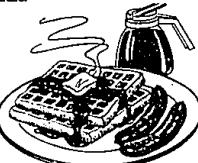
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For information about the coming season, call 62-MUSIC.

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