

# The China Study Project

BY BOB WHYTE

The China Study Project began work in 1972, with Victor Hayward as its first Project Officer. The Project was the result of the vision and hard work of a number of "old China hands" who had never lost their interest in China and the Chinese people. They were very concerned at the failure of the British churches to come to terms with the reality of the New China. For this reason the China Study Project has always seen its primary task as one of equipping British Christians with information about contemporary China with a view to understanding and, hopefully, preparing the ground for new relationships between China and the British churches. It was recognised that, whatever one's view of past relationships, these could not be a basis for future contacts.

Victor Hayward, who had himself worked in China, spent the three years of his term of office concentrating on the study of the Chinese Revolution and the China of the early 1970s. On his retirement in 1975 the Project Committee, together with the sponsoring churches and societies, decided that the Project was now in a position to expand its work of communication and education about China. It was at this point that I took over the post of Project Officer. We began the publication of our Bulletin and prepared a film strip in an attempt to communicate with the Christian public. In these years from 1975-79 the primary emphasis of the Project was on the secular reality of China, but the Project always hoped that one day it would be possible to combine this general concern with renewed contacts with religious people in China, especially Christians. This hope became a reality after 1978 and there is no need to speak of the transformation that has taken place within China over the past four years or so. In terms of the work of the Project, the change has meant a greater concentration on religion in China, reflected in the publication in late 1979 of our second regular journal, "Religion in the People's Republic of China: Documentation", in co-operation with Pro Mundi Vita, the Lutheran World Federation and others.

Today the Project is planning for the next period in its life, over the next four years. The study side of the Project's work has recently been expanded with the employment of a part-time Chinese language assistant, Mrs. Yang Huifen, and we are hoping that we will be able to

develop this work even further.' At the same time we are in the midst of a programme of visits and exchanges between British and Chinese Christians, a process in which the Project provided the initial channel for communication, and now provides back up and information.

Despite the changing emphasis of our work over ten years, the overall objective remains the same; that is, not study for its own sake but for the sake of greater understanding and friendship between the Chinese people and the people of this country, in particular the Christians of Britian.

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