

# CANADA CHINA PROGRAMME

## An Introduction

*Editor's Note: Information for this article has come from Canadian Openness to the Chinese Church by Katharine B. Hockin, which appeared in the July 1982 issue of the International Review of Mission, as well as from introductory materials published by the Canada China Programme itself.*

The Canada China Program is a Toronto based ecumenical organization now in its second decade. It was organized in 1971, when Canada and the People's Republic of China re-established formal diplomatic relations, and has as its main purpose the development of friendship and openness between these two peoples. For those of our readers not yet familiar with the Programme and its work, Dr. Theresa Chu, its present Director, has sent along some literature by way of introduction. Even for those already familiar with the Programme, a brief summary of its past history and present direction may well serve as a valuable study in how a nation of Christians goes about the difficult task of formulating an intelligent and suitable response to the dramatic changes that have taken place in Sino-Canadian relations. While the Programme represents only one such Christian response, yet because it is supported and administered by most of the major Christian churches and Canadian mission sending Societies, it is indeed a national Christian response that carries a lot of weight.

In retrospect, it seems natural that the first moves towards organizing a national Christian structure solely concerned with rebuilding ties almost completely severed by thirty years of isolation would emerge from the Canadian Council of Churches, more specifically from its World Concerns Department. Almost immediately after the re-establishment of diplomatic relations with China in 1971, its Secretary, Dr. E.S. MacKay, convened a special committee meeting to explore the implications this move would have for the Canadian Christian churches. When Dr. E.H. Johnson, chairing the meeting, proposed the establishment of a more permanent structure, he also pointed out the direction such a structure should take:

The thrust would be non-political, with an emphasis on people-to-people relationships, and involving exchange of visits and sharing cultural values.

At a second meeting, a motion was carried for the establishment of the Consultative Committee, which immediately became the basis for a new

ecumenical and nationwide structure. In the Spring of 1977, the new group set up a study day, offering valuable materials on China and the recent changes taking place there. It also made contact with the China Programme of the National Council of Churches USA and discussed plans for a future organization to be established in Canada modeled along the same lines as the one in the United States. Subsequently, this became known as the China Working Group.

The main purpose of the China Working Group was to re-awaken interest in the Canadian church with regard to China. It saw its role as primarily one of education. It sought to promote serious study of contemporary China on all levels in order to understand more clearly what was happening there. Because of its national communication network, it also sought to interpret these events for the churches and the wider Canadian community. It explored lessons to be learned from the Chinese experience, implications for the Christian faith, for Christian theologians, and for Canada itself when coping with larger world problems. Such a focus also led easily and naturally to a re-discovery of the local Canadian Chinese community, its needs and its unique contributions to the country as a whole. At this stage of development much effort went into information gathering for archives, and an in-depth study of China missionary experiences. It was now time for more personal contact with the Christian churches in China.

In the Spring of 1973, Dr. and Mrs. Johnson made the trip to China. In Nanjing, they received a warm welcome from Bishop and Mrs. K.H. Ting. From Nanjing, they journeyed on to Beijing where they met with Christian leaders of the Protestant Churches as well as representatives of the Catholic Patriotic Association. The opportunity to discuss formally and informally the many issues involved in re-establishing warm positive relations between the Christians of both nations proved to be invaluable. Upon his return, Dr. Johnson made a full and detailed report of his trip. He was able to give a first-hand report not only of the past history of Chinese Christians during those long years of separation, but also the realistic possibilities for dialogue to be found in the present situation there. The Chinese leaders also alerted him to the coming international, ecumenical colloquium to be held the following year in Louvain, Belgium, which they themselves were planning to attend. Perhaps the most important result to come from Dr. Johnson's visit and report was the impetus it gave to what was becoming more and more obvious with the passage of time, namely, that it was imperative to enter the final phase of organization and establish a permanent structure with a full-time staff and Director. In 1976 Dr. Raymond Whitehead, who was then serving as Asia Research Consultant for the National Council of Churches USA as well as on the faculty of Chinese University in its Department of Philosophy, Religion

and Theology, agreed to become the first Director of what was now named The Canada China Programme-Canada Chine. When in 1980, Dr. Whitehead left to become the Director of the Doctor of Ministry Programme at the Toronto School of Theology, the Programme considered itself very fortunate in obtaining the services of its present Director, Dr. Theresa Chu, who also comes to it from China research work in Hong Kong.

The original aims of the China Working Group continue to guide the Programme today. There is still a strong emphasis on education, research and study. Today the principle of mutual respect is emphasized as well as the mutual search for common understanding. The importance of interpreting to fellow Canadians not only the Chinese national experience but also the Church experience in China highlights the continuing developing relationship between Christians of both countries. And the stress on an "exchange" that should be "well informed" indicates a growing sophistication in understanding the complexities of the problems involved.

Turning to the practical side and what the Programme offers the Churches of Canada, it provides assistance to local community groups in setting up educational programmes about China and the Church in China. Such programmes encourage reflection on what the local people can learn from China about themselves. Groups planning to visit China can arrange orientation programmes before their departure. There is also a library of audio-visual material, books and periodicals available to all interested groups and individuals. From time to time, public meetings, featuring guest speakers, films and discussions are organized by the Programme. The news organ of the Programme is China and Ourselves, published five times a year and featuring the latest news about China and the Church in China, recent developments in international relations, and information about the work of the Programme itself. (A subscription can be obtained by writing to Canada China Programme, The Canadian Council of Churches, Suite 201, 40 Clair Avenue East, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M4T 1M9. The overseas rate for a one year subscription in six Canadian Dollars)

In summary, then, what began as a desire to provide a Christian response to the sudden resumption of political ties between China and Canada, has now matured into a national ecumenical organ for Christian concern and communication. With its ecumenical approach, its emphasis on mutual respect, its willingness to grapple with all the complexities involved in bringing the Christians of both peoples into an ever deepening relationship, in its willingness to learn from mistakes while continuing to seek out those paths leading to Christian reconciliation, the Canada China Programme has already become an effective instrument in furthering the goal of Christian unity not only between China and Canada but also among the Western Churches themselves.