

**far
east**

Reporter

**“What About Christians
In China?” – The YWCA**

**As Reported By
A Canadian YWCA Visitor**

25 cents



Canton YWCA Staff and Board Members.



YWCA Members Chengtu

“WHAT ABOUT CHRISTIANS IN CHINA?—The YWCA

As Reported By A Canadian YWCA Visitor

“What about Christians in China?” is a question which many Americans ask. Christian and other religious communities continue to function in China and as such have a recognized status in the social and political life of the country. The Constitution of China provides (Article 88) that “Citizens of the People’s Republic of China have freedom of religious belief”.

Christian Churches, organizations, publications, evangelistic campaigns, conferences and retreats, worship and work continue. Fellow Christians from other lands visit their brethern in China.

A member of the Young Women’s Christian Association of Canada recently visited China and wrote a report of her “Visit to the YWCA of China” for the World’s YWCA. *Far East Reporter* takes pleasure in sharing this Report with its readers, many of whom have been asking “What about Christians in China?”.

Mrs. Woodsworth is a professional social worker in Canada, now employed, with a Family Counselling Agency. She is a member, and elder, of the United Church of Canada. At one time she was a staff member of the YWCA, serving for eight years in that capacity; she was later a Board member of the YWCA National Council, and more recently a committee member. She is the mother of three children.

Her report follows.

Report from Mrs. Kenneth Woodsworth of Toronto on

A RECENT VISIT TO THE YWCA IN CHINA

Prepared on the Request of the Canadian YWCA

For A Report to the World’s YWCA

I Visit China in 1960

This summer I had the opportunity to spend ten days in China with my husband, a guest of the Political Science and Law Association of China. During that time I visited the YWCAs in Peking and Canton and met with their executive directors. I was never more conscious of the depth of the world fellowship of the YWCA than on those occasions. Though we used an interpreter for our speaking, there were no barriers of the spirit.

Peking YWCA

One August evening I visited the Peking YWCA. Directly from the street we entered a large, simply furnished chapel, whose sole decoration was a simple brass cross at the front of the room. We were greeted by Miss Cheng and another staff member. I was grateful for Miss Cheng's courtesy and conscious that I had caused her considerable inconvenience, as my visit had been delayed several hours because of my interest in the sights of the day—a prison and a children's hospital.

My interpreter and I were taken upstairs to a beautiful lounge—a huge room, beautifully furnished with comfortable chairs, Chinese tables, scrolls on the walls, and soft yellow silk drapes. Here we sat and talked for three hours, Miss Cheng asking me about the YWCA in Canada and I asking her about the Chinese YWCA. Miss Cheng had come to Peking from Shanghai where she had attended university. She had been with the Peking YWCA since 1947.

I was interested to learn how the YWCA felt it could best serve in China today, and I particularly wanted to know how the great changes in women's lives had affected program and emphasis.

Miss Cheng told me that before liberation (the term gen-

erally used in China to describe the end of the civil war in 1949) the YWCA had served mainly women of leisure and some wealth, and that other women were by the very nature of their lives, unable to participate. "Now," said Miss Cheng, "Our work is increased a thousand fold—women want to learn to read, to write, to sew, to know about international affairs, to study the Bible. Five thousand housewives are attending classes, learning to take their part in society." This reply seemed to me to be in keeping with the tremendous vitality of spirit I had felt in the Chinese women I had met—a boundless enthusiasm and determination to develop to their utmost and to contribute to the development of their country.

Miss Chang went on to say that "Since the Great Leap Forward in 1958 there has been great emphasis on the development of services to free women from household duties." To this end there had been development within the communes of the following —

Service centres—centres where local residents can have their laundry, cobbling, carpentry, mending, etc. done.

Canteens—community kitchens where food is prepared, usually to be taken home, but sometimes eaten in the canteen dining room.

Nursery schools—for children whose mothers were working.
Literacy Programs and Sanitation Programs.

The YWCA has trained leaders in each of these areas. The Peking YWCA has given leadership especially in training nursery school teachers. I had visited nursery schools and service canteens and so was delighted to hear this from Miss Cheng.

I asked about work with teenagers. The Peking YWCA does not feel there is particular need in this area because the schools offers a very broad program of activities. The other staff member meeting with us told me that her daughter of

fourteen enjoyed a very wide variety of activities in her middle school and in the Young Pioneer movement.

Miss Cheng told me there are the same number of local YWCAs in China today as before Liberation. They are in excellent financial position. Funds come from three sources—membership, gifts, and rentals from their rather extensive properties. These properties belonged to the YWCAs before 1949 and are now tax free, and therefore a good source of income.

I asked how the YWCA was regarded in China today. Miss Cheng proudly told me that although Christians in China are a very small part of the population, they take an active part in affairs and are highly respected. I found this to be true as I talked with members of the Political Science Association and the Women's Federation. To prove her point, Miss Cheng told me that "Miss Cora Teng (Executive Director of the National YWCA of China . . . ed) is an elected member of the National People's Congress (the supreme governing body of China) and a member of the Standing Committee of the Women's Federation. Mr. Y T Wu, of the YMCA, is also an elected member of the National People's Congress. Madame Li Teh-Chuan, a former YWCA secretary, is Minister of Public Health of the National Government." At every level, she said, the Christian Church is represented in public life—nationally, provincially, and at the municipal and county levels.

Miss Cheng went on to say, "Foreigners wonder why we are so anxious to take part in building society; look at our history—of war and suffering—then you will realize our enthusiasm is boundless; only so, as we help build our country, is our past suffering gone forever.

At this point I asked Miss Cheng how the YWCA, with its Christian aim and purpose, took its place in a Communist

state. Miss Cheng replied that "The YWCA is a body in the service of society. The needs of our members and the needs of society are not contradictory. The ideology of the YWCA is different from the aethism of Communism, but this is not the key point. We feel the important thing is that the fate of all Chinese people is the same; we all suffered the same under the Japanese and under Kuomintang corruption. We all aspire the same today for peace and prosperity. The YWCA is different today than it was before Liberation—it is really Chinese. You must remember Christianity was introduced to China by foreigners; now, since Liberation, the YWCA and the Christian Church are really our people's, not managed or controlled by outsiders. It was a liberation for the YWCA as well as for the nation.

"The liberation we have experienced is seen in many ways. There are greatly improved relations between the YWCA and the YMCA, and between the YWCA and both the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches. Before Liberation, we felt the interference of missionaries which made good relations difficult."

Miss Cheng was anxious to hear about the YWCA in Canada. I told her what I could about development's here, and about the latest National Convention. She was particularly interested to hear of the Canadian YWCA's acceptance of the World YWCA Statement on Peace, and said this would be of great interest to Peking YWCA members.

The Christian Church in China Today

Since I was anxious to discuss some other aspects of the work of the YWCA and the Christian Church in China I asked Miss Cheng and the Rev. Mr. Chao to meet with me the following day. Mr. Chao is Dean of Studies at Peking

Union Theological Seminary, teaches Christian ethics there, and is pastor of one of the Protestant churches in Peking. He trained at St. John's University in Shanghai; his English is excellent and we talked freely and easily.

I asked about trends in theological thinking in China, asking if there was developing any reconciliation of Christianity and Marxist aethism, with perhaps a re-interpretation of "theism" and "aethism." To this Mr. Chao replied and Miss Cheng agreed, that the Christian Church in China has determined to keep its theology "pure." Mr. Chao said "Biblical truth must not be abused to support any temporal political system." We discussed some of the points of view of Professor Hromadka of Czechoslovakia. Mr. Chao quoted Dr. Martin Fischer of West Berlin as writing that "theology in the west is being perverted to support imperialism."

I asked Mr. Chao to comment on the life of the Church in China. He commented, as Miss Cheng had, on the liberation of the church, saying that before Liberation Christians had been looked down on as "second class foreigners" and had been suspected of embracing Christianity for material gain. "The last ten years have been years of the revolution and guidance of the Holy Spirit—a time of purification and cleansing—an experience of a deep sense of renewal and fellowship in the Church and a time of witness in society. Churches are today true worshipping communities, Church life is very lively and exhilarating." He described the joy and enthusiasm of such well-known churchmen as T. C. Chao, a former Vice-President of the World Council of Churches. He said that during these years insincerity and superficial motives had fallen away from the **Church members**.

To my question of freedom of religion Mr. Chao referred me to the provision of the Constitution which guarantees "freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, and **freedom of religious belief**. The



In the Peking YWCA Lounge



National YWCA Board and Staff Members tell of their
"After Liberation" lives

Shanghai YWCA—Worship Meeting.





Canton YWCA Members Discussing a Government Report.



In the Canton YWCA Grounds



YWCA Members Signing Peace Petition

Beatrice Cheng, Executive Director
Tientsin YWCA





Members Meeting Peking YWCA



Entrance to Tientsin YWCA



Bishop K H Ting, Maud Russell, Dr. Wu I-Fang



A Dance Evening Peking YWCA.

State guarantees to citizens enjoyment of these freedoms by providing the necessary material facilities, [Article 87 . . . ed]. A Bureau of Religious Affairs, set up by the Government, gives support to these principles. As an example of the work of this Bureau Mr. Chao told me several instances where grants of money were made to Church congregations for the rehabilitation and repair of cathedrals when these expenditures were beyond the means of the local congregation.

Concerning Church unity in China, Mr. Chao said the development of church unity had been gradual, beginning with joint services at Christmas and Easter. For fourteen years there were discussions about uniting theological seminaries. In 1952-53 three were established—in Nanking, Peking and Canton. Bishop K. H. Ting, known to many outside China because of his work with the World Student Christian Federation and with the Student Christian Movement in Canada, is Principal of the Nanking Seminary. His wife, Sui Mei, is a member of the Board of the National YWCA. Women are enrolling in theology in increasing numbers. From the experience of uniting seminaries the Protestant Churches began to move toward union in 1958.

Churchmen and Manual Labor

Since I had been hearing of the emphasis placed on the importance of all intellectual workers participating in manual labor one month of every year or, where this was impossible, for a full year every three or four years, I asked whether or not this applied to clergymen. Mr. Chao said that clergymen joined in this effort, and periodically went to a village where they lived and worked with the people. I asked if that was not a very difficult experience for educated cultured people. Mr. Chao replied that "it was a most rewarding experience—how else can we understand the attitudes and aspirations of

our people? Clergymen come back with greater ability to reach their people both from the pulpit and in their pastoral work.

Canton YWCA

In Canton I spent an afternoon with the Executive Director and another staff member—both Mme. Ling by name. Both had been with the Canton YWCA since before Liberation. The second Mme. Ling's work was with the YWCA and the Christian Churches with particular responsibility for Christian education for young people.

It was interesting to note the difference in emphasis in Peking and Canton. In Canton there seemed to be a major emphasis on work with young people; summer camps and conferences are held each year; at one of these in 1959 young people of Buddhist, Roman Catholic and Protestant communions met together for discussion of their faiths.

As in Peking there was close cooperation between the Churches and the YWCA. One of the YWCA buildings (the YWCA property seemed extensive with buildings circling a large courtyard) had been given over to the Three Selfs Movement of the Christian Churches (Self-propagation, self-administration, self-support . . . ed.) for use as a factory. Mrs. Ling pointed out that this project was undertaken because Christians wanted to strengthen the productive forces of their country—a general emphasis in China where everyone is striving to build a China able to support its people adequately.

Both these YWCAs, Peking and Canton, are aware of the needs of those Chinese women who would probably never wish to work full time outside their homes. For them they have set up groups who are making some contribution to their country's production on a volunteer basis; I met with one such group in Canton, about twenty women who come to

the YWCA for several hours each day, making children's slippers and dresses.

One of the Canton YWCA buildings was a nursery school, with about a hundred five-year-olds cared for while their mothers were at work. Mrs. Ling stresses the importance of activities which were helping women adjust to their new freedom. They had sponsored classes in hygiene, sanitation and child care. There were forums and discussions on the Christian purpose of the YWCA and on international affairs. There were regular social dances for young people and gym classes. From pictures of activities which they showed me I gathered that Christmas and Easter were times of special celebration with pageants and special services.

Chinese and Western Christians: Related? Or Isolated?

To my question as to the YWCA's relations with other national Associations, Miss Cheng told me of the visits they have had from the Associations of Sweden, India, Great Britain, New Zealand, Australia, West Germany, Norway and Japan. These visitors had been very welcome. However, it seemed to me that the YWCA shared the feeling of isolation and rejection—China's exclusion from the UN—which is common to all Chinese people. Moreover, Mr. Chao spoke of incidents in the World Council of Churches and the YWCA which had persuaded the Chinese delegates that these bodies were being influenced by American foreign policy. The inclusion of Taiwan representatives is not acceptable to the Chinese. They stressed the fact that there is only "one" China. Mr. Chao and Miss Cheng told me of several instances where delegates from the Chinese bodies had been ignored or offended at world gatherings. But they both assured me that letters and overtures from friends in the West would be welcomed, and would not be a cause of embarrassment.

I hope that in the very near future many Canadian YWCA

members will visit the China YWCA. This renewal of friendship is not only vital to the YWCA but can be of value in bringing about the recognition of China by Canada and her inclusion in the United Nations. These are goals which are of the greatest importance to the maintenance of world peace.

Addendum

Your publisher, Maud Russell, served on the staff of the Young Women's Christian Association of China for twenty six years (1917-1943) and during her visit to China in 1959 visited many of the local YWCAs in China-Peking, Tientsin, Tsinan, Nanking, Shanghai, Wuhan, Chungking, Chengtu and Sian, as well as the National YWCA in Shanghai. Mrs. Woodsworth's account substantiates Miss Russell's report of the YWCA of China as a going, energetic, patriotic and constructive participant in the building of the new China and at the same time both maintaining and stressing its character as a Christian movement. It is not out of place to repeat here from an earlier issue of FAR EAST REPORTER (New People in New China) your publisher's observations:

The YWCA in China

The Young Women's Christian Association flourishes in China, the staff giving their full time to program; no longer does effort go into finance campaigns; all salaries of local and national staff are paid by the National YWCA out of its income from accumulated endowment funds and its income from rentals of its nine-story office building in Shanghai. Local YWCA's have membership dues and some fees from activities. One capitalist said to me, "We love our local executive secretary, we always have; but now when she comes to see us, there are no financial strings; she used to get the money out of us all right, but now it is just friendship." As one happy staff mem-

bers said to me: "No more false smiles." Program work centers on helping women understand and gear into the new society—a cooperative rather than a competitive society, a society in which women have a new role. Program work includes helping prepare women to function as equals—many discussion classes with citizenship emphasis, training classes in literacy, salesmanship, bookkeeping, tailoring, handicraft, etc., which enable women to take remunerative jobs; and nurseries and kindergartens to care for the children of wage-and-salary-earning women. Worship services and student conferences, national conferences and membership parties continue to be a part of the program. The China YWCA relationship with the world's YWCA continues, two representatives of the World's YWCA having visited the China YWCA during the past years. All the staff are Chinese.

Your publisher also shares some of the pictures of YWCA activities secured on her visit to China in 1959.



National YWCA Committee Members and Staff—Shanghai, June, 1959

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