

Kaochiao Beach

BY RANDALL GOULD

THE relation of man to nature has provided the title for a leading and popular lecture course at one of the largest American universities. In Shanghai, however, the relation of man to nature is hardly that of a second cousin. It isn't quite in a status of *non est*, but for the mass of the people nature hardly figures to any major degree in the scheme of things from one month's end to the next, aside from heat of summer sun and cold of winter.

Kaochiao Beach will not change that for everyone all the time, but it does represent a mighty step forward in the path of making nature attractive and relatively accessible to the average Shanghailander of every nationality (if there is any such animal as an average Shanghailander). Its existence and steady improvement show that Shanghai is not, after all, wholly devoid of natural amenities which can be capitalized to advantage; and these things further show that Chinese as well as foreigners can work for attractive out-of-door recreative facilities which many of us have thought of no great interest to the Chinese mental and physical make-up.

It must be understood from the outset that Shanghai is, after all, in a relatively ill-favored site. Not so many centuries ago the whole shebang was under water—dirty Yangtze water like the kind which still pours its turgid bulk down to the sea. The dirt settled and built up Shanghai, along with all the country for miles around. Naturally this process involved no hill-construction, and the ground material was mud, not very pure but extremely simple. You can't find much natural beauty in or about a big mud flat surrounded by muddy water.

But there are ways for man to improve on this situation. The Whangpoo, muddy as is the Yangtze, nevertheless represents a chance for man to enjoy himself and Shanghai's City Government Ferry service has now been improved to where virtual yacht luxury is available. To get to Kaochiao one must first of all patronize the ferry, and in passing it may be mentioned that one of the best ways to spend a hot summer evening is to ride the ferry all the way to Woosung and back—fanned by cool breezes and, if desired, internally cooled by iced drinks served by an attentive staff. First class prices are not prohibitive by the ordinary foreign price-standards, and the experience is out of the ordinary for earth-bound city dwellers.

However, if one is headed for Kaochiao, it is necessary only to take passage for some fifty minutes, actual running time, which brings one to a landing at the opposite side of the river where clean and comfortable buses wait to whisk the tourist over well-kept gravel roads (with some square corners not well adapted to motor traffic, but safely negotiated by the skilled bus chauffeurs) to

the other side of what is in effect a peninsula stretching down Whangpoo to the Yangtze—and when Kaochiao Beach is reached, there is the sea with numerous improvements devised by man to cheer what must have originally been a not wholly inviting prospect.

Passing up a flight of steps and through a gateway, one walks along a bridge and past a "ting-ehr" to reach a group of main buildings which are excellently kept up, ably staffed, and provided with everything from chocolate bars to rubber giraffes—to say nothing of bathing suits and similar necessities.

There is a long stretch of beach, quite well kept, and such special features as a diving platform and red marker buoys are being provided this season. Along the beach are tents for hire, and behind them a row of huts which seem popular with the Russian community. The whole is well fenced and enclosed, and there is plenty of room for expansion.

Of course, Kaochiao Beach is not perfect. While the shore is not particularly rocky, it is necessary to comb it over and this is being done. Apparently there are some rocks out under-water, and these must be removed and kept removed, for the waters always tend to sweep new ones in. The beach tents are hot; that is the nature of a tent, and about all anybody can do about it is to lift the sides in such fashion as to provide ventilation. There has been complaint that the attendants hang about for tips; that is a common trouble everywhere, but it should be stamped out at a pleasure-place like this, not run primarily for profit in any event.

There is already a good deal of grass and more should be provided together with trees, while it should not be impossible to build up a small artificial hill or two as a break in the landscape and a treat for the children. A real playground should be developed. Sand is being brought in from Ningpo for the beach proper—a rather sad situation but one to be faced and conquered by the responsible authorities. The sea water is tinged with the familiar Yangtze color but that is simply something which can't be licked except by seeking our pleasures farther afield, and after all a little honest mud is not likely to do much damage.

Promoters of the project deserve a world of credit and their work thus far shows an attention to detail of a sort we don't usually expect in China. Faults exist, it is true, but one may well hope they will be remedied when the progress thus far made is examined. Perhaps the most notable feature about the whole Kaochiao Beach idea is its potential value as example. If China can once be made what one might call "outdoor-recreation-conscious" in a large way, it will make the country much pleasanter for Chinese and foreigners alike.