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Midwest China Oral History Interviews

Rolf Syrdal

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ROLF SYRDAL
ORAL HISTORY ABSTRACT

BORN: August 12, 1902, Hahar, North Dakota.

EARLY LIFE: family background; education; went to China under the auspices of the Lutheran United Mission, 1929.

CHINA EXPERIENCES: Scandinavian interest in China missions; language training in Peking; lifestyle and evangelizing in and around Fancheng, Honan; description of various Chinese Christians living in Fancheng; military disturbances at Fancheng, early 1930s; the Bert Nelson affair; Communist activity in the Fancheng area; impressions of Chiang Kai-shek and Feng Yu-hsiang; anti-foreign sentiment in Sinyang; educational system at the mission school; response to gunboat policy; experience with revivalism of 1930s; impressions of ecumenism in China; memories of Peng Fu; response to a Lutheran college in China after WWII; Lutheran conceptions of the future of mission work in China after WWII; reasons for ordering evacuation of Lutheran missions from China as director of world missions for the Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1948; lessons learned from missionary involvement in China.

INTERVIEWER: Sarah Refo Mason

DATES: 10-25-76; 11-4-76

PLACE: Northfield, Minnesota

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INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWER: Rev. Syrdal went to China in 1929. He worked under the auspices of the Lutheran United Mission, first as an evangelistic worker in Fancheng and Taipingtien, Hupeh Province from 1930-32. Later he was a teacher and principal of the Lutheran Bible School in Sinyang and Hsuchang in Honan Province. He completed his term in China in 1936.

I wonder, Rev. Syrdal, if you could tell us a little about your parents, why they came to this country, and whether there was something in your own childhood and background that might have pointed you in the direction of the missions.

SYRDAL: My father was from southern Norway where it was customary for the children to leave home and be on their own as soon as they were confirmed. He left home then right after confirmation and went to sea. He sailed for a British line under a Norwegian captain. The first trip took them over four years. Then he migrated, finally, after four and one half years, to this country.

When he came here, he decided he felt called to the ministry and so he attended Sakarias Theological Seminary in Minneapolis and graduated from United Church Seminary. While he was studying theology, he felt that he had a call to the world mission program, but in those days they didn't express that desire. Evidently nobody was informed of the desire and he was never called. This interest remained with him.

When I was a child, I remember especially in Milan, Minnesota, where he was a pastor for about eight or nine years, that we had many missionaries staying with us. We had missionaries Trygstad and Bjelde from Madagascar. We had old Rev. Daniel Nelson, one of the pioneers in China, stay in our home as he spoke to the churches in the area. This was when I was 12 or 13 years old.

Rev. Ingvald Daehlin and his wife and family were with us for a while. These are some of the impacts I had. I was already very much interested in missions and that was fed all through the years by contact with many missionaries.

My wife, then Borghild Roe of Stanley, Wisconsin, had felt a call to work as a missionary just as I had. When things opened, we were ready to go.

I: When you and your wife were at St. Olaf College, was the Student Volunteer Movement active or was that earlier?

SYRDAL: No, the Student Volunteer Movement was very active and we became active in it. I was the leader for a while and then was president of the state organization and worked with students from various campuses. We had a lot of students from the University of Minnesota, especially from the medical school of the university.

I: Did you try to persuade them to go as medical missionaries?

SYRDAL: Oh, no, no, not to try to persuade but just to gather those who had been persuaded by a call from God, so they could study together and prepare themselves for this work. There was some soliciting, but I think that was rather secondary as we felt the call had to come from God to the individual.

I: While you were in college, were you called to China or just the missions generally?

SYRDAL: I think that we leaned toward China, both my wife and I. The reason, I suppose, was that we at that time met quite a few missionaries from China. Daniel Nelson, Sr., Rev. Joe Tetlie and his wife were living in Northfield, and oh, many others, as were Rev. and Mrs. Edward Sovik. They were here on furlough. So we had

a great deal of impact. I might say, while I was at the seminary and ready to leave for China, we couldn't go due to an insurrection. I was asked if I would accept a call to the Union of South Africa. Somehow I just didn't feel comfortable with it because it was explained to me that this was a place where maybe there should be a change in mission policy. I just didn't feel that was in the picture for me--to do any change in mission policy.

I: Do you remember details of what kind of change that meant? Could it have something to do with the racial situation there?

SYRDAL: No, not the racial situation, as such. I think there was, maybe, in part a contention regarding different viewpoints of theology and partly that there was a little more paternalism than the mission board felt there should be.

I: There was less paternalism toward the people in China? Is that your impression?

SYRDAL: Oh, yes. Long before we went out they had already organized the Lutheran Church of China and a program leading towards full indigenization of the church as far as control and support was concerned.

I: This hadn't been done in Africa?

SYRDAL: I am not judging that at this point. But this was the feeling that was given to me. And I might say, in the Union of South Africa in later years, when I was director of the Board of World Mission, I was tremendously pleased and excited about the wonderful way in which the missionaries proceeded in indigenizing the church. They were terrific.

I: I think in missions generally it was a little ahead in China. It seems to be my impression. The missionaries in China had maybe more respect for the people than in other parts of the world.

SYRDAL: I think that is rather difficult to say. I believe that in many instances it didn't have so much to do with the attitude of the missionaries as with the cultural standard of the people. In China maybe they could take over a little earlier than others because of more cultural and educational opportunities than in some of the African areas.

I: Did you have a particular experience of call or was it some influence throughout your life that centered your interest in China?

SYRDAL: Well, if you speak of a particular experience, I imagine you are looking for something rather dramatic. There was nothing dramatic about it, and I think my wife and I just felt more convinced in our minds that this was it. It's the feeling which I have passed on to many young people who used to ask me about how to determine what a call is. I said that it comes in different ways to different people, but if you live a while under a conviction that the Lord wants to use you and that somehow you can't get away from the idea that it's China or some other place in the mission field, at least you had better check into it and see if this is where the Lord is calling you.

I: Then after the seminary you had a pastorate for a few years?

SYRDAL: I had a pastorate for two years. I had a call from China, you see.

I: Before you took this other pastorate?

SYRDAL: That's right. It was in 1927. It was that year that they had the insurrection and the army from the south came up, which made it necessary for most of the missionaries to evacuate China. We received a call from China and accepted it before graduation. Then we were informed that they could not send us, so they suggested I accept the call to South Africa which we didn't feel we could accept. We were without a call then, but we had more or less informally agreed that we would take a call and be ready to leave when things reopened in China.

It was rather interesting that most people weren't interested in my ministry when they figured I'd only be there a couple of years. But on graduation day I got a letter of call with no qualification as to length of time I should stay and that was from Madelia, Minnesota, and a country church at Rosendale. I felt I had to write and tell them we were planning on going to China as soon as it opened up. Contrary to the other inquiries we had had, they wrote back and said, "It is all the more reason we want you." So we went there and had a very fine and enjoyable ministry with the people there for two years.

Then in '29 China was reopened. We had a letter from the mission board that they were ready to send us. We took our physical examinations, found we were okay; so we resigned from the congregation and accepted the call to China.

I: What training did you receive before leaving for the China mission field?

SYRDAL: In those days there weren't schools for training missionaries. There weren't even any special courses, but we did have a course at Luther Theological Seminary in

missions in general. However, I had been interested in missions, oh, since I was a freshman at college, or even before that, so that I had been doing a lot of reading. So I think that most of the preparation was in the private area beyond the general mission picture that we got in our classes.

I: Why do you think the Scandinavians and perhaps particularly Norwegians were so interested in the China mission field?

SYRDAL: Actually the start of the thought of missions in China came from Norwegian missionaries who had been in China and were writing letters to Norway that finally penetrated into our church life and our church periodicals. Ole S. Nestegaard was one of the more prolific writers. He also visited this country and spoke in many congregations, so from the external aspect of real propaganda, I think that maybe this made a great contribution to the particular thought of China missions.

The Norwegian missions as such--that is, the official missions at that time--were more interested in Madagascar and Africa. It was only later, or about the time that we began our work officially out there, that there was a special mission society formed in Norway for China. But these were independents who had come out there just on their own who sowed the seed of the need for China missions to the people in this country.

I: It seems that some of the first China missionaries from the Lutheran church in this country had recently come to this country from Scandinavia and were here a very short time and then went on to China. Did that affect their work and their visions at all?

SYRDAL: That's very difficult to analyze. There was, of course, among the Norwegians at that time a concept of looking beyond their own nationalistic borders into the larger areas of the world. That's what brought them to America in the first place. Many of them had strong mission impact while they were still in Norway. There were several areas in Norway where they had local mission societies that sponsored missionaries. We find some of those areas sent many missionaries just from one small region in Norway. So they came with the mission idea and when they met it here, as it was concentrated on China in a special way, I think the two fit together and caused a stimulus.

I: Because you were leaving for China at the end of rather turbulent times in that country, were there any negative reactions from anyone to your going to China?

SYRDAL: There were some of the former missionaries that were a little skeptical, although there were other missionaries that had been there before who were now returning to China, so it was rather mixed. I know one missionary had said, "This will make a nice pleasure jaunt because you won't be out there more than two or three years and you'll be back again." But it happened that we were there a full seven years, for a term.

I: I think it would be most interesting if you could give us a few details about your trip and your first impressions of China in 1929.

SYRDAL: We left in late September. We got a late start because we had to close off our ministry, so we didn't get there at the beginning of the language school in Peking. But we were only about two weeks late.

Of course, when we went into China, we were quite tense because there was still tension between the North and the South and also with some of the warlords up north. But we arrived in Shanghai by ship, having gone through a typhoon on the way which was quite severe. We were the only two that were going up to the language school, so we got on the train and went up to Peking, and, of course, we couldn't speak the language. Some people had warned us that we weren't going to get through, and we were a little nervous.

At some of the places where the train stopped, the station platforms were packed with troops and things didn't look too good, but we got through all right to Peking. We managed to get to the language school, one of the finest language schools in the world in those days. And we got busy in a small class to catch up to the big class. And that started our work in China.

I: Could you give us some details on the method of language study which missionaries and others used?

SYRDAL: It was a very interesting experience because there wasn't a bit of English used by the teachers. We were not encouraged to try to write out the sound of any of the Chinese words or characters which we were supposed to learn, but the whole thing came by ear to begin with.

We came into the classroom and the teacher would introduce the word by more or less acting it out. The first three words--we called it in English "Juanita" from the song "Juanita"--were wo ni t'a. To catch the tones and also the pronunciation, they were repeated many, many times. Wo is "me," so the teacher would point to himself. On "ni" ("you") he would point to somebody else, repeated it again and again, and "t'a" ("he" or "she") he

would look away from the person he pointed at, so we would get the idea. This was the beginning.

All of it was acted out this way so we could get it without attaching the sounds to any English pronunciation, which I think is a very good idea because then the words stand by themselves. Then, of course, all of us were encouraged right away to get the sounds (or tones) and especially recall the third sound or third tone which starts medium high and then goes down and up again. All our heads would be going down and up. It was really an experience because all of us found it strange to make a different word by making a different sound or tone or accent.

This, of course, is contrary to all European language and the American language. This is where I think the greatest difficulty lies in the Chinese language. It is not only that you have four different tones in Peking, the same sound in each different tone being a different word. Then you move down to another part of China and you have five tones and maybe they are reverses from the tones in Peking. This became frustrating when we went down to Honan to start our work.

It was an excellent school. They tried to eventually introduce 10 words every morning. Then, after about 50 minutes of this introduction, we would go to what they called "fen san," a divided class. There were about eight people in that class. They would drill us on the use of the words and the pronunciation, so we would be able to use every new word that had been introduced that morning before the morning was up.

After that class we would go to a private teacher to be sure that our pronunciation was as good as we could make it. It wasn't always perfect. Then back to the divided class again. In the afternoon there would be a repetition of the morning. There were many strong points, but, of course, one was that we learned to use every word that was introduced during the day in just about every possible way there was to use it.

I: Very interesting. Was this school set up by the mission or by the Chinese government?

SYRDAL: No, it was a cooperative, inter-denominational venture in a sense. It was affiliated with the University of California, I think, at that time.

I: I see. Did you have time to go around Peking a little, too, or was it mostly concentrated work?

SYRDAL: No. We didn't have classes every day. We had Saturdays and Sundays free. We were encouraged to go around the streets, shop, do everything we could to use all the language we had. And then weekends we had a chance to get out to some of the scenic areas around Peking.

I: Did this mean a change in the way you spoke when you went to Honan?

SYRDAL: Oh, yes. When you go from one province to another where there may be a change in tones, then you have to learn the new tones. That's really rather a painful process. But it's necessary.

I: So there was a marked difference between Honan and Peking?

SYRDAL: Yes, there really was. Some in the sound of each word, but most noticeable in the change of tone.

I: In 1932, you went to Fancheng. Is that right?

SYRDAL: Well, no, we went before then. We came to Peking in 1929. And then we left for our mission field in 1930--the spring of 1930. At that time there was a northern group fighting some of the more local areas or groups. I think it was Feng Yu-hsiang at that time. There was fighting on the rail from Peking to Hankow. So we had to go around by way of ship from Tientsin to Shanghai. We left by ship from Tientsin, stopped at Tsingtao, where we had a chance to visit the United Lutheran Church Mission. Then we went on from there to Shanghai and from there up the Yangtze River about 1800 miles to Hankow. It was a roundabout way and that kind of initiated us into what it was going to be like--a rather frequent situation in China because of Communism and banditry.

I: Do you know who Feng Yu-hsiang was fighting against? Was it another warlord? Was it Communists?

SYRDAL: No, it wasn't Communists at that time. I think it was a factionalism--a warlord business again, perhaps Yen Hsi-sam-us Feng.

I: It was about this time, wasn't it, that Bert Nelson was captured?

SYRDAL: It was in the fall of that year, 1930.

I: You may wish to discuss your work at Fancheng first.

SYRDAL: When we came down from the language school, we went to Kikungshan which is a 2000-foot mountain--not very high, compared to many--but it did give relief from some of the terrific heat. We had our mission conference there every summer and had a little chance to get away from the work and the heat of the plains.

We were stationed in Fancheng on the West Field. Ho Lung, a Communist general, had established a communized area along the Han River. Fancheng lies about 500 miles up the Han River from Hankow. It wasn't easy to get in there. The American Consulate advised against it and the Chinese government in charge advised against it. But we went in with another missionary family, Rev. and Mrs. Lars Hompland.

We went to Huayen by rail, got off the train there and had coolies bring our things about a mile across the river to a Chinese inn, where we waited for trucks that were carrying goods into the interior of the country. We were fortunate enough in getting a little old car that didn't have any cover. It had a cover once, but most of it was ripped off. And there was just barely room in this little, kind of a van for the Hompland family and my wife and me. I think we made it in four days--200 miles. So it worked out pretty well.

Then we started our work in Fancheng. My main concern was evangelistic work. Pastor Hompland was in charge of the work because I was still pretty new at the work. It was easier for my wife to get into things because she was an English teacher from this country and an organist and pianist, so she worked with the school in Fancheng and I went out on trips. But both of us worked with a private tutor to perfect our Chinese language which was still rather limited, to say the least.

We were living with the people and going on trips with them. Sometimes we would go out to a village where there was no church established, no contact made. We would get a couple of empty rooms someplace and I would be with six to eight Chinese evangelists and Bible women.

In the morning we would go out in the country area, two by two, and visit with the people. After we had talked with them a while about faith in Christ, we would invite them in for services. We met with children about 6:00 and the adults about 7:00 or 7:30 each evening. It was very strange how people really attended these services.

Besides visiting in the homes, on the days they had village markets we would be there in the morning and set up some posters and tell what the gospel story was. In any place that we had been I don't remember a single place where there wasn't a large audience in the evenings. One of the things, of course, that we tried to do as soon as we were through with maybe a week or two in an area, we would have names of some people who were very much interested and try to leave one trained evangelist in the area to do the follow-up work. From this we began to build the congregations and start to form this little church that was to be in that particular area.

I: Would you describe in greater detail your lifestyle when you were on village itineration?

SYRDAL: The situation in Fancheng at that time was that we were encroached from one side by Communists who had communized an area within five miles of the city. On the other side there were frequent bandit raids so that the entire country was more or less disturbed. So we had evangelists living in the city of Fancheng who were trained to take care of congregations and also to start new work. But they couldn't live where they had been assigned because the Communists had taken over those areas and stopped all the Christian work. So as we were thinking about what we might do, we realized that there were cer-

tain areas that were quite peaceful going northwest of Fancheng and at least, at times, were quite open. So what we did was to get the evangelists together and we would scout the area where we should go.

So we could go with about six to eight evangelists. I had been given money for a motorcycle by some friends in this country, but I decided I didn't want a motorcycle because I didn't want to be different from the Chinese and they couldn't afford a motorcycle. Neither could I because then gasoline was about a dollar a gallon and you had to pay for a \$200 permit to the Chinese government to run a motorcycle.

I was given permission to use that money to buy bicycles, so we bought 10. We then had all the evangelists on wheels. We would go out to a place, maybe 30 to 40 miles out and rent a building on the main street. You know how the back of these buildings usually have a lot of smaller rooms. We would live in those rooms. We had some Bible women with us and so we would set up for the whole group--kind of a communal organization of people. We would eat together and use the bedrooms at night.

Then we would have the building right on the main street. You know how they are made. They are usually three rooms. So we would just tear down the temporary partition between those three rooms and we would have a chapel. We would arrange for some seating and so there we would have our meetings.

What we did was to go out to the markets. They had markets usually every day or every other day in these smaller towns. We would set up posters--evangelistic posters. Then we would have groups; if it was a large market we would divide up into groups, one

on either end of the market. We would sing a song and people would gather to look and listen. One of the evangelists or Bible women would speak with the aid of a poster. People would stand around and it was very seldom that they would leave. They were interested. A few would come and look for a minute or two and spit and go their way, but most of them stayed. We would keep on all morning because there were people coming and going. We would always give an invitation for them to come in the evening to the regular services.

In the afternoon, after we had stopped for lunch and rested a little, we would go out to the surrounding countryside where there were very small villages, maybe three or four families living together. We would visit these people and talk to them about the Lord and salvation and invite them to the evening meetings. So the whole day was taken.

Then in the evening, as I mentioned, we would usually give services at 6:00 for children; then at 7:00 for adults. And I still don't know one place where we couldn't pack that building both times. So that it was really a golden opportunity. We were mobile. We would stay at a place maybe a week or just a little longer. We would contact the individuals that came to services. We would usually find quite a few who were interested enough, so they wanted to enroll in an instruction class.

As there were six or eight evangelists who couldn't go back to the places where they were stationed, one of them would stay on after our series of meetings to instruct the people and to form a congregation and to carry the work on from there. There was our pattern.

Now, of course, we all lived together, in a sense, so that we ate Chinese food, hsi fan or wet rice (rice porridge) in the morning and kan fan or dry rice (steamed rice) at noon, and occasionally a few strips of meat. But we ate just what the Chinese did.

I: How long did the people usually receive instruction from the evangelist before they could be baptized?

SYRDAL: That, of course, differed because of the situation, which was very, very unstable. We never knew what was going to happen, so it had to be elastic. If they could come frequently, for instance, if they could come every other day or everyday, then it would be a shorter period of time.

We had the catechism and then the explanation for it which we called the wen ta. You know what that is: "wen" is to ask and "ta" is to answer--the question-answer book. And we would go through that. For some who were rather illiterate, it would take quite a long time. Others could do it in a hurry. The instruction was based on the amount of learning they could take in, rather than on a specific length of time.

I: When you went out to the smaller villages in the afternoons, did you find that the people were hesitant or shy about letting you, a westerner, talk to them or come into their homes?

SYRDAL: No. We would usually divide up into smaller groups for the afternoon, so I would usually be with two Chinese. I wasn't too conspicuous. I wasn't the only person.

I: Did you wear Chinese dress also?

SYRDAL: Oh, very definitely. In the summer we had the cotton gown. In the fall and towards winter when it got cold, we wore padded garments.

I: Do you recall some of the backgrounds of some of the evangelists and the Bible women with whom you worked? Do some particularly stand out in your memory?

SYRDAL: The background was, generally speaking, the same as the background of the people to whom you naturally went to do the evangelistic work. So many people speak about Buddhism or Taoism or Confucianism. In the rural areas, and I think it is quite general throughout the country of China, except where they had certain centers for Buddhism or Taoism or Confucianism, the people were not either one or the other. They would use some of the aspects of all three religions on festive occasions, but their normal worship was more animistic, which some people call "folk" religion. It was out of this background that people came.

They knew about Buddhism and Taoism, but their lives were actually in the small temples that they put up or in the shrines that they had within their own households. Economically and in other ways the background was varied.

We had one Bible woman that was very, very effective in her work. She worked with me in Taipingtien, which was northwest of Fancheng. I was in charge of that work for a while. She was, or had been, married to a government official. They called her Kao San Chieh. She had bound feet like the old Chinese. I was with her when one day we walked 28 miles. I finally got a donkey for her to ride on, but she never complained. She was terrifically enthusiastic. She was the second wife of a government official and had separated from him when she became a Bible

Christian, as she felt that type of life was not right for her.

We had some workers who had been in government work as officials in the army. We had others who were brought up on the farm and who were very rural and who were illiterate until they started mission school. They grew up in the basic background of the normal rural Chinese life.

I: One person that you mentioned before was one of your Bible school students who was a reformed opium smoker. Can you fill us in with a few more details about his background and life?

SYRDAL: He had been smoking opium for about 40 some years; I think it was 46 years. He was poverty-stricken in a sense. Still he was in a family that he could kind of sponge on, and had some type of business. I am not quite sure what his business was, but he was attending one of our services in the eastern part of the field where he was converted.

He realized that this opium habit had to be gotten rid of, so he came to us and asked if we could help him. We didn't have the facilities that we have in this country for treating addicts of any kind, but the Chinese knew more about it than I did. The Chinese Christians (this was in Sinyang where our Bible school was) put him in a little house, a kind of shed, and walled him in so he couldn't get out. He had plenty of ventilation, but he had to stay there. And they gave him a decreasing amount of opium and plenty of food--a decreasing amount of opium for 30 days.

After that, with the help of the Lord, he broke the habit. I did some graduate work in the field of special service of this nature. It was on Rykers Island in New York where they were at that time treating about 5000 dope addicts a year. We asked the head doctor about the cure they used. I was the one that did most of the questioning,

I guess, because of my past experience in China. I asked them how they did it. Then finally I asked him, "How many cures do you get?" And he said, "Not a damn one. They all return back and are repeaters."

I had been asking so many questions that he finally turned to me and he said, "Why are you so interested?" I told him about what we were doing in China. So he asked about the method and I told him the method wasn't very scientific according to his method, but at least it was the best we could do. He asked me the percentage of cure and I told him I thought it was about 98 percent. And he asked, "How do you do it?" I said, "These are people who have come to Christ and on that basis have sought His help. In faith they go ahead and go through it." This he couldn't quite understand. He said, "You better come back and tell me about that some time later." But this worked where they turned to Christ and were converted.

I: How many opium addicts did you see like that who had been converted and then were able to give up the drugs?

SYRDAL: I didn't have so very many because I was in the specialized field of training evangelists and Bible women in our Bible school. When I was speaking to him, of course, it was on a general basis of the practice that went on throughout the mission field to help these people.

I: Dr. Syrdal, you mentioned, too, that you had a student who had been an officer in the army and who was quite brilliant. After he finished Bible school, what did he go on to do?

SYRDAL: When he completed his work at the Bible school, he went out as an evangelist to be assigned in either a city or a smaller town in the area. I am sorry to say that this was so close to the time of the break in relationships and the take over of the Japanese that I wasn't able to follow his work for more than about a year. So I really don't know what happened after that. But he was a very able man and very enthusiastic as a preacher and a witness for Christ. I am sure that he had his difficulties after the Communists took over, but what it was for him, I don't know.

I: How did he work with the people who were illiterate and poor? Did he have any difficulties because he perhaps was above them intellectually and educationally in some ways?

SYRDAL: No, he didn't seem to because in the army they had illiterate people--a lot of them. He was used to dealing with that type of people. That would cause no difficulty.

There were handicaps in the evangelization work in our area. One was that the Communists (the communized area) were within five miles of Fancheng where we lived and there would be frequent raids of that area. It was a little better in some of the other sections up there. We had a big area because it went from Fancheng inland up the river a ways to Taipingtien and north from there into Honan Province. Fancheng was in Hupeh Province. We had an area about 165 miles long and 60 miles wide with about two million people in it.

Hompland and I were ordained missionaries. There were single lady workers (as we called them), lady missionaries in two areas up in Honan, but we did try to do as well as we could in covering this area on bicycles. And it was quite an area. Then the other was the uncertainty about the Communist attacks and there were frequent raids throughout the country. Actually, during the two years that we lived in Fan-cheng, we don't remember a single night there wasn't shooting--sometimes machine gun, sometimes artillery.

I: And these were the Communists fighting a warlord?

SYRDAL: No, no, they weren't fighting warlords; they were trying to take the territory away from the Chinese government. We came in 1930. The second year we were up there, Pastor Hompland had gone up and gotten his property and left. So my wife and I were kind of left on our own as far as some of the work was concerned, although there were three single ladies in that entire area that we shared the work with. But some of them we hardly ever saw because of the distance, and others were in school work. But it became, in a sense, a trying period.

I had gotten sick with malaria and my wife couldn't travel up that fall to the mission field because we were expecting a baby. The traveling conditions were too rough and it wasn't advisable. So she stayed in Kuling where we had spent part of the summer, together with Mrs. Herman Bly and Mrs. Tom Lee, who stayed there with their children because of the conditons worsening throughout our mission area. We lost the baby and I had to travel down to Kuling.

After my wife had recuperated, we traveled back to Fancheng. At that time, things were quite tense. I would go out on a bicycle and keep watching. If transportation was normal, that is, people going back and forth, walking or wheeling wheelbarrows or oxcarts, I didn't worry. If there was no transportation, there was usually trouble someplace. When I went on the bicycle, my feeling was that if I did meet Communists my only hope was I would be faster than they because I would be on a bicycle and they would be on foot. There were times when we had to retreat back into the city wall.

We were there at that time against the advice of the American Consulate and the Chinese government because they said they couldn't protect us. The American Consulate in Hankow refused to give us a permit to go in there. I knew he didn't have any authority to demand us to stay out, but I felt rather strange about it. I figured I would go and secure permission from the Chinese officials for that area, but they refused to give us permission.

So we got on the train and went up to Huayuan and then across. We felt that this was where we belonged. This was our work. We felt that if the Chinese had to stay there why shouldn't we. We were there with them. This was the year after Bert Nelson had been taken. He had stayed with us for a couple of weeks during that summer of 1930. It was a few days after he left us for his mission station that he was taken by the Communists. Ransom was paid for him. All of us chipped in and paid it. But he was beheaded. So my wife and I, after we had gotten to Fancheng, thought things through and prayed things through.

We had gotten advice from the president of the missionary conference to get out while the going was good (also from several other older missionaries), but we stayed on. We wrote the American Consulate, the mission office and the director in the field that if we were taken by the Communists we did not want any ransom paid because that would put a price on every missionary's head. Somehow the Lord gave us peace through the whole business and we prayed for that. We slept through the noise, except one night when we heard rumors that 10,000 bandits or Communists, we weren't sure which, were going to attack our city.

During the middle of the night everything was completely quiet and we woke up. That ominous quiet put us on our guard. We got dressed and figured something was going to happen when suddenly everything broke loose--cannon and machine guns and rifles. After a while everything stopped again. We figured something happened, so maybe it wasn't as bad as we thought it would be. The next morning I made inquiries and found out that the army had sent out scouts to see where the enemy was and the farmers had formed a militia of their own.

When they saw the army men coming, they thought they were being attacked by the Communists, and they started to shoot. The army thought they were being attacked by the Communists, so they began to shoot. It took about 20 minutes before they found they were making a mistake and then everything stopped. But the next morning we heard rumors that Laohokow had been taken.

At that time the Communists were coming in from the Northwest and down the Han River and were taking one city after another according to their set schedule. They infiltrated the cities with secret agents who wrote placards announcing the date they would take the city.

Our city of Fancheng was placarded, too. They were coming down from that area and were about three days ahead of schedule, so we expected to be really attacked very soon. Then we heard that Laohokow had fallen. I figured I'd get on my bicycle and get up there and see if there was anything I could do. It was only 60 miles up there. So I got on my bicycle and went up.

When I walked in the mission compound where they had the hospital and teachers living, the people saw me and came running out of their homes. This was a Norwegian mission up there. They came running out and said, "Are you the only one who escaped from Fancheng?" They had heard the rumor that we had fallen. So this was the kind of situation under which we lived at that time. This was, of course, before the Communists were driven up to the Northwest.

I: You don't happen to know any of the leaders' names of either the army or the Communists at this time, do you?

SYRDAL: No. Ho Lung was actually the one who had communized the area and who had gone up further north and was now coming down to take one city after the other. You see, all of these cities were walled. They had army units, but actually the army units were not too dependable. They were not very loyal to the country. And the city walls weren't always to be depended on as a safeguard either.

When I was up there alone that fall, sick from malaria, I was pretty weak. I came to Fancheng and was there two or three days when I found that Taiping-tien needed some help. So I drove up there and was there for a while and then got called back to Fancheng. I was so weak I had fallen off the bicycle two or three times along the way. I came to the city wall at Fancheng and found every gate was closed except the South Gate. That would have made another mile or two to go on my bicycle and I just didn't see how I could make it. I went up the north end of town and I took the bicycle in one hand and climbed over the wall. So you see it wasn't too dependable if I could do it under those conditions.

I: Were these militia under a local leader or were they part of the National Army?

SYRDAL: Actually, they were part of a division of the National Army.

I: Was there any way that people could contact the Communist troops? I don't want to get ahead of the story, but I read in the book White Unto Harvest that Dr. C. C. Skinsnes sent messages to Bert Nelson. I assume they always sent these through a Chinese intermediary.

SYRDAL: Always through Chinese messengers. In reference to Bert Nelson, they had sent people out with their demands. So there were messengers and they were committed to go back and forth.

I: Dr. Syrdal, would you recount in greater detail the efforts that were used to save Bert Nelson?

SYRDAL: It is very difficult to give all the details, but I think that we will start with the fact that they demanded a ransom. Dr. Skinsnes at that time was superintendent of our mission. He was very effective both among officials and military groups in China because he was a man of great prestige and was in charge of the hospital that served all these people. So the demands came to him.

I don't remember all of the things that they demanded, but they demanded blankets; they demanded a lot of medication; bandages, some equipment; they also demanded some folding organs. All these things were taken to them by wheelbarrow. As we didn't feel at that time as individuals that we should ask the church to pay ransom, all of us chipped in and paid the amount of money that was necessary to purchase all these things.

They were then piled up in the wheelbarrows and sent into the area where the Communists would receive them, which, as far as I know, was in a mountain area along the border between Honan and Hupeh. K. V. Tvedt was released. There were two of them, Rev. Tvedt and Bert Nelson.

Working very closely with Dr. Skinsnes was Bert's brother, Dan, and he had made trips up, at least partly, into that area. After the ransom demands had been met, we were expecting Bert's release.

Dan went in to meet him at a certain point where he was supposed to be released, but he never came out. We entered into a period of simply waiting because we didn't know what next to do. There were no other steps to take actually according to the demands of the Communists. They had all been met. Then gradually news drifted out that he had been killed.

I: Why did you think it unwise at this time to seek funding from the church?

SYRDAL: I think that was a conviction that the money that was given by the church for missionary work was not to be used for that purpose. We who were out there in a sense took a risk--all of us took a risk. As I indicated earlier, we were warned by the American Consul and by the Chinese government and also by the missionaries to get out while the getting out was possible, but we thought we ought to stay. "Why should we leave when the Chinese Christians couldn't leave?" So we stayed and we took the risk and felt this was our personal responsibility. We felt that we as missionaries had a debt to the church because they were willing to send us out to do the work that we felt called to do by God. Therefore, we were responsible for being there in reply to that call to God and the church was helping us to be there.

Now that's a little different psychology than we sometimes hear, but I think that this was common among all of us at that time. We didn't hold the church responsible for us being where we were. They helped us to be there, but it was our decision and that's where we wanted to be.

I: But there was never any contact at any time except hostile kinds of contact between missionaries and Communists in this area?

SYRDAL: Not hostility from our side, but they, of course, felt the missionaries were against their particular interests.

I: You don't know if there was any change in their policy after '36? That's the year you left, but did you hear about anything?

SYRDAL: They were very smart, of course. When they came into an area, they upheld the law and were quite strict and gained the confidence of the people, not revealing their true character. Actually, they did nothing to change the status of the people. They still kept on farming or kept on with their business to begin with. It was only after the Communists had actually established themselves to the point where they knew that they had the strength that their particular policies were carried out as far as communizing the country.

I: What did that consist of? Lowering rents on lands? Or did they redistrict at that time?

SYRDAL: It was then that communal farms began. No more landlords. All the land actually became government land. In the 1930s at that time, the areas that they held were held very precariously and for a very brief period of time. They had tried some of the communes, but I am unable to say anything about how far they had come at that time--at least in the areas where we were.

I: Did any of the missionaries know of any reactions among the farmers to this?

SYRDAL: The farmers up in our area around Fancheng were certainly hard pressed by the Communists because we could see farm homes and rural clusters of homes, every now and then, go up in smoke, having been attacked by the Communists. They were pressured by them. One of the methods used by the Communists in attacking a town or a city in that area was to force the farmers to take whatever arms they had and ammunition and send a whole horde of farmers against a city, shooting at it. When the soldiers inside the city had maybe used up their ammunition in shooting the farmers who came at them with loaded guns, then the crack troops of the Communists would rush in. So the farmer, of course, was always the one who "got it in the neck" from either side.

When we were talking about the Communists in the proximity of Fancheng, which was actually only five miles, one of the things that made it so difficult was that the only transportation we had to the outside world was by truck or by some kind of vehicle we could sit on, often times sitting on top of loads of freight going out of the area.

The Communists would often raid the buses along the route and take both the people and the goods. Buses usually went in convoys--eight to ten trucks. Sometimes they had soldiers along, but it didn't seem to help much because maybe they would get straggled out or some would straggle at the end and be taken by Communists. It was one of the situations which was so difficult, and at least one missionary was taken and lost his life. He belonged to the Norwegian Mission and had his headquarters in Laohokow.

Buses went only during the daytime and would stop at night. We could never count for sure on making the 200 miles to the railroad in less than four days. Once it took us somewhat over 20 days just to go those 200 miles because of the difficulties of bandits and Communists and soldiers who commandeered the trucks.

I wanted to point this out. We were there two years--1930-1931 to the summer of 1932--and the next year the area was cleaned out. The Communists were driven away and the whole area pacified to the point where you could even drive at night. That is very expressive of a complete change in the situation.

When you talk about the great move to the Northwest, it has been glorified as far as the Communists are concerned. It was a systematic cleaning out of the Communist forces in the area that finally forced

them to move to the Northwest. Actually, in my mind, Chiang Kai-shek should have tremendous credit for having accomplished what he did against great odds.

I: And this would have been around 1932?

SYRDAL: Right.

I: I think that is very good information which isn't always available. Is there anything else about this period you would like to add?

SYRDAL: No, not necessarily. Except I think it might also be said that when we used to travel back and forth, we would have to make many stops along the way overnight. And we got in contact with quite a few people. One of the things I noticed, on one of the trips in 1932, a lot of school teachers were traveling--young men and women. In spite of the struggle they had with Communism, Chiang Kai-shek had started an education program which had set up compulsory attendance at school for every child up to high school with the idea of extending that later through high school. This, of course, could not be enforced all over, but the fact that he was progressing in this direction with this type of idealism certainly gives terrific credit to the man and the government.

There was also some betterment of the roads for main transportation. The idea of buses was started and airplane service started, evidently jumping over the expansion of railroads in favor of more rapid transit that could be secured by bus and airplane. This, actually, is something that has been overlooked by very many historians of China from this particular period of time.

I: Was this most marked after 1933 in this area?

SYRDAL: Well, it started, I think. It may have started earlier, but as far as we were concerned, we saw the marks of it already in 1933.

I: Beginning, then, in 1932. Was there any request for help from the missionaries in Chiang Kai-shek's program?

SYRDAL: No, there was no request from the government as far as I know, except that they, of course, did give favorable recognition of our mission schools that were up to standard. But they had to be up to standard, and this, of course, was also our aim.

I: And at this time all the schools were registered with the government?

SYRDAL: Oh, I don't believe we registered the grade schools, but I-Kwang High School in Sinyang was registered. I couldn't talk about all Lutheran schools, but I know we have had recognition. But this comes in 1933.

I: I think we might add a postscript to some remarks you were making about your observations of the Communists in Honan during 1930-1932.

When we ended last week, we were talking about some of your observations of Communists tactics in Honan in 1930-1932. I wonder, Rev. Syrdal, if before we go on with this interview, we might outline some of the sources of information which you seem to have.

SYRDAL: That's an interesting question in many ways because we were cut off from most mail service. There were times when letters wouldn't come through up to five weeks at a time, and, therefore, we had very little information from the press. Most of what we had in reference

to the movements of the Communists at that time came through the normal Chinese source and that was by word of mouth--rumors which were gradually spread. The Communists, of course, were quite bold and the secret agents put posters in various cities. They usually appeared one morning telling when the city would be taken. I mentioned, I think, that they were a few days ahead of schedule on their way down to our city which created a lot of tension.

One of the questions that was raised was about the method of attack used by the Communists in sending farmers in first with antiquated rifles of what-have-you. Then the crack troops would hit the town after the slaughter and after much of the ammunition of the soldiers maybe had been used up. This came from information that we got from the Chinese themselves, not necessarily Christians, but the Chinese knew this, and also from people who had been taken prisoners by the Communists. I know especially Paul Johnson, who had been taken prisoner by Ho Lung and his army. There were certain questions sometimes raised by the Communists in his presence so that what we have is actually information from first-hand experience. It was not through press or opinions or anything else.

The same can be said about the general aspect or condition of the country and the tension of those days that we recognized that there were areas where we could not travel. These were close to Communist-controlled sections of the country along the Han River. I think I mentioned last time that usually the trucks went in caravans and sometimes would get one truck ahead of the caravan with some soldiers in it, especially as

they skirted the Communist area, but they often times became separated. The Communists would take one or two of the trucks and take the materials and we in them and hold the people captive.

I talked to one Chinese who had been taken in one of these trucks. He told of his experience where he had been tied in the marketplace to a stake and little kids (he had been stripped to the waist) would heat a wire and brand his back, more or less as a sport. I evidently looked a little bit misbelieving at this statement, so he showed me his back which had brand marks. He was not a soldier. He was only a passenger. So there was a lot of fear and dread among the people for the coming of the Communists. It was not true, as some would indicate, that the Chinese in that area looked at them as liberators. There wasn't any of that spirit at that time. They looked upon them with great fear.

I was in a group in a village rather close to our home in Fancheng and some of the people came up to me and whispered: "You had better get on your bicycle and get out because there are a few Communist agents in here and they are armed." That showed a concern for us as people in their midst--these, of course, were Christians that warned us--and they had no way of getting out. Most of them would not be afraid because they were peasants or small businessmen and were not in specific danger. Now this was the general situation at that time before that march to the Northwest started, which was actually a retreat.

When we were there, we knew that there was a tremendous amount of danger, but after Chiang Kai-shek had come in with his army to clean up the mess--that happened

the year after we left there, which would have been in 1934, maybe starting the fall of 1933--the area was cleaned up so that villages which had been held by the Communists were again free. They claimed where we never dared drive at night in truck or bus, they now dared to do that. It was pacified. This was the principle that Chiang Kai-shek used. He would send in soldiers to clear up one area at a time and put a corps of soldiers to hold it. Now the soldiers we had weren't very well-qualified as soldiers. I know in the attack on one city the soldiers built pill boxes outside the city wall when they expected an attack. When the bandit army came, they left everything and ran inside the city wall. The bandits came in and turned the guns around and used them on the city. So they weren't the best soldiers.

Once my wife and I and about three or four other missionaries were going to Fancheng. We were on one truck and there were others behind us and ahead of us. There was one escort truck with about 15-20 soldiers in it. They saw armed men ahead that were not in uniform. They didn't know what they were. So the soldiers pulled to one side and stopped and talked it over. We didn't know what was happening until finally our driver pulled ahead of everybody else. If we got through, the soldiers and the rest of the trucks would follow. That's exactly what happened. It happened to be local militia, so it wasn't so bad.

I: That was lucky for you. I am curious whether the missionaries in this area knew about the Long March when it was happening because in many areas apparently the missionaries weren't aware of this.

SYRDAL: No, we considered the area cleared of the enemy. That is all. We knew they had retreated, but that Long March which became popularized later, of course, was just in the making at that time. It started just like a big river with all its little branches flowing into it. It came from all over China where the people were liberated--one section after the other--and the Communists who were driven out gradually drifted together. That started the unified march or retreat to the Northwest.

I: Would the Communists in your area have joined them or gone separated up to the Northwest?

SYRDAL: I lost track of Ho Lung, but I am quite sure he was part of it. I am quite sure of it, but I can't prove it.

I: Do you by any chance know what some of the questions were which Paul Johnson heard raised in the Communist camp?

SYRDAL: No, not entirely.

I: Do you think they tried to get information from him?

SYRDAL: No, they weren't using him too much for information. There was one rather peculiar incident which stands out as more a miracle than anything else. I forget the name of the city, but it was a little northwest of Laohokow where several missionaries and Christians who had been fleeing from the cities up further northwest were gathered together and couldn't get out. They were praying that the city should be protected. All of the other cities had fallen to the Communists with very little difficulty. At this city, they sent the farmers of the area against it. When they were more or less through with their attack, the crack Communist division was sent in. They fired a few shots and retreated, claiming that there was a new wall around the city manned by people who were white and wore shiny, glossy clothes.

Johnson was called in and asked this question: "When did America come in and take over the city and man it and build a new wall?" He said he knew nothing about it. What transpired after that I don't know. This, as far as we could see, was an answer to the prayer that somehow these hardened Communist soldiers were given a vision of something that caused their retreat. We know they attacked and retreated and never tried it again. That we know.

I: The fact that there were Westerners there. Does that mean...?

SYRDAL: Oh, whether they were Westerners or heavenly figures we don't know, but they figured if they were white they must be from the West.

I: And they said they had shining clothes on?

SYRDAL: Now this is something that came from the Communists themselves as a question. But this is one specific aspect of the questioning that I know.

I: So they did ask him specific questions?

SYRDAL: That's right. But that's the only incident I know of that they asked him anything.

I: Can you think of any other relevant examples?

SYRDAL: No, but I would like to make this observation which I haven't really seen in books on the history of China (it may have been mentioned because I haven't read all the books). Chiang Kai-shek, I think, should be given credit in one area. That is, when he came into office he had the problems that had been built up before his coming in which he had to cope with very much like President Gerald Ford. I think all of those were heaped on him as his problems. He had a difficult time and has

been very severely criticized by a lot of historians which in many instances were unjustified. One is his dealing with the warlords. It was during his regime (and it was happening at the time we were in China) that some of the more clever military and political manipulations were being carried on.

It had started, of course, before that, but it was still going on. Instead of sending millions of troops out to combat the warlords, he would play politics with them and set one warlord against the other. When one warlord was beaten, he would support the other warlord who had defeated him. When they were defeated, they were out. He would then neutralize the warlord who had won.

Now whether this was highly ethical or not, at least, one thing for certain was that he was able to overcome the warlords with the least possible loss of life of his own soldiers and expenditure of the national treasury. And also the people. So actually, in one sense, it was a beneficial way as well as a very effectual way. Now this is an observation, and I think it can be verified.

I: Do you think that was generally a kind of a consensus view among the missionaries? That this was the least bloody way?

SYRDAL: I couldn't say what their attitude was. I really haven't discussed this with the missionaries, but I think it is accepted.

I: Did it stick? When one beat the other one, did the conflict arise again later?

SYRDAL: Well, in some instances it would, but actually he did overcome warlords and this is the way he did it.

I: Was Feng Yu-hsiang one of these that fit into the picture? Sometimes he allied with Chiang and sometimes not with Chiang, I believe.

SYRDAL: That's right. Of course, he was a very unpredictable person. I did not know him in China. I met him later when he was on his trip to America. And that was a very interesting thing.

I: What was interesting about Feng's visit? Why was he so close to the Lutherans and why did he eventually become a Lutheran in West China?

SYRDAL: The way he told it at a small group--we had him for dinner in Minneapolis--he said he had belonged to another church as a Christian before, but he had come in contact with some of the Lutheran missions in the province of Honan. Quite a few of our missionaries before my time were personally acquainted with him, so I suppose that was the initial contact.

As time went on he drifted out of our area and so he most likely had his contact with other denominations because in China we were divided up geographically as far as the denominations were concerned. As he was traveling around, he finally appeared up in Chungking. He observed some of the work that had been done there by the Christian mission and was so tremendously fascinated by the work that was being done by the Lutheran church there among the youth and among the military. This, he said, was what drew him into the Lutheran church. When he was up there in Chungking, young Daniel Nelson was there and the two made contact with each other.

I: When he was here in Minnesota when his children were attending St. Olaf that year, do you recall some of the other things that you discussed at this time when you visited with him and what his outlook was on the future of China at that time?

SYRDAL: He didn't say too much about the future. He was on the outs with the government in China at that particular time and was very bitter against Chiang Kai-shek. He spoke a lot about that, but he had been granted a political trip to this country to get him out of China. This was a "vacation" trip, but officially he was supposed to study the system that we had for controlling the water flow of the Mississippi and other rivers.

He made trips out to see the different locks and dams because that was all "part of his work." Whether any of that ever got back or not, I don't know. I know we invited the governor of Minnesota and the commissioner of agriculture to be at a dinner given in his honor because of this particular aspect of his work.

I brought him down to St. Olaf College and he spoke there about "Christian freedom." He was speaking about the freedom of the American people which he admired. He said one of the greatest illustrations of that was right in the chapel at St. Olaf College. In those days the girls wore hats. He said, "You can look around and you can see about 100 different types of hats." He said, "This is your individual freedom." As far as we know he was a Christian, but he had different views in many ways than we did. We never discussed the differences as far as our faith was concerned because he at that time considered himself to be a Lutheran and was, actually in fact, a member of the Lutheran Church of China.

I: What would some of those differences have been, Dr. Syrdal?

SYRDAL: I think that in one way it was on the basis of the military type of procedure that he had used when he was in full power in China where he baptized his soldiers by company; where it may not necessarily have been a

personal conversion to Jesus Christ, but where it may have meant simply an acceptance of a different Tao according to the Chinese concept. In other words, it is a different principle; it's a different outlook on life that demands different ethics. Such change was possibly not as fully grounded in the sense of a personal relationship to Christ as we might have preferred to have it.

I: Even though he had bitter feelings about Chiang Kai-shek, did he feel he could fit into Chinese society again and be able to work there?

SYRDAL: I can't say anything about that. His return to China and his disappearance on the way back was kind of covered with a cloak of fogginess as far as reason and even actual events that took place. I can't speak of them at all. There are many theories, but one of the theories that was officially acceptable was that he had been developing pictures in his cabin in the boat when he was on the way (whether that was to China or to Russia I am not sure). While he was working, the developing chemical blew up. Now, whether fact or theory, it has been suggested that, although he had shown favor towards Communism for a while, he had reneged and the Communists saw to it that he was done away with.

I: I wonder, too, whether you heard opinions from other missionaries on Borodin because at some point he and Chiang were conferring together and then they broke, I believe, after 1927. What did missionaries think of Borodin?

SYRDAL: Well, I think that was quite unanimous that he was recognized as a Communist from Russia and that he was the root of some of the problems. But Chiang Kai-shek, to begin with, was with the group. He broke with Borodin and so, in one sense, Borodin, as "bad" as he was and with all the schemes he had which were contrary to the welfare of China, still became useful because his tactics created the reaction that set the Chinese against the Communists at that particular time.

I: You mean he was the spark that caused the reaction in Chiang Kai-shek?

SYRDAL: There's no doubt that he had a lot to do with it. Now I suppose he was only one element of that which was appearing to be contrary to Chinese culture or philosophy.

I: But the people in general, too, reacted in your area?

SYRDAL: Chinese people up in the rural areas where we were didn't react really to anything that didn't bother them directly. They were not political philosophers. If they were permitted to stay home and work their farms without too much interference, they were satisfied. So I don't believe there was an awful lot of opinion except from the practical aspect of what the Communists had done to some of the areas they had taken over. They were fearful of it at that time.

I: The peasants would be in favor of whoever would let them lead their life as usual?

SYRDAL: The question is, again, the use of that phrase "in favor of." I don't think that you could build up a strong political party in either way among the Chinese at that time. They just wanted to be left alone.

I: They weren't very political?

SYRDAL: No. I think that's the situation throughout much of the world. And it's the same in our country. It's more sophisticated. They are satisfied with the president that gives them what they want. And if they don't get it--the world is selfish--very few people even in our country vote for the welfare of the country. Most of them vote for the person they can get something out of. I don't think we can expect any more from the Chinese.

I: Chinese peasants are known for their very practical wisdom.

SYRDAL: That's right. They are very much like the Hebrews in that respect. It's not like the Greeks, where it's the concept that works.

I: Could you give a little background on where Sinyang and Hsuechang are and the kind of topography and a little history?

SYRDAL: Sinyang is on the Peking-Hankow Railroad and is maybe 50 to 70 miles north of the Honan-Hupeh border. It was a city of about 70,000 people. At one time, it had electric lights, but that had been ravaged by some marauding group of soldiers, so it was short-lived. When we lived there, it was rather primitive--no running water or electricity. But it was a fairly good center for trade and commerce and the church had built up two very fine schools there. One was for boys and the other for girls and they were high schools.

When we came there, they were both closed because both of them had been occupied by soldiers who had taken them over and used them for barracks. But the girls' school, which was I Kwang, was really brought back to its original purpose by the force and willpower and resourcefulness of some of the Chinese who wanted to see it re-established.

I: Who were these soldiers?

SYRDAL: I don't know the particular regiment. But they were Chinese Nationalist soldiers. But the soldiers, even though they were of the Nationalist Army, were more or less loosely attached to the military headquarters, and there wasn't a uniform policy. It depended a lot on the particular group. At that time, some of these groups were a little anti-foreign. I wouldn't brand them as far as any particular activity was concerned in their normal practice, but it did come out occasionally--a little of the feeling of 1927 was among them.

I: How were these occasional anti-foreign feelings demonstrated to you?

SYRDAL: The basis of these feelings I think was quite typical of China. There never was at that time, except among the very, very few, any strong nationalistic feeling. I think it is true of the Chinese that their unity and their strength was not so much--at least in the past--on the basis of belonging to the same nation but on being of the same people. That is their strength and their unity.

I think that it's given in the three principles of Sun Yat-sen where he gives the phrase: "Chung Hua hsiang ip'en shan sha"--"China is like a panful of loose sand." Then, on the other hand, he used the illustration that China can't be conquered: "It's just like a big ball of dough. If you hit it and push your fist into it way up to your elbows, you pull it out and it suddenly fills in again." I think that he had an insight there that was manifested all the way through the history of China.

China has been beaten before and they have been ruled by foreigners, but finally they came back. It was the people of China that was the unit that had coherence and held them together rather than a particular nationalism. So what do they have to do to stimulate this nationalism? It isn't there in a positive sense, so what they had to do was to stimulate it in a negative way. Therefore, it was anti-Japanese or it was anti-foreign in general, just to stimulate some sense among the people that they are different.

Occasionally people would come from certain organizations, usually the Kuomintang, that stirred up the people by slogans: "Hate America" or "Hate Japan." Of course, many of them didn't realize that there was any difference between Japanese or American. The agitation became hostile to all of us. Within the church we didn't notice this. Or maybe I should say that we didn't notice this in the wave of anti-foreign feeling.

I think there maybe was, among some of the students, a feeling of pride as over against the foreigner. They, of course, had been taught about the opium wars and about some of the things that had taken place in the larger cities where there was segregation of the foreign compounds and foreign divisions. As these things were taught to the students, there was maybe some resentment in the background of their minds, but in ordinary work among them we never noticed it.

When these waves of anti-foreign feeling broke out, having been stimulated by people that came in for that particular purpose, we would walk the streets and kids would throw little rocks or dried manure or something at us or towards us. What we did was usually to retreat and be seen on the street more seldom than usual. In three or four days they were just as kind and friendly as they always were. They were waves that came occasionally. They didn't bother us.

I: Could you tell about the Chinese leaders at Sinyang?

SYRDAL: This you have in all history, so I don't think it's of any value to go through the history of it. Dr. C. C. Skinsnes, who was in charge of the hospital there, was a very influential man among the Chinese. He lent his weight towards the release of the schools. He took charge of some of the negotiations. He was a man highly respected by the Chinese.

I: So would he have negotiated directly or through a kind of emissary?

SYRDAL: Oh, he would do both. Use every avenue. The boys' school buildings were also set free after a while. I was to be principal of the Bible school for training of evangelists and Bible women, and we had our quarters to begin with outside the South Gate along the banks of the river. All our property there for foreigners was outside the city walls. There were some buildings available there for the Bible school. We had no problem as far as the political situation was concerned. Later the boys' school property was evacuated by the soldiers and was used by the Bible school. We still lived at the South Gate and conducted the school outside the West Gate where the property was located outside the city wall. That property was very adequate for our Bible school. We were there from 1933 to 1935.

I: Could you tell a little about the kind of educational methods used in the Bible school and what you hoped these students would do after graduation and also how many there were?

SYRDAL: The students that we had were largely from our own mission field. They were Christians and were supported--some by local congregations and some by their own means, at least in part, or by missionaries or by scholarship. We have to remember that the western school system, of course, was still not entirely popular and that tuition was something very difficult to collect. But the church felt the need to train people who could do the work of witnessing to supplement the work of the pastor. So we trained evangelists. They had a three-year training. It was biblical and also practical in methods of doing evangelistic work.

We also found that it was necessary to use the secular studies in order to elevate them in the field of general education because many of them were not as highly educated as we would have liked. We had a mixture of different types of studies. The graduates, then, would go out to be in smaller places where there were no pastors. They would also be used in extension work in places where there was no Christian contact. It was a way of spreading the gospel.

The men were called evangelists and the women were called Bible women. Actually, the term "evangelist" could have been used for both. The students we had were sons and daughters of farmers and small businessmen. We also had a couple, two or three men, who had been in the army. The one I mentioned earlier had been an officer in the army and was very brilliant and was the type who could stand up and preach to five or ten thousand people.

I: Would any of these have been from Feng Yu-hsiang's troops?

SYRDAL: I think most of these were younger than those who followed Feng Yu-hsiang.

I: Were some of the teachers Chinese, too?

SYRDAL: All the teachers were Chinese, except me. We had mostly men on the faculty. We had some teaching the Bible and methods and some teaching history, English and music. Let me check on saying I was the only foreigner. That is after we had divided. There was one lady, Nora Rosvold, who was in charge of the women. She helped out in teaching, too.

I: So at first it was a combined school?

SYRDAL: We later separated, yes. She and I were the two foreigners. We were the only two foreigners on the staff.

I: Would you include older people? How did they compare with the girls in the girls' school and the boys in the boys' school?

SYRDAL: We had a big spread in ages. Most of them were pretty young. We did have a few older ones. We had the one student who had been converted, who had been the opium smoker for many years. So you get a rather wide spread in age.

I: Would they get an equivalent of a high school education? How would they have compared educationally with students in high schools?

SYRDAL: We had many types. Some of them, I imagine, would be a little above, but most of them, I would say, would be more of the junior high school level.

I: And this was in both Sinyang and Hsuchang?

SYRDAL: Yes, in 1935 we moved to Hsuchang. The Augustana Mission and our mission decided to combine forces in the

training the Bible school. So the women's Bible school was conducted in Sinyang and the men's Bible school was conducted in Hsuchang.

I: Your mission was the Lutheran United Mission? And it combined with the Augustana Mission. And this combination ran both the schools, then.

SYRDAL: That's right, both the schools were run that way. And the principal, then, in each instance was the missionary on that particular field. John Benson was the principal or superintendent of the school up in Hsuchang and I was his assistant.

I: So that would be two foreigners?

SYRDAL: There were two down in Sinyang, too. Then one of their ladies moved down to our field, so actually there were two all the time.

I: How many were graduated, approximately, from your school each year? Was it a fairly small number?

SYRDAL: It wasn't so large. I suppose it would have been around 20-25. I'm just making a guess at it.

I: All of these schools were fairly small, as I understand it. Is there anything more, in specific kinds of experiences in these towns, that you think would be interesting in a general way?

SYRDAL: Sinyang was a very fine place to be. It was close to Kikungshan, where we had our summer home. When I speak about summer homes, don't get the idea that they were too large. But we bought a little home up there, and we didn't spend the whole summer there. It was awfully hot in the summer in Sinyang and usually we tried to get the families up to spend a little longer time than some of us could take.

I know one summer that it averaged around 120° in the shade every day for over two weeks and never went under 110° at night. I had to be in Sinyang because I was overseeing some rebuilding in the boys' school which was then going to become the Bible school. I had to be there for that. Somebody had to be there to watch the building, so army groups coming through wouldn't take them and use them as barracks. Once they get in it's hard to get them out. They might do a lot of damage.

It was only once when I was down there that I was challenged. I was sitting in the study and wasn't heavily clad because of the heat. We had no refrigeration and all of the water had to be boiled, so it was lukewarm. Some Chinese came running in excitedly saying that the army had taken over the dormitory for the Bible school. I went over there and there were two men standing guarding the place with fixed bayonets.

I saw they had the sign right at the door. They had broken through the outside wall into the compound. The sign was still newly put up so that the paste hadn't hardened. I asked to see the general. He wasn't available. I wouldn't go lower than a captain (if I did, I would lose face or authority), so I simply told them that the National government had made a law that they were not allowed to do this. I said, "If you have none of these officers available, then evidently you haven't been given authority." So I walked between them and took the sign off and folded it up and walked away with my back to the bayonets and I got by with it. So they never took the building. That was foolish, I guess, but it worked.

I: It would seem they were a motley crew.

SYRDAL: There were some crack troops, but many of them that were stationed in these areas had become a little careless about discipline and about everything else.

I: These were usually recruited from the peasants?

SYRDAL: Many were, but some of them, I imagine most of them, had been moved in from other areas. They were very poorly paid.

I: Were they adequately supplied?

SYRDAL: It depends on what you mean by supplies, I guess. No, I am not able to really tell. They did not have any large guns. They had rifles. They had ammunition. They had some small field guns. Of course, that's really what they needed for that time. What they were there for was to protect the dynasty. Although occasionally there was fighting between different segments of the army or the army against warlords, normally it was pretty peaceful, except when bandits or Communists threatened.

I: What about food and clothing?

SYRDAL: They were supposed to be fed as a group. That, of course, would not be called adequate according to our standards, but the food that the normal Chinese ate we would not call adequate either. So maybe it was normal according to the pattern they had.

I: Were they dependent on finding something for their food or was it actually supplied on a regular basis?

SYRDAL: You can't give a yes or no answer to that because in some instances they were and in some instances they were not. There were instances that we heard about--now I can't prove it--but, I think it can be authenticated if you dig deeply enough, that there were some units of the army that were supposed to have 1000 troops and they maybe

had 750. The man or general or person in charge would get grants from the government for 1000 troops and keep it at 750 in order to pocket the difference. So there was graft. But that's a manner of life. We condemn them for it and still in our country things are done we think are not ethically right or morally right that people who do it call smart. Now where are you going to draw the line?

I: I was wondering if the Nationalist government sent them what might actually feed 750 knowing that this goes on? It gets to be a vicious circle.

SYRDAL: The only thing we know is that the money wasn't forthcoming when it should have been forthcoming, at least according to the reports. So that you have both.

I: I think we will go to some general questions and if you could give us some idea of missionary-indigenous church relations, that would be useful.

SYRDAL: That is a very interesting question because it is one that I have dealt with as director of missions in Africa, South America, and Asia. I find that in many ways it is a very individual thing. So that if you speak only about policy, it is fine. If you speak about individuals, you have a mixture of pro and con. But in China, generally speaking, I felt that the situation was very good during the time that I was there.

We came in 1929. They had organized the Lutheran Church in China in 1920. The years that we were there I never had a vote in any area of the church. I never had a vote in a local congregation or in any of the higher organizational areas of the church. I was never a delegate to any of the conventions of the church. I was very happy to have it that way because it's the way that it should be. I was considered to be an advisor within the

church, and I felt that I had all the opportunity that I wanted to exercise my own concept of the way things ought to be in that area.

Certainly there were things that maybe should have been shared in a more general way. Certain areas of the work fell to the missionary. I think that there were some things that could have been carried out by the missionary which would save the church some difficulties. For instance, in relationship to government soldiers coming in to take over buildings, there was a certain amount of carrying the burden there which was easier for the missionary.

I think you questioned something also about the general relationship between the Chinese and the white which would play a part in here. This, of course, was something that we had to live under because of the general pattern that the whites had set for themselves in China with the Chinese. We couldn't as missionaries, really shake ourselves from results of these international situations that had been forced on them. The white man had special privileges at that time. He was under his own law actually--the law of his own country. He was, to a certain extent, immune, then, to the laws of the nation.

We had gunboats on the Yangtze River as far as Hankow, which we resented. When we went against the U. S. government policy by going into areas where they didn't want us, we, of course, mentioned that we didn't feel we needed that type of protection. But there wasn't much we could do about it. So it was in one sense one of our aggravations that we felt made it difficult for us to really be as close to the Chinese as we would like to be. We could be close to them on a personal basis, but there was always that aura of foreignness hanging over our heads.

There were some missionaries that, of course, decided that the missionaries should do just as the Chinese. One of my hopes, which was never realized, was that I would like to have lived in a Chinese house but have enough money to revamp it to have some of the comforts of an American home inside. Usually those who expected the missionaries to live as Chinese entirely were rather unfortunate because we white people don't seem to have the stamina and just can't take it.

There is a question there as to the wisdom of "going entirely Chinese" and going native. But there were a few Chinese who came to us and said (although many were envious of the homes in which we lived, which were larger than they should have been) that we had given them (the Chinese) inspiration. That they could live better was something that Westerners had taught them. I suppose if this were true it was simply a sideline which was unexpected and unintended. It was really for our comfort.

As I indicated earlier, there was an occasional anti-foreign feeling that showed itself. We saw it in Fancheng, we saw it in Sinyang, but that was usually by irritation of the population from the outside. We would simply take it on the chin until a week or two later and everything would be just as it had been before. People were friendly. We never actually, outside of those instances, felt any hostility, but only friendliness.

I: Did you have some relations with Americans or Westerners who were not missionaries? How did your role in China or your life in China vary or differ from theirs?

SYRDAL: The only place (you see, we were way in the interior) was in Hsuchang where there was a British-American Tobacco Company buying station. I think they had about six or eight foreign men who were doing the buying for the business. We had some contact with them. Their manner really was quite different from ours. They had a lot of servants and a tight compound where nobody could come in unless they had a password. But we used to visit back and forth. Occasionally, they would come to special services that we would conduct for the missionary group, and for them, in English.

We could never understand the fear which they had. They evidently had had some opposition from rival tobacco companies which were Chinese. They had about 30 armed guards to protect their compound, and when they went out, each one would carry a handgun. Their contact with the Chinese was just in the business. They had contact with some of the business circles in the city. At last it was suggested to them they could make payment to a group in the city for protection. (If it was a bandit group or not, just what it was I don't know.) So they dismissed most of the guards and depended on payment to take care of their safety.

When I heard this, I talked to the head man and said, "I hope you haven't completed negotiations on that because they are going to raise the price on you." This they did and when they weren't able to pay it, the top man was shot. There may have been several reasons for this. He was evidently very good at playing cards and would play with some of the top men in the city.

I: This was the top man among the Westerners?

SYRDAL: Among the Westerners, yes, and he usually won. And, of course, that would usually create some resentment. He played cards with select people in the top bracket evidently in the financial area among the Chinese in the city. The Westerners were very friendly to us, however, and we had a good fellowship with them on a person-to-person basis. The only time we had turkey in China for Thanksgiving was at their compound one particular Thanksgiving when they invited us over. Otherwise, they usually came over to us for some special occasions.

I: Did Lutherans try to influence American government policy in any way?

SYRDAL: As far as influence in the government, we were just too busy doing our job and thankful that the Lord had given us the opportunity to be there and work to bother about these things where we felt our influence wouldn't carry any weight anyway. I was there to do a job. and as long as the Lord let me do it, I was happy. As far as any official work with the government, I believe that there wasn't much from our mission, except that it was very possible that we had made some statement about the gunboat policy, which I also had done personally to the American Consul General.

I: So you did take a stand against the gunboats?

SYRDAL: Yes, I know I had, and I am sure that was the general feeling among the missionaries.

I: And you went to the consul?

SYRDAL: I had a good reason to do that because I had gone against the advice of the consul to begin with by going to Fancheng. He said he didn't want us to go because they couldn't protect us. That really opened it up, so I could tell him what I thought of it.

I: How do you think your perception of the missionary role in China changed during the years? Or did you pretty much go in with the ideas you came out with?

SYRDAL: No, I don't think there was much change of perception. I think maybe there was a general appreciation--a growing appreciation-- of the role of the Chinese which, of course, you can learn only by being in contact with them and working with them. We recognized that there were some Chinese members of the church, even those that were working within the church, who seemed to be lacking in the zeal we thought we ought to have; but by and large, the church as a whole was a thrilling organization and this, I think, was one of the things that grew on us.

I: What experiences with the revival in your area, while you were on the field, did you have?

SYRDAL: In Sinyang at our Bible school, with 60 some students we invited Chinese speakers. One of them was a pastor from the Augustana field. He was a very dynamic person. He had been brought up in a Christian home. His mother had been doing a lot of praying for him, but he hadn't seemingly followed her faith until after he had lived a different type of life than you would expect from a Christian.

He had become a bandit. This was, of course, not known generally, but he would disappear once in a while and would go with a bandit group. On one occasion he came to one place, not far from where we lived. And the bandit group took the town. They robbed and burned and raped and then fled. Nobody knew where they were or who they were because they dug their weapons down into the ground and worked in the fields the next day, so nobody could find who they were.

When this young fellow accepted Christ as his Savior, he became entirely different. One of the first things he did was to go back to the same town that they had just plundered and raped and told that he had been among the group, but that he was now a new man. He started to preach the gospel.

This, of course, was not accepted. All they could think of was that he was one of the robbers that plundered and killed. So they went for him. About 3:00 the next morning he appeared at our house, as he had escaped during the night. This was our first contact with him. A little later on, as he matured in his Christianity, we invited him down to preach. He preached with a great deal of power. We had invited all the students and the evangelists around in the area to come. He was very effective.

His preaching (he spoke three times a day for about a week) was very heavy on the law. He preached on every commandment up to about the sixth or seventh commandment. By that time I said he ought to start with the gospel, but he said they weren't ready.

That very night one of the students came in to tell him that they had been trying to resist this evangelism business, but they couldn't any longer as they were under the conviction of sin. That's where it started. The next few days--I think there were two or three days left of the meeting--one after the other of the students and some of the evangelists were coming to see me. Some of the others were confessing that they had been either very careless or that they had been false in their faith; that they had been untrustworthy in some cases and never really accepted Christ, but they had simply gone along as formal Christians and gotten their schooling and figured they'd done their job. Actually the breakthrough was of tremendous importance.

I: What do you think the missionaries contributed to China in secular aspects? Do you care to separate it out? Maybe the social aspects or modernization?

SYRDAL: As far as some of those contributions in the secular area, they are so intangible that I think it is difficult to catalog them. On the other hand, in the field of education, that in itself would be of tremendous importance to the future of China, and also that particular time in China.

Where we did have schools according to western curriculum largely, and we also had some in outlying areas more specifically Chinese, there was a broadening and development through education. I think also we cannot forget in the personal area, outside of just the spiritual concept of the church, that our medical program had a great deal of influence upon the people as a whole--both in its benefits and its concepts of what it might be. That was important to the people.

I: Was there disagreement in mission about which was more important? The religious aspect or the secular aspect?

SYRDAL: No, I think it was pretty much settled. I think there were some that emphasized education more than evangelism, but I think that actually they were all unified in that we felt the educational aspect of the mission was one arm of the general program that we were to carry out. There was a dual aspect to let the love of Christ be manifest throughout ministry to the general needs of the people as well as the direct evangelism of proclaiming the gospel. We must not forget that the schools were Christian schools, so they retained the Christian emphasis--sometimes more and sometimes less, depending on the situation--but it was always there.

I: What about your cooperation with non-Lutheran missionaries. Did you have much competition in the area?

SYRDAL: No, actually in most mission fields an agreement was made which was called "Comity Agreement." As an example, when missionaries from five denominations go into an area, they will divide it up so there is no competition. Each group will take a particular area for which they will then be responsible.

I: Is this a formal agreement or understood?

SYRDAL: It was started by the International Missionary Council, I believe, as a suggestion, but it was carried out by mutual agreement on the mission fields. And the area wasn't divided up by a board in New York or any place like that, but it was the missionaries in the field who went through and divided it up.

There were a few who would not abide by this and had nothing to do with it--some which you may call sectarian groups. During that time, and I think it is still true, the Catholic Church did not recognize any "Comity Agreement." But, with all the Protestant churches, it worked very well. Christian Missionary and Alliance had their field; the China Inland Mission had their large area; Methodists had theirs and Baptists had theirs.

Now the question is if, for instance, Christians moved from one area to another, in most instances (and here, of course, you get some individual differences) they would make adjustment so that if it were Baptists who moved into a Lutheran area, maybe after two or three hours of instruction, they would become members of the Lutheran Church, or vice versa.

I: These are Chinese persons?

SYRDAL: Chinese persons. So that in this sense, we avoided the competition and coordinated our work.

I: Is it true that some unification of denominations really originated on the mission field where it became obvious that it was a little absurd to reintroduce these divisions in the foreign mission field?

SYRDAL: I think that is true. Of course, in China, there were so many areas where there were Lutheran missions, that the Lutheran church--the church that developed from each Lutheran mission--finally united into the Lutheran Church of China. That covered the area from Korea way down to Canton.

I: And that was in 1920? Or earlier than that?

SYRDAL: Oh, negotiations were started earlier but that was the time. The book, White Unto Harvest, will give it to you in case my dates are wrong.

I: What about the China Inland Mission? They weren't really denominational. Did they operate in your country, your area?

SYRDAL: They had a group in Honan, very close to us, and we had good fellowship with them. Of course, in China, there were so few missionaries and each one so busy that there wasn't an awful lot of fellowship except with missionaries who happened to live in the same town. And except during the summer when we would have maybe a month on Kikungshan. There we had very good fellowship. The China Inland Mission, of course, had groups of various denominations who actually never left their denomination in their home country, as far as I know.

I: I see. So they were denominational in a sense.

SYRDAL: The organization was not. But the people naturally came from denominations. I know one of the policies limited theological discussion within their group. They had the rule that at the mealtime, or in certain situations, there should be no discussion of denominational differences. Usually they tried to put people who (at least this is what some of them told me) were of one denomination together in one area. They made allowance for denominational differences.

I: So there were some tensions between them?

SYRDAL: There were occasionally, yes.

I: Did they establish churches or did they just convert people and suggest they go to, say, the Lutheran church?

SYRDAL: No, they established churches. Of course, the term "church" is something that is very broad in interpretation. They established congregations that were inter-related with others.

I: So they did set up churches. They did have a building with a regular pastor. Were they just called Christian churches?

SYRDAL: Yes, and, of course, we didn't use the term Lutheran out there. We had our own Chinese name which meant the Church of Righteousness by Faith. Hsin I Huei. "Hsin" is faith; "I" is righteousness; "Huei" is organization or group. Usually the people that came through who didn't know all the differences between the different denominations looked at it as the Christian Church.

I: So you de-emphasized the denominational aspect?

SYRDAL: Whether we did or not, it was a factual thing that it was looked at that way. Of course, a lot of people have talked about this "sin of denominationalism." You know, the Moslems claim to go the Christians one better even in that area. They have more divisions and differing groups within their organization than Christianity has. And you have a lot of different types of Buddhists and schools of thought among the Taoists, so actually I think some of this has been overplayed.

These people are used to it. They know there are differences. And if these differences are not permitted to become competitive with a spirit of antagonism, I think they are understood by everybody. We don't all think alike. Maybe you and I don't think alike on everything. And there we are.

I: The Chinese understand that quite well.

SYRDAL: You bet they do.

I: The terms "liberal" and "evangelical" are sometimes used to describe missionaries in China. How did the liberals differ from the evangelicals in outlook and actual work on the field?

SYRDAL: Those are theological terms as used in this sense. Theologically the evangelicals were those that retained the sense that the gospel was the word of God that had to be preached in order that people may come to Jesus Christ to become his children.

The liberals were more or less influenced, or supposedly influenced, by what at that time was the "modernist" movement, or "modernistic" movement, in theology. Among some, Christianity was considered to be the development of the culture of the people rather than God's revelation to mankind. Therefore, it was an actual development which did not necessarily depend on the proclamation of the gospel for salvation.

The general development of mankind was on a humanistic basis rather than on a spiritual basis. For this reason you will find that those who were of this group had few individual missionaries for the world of evangelism; that is, reaching out to people with the gospel of Jesus Christ, but they became more highly institutionalized. Often their efforts were for humanitarianism rather than for spiritual life. Now this would be a little extreme expression because you had many shades of persuasion, but I know that there was one rather large mission in China that had (when I visited them) only one person left in preaching work or evangelistic work out of a large group of missionaries. All the rest were in institutional work of some kind.

I: How did the Lutherans fit in? Was there any discussion among the Lutheran about where they were to put their emphasis?

SYRDAL: In the Lutheran Church, as in other churches, there are various emphases. If you happen to be in evangelistic work, you may emphasize that more. If you happen to be in school work, you emphasize the educational aspect. But the Lutheran church generally is both educational and evangelistic and these two have been coordinated rather than pitted against each other. I don't feel that we had really any strife or difficulty on this score.

I: How did the Lutheran mission, particularly the LUM, respond to potential involvement in the national church in China as that was being formed and developed?

SYRDAL: We just didn't have much to do with the larger interdenominational organization of the church under the official Council of Churches as it was assumed that we didn't fit into it. Its emphasis at that time especially was very liberal. It was modernistic. The constitutions of that organization would imply possibly that all that were in it were of the same mind, an attitude that we couldn't agree with. These decisions were all made before I came to the mission field, but I feel that they were justified. There were many more evangelical groups that did not belong. There might have been exceptions, but normally they did not belong to the National Council of Churches of China.

I: Did this become a question again after World War II? Was there a reawakening of interest of Lutherans in ecumenical movements and perhaps being a part of the NCC?

SYRDAL: When we get into the post-World War II period, it is very difficult to generalize because it was broken up into distinct periods. I think there is a lot of difference between the time from '45 to '49 and from '49 and on to the present. During the Second World War there had been a depletion of the missionary staff. The Communist uprising raised havoc among the people. The program of the church, as such, had been more or less disrupted because of the political situation and the economic situation that grew out of that uprising.

During this period most of the missionaries that went out had to be busy about re-establishing footholds that had already been there and had been more or less neglected. We, of course, were way in the interior and were not in many large cities, although during that time we did make an effort to expand the city work.

We went into Hankow, Nanking, and Shanghai, so that we were spreading out into areas where we hadn't been before. But as far as any commitments to a larger ecumenical organization, we saw that we could cooperate in various areas which we had been doing for a long time. We were cooperating with the Christian Literature Society and the China Tract Society or the Christian Tract Society. I was one of the editors of this last organization, of the Tract Society, and that was interdenominational. We had been cooperating in these fields, but our cooperation was selective in areas where we felt we could be of service and where we could work together effectively.

I: When were you editor of the Tract Society?

SYRDAL: That was from 1934, or '33, to 1936. I wasn't editor; I was one of the editors. They had editors scattered around the country to read through all the manuscripts and make recommendations. It was this type of work; it was an associate editorship on that basis.

I: So then you were able to help recommend what would be best suited for the people on your field.

SYRDAL: Yes.

I: What were the relationships and involvements of the Lutheran United Mission with the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod missionaries? How did these two groups work together?

SYRDAL: We worked together on a basis of personal relationship between missionaries rather than any official relationship that had been established by either group or within some sort of agreement. The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod Mission started work much later than we did and had headquarters mostly in Hankow and in that area. We were very good friends, but there was no official cooperation as far as I know.

I: Did this change after '45? Was there more cooperation or less after 1945?

SYRDAL: I think there was more. I can't pinpoint it because at that time I was not in China. According to my memory, there was cooperation in literature work and also in some of the theological training efforts, but not officially.

I: Let me ask you a few questions about Peng Fu. Peng Fu was visiting here in 1947 and 1948. Do you recall some of the things he said about the future of China and the church work there and some of the difficulties he saw at that time?

SYRDAL: Peng Fu was, of course, hoping for the time when they might return to Mainland China, but it seemed to be rather dark, at least in the foreseeable future, when he was here. So we were talking about the work in Hong Kong and Taiwan rather than the work in entire China. We were talking about what we might do to penetrate through the Bamboo Curtain. Also, we were talking about what we might do for training men for going back into China some time in the future.

I: I have read that Peng Fu lived with conflict between national and cultural loyalty and loyalty to the foreign mission. Do you have any feeling for this statement or any response to this?

SYRDAL: That's kind of a loaded question. I really don't know what's behind it. The national and cultural aspects of his life were, I suppose, more or less colored with his faith in Christ to the extent that it is for you and me. He had been a Christian since he was a very young man. I suppose in that sense, just as we may at times have tensions between our faith and the culture among the people with

whom we live, I think he would have. On the other hand, there may be one added element here and that is that the mission was consisting of people of different nations, a different color of skin and different way of looking at things. And there were no doubt within the church, some of the younger pastors who were becoming more nationalistic and therefore (as expressed in a negative way) anti-foreign.

It may be that he felt this pressure, that put him on the spot, because he always was friendly to the missionaries because this is where he had gotten his faith and where he had gotten his support. But at this time, I think that especially in the later years when the missionaries saw the need for a strong Chinese church more definitely than they had before, that this would fall right in line with Peng Fu's line of reasoning. I think that if there was anything different from regular conflict between humanistic culture and Christianity, it would be on the basis of the management or of the central control of the Lutheran Church.

I: After World War II, what were the positive and negative changes in the Chinese church that were brought to your attention as a mission executive?

SYRDAL: When this question is considered, you have to remember that the Lutheran Church in China was--especially in the central part of China--was an indigenous church at least in the main from 1920 and on. When we came out there as missionaries in 1929 and through the time that we lived there until '36, we were considered advisory members to the church.

We were, therefore, under the church and had no direct control officially so far as the church was concerned. I had no vote even in the local congregation where we lived and where we belonged in Fancheng, and no vote in the

general assembly of the church, either of our synod of the LUM, or of the Lutheran Church of China. Therefore, this preliminary step had already taken place long before it took place in most areas of the world as far as missions are concerned.

Naturally there was a long period of time when it was struggling with the exact relationship between mission and church. But actually, during this period there was not a complete break from past history--from a mission-controlled organization to a church-controlled organization. It was rather, the church had been established! At this time, there was an intensification of this aspect of the independence and self-government of the church, both on the part of the Chinese and also on the part of the missionaries. So it wasn't a revolutionary thing. It was the development of an established accepted stations as far as our church was concerned.

I: Did you notice, or was it reported to you, that there was any tension created between the Chinese Christians and the Lutheran missionaries because of this intensification?

SYRDAL: Actually, as far as I could sense, there wasn't any tension. It may not be classified as the same type of tension that you get among younger students just graduated from schools and starting out having a feeling that they are held down because the old people have a little more control than they have. This is the only thing. I think the reason is that after the war the missionaries who went out were maybe just as strong, if not stronger, in their effort to totally turn everything to the Chinese.

I: After World War II, both on the field in China and in the mission office, what long range plans were made for China? What changes in policies and procedures, if any, were there to be?

SYRDAL: As far as 1945 is concerned, I think I have already mentioned that that was a period of time of picking things up again in many of the mission fields. There were some that had been stranded on the mission field during the entire period of war and had to come home on furlough, so there hadn't been new ones sent out. There was kind of a shifting of gears at that time to pick up the slack on the mission field with new people and to prepare them for that work.

As far as long range plans were concerned, we did expand our work into new areas. I think I mentioned that, too--to Shanghai and to Nanking. We also started some work up in Peking.

On the other hand, the policy change and procedures at that time were not really much different than they had been before until we come to 1949. At that time when the Communists took over our mission field, naturally we did have to make drastic--or I shouldn't say drastic. The changes were not as drastic as they might have been if we hadn't had an indigenous church already organized. But they were more dramatic and that was the pull-out as far as the missionaries were concerned. At the time we started mission work in Hong Kong and Taiwan, we also started a mission in Japan. Naturally, there were new procedures that had to be carried out. I think maybe you want to mention something about Hong Kong and Taiwan a little later on, so maybe we should leave it at that.

But as far as the internal areas of the mission field were concerned, conditions were, of course, abruptly changed because of the attitude of the government. When the church, by government fiat, became semi-dependent on the government, the individual became a servant of the government first. The Christian aspect was secondary. As far as the spiritual needs were concerned, they were not designated or recognized in government documents.

I: Did you have an active campaign for missionaries right after World War II? There were so many new ones who were leaving for the field at that time.

SYRDAL: No, we actually never had a campaign for new missionaries. I believe that we published the needs so that they were known to our people. We also did have an opportunity to speak at our colleges and at our theological seminaries every year to present the needs and the general mission call to all theological and college students.

In every student body that we met there were people who were ready to receive that type of message. So, it wasn't on the basis of a campaign, but more on the basis of meeting the missionary interest that had already been stimulated through the Word of God, and through faith they had in the Kingdom of God, that we drew the ranks of our missionaries.

I: Did you find that some younger people were more responsive at this time than they had been in the decade or two before that?

SYRDAL: Not necessarily. I think it is difficult to judge that. During World War II it was practically impossible to send missionaries out to any field so that there was maybe a carry-over that had been built up in those years on the part of young people that normally would have gone out some years before. They were now finally at the point where it was possible for them to respond to the mission call that they felt in their own hearts.

I: One new plan that was discussed quite a bit in these years from '45 - '49, was the possibility of starting a Lutheran college on the field. Why were Peng Fu and Daniel Nelson so eager to begin this Lutheran college?

SYRDAL: There was a difference of opinion, not on the idea of the college, but on the idea of how it should be established--whether it should be started on the basis of a completely independent college of the Lutheran Church or whether some arrangement should be with existing universities. Those were the two questions that came up.

There was some investigation that I had requested from the university that was located in the Wuhan Center. We had made tentative arrangements with that school so that they would permit us to build two dormitories and a small classroom on the campus of the university. We would register students at the university as full students and they could live there in our Lutheran dormitory and take religious instruction in our classrooms. This appealed to some of the people.

The argument for this was that is very difficult to break into a university situation at that particular time. I imagine that every student that wants to do advanced work looks for a university that has standing and some rank. I think this is especially true of oriental students. They don't like to go to a college that doesn't have much prominence. "Face," of course, means a lot. We did have a start of a college earlier in China in the Hunan area. It was found that some of the students that went there were rather rebellious because they would rather have gone to a university of rank. As this was the only place that they could get a scholarship, they had to go there. There was a little resentment. I suppose that most of those who went there went on a scholarship basis.

Now at this time the Chinese church was not in a position to grant large scholarships to support the students and the very few that had the money could go on their own. So this was part of the argument on that particular side of the question.

A Lutheran college to be independently constructed and operated was a very expensive thing. However, those who backed this proposal felt it would give the mission status of influence. It would put us in the forefront where we could control the school ourselves and have the school to be exactly what we wanted a church school to be. The time between '45 and '49 was too brief to start anything either one way or the other. Therefore, in '49 this question was simply eliminated.

I: So you had actually not reached a decision as to which option that you were going to take?

SYRDAL: No, that had not been arranged. To do something like this it would have had to be a joint Lutheran project. We could find very little enthusiasm on the part of some of the mission boards of the Lutheran churches from Europe especially, and maybe one or two from America in that particular project. It would have taken a lot of preparation to really sell it to all the mission boards to get the type of support we needed. This was all being explored at that time when the final break came.

I: What was to be the specific purpose of this college? Was it to train workers and leaders for the church?

SYRDAL: No, not necessarily, but it was to train Christians so that the Christians who were ready for college or university in whatever branch they were going into would have the opportunity to go to a Christian school. I think the feeling was unanimous on both sides of the question, that it was important not only to train leaders within the church (that is, full-time church workers), but we also needed a strong Christian laity. They should have the chance to get their education in a church institution for their life's work and at the same time to be given special ability to deepen the spiritual life for the church.

I: After 1945, how much discussion was there about whether you should put a lot of money into rebuilding the physical structures or whether money should be channelled into personnel and that kind of expenditures?

SYRDAL: As far as our mission field was concerned, we didn't need any money to speak of for rebuilding or building new structures. The buildings were there so that the program could carry on as it was with some repair. New personnel would be considered on the basis of the request of the Chinese leaders of the church.

I: I was reading that there was a discussion during these four years about whether there should be self-government completely for the Lutheran Church in China without corresponding support or whether the church was not quite ready for this. Daniel Nelson was supporting self-government without corresponding self-support and Harold Martinson said that this should not be. Do you recall the discussion on this line?

SYRDAL: Yes, there was some discussion. This was not necessarily limited to our own particular mission, but that was pretty general throughout the entire mission body in almost every country. The question was simply this: "Which is more wholesome for the church: to have self-government before they are self-supporting, so that is really theirs or to have government depend on self-support."

I think that almost all finally agreed upon one principle, at least in our mission. We agreed that if we had a good plan for leading the church towards self-support, self-government should not be even questioned. Really, that wasn't a legitimate question at any time after 1920 because at that time they were already a self-governing church.

The argument continued occasionally on the basis of, "If you have the money strength, you still kind of control the church." Therefore, a compromise had been worked out before 1945 whereby some institutions of the church that we felt were maybe more than the church would have built if they had started from scratch as an organization should be supported freely by the mission was a gift to the church. Some of the institutions, like the publishing house or the theological seminary and the Bible school (and there might have been a couple of high schools) could receive special grants from the mission. Therefore, the mission would also have some control by having people on those particular boards. This was a special gift to the Lutheran Church of China that they might carry out their work more effectively. I don't believe there was ever any time in our mission that they would disenfranchise the Chinese because of lack of support, but they worked out a program of gradual decreasing amounts from the home church. On that basis they had to plan for gradual development of self-support.

I: In The Missionary magazine, I was reading that Daniel Nelson in 1948 was saying that the future of the Lutheran Church in China had never looked brighter. As late as September 1948, the missionaries on the field were still asking for new missionaries to come out. How realistic were the missionaries on the field about the political and social situation in China at this time?

SYRDAL: I admire them because this is the true missionary spirit. At that time there was tremendous tension in China and things could possibly go either way. Communications were not as rapid in China as they are in this country so that things that happened in Peking and around in that area really didn't affect the rest of the country too much. So, there was a time when we could dream about the future even

though politically it was unrealistic as we discovered from later developments. But actually I think it's wonderful that this was the spirit of the missionaries at that time. I would not have it otherwise if I had anything to say about it because we were always building. Our purpose was to build for the future as long as there was a future there.

One illustration is Japan, when we started our work there. I surveyed the mission field and it was accepted by our church as a mission field. I went to some military officials and some of the leaders of economics and business in Japan and talked to them about future possibilities for missions. Generally, they all had the feeling that in 10 years all the foreigners would be out. They would be through! Well, if you start a new mission field and find no future beyond 10 years, it sounds crazy. So I went back to the board and told them this. They asked for my recommendation and I said, "I think we ought to go in and put in all the missionaries we can in those 10 years. Maybe the Lord will open up the goal for the future." We have a right to dream in that way. So I think they were right in doing it even though politically it was at the time actually unrealistic.

I: In another article that Daniel Nelson had written, he was talking about purchasing the plane the St. Paul. He said, "I took matters into my own hands and purchased this plane." I wondered whether that created any complications between the board in the United States and the missionaries that one individual like this has purchased a plane for the work.

SYRDAL: Actually, I don't remember how it was settled. If it didn't leave a mark on my memory, I guess it really didn't bother us too much.

I: As the Chinese Communists began to gain more and more control of China, how much did you know in the United States of exactly what was happening there?

SYRDAL: We did have missionaries in Shanghai, Nanking, Peking, Chungking and in Honan and Hupeh provinces. We recognized that things were closing in on us very rapidly. We, of course, got the reports about the Communists rushing south and taking over the country a little more rapidly, more than most people had anticipated. We also knew some of the dangers that lay in the area because we had already had people in Communist-occupied territories that were put under house arrest. There they had to stay; they would never be martyrs for the faith and neither could they do an awful lot of work, so they became more or less a burden upon the Chinese Christians. So, we began to look at it from the possibility of the continued encroachments of the Communist army and that they would take over our field. Finally we were forced to plan for this eventuality.

I: Did you entertain hopes initially that missionaries would be able to work under the Chinese Communists so that the Chinese church at least would be allowed to exist or co-exist for a while?

SYRDAL: We were always hoping for that possibility. There were some of the missionaries who thought it would be possible. But we had been living under conditions where the Communists had been on part of our mission fields, especially up in the area around Fancheng, and where they closed off some of the work. We gathered that the work would be hampered and eventually impossible under the Communist regime.

There was a lot of publicity in mission presses and publications both in Canada and in Europe and in the United States that they thought that this was simply an agrarian reform. Most of us in the Lutheran circles that I know recognized that this was more than an agrarian reform and that some day policies would have to be established that would take care of the finality--work under Communist control.

With our experiences in Honan and in Hupeh of previous years, we recognized that something drastic, beyond simply living through, might be needed for the sake of the welfare of the church. At first some of us felt that the church maybe could live on, but that the day of the missionary, at least for the time being, would be over.

The Lutheran seminary, which was in Shekow in Hupeh Province, was under its own board which was selected from the various cooperating Lutheran churches. They faced the reality, and with home board approval, and moved from Shekow to Hankow. From Hankow they finally moved to Hong Kong. Now that's before I was the Director of Missions. I started in 1946. Hong Kong was already the site of the seminary when I took over the office.

I: Did they ever consider the possibility that they would not be able to send trained workers back into China if they moved out of the actual Mainland?

SYRDAL: I don't think that was the question. The question was rather in keeping things going so that the church could be strengthened so that they would have opportunity again to carry out the work when conditions would permit return to the Mainland.

I: How and what advice did you give to missionaries about when or when not to evacuate their positions?

SYRDAL: This was a real burning question at that particular time. We met as mission board secretaries and discussed this particular thing. Some decision had to be made. The discussion in mission circles, and especially among the directors of missions, depended on whether this was considered a revolution that would last or was it simply a temporary revolt of certain people. Because of our experience in Fancheng, and also the experience of missionaries in Kioshan and other areas that had been taken over momentarily and then released again by the Communists, in agreement with the executive committee of the mission board, I sent a cablegram to China in the fall of 1948. It went something like this: "All missionaries to evacuate Communist-controlled or threatened areas. Only exception to be a small staff to transfer matters from mission to church, if requested by the Chinese." This action was more or less discredited as showing poor judgment by some of the mission directors, especially in Canada. I met with the leaders of missions in all of North America in January of 1949. Especially the Canadians still thought the uprising was only an agrarian revolution and that nothing was going to happen.

But actually the reason for our action was three-fold: One was that we recognized that the missionary could not do the work that he was supposed to do where the Chinese Communists took over. He would, therefore, become a burden upon the Chinese church which we thought maybe was not advisable. The second thought was that if it was at all possible for a church to exist effectively under a Communist regime, it would be best for that church to have no obvious foreign connections. They could simply state that they were a Chinese church with no foreign members on their staff--a completely Chinese church--Chinese-directed and Chinese-

supported. Therefore, they should have the right to continue. In other words, that they could state that they were separate from what Communists always called western imperialism and that they were not agents of any foreign country or group.

The third was that we wanted to take the burden of decision as to whether they should leave or stay away from the necessity of each missionary making it for himself. I figured that everyone wanted to stay, and that out of loyalty they might stay just as they had often done before. I felt they should not be forced to make their decision themselves and finally afterwards be criticized by some for having left. Now they could blame me and I figured that would be a lot better if there was blame to be levelled at anyone. Those were the three reasons that lay behind our decision. It was approved by our whole board after it had been sent.

It wasn't long after that that most of the mission boards, who had decided not to bring their missionaries out, were wishing they had done the same thing. Most of our missionaries came out at once. There were two men who remained in Hankow. One was Palmer Anderson and the other was Pastor Hans Nesse. They stayed there to close up everything, as that was then the actual headquarters of our mission as far as contact between church and mission was concerned. Mrs. Knut Stokke, who was a retired missionary in Hankow, had fallen and broken her hip, so arrangements were made that they should bring her out when they came. When Anderson and Nesse finished their work, they took her with them and went to Hong Kong.

Meanwhile the mission office at home was considering new mission work. We thought that as the possibility of foreign personnel was diminished in China, that we still

had the obligation to do mission work. And so I was sent to Japan to investigate possibility of mission work there. That's when things really boiled over in China. I was due to take the plane from Tokyo to Shanghai, but seeing the rapid encroachment of the free territory of China by the Communists, I changed my booking and I went directly to Hong Kong. (If I had been on that plane that went to Shanghai, I would have come an hour before the Communists took over the airport.) So I went via Hong Kong to Canton. Arrangements had been made for the missionaries in China to retreat to Hong Kong or Canton. There we met together to talk over the future.

I: Were you criticized initially by any Lutherans for the decision, for the advice you gave on evacuating the mission field?

SYRDAL: Not openly. I think some felt I acted a little hastily, but I never regretted having done that because I think that it made it possible for missionaries to come out in a more orderly way. Some who were ready to retire or to come home on furlough had already left for America. Those still in China were in Canton, and could make up their minds as to the future. I think there were a couple of women that were a little disgruntled that I called them out at all, but they forgave me. I think maybe they saw that God had guided us to make this decision.

I: In the latter part of your telegram you said that the work of the mission should be turned over to the church if the Chinese requested it. Was most of it turned over then?

SYRDAL: Actually, that wasn't the point. The work was already in the name of the church. It was only that they should stay a while if they were requested to do so by the Chinese church.

I: Oh, I see.

SYRDAL: It was simply to close up the final details. Actually the church was already in authority. But the point is that there were still property arrangements and other things that they maybe could take care of that would at least tide over so that there would be no difficulty for the church. I felt at that time the one thing we had to think about was the church, to see if we could separate it from any hint of being influenced by "capitalism."

I: Were most of the deeds of the properties and documents of that nature turned over at that time, too?

SYRDAL: No. That couldn't be done, actually, because the time was short and that was a lengthy procedure. Some of these deeds are still, or at least replicas of them, in existence some place, although there is a big question whether any of them are ever going to be found.

I: How long did you continue sending money into China? Did you continue supporting workers or work even after most of the missionaries had left?

SYRDAL: No. There were some funds on hand that were turned over to them. But there was, as far as I remember, very little opportunity of contacting the Chinese Christians for remitting funds. There were some funds that were sent in through Hong Kong, but outside of that direct contact with the Chinese church from our office, without going through Hong Kong, ceased. There were good reasons for this. One was that it was very difficult to make contact with them. We were not sure that whatever was sent would reach them. The second was that those who received letters from any official body in this country or even from individuals would be under suspicion. It would create difficulty for them before the government of Communist China. Our contacts with the Mainland were very indirect.

I: Were you able to find out how most of the church workers were able to maintain themselves after the support from the U. S. and perhaps the support from the congregations were cut off or tapered?

SYRDAL: For the first few months or year or so, we did get some reports. They, of course, as a church were partially self-supporting. This would vary in different areas, but I know in some areas it would be about 75 percent self-supporting before the Communist had taken over. This support was continued for a while in some areas. In other areas we heard that the pastors had gotten jobs. One pastor by the name of Wu Ying was a water carrier. He would go down to the river and bring water up in buckets and sell it from house to house. Later on I think he invested in just a few little things he could carry around and sell on the streets.

Others had to get occupations as well so that they were partially self-supporting as individuals and would get some help from the congregations. It was a very difficult time for the church, but to have sent out monetary support to individuals would have meant confiscation of the money and putting them under a cloud which they could never overcome before the Chinese government.

I: When you flew to Hong Kong for the meeting with the missionaries, what decisions did you make at that time?

SYRDAL: The Communists had not reached that area yet, so some of us tried to get into the interior. We tried to go by train, but the train went part way and then came back. There was talk by some of starting missions in one of the southern provinces. We flew out there and were thinking of flying over the Communist army to try to contact some of the Chinese in the Hankow area. But we had trouble with the plane so we had to return.

Then the Communists were advancing so fast that actually there was nothing more we could do about starting a new church on the Mainland of China. The missionaries who met together with me as representatives of the home board at that time considered the possibility of the future. Hong Kong was one place where we had already started work on a small scale and where we could expand. With millions of people converging on Hong Kong as a place of refuge, naturally there would be more work than the present staff could take care of. The refugees spoke Mandarin and the people of Canton spoke Cantonese, so there was a wide open field for Mandarin-speaking Chinese and missionaries. The other opportunity was in Taiwan, which opened shortly afterwards as a mission field for Mandarin-speaking Chinese. The third choice was Japan. Some of the younger missionaries in China accepted the idea of going to Japan and starting the work there.

Some who were about ready for retirement decided to retire. Others chose one of the three open possibilities for work. Dr. Olaf Skinsnes was out there and was hoping to go inland, but things closed up so rapidly that we persuaded him not to go. I went with him to Manila to see if we could get him a position as professor of medicine at Silliman University, but they were just reopening after the destruction of the war. Fortunately, they needed a man of his calibre at the University of Hong Kong, so he was placed in Hong Kong at the disposal of the university, which followed the normal policy that we had had to cooperate with universities wherever we could.

I: What, if any, complications did you have in both Hong Kong and Taiwan with so many missionaries from so many different missions all of a sudden trying to start up work in these places which were much smaller areas than had existed on the Mainland of China. Were there coordination difficulties in the beginning?

SYRDAL: No, actually, I don't recognize any coordination difficulties. The Lutherans, of course, got together and we started a united advance in those areas, under one head on the mission field. One of our mission secretaries of the cooperating missionaries in America was elected to be kind of responsible for that one field on behalf of all the mission boards. In this way we could coordinate the work. There weren't that many of the other denominations who settled in these areas, so that coordination with them was not a problem. The problem, I think, was to map a strategy of mission stations and particular work so that we could most effectively utilize the staff that we could get from the various mission organizations or groups throughout this joint venture.

I: Why were some of the Chinese Lutherans some of the first ones to sign and support the Three-Self document?

SYRDAL: I don't think it's a fact--if you refer to the Communist document of that name. When you mention supporting the Three-Self Movement, this, of course, was not original with the Communists. Self-government, self-support and self-propagation was the goal set, I suppose, 15 or 20 years before the Communists ever came on the scene by the missions themselves and by the churches. That idea was not new. The Communists grabbed this idea and made it a law that they could use to squeeze some of the missions into submission and some of the churches into submission under Communist control.

The Communists made the Three-Self Movement more of a political weapon than a spiritual aspiration. I read through the Christian Manifesto. As far as I could discover, there were only two, possibly three, Lutheran pastors who signed that manifesto out of the several hundred that signed it. I recognized those names and,

as far as I know, no pastor of an American Lutheran-founded mission church signed the document.

I went over that with Bishop Manikam from India who was on a trip to China at one time. He had made some statements that I challenged, so I re-examined the document. There were only two Lutherans, possibly a third, who signed the original document.

I: Had the bishop been saying similar things, that a number of Lutherans had signed the Three-Self Document?

SYRDAL: No, actually he hadn't, but he claimed that none of the people that were then serving as pastors of churches on the East Coast--Shanghai, Nanking and Peking--had signed the Communist Manifesto. That's why I was interested and looked it up again. Everyone of the pastors he referred to had signed it, but none of them were Lutheran.

I: I read also that someone had said that Sin I Pao had become too political. At least some people were afraid that maybe this was a misuse of this paper? Do you recall anything of that nature?

SYRDAL: Yes, I heard something about that, but actually, I never was able to investigate nor have others investigate it to the point where it was really verified. It is very difficult at a time like that not to at least have something on politics. And just how far they went one way or the other, I wouldn't dare to say. I believe that one of those who signed the Manifesto had some relationship with Sin I Pao, but I am not sure. If he did, I don't believe that he reflected the feeling of most of the people on the staff.

I: When you were establishing a new work in Taiwan and in Hong Kong, were there certain aspects of the work that you decided to do differently now that you were opening up these new fields or were things carried on pretty much the way it had been on the Mainland?

SYRDAL: The conditions were quite different from the conditions on the Mainland. In Hong Kong there were quite a few who were Christians from the Mainland and we made those our contact points. Many of the Christians that had come were in very poor circumstances and in refugee camps. Therefore, much of the work there was supported by mission funds. When you meet a situation like that, strict mission self-support policies have got to be thrown to the winds. So we went ahead. We sought what self-support we could get, and from the nucleus of Christians reached out to others. We worked in certain areas in Hong Kong and also in the New Territories and in Kowloon.

Our joint Lutheran Theological Seminary was at Tao Feng Shan and finally below the mountain. This was sustained on the basis that the more we could train in theology the better it would be for the day when China will reopen. Maybe people will eventually say about us what was said about the missionaries in 1948, that they were dreaming against reality. It may be years--we never know--but we must prepare for the day when China will reopen.

Besides the theological seminary we had the literature work which is able, both through the printed word to some degree but more through radio, to penetrate the Bamboo Curtain even at this time. But we prepare literature and prepare the pastors for "that day."

In Taiwan we have, in one sense, the same situation. Many of the people that came there from the Mainland were financially more capable of supporting the church than the people that went to Hong Kong. Many of them had good positions with the government or otherwise had money enough to go over there, instead of remaining in Hong Kong. The Mandarin-speaking people became our responsibility as the Presbyterian Church continued their strong work among the Taiwanese people.

To build a church we also started a theological seminary and a literature group there which were coordinated with those in Hong Kong, finally more or less merged to serve the present situation that we were facing, and also be prepared for the future.

I: Why was the seminary also started in Taiwan if the seminary in Hong Kong remained a Mandarin-speaking seminary primarily?

SYRDAL: The Hong Kong seminary is still largely Mandarin-speaking, and to begin with, it was so in Taiwan. At this time they are shifting so that there will be more of a Taiwanese impact upon the seminary. As in Hong Kong, the work was started in hopes that it could be a united effort, all Lutherans, including the Missouri Synod, cooperating in one theological seminary. Missouri Synod, at that time, was not ready to do so. I was in on the negotiations to try to get them interested, but somehow they weren't ready. Later on there was some cooperation.

I: What do you perceive now as the role of missionaries in Hong Kong and in Taiwan today?

SYRDAL: As far as the missionaries are concerned, I think it is the same as on any mission field. They proclaim the gospel and use their talents to produce literature, training personnel to carry on the work in local areas so that the nation can be christianized. Always keeping in mind the possibility of returning to the Mainland.

I: I know that we were told that the churches in these areas have come of age now and that there is no longer a need for the church in America to send personnel out to these areas.

SYRDAL: We have heard that in many sections of the world, but strange things happen. The president of the Lutheran Church of Hong Kong was supposed to send me a list of missionary personnel needs annually. One year Wu Ming-Chieh sent a request for 65 missionaries for Hong Kong. This request was both tragic and still inspiring. Tragic, because they seemingly did not feel ready themselves to take over the work, and still very inspiring because they saw the needs that ought to be filled and that they didn't have the qualifications to fill. In other words, they were wide awake to see the openings. There may be a temptation in certain areas for the indigenous church to lean on the missionaries and have them do the work and they just sit by and receive.

On the other hand, I don't know of a single mission field today where there isn't need for expansion. Mission policy should rely on the indigenous churches to carry their full load of church development and evangelism on their own and still give the missionaries an opportunity to reach into the unreached areas. You are not going to hear much, if you have that kind of policy, about the day of the missionary being over; that is the point where the two can work together, coordinating each one's abilities and visions for the welfare of the church as a whole. We are not a "foreign" and "native" church. There is just One Church in which we work together! If we can get to this point, we can expand the work way beyond our present capacity.

I: As you look back on the China mission experience, what do you feel were the lessons that were learned from this massive involvement in China?

SYRDAL: It's very easy to be an arm-chair quarterback, especially to look over the situation that was in the past and was in a completely different milieu than that which we have at the present time. I am not critical over what was done because I think that there were certain situations that were in the forefront that led them to do what they did. If we didn't have the schools that some think we shouldn't have built, where would we have our leaders for today?

If we hadn't had hospitals which are expensive --and should be actually more expensive than they are because they often times give our doctors much less efficient materials to work with than they should have had in the line of X-ray and all the gadgetry they should have had to sustain their work-- if we hadn't done that, would we have had a good conscience? If we hadn't done welfare work, feeding the hungry and starving and trying to reach out through betterment of society, would we have been as obedient as we should have been? Naturally, all these aspects in the past still lie before us in the future.

I do believe that in some instances we have gone ahead of the ability of the churches to take over the institutions of missions and make them their own. What is organized or erected should not become a burden to the people but become something that they could enjoy and use. There are some areas where I still think that because of what we have, we should continue support--for instance, in institutions like hospitals. Certainly we shouldn't make them second-rate hospitals or third-rate hospitals in order to put them in the economic scope of the future church, but we should build them well so that we can do a good job now. That's a very complicated question.

I: Dr. Syrdal, my next question pertains to your work as professor of missions at Luther Theological Seminary. How did you become professor of missions? You were preparing for another responsibility when you were called to be professor of missions. What were you preparing for when you received the call to the seminary?

SYRDAL: I had been elected by the mission in China to become professor of Old Testament at the joint theological seminary at Shekow. When I came home on furlough, I felt that the best thing I could do would be to spend whatever time I could to prepare myself for that position. That's why I began work on a doctor's degree because I felt that naturally it might be advantageous for the school to have professors with degrees.

I started out in the Old Testament and that was the area of most of my resident work on my Ph.D. However, while I was doing this graduate work, I was elected by the church body to become professor at Luther Theological Seminary in missions. As I still had a year left on my graduate work, I shifted gear. I already had about enough mission courses to satisfy the resident demand for a degree in the field of missions. Therefore, I did my dissertation in missions so that I would feel more fully prepared in that field.

I: Why did you feel that it was necessary for you to study Old Testament in Norway in preparation for your work in China?

SYRDAL: We had our theological seminary in China which was a union Lutheran theological seminary which served missions both from Europe and from America. Some of the professors were from Europe, and I felt that it would be easier for me to be accepted and to work harmoniously with people from Europe if I spent at least part of my work in European institutions. I enrolled at the University of Oslo and also took some course at the Independent Theological Seminary at Oslo.

I: How did you gather your materials for dissertation on the work of the Lutherans in China?

SYRDAL: I was doing much of my research work at the Missionary Research Library in New York and had taken a couple of courses while I was writing my dissertation at Union Theological Seminary. But I had access during the summertime to the Lutheraneren and Lutheran Herald and to the periodicals of other Lutheran groups from America. The mission boards were very kind to give me access to synodical mission records. As an example, I had insufficient material from the Lutheran Brethren and I wrote to them. They very kindly sent a complete file of their periodical to New York for my research.

I: Did some of your initial interest come when you were the editor for White Unto Harvest because you were compiling a lot of material there? Did that give you the foundation for this dissertation?

SYRDAL: It made it easier. I read the old edition (1919) of White Unto Harvest before I went to China. Ever since then they had been planning a new edition. So off and on they'd get a little committee going. They would start it and they'd gather all the material and then it would kind of die on the vine. One summer we had a missionary conference. I was elected as editor to get all these things together and write new material and consolidate everything and put it out in a book in hopes that it would be ready for Christmas. That was quite a task. It did give me some of the background and it forced me to work through the history of our own mission. That preliminary work helped me in the rest of the work. And also it gave me some of the methods that I could follow through on some of the other missions.

I: How were you able to prepare White Unto Harvest in this short time? Did you have masses of information that had been prepared by the various committees and it was a matter of your going through and selecting?

SYRDAL: There were snatches of histories from each of the individual mission stations. All we had to do was to collate them. But there were others where we wanted new material and there the missionaries wrote the material. One of the things that I did especially was to connect and write the history of the mission. As it was, there were separate accounts of three different missions to be worked together. It was enjoyable to get it all into one united history.

I: Mrs. Syrdal was saying something about the difficulties of preparing the map for White Unto Harvest. Had there never been an accurate map of the mission field before?

SYRDAL: The difficulty was mainly because of inaccuracies of some of the maps in existence already. We were able to get a pretty good map of the country that could be a corrective for the maps that we got from each mission area. We could put those mission areas on that larger map and try to put them together in one map. It was something like a puzzle. It was kind of fun to work with and solve.

I: Were you given special time to prepare White Unto Harvest or did you have to do this in addition to your other basic responsibilities?

SYRDAL: Special time was after quitting time at night and before sleep. I was at that time the principal of the Bible school in Sinyang. As it was a fairly new experience, that took much time. Most of the books that were used at the Bible school were non-existent, so I prepared them and

had them translated into Chinese for each class. I had a secretary working with me on that. I would talk to him in Chinese and he would put it in better language and write it out and then edit. So we made our own textbooks.

I: Were you also editor of Gleanings at this time?

SYRDAL: Part of the time. Dan Nelson had it first and then I followed through.

I: So you did have quite a few literary responsibilities, actually, in China?

SYRDAL: It's nice to have something besides your regular work kind of as a hobby.

I: As professor of missions at Luther, how did your perspective and approach compare with those who preceded and followed you in this position?

SYRDAL: Comparisons are sometimes odious and I don't like to make any comparisons. I think that our church has been very fortunate because we have had Dr. John Gronli who preceded me, who had mission experience both in China and in South Africa. I had mission background in China and our present mission director has had mission experience in Japan. In other words, together with the understanding of missions that one can get theoretically through a lot of different studies, approaches, research, each of us three have had mission experience so that we could relate very well to the missionary point of view. I think that this gives us, in a sense, something that you can't write out in a document.

Your heart is beating more or less in sympathy with the missionary and keeps you alive, not so that you sit down and capitalize on changes that come along the way in any formal sense, but that you are always alive to the new and to change. I think that's very important because you can learn to see it through the eyes of the missionaries and envision it through your own experience.

I: In the book that has recently come out in honor of the anniversary of Luther Seminary, Striving for Ministry, one comment that was made there was that you were an advocate of the indigenous church. Were you a pioneer or one of the primary spokespersons for this position in the Lutheran Church?

SYRDAL: No, very definitely I wasn't. That was pioneered long before my time. I maybe gave it a little added impetus, but I think that it is that I was a little more fortunate than some in being ready and taking responsibility at a time when this could be effectively carried through. There were some of the mission fields that actually were not as well-organized towards indigenous churches as they were in China. Before the end of my term in the mission office, every mission field that we had had become indigenous theoretically and on the basis of full implementation at least to the initial stages and were really quite well along in self-government, though not always self-supporting.

I: What did you find were the problems of missionaries who were faced with a major, rapid change? (As you mentioned, in your tenure as executive many of the churches did become indigenous and the power was transferred to native leadership.) What were the problems that some of the missionaries faced and do face because of this change?

SYRDAL: I think that one of the (let me take the negative first) difficulties of the missionaries in the time of indigenization is not so much in the original official step, but in the implementation of it. They may suddenly feel that their work is not as valuable or as needed on the mission field as it was in the past. This differs on different mission fields and almost on individual bases.

I know that in Tanzania we had one missionary that had been there three years when I came out there. As I always tried to visit every missionary of ours on every mission field, I visited with him. I asked him: "Where is your work now?" And he said, "I don't know." When I asked him what he was doing, he said, "I'm waiting." It's awfully tough for a young man who is dedicated to his Lord and to the work to sit around and wait for an assignment for two or three years! This was a case where the work was supposed to be assigned the missionary by the church. It was the bishop's job to make the assignment and to gear him into the church. He failed in this, and here was this poor missionary sitting out there feeling that his time was more or less wasted. He had courage enough to stick it out; some haven't.

This is not the case, in most instances, of any opposition--one group against the other. I would rather say that it is the inability to visualize the possibility of gearing everything together by the native church leader. One of the places where this would be expected most would be the Union of South Africa where a native never had a right to vote on anything in reference to himself or anything else or in the government. That church became indigenous and is now stationing the missionaries and deciding on the speciality of work of each missionary and native pastor and running the organization on an effective basis with good coordination between the missionary and the native.

There are places where nationalistic tendencies have set the native more or less at a point of tension with the missionaries in order to get things faster than he has gotten them. We try to counteract that spirit by giving them a little bit more responsibility in an indigenous church than they are willing to take.

I: How do you feel missions affected the growth of the church within the United States?

SYRDAL: They are reciprocal. Where there is a good deep spirit, alive with concern for the Kingdom of God, you have good mission interest. Mission interest will stimulate this type of view among the average Christians so that each one will feed the other. And without a mission view, Christianity can grow pretty stilted and self-centered and ingrown. With a view of the call of the church to go out into the world where there is tremendous need, where there is no gospel, it widens the horizon of the individual Christian and the church as a whole beyond itself where it begins to stretch and push to reach out. That's always helpful to a church. Whenever a church becomes self-satisfied and doesn't feel that it is needed for other people, it loses effectiveness.

I: What did you feel that missions contributed to American life in general?

SYRDAL: That's a rather difficult question because it's so far-reaching. We do recognize that the knowledge of foreign lands--and that may be especially true of India and China--comes through the missionaries. They are the ones who break the ground, who prepare the original writing about a nation, write the grammars, call attention to the needs of people. The world is enlightened by what the missionary does and has done to carry the message to people in other nations.

I: Did the missionaries from China try to influence the U. S. government in any of their policy decisions, particularly as the Communists were gaining control? Did they ever try to get the United States to send more money or more weapons to China?

SYRDAL: Not that I know of. In the early history of China there were some countries (France was one of them) where some of the early Catholic missions sought to get some control or some government aid in certain areas. When our generation of missionaries was in China, I think that we rather resented the fact that the gunboats were plying the Yangtze River and that they claimed it was for our protection. We didn't need their protection, so we were particularly anxious to have absolutely no connection between the government policies and our work. We wanted to be simply left in peace to do our own work.

I: What did you find were the aspects of Christianity that were the easiest for the Chinese to understand and accept and which ones were the most difficult?

SYRDAL: I think that would take a book and a little research to answer that question. The aspects of our faith that dealt with the creation, I think, were very easy for them to understand because the age-old Chinese religion that dates back maybe a 1000 years before Christ dealt with one god who was the creator God. They called him "Shang Ti." And actually the name for God was so purely monotheistic that it was used for the name of God in the Bible when it was translated. There is a connection. Shang Ti is the creator and that leads to the concept of God caring for His people--to the point where sin is met by grace through Jesus Christ.

I suppose that grace is the hardest thing for them to understand because to them religion is something where they try either to intimidate the gods or to placate the gods in order to get their own way. In other words, it is what they do to their gods rather than what God does for them. Or else it's the old Chinese saying which is very

much translated. It would be "Shan yu shan pao 0 yu 0 pao."
"The good bear the fruit of good; the evil bear the fruit
of evil." And then they go on and say if this doesn't
happen right away it means that it has just been delayed
a little while. So it's works-righteousness which is,
of course, also the bane that we have to combat in this
country.

I: Dr. Syrdal, we are at the end of the tape. We do thank
you for your time and contribution.