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EDGAR SOVIK
ORAL HISTORY ABSTRACT

BORN: February 23, 1910, in Kioshan, China.

CHINA EXPERIENCES: reason for returning to China after seminary education; memories of Pastor Wu Ying and experiences with Communists in Sinyang; work as manager of Lutheran Church's Board of Publications and Lutheran Book Concern; coping with inflation after WWII; disagreements with Chinese pastor over what kinds of articles to publish in Sin I Pao (the voice of the Lutheran Church of China); dealing with the Communists as Director of Lutheran Missions' Home and Agency; efforts to leave China, leaves China, June, 1950; response to People's Republic of China and government programs; lessons learned from the China mission field.

INTERVIEWER: Jane Baker Koons

DATE: 7-21-77

PLACE: Northfield, Minnesota

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INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWER: Mr. Sovik, may I begin by asking you why you went to China?

SOVIK: My approach was kind of pragmatic. I thought where would be the normal place for a young Christian to go? I knew the language, I knew the people, I had spent 15-17 years there. It seemed to me that if I were to work in the Lord's work at all, that would be the normal place. And rather than look for a specific call, I would look for a denial of my going there. It seemed such a strictly logical extension of what a Christian would do. Basically, that was the reason I went back.

I: Did you have seminary training then?

SOVIK: Oh, yes.

I: Did the Evangelical Lutheran Church Mission Board have any questions about accepting children of missionaries?

SOVIK: No, I don't think they did. They knew these candidates were probably the best equipped. But they also were a little careful. They didn't want to have only second generation; this might develop into something which was pretty ingrown. It might lead to the children carrying on as their fathers did without any new ideas. It could be bad. So of the group that went out, there were Reidar Daehlin, my sister, Gertrude, and me, three who were missionaries' kids. Then there was Joseph Albue and Gary Lane. So it was pretty well split down the middle.

I: How did your parents react when you and Gertrude decided to return to the mission field?

SOVIK: I think they accepted this as the normal course of events.

I: I think now we will jump to the years after World War II. When you were involved in refugee work in Hankow, did you then go to West China?

SOVIK: After the war I didn't go to West China. I went to West China during the war. I worked for the Chinese government. When the war was over in 1946, I went back to the mission field. I went back first to Sinyang in June to put all the buildings back in shape. They were going to open the American School in Sinyang rather than on the mountain. There was a lot of carpentry work and supervisory repair work to be done. So I went there and spent the summer and early fall getting the buildings ready, and then the school moved in. In January of 1947, I was sent to Hankow to take over the business management of the Lutheran Board of Publications and the management of the Lutheran Book Concern. I went down on January 1 to Hankow and I stayed there until June 23 of 1950.

I: When you arrived back on the mission field after returning from West China, what did you find were the positive and negative changes that had occurred in the church?

SOVIK: Sinyang was a bit unusual because there had been a lot of physical damage. That's easy to replace. I mean you can rebuild a house, you repair a roof, that's just a matter of dollars and cents and nails and lumber. We had at the time a Chinese pastor, Wu Ying, who later became the president of the Lutheran Church of China. He was a very forceful strong character. When the Japanese wanted to take over the church building, he stood in the doorway and said, "No. You can take it by force. I can't stop you; I have no guns. But this is where we worship God." They pretty much respected him. I think statistics will

bear out that the church, at least numerically and perhaps spiritually, was stronger when we returned than when we left because of his particular position in its history. I don't know where he is now, of course, but we all liked him. Last I heard, the Communists had him hauling water for a living.

I did know, if you want that part of it, that when the Communists came in they said they they were not anti-religious. They believed in atheism, but you were free to believe what you wished. But then they said, "You have this big building here and we're rebuilding a new China. We have to educate the people and we can't let this building stand here for seven days a week. You use it on Sunday and maybe one day during the week, and the rest of the time it stands empty. We'll have to use it for classes and indoctrination and things like that. But Saturday nights we'll clean it up, and Sundays you can have your services. So there'll be no interference with your work."

Well, it sounded good, but they never did clean up. So the parishioners would come late Saturday night or Sunday morning to clean up the church and they'd have services. Then one day they came to have services on Sunday and the church was packed full with Communists. They said, "I know what we promised, but this is a special occasion. The big man came up from Hankow and he only has a limited amount of time. We have to have this meeting. You can worship God just as well in the afternoon, can't you?"

The next step was when they came around and said, "We're having a big meeting out at the square behind the county seat and we need seating facilities. We'd like to borrow some of your pews. We'll bring them back, don't worry about that. They'll be here for Sunday. We'll just borrow them. We're not going to hurt them, just sit on them." You can't argue with that. So they borrowed maybe two-thirds of the pews. Come Saturday they

weren't back. Pastor Wu Ying and some of the people went up to get the pews and haul them back. There was a guard on the pews who said, "I don't know. I was just told to guard the pews." So they went from pillar to post and could find no one to give them permission to take the pews. I really don't know how that ended - whether they got the pews back eventually or not.

The next step was, "Pastor Wu, you're the pastor here, but you can't live on the sweat of your congregation. You've got to make your own living." He said, "I've got several thousand people here. I have to call on the sick. I have to instruct the young, I am busy all the time." "No, you can't take any collection in church. This is wrong. You can have your services, you can preach, but you have to make your living some other way."

The last I heard he was carrying water from the river, peddling it on the street. Now that's not a very easy job. Of course, people have made their living that way for a long time, but they're professional carriers - they're used to it. Their shoulders are strong and they have big callouses on them, but for a person who has always been a school man and a minister and is not used to the physical side of it, well, I don't know. That's the last I heard of Wu Ying. How it turned out I don't know.

I: How old would he be now if he were living?

SOVIK: I would have to guesstimate and he was older than I was by a number of years. So he must be, if he is living, 75 or better. He had a rather tragic life. His wife, his first wife, and children were swept away in a flood in Fancheng which is in the West Field and they were all drowned. He later married, had a second family and then this happened.

I: Was any of his family able to leave China?

SOVIK: I don't know. I doubt it because no one knows anything about him. If they had left, they would have gone to Hong Kong and joined the church there and there would have been some communication one way or another. But I have never heard any.

I: When you returned to the field after World War II, how did the Lutherans view the future? What new plans were under consideration?

SOVIK: I wouldn't say "new plans." The planning had been done years ago. You had at that time the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America, which had Chinese converts. We had Chinese who were converts to the Swedish Lutheran Church. You had the American Lutheran Church; you had the Missouri Synod; you had the Swedes from Sweden. You had the Norwegian State Church, you had the Norwegian Free Church; you had so many groups in different parts of China. In order to get away from this kind of foolishness, they felt that a Lutheran Church of China was essential. These people were not children of an American church of foreign ancestry; there should be an indigenous church. Hopefully, the various missionaries would stay on and help build this church, eventually recede in the background, and the Chinese gradually take over.

Of course, the Chinese church had no funds and they were saddled with all the big churches we had built which they couldn't keep up. So a schedule was set up to gradually have the foreign people withdraw and have the Lutheran Church of China take over. The new churches would be indigenous. They would have congregations and build their own churches, even if they were mud huts and had to develop from the bottom up. This was good in theory, but then the war came and all that. Of course, after the war, everyone was thinking, "The war is over. Now we can proceed with plans."

One of the organs of the Lutheran Church of China was the Lutheran Board of Publications which was the organ which put out Sin I Pao (the church paper). It translated a lot of works into Chinese, Christian works, mostly English, some German, some Scandinavian. We had a group of translators who stayed out in Shekow, mostly, where the seminary was. The LBP had put out the hymnbooks, catechism, study helps and all that type of thing.

This Board of Publications had a large budget from various, different foreign missions. For instance, subscription price of the Sin I Pao just about paid for the paper on the cover. The rest was all subsidy. We did not believe in giving this away. Of course, there were free tracts from the Bible Society and others, but basically we did charge. But the charge was aimed at being so nominal that any Christian could afford the few cents that was needed and the rest was a complete subsidy. That was the one organ of the Lutheran Church of China that functioned on a running basis. They had, I suppose, occasional meetings of the Board of the Lutheran Church of China and so on, but the rest was pretty much all wish, hope and the future. The Board of Publications was the natural function and concern, but subsidized completely - really almost entirely subsidized by foreign mission groups.

I replaced Ralph Mortensen on the Board of Publications and the Lutheran Book Concern. Perhaps you know the difference between the two. The Board of Publications was the unit of the Lutheran Church of China. There were no English books available, no book store in Hankow, which had quite a large foreign population. Mortensen felt that there should be a possibility to sell books, not only Christian books but

dictionaries and all kinds of useful material. This led to the establishment of the Lutheran Book Concern. The profits of the Book Concern were to support the manager of the Lutheran Board of Publications. There had never been, up to that point, any reasonable profit. It had broken even or made some profit, but never much.

When I came in 1947, I think there were \$700 or \$800 in the account and a bunch of pre-war books. One of our Chinese had slept there at night just to keep the thing intact and keep wandering Japanese soldiers out. The seminary had been in there and picked over the stock. They took any book they thought they could use before I came down there. So there was practically nothing there to work with. In a year and a half or two years, this sounds like bragging, but I had completely redone the bookstore, redone all the shelves, put glass show-cases in, redone the front, restocked the whole thing and I showed about \$10,000 in profit. But this was a product of the times, rather than individual skill, because the universities all over the country were screaming for texts. They couldn't get foreign exchange from their government to buy texts. That is why the pirated editions became so popular in Shanghai. That's why China did not agree to the copyright convention. But still they were getting very little from that. These people were completely crazy to get reference books. Like the National Hunan University and K'e Chiang College. There were a number of them.

I was mission treasurer at the time for our mission. The question was whether or not we should go on the black market with our money. I was sent down to Shanghai to talk to the number two man of the Chase Manhattan Bank, who was a strong Lutheran, over the whole prospect. He advised against going on the black market because he said, "You're guilty by default if they want to make a case against you. You haven't changed money

in the banks. Where are you getting your money? You're spending money evidently; you're not changing it through the banks." He said, "You'd have to change at least the bulk through the bank. You could go through the black market for a little bit. That might be all right."

I wrote to my uncle, Edward Sovik, who was chairman on the board of our mission. I said, "I'm not prepared to put our mission on the black market on my say-so. If you want the mission on the black market, you write me a letter saying so. And I'll follow your instructions. But I'm not going to take the responsibility." I got a letter back saying, "Well, who is going to?"

Then I thought of this gimmick in which I could make a case if it were ever rammed to me. I went to the universities like National Hunan University in Changsha. I made this offer: "Look, I will buy you all the reference books you want. I'll send you catalogues. I will charge you the price of the book, the retail price of the book. You'll pay the postage at book post, which is very cheap. On a \$3.00 book, the postage will be \$.12, and you'll pay me a 10 percent handling charge. But I'll let you have them at the official exchange rate." The official rate was generally \$.40 on the dollar. So if they bought a \$3.00 book, they were paying the equivalent of \$1.40 or \$1.45 for a \$3.00 book. They were as happy as could be. Now I said, "I can't guarantee any amount, but when I can use your money I'll wire you and you wire it back to me." So whenever the mission needed money, I wired the university for so many hundred million. So next day I'd get the money. I'd use it for the mission and give them credit in U. S. dollars. Against this amount they would order books.

How did I come out on this? On a \$3.00 book I made 40 percent generally so that was \$1.20, plus I had a 10 percent handling charge or another \$.30. I was making almost 50 percent. They were paying all the charges. So the book store was making out like a bandit. What was actually happening was that I was picking up for the book store, what our mission was losing in the exchange. Now technically, the Chinese government might be able to make trouble for me on this, but at least morally and theoretically I was helping. I always used the official rate; I gave them their books at the official rate; I traded at the official rate. I didn't go to the black market rate. And all this was for libraries of universities. We had tremendous orders until the Communists came and brought an end to it.

At the time I was looking at property out near the race club in Hankow. My idea was to buy some property out there and build some homes and move the translating staff in from the Shekow seminary, so they were closer to the Board of Publications. But it never came off because things deteriorated.

The General Secretary of the Lutheran Board of Publications was Rev. Chen Chien-hsun, who was Chinese. He had gone to our seminary in Shekow. He'd come to the States to study at St. Olaf and then gone to our seminary in St. Paul. He was a little older than I. He was the general secretary and I was just the business manager. So what it amounted to was that I printed what they turned out. I had very little if anything to say about what was to be translated, who was to be the translator, who was to do the specific job, or anything like that. We had Chinese professors out at the seminary translating part-time for the Board of Publications. But when a manuscript was finished, it was my job to put it into print and circulate it, put it on the market-- that and the Sin I Pao, which was the Lutheran Church paper.

Then when the Communists approached, all the missionaries came in from up country. Of course, the American school moved out. Everyone was moving out ahead of the Communists, but my feeling might be put thus: "We're not moving. We're going to stay and see what they are like. Governments come and governments go in China. Hankow won't be the first place to fall. Peking will fall first and if the foreigners fare badly there, I'll still have time to make a break for it. And if they don't, why we'll sit back and see what happens." When I made this decision, the Lutheran Mission Home was also turned over to me. This was our six-story building. We had two other missionaries stay behind - one was Hans Nesse, who carried a Norwegian passport, and the other was Palmer Anderson, who carried a Canadian passport. Then there was old Mrs. Marie Stokke, who lived up on the fifth floor. She wasn't going to move for love nor money. We had her meals sent up to her on the fifth floor. She went out on the porch on the fifth floor, but otherwise hardly ever left her room.

Now we get into a whole other big kettle of fish: the Communist situation. The biggest problem I had was with Chen Chien-hsun. It was just kind of against my grain to walk out and leave a thing without some kind of struggle to see if we couldn't come out somewhere on top. My dad had asked Chen Chien-hsun how he felt about the Communists. He said, "I'm no Communist." But he said, "We've had government after government after government which have all been fiascoes. If the Communists can't run a decent government, China is finished." Now his point was theoretically well-taken. He said, "You missionaries can leave and run off to the States when they come. We Chinese, we live here. We have to make our peace with the Communist government. They have promised us religious freedom; we're going to have to insist that they give it to us." And he said, "They say they want to build a new China. We'll show them that the best people to rebuild a new China are the Christians. That's our only hope." This seems logical and it seems heroic and, in a sense, it was, I think.

The Communists came in on the 17th day of May, 1949 (that was Dad's wedding anniversary and Norwegian Independence Day). They behaved pretty well, really. Chen Chien-hsun continued to publish the Sin I Pao. Shortly after they came in, Chen brought the copy over to me and it was a "Welcome Edition" to the Communists. I said, "Now wait a minute. You can't put out this paper. A lot of China has not yet fallen to the Communists. If you sent this paper into South China, the Nationalists are going to say the Lutheran Church is Communist; and it is going to be persecuted. This just can't go this way." He said, "We're going to live with the Communists; we've got to make our peace with them." Of course, I was young and I finally took the paper over to Claude Pickens, an Episcopalian who was my senior. He had a good deal of experience, especially in Moslem work. So I talked it over with him and said, "I can't let this paper go this way." Yet, Chen was my superior. So I said, "Well, Pastor Chen, if you insist on putting this paper out, I can't stop you. But I can do two things, which I'll have to do. I want my name off the mast-head of the paper as the business manager. Furthermore, I don't mind telling you that I'll recommend to our Board that we cease subsidizing the paper because our people at home are giving money to support the church, to push the cause of Christ, not Communism." Of course, I used the very worst thing, "dollar diplomacy." But there wasn't much else to do, so he finally softened the thing in a way.

We went through this battle week after week after week. I was trying to save the Sin I Pao and he would make statements with which I disagreed. I said, "Now look, whatever is put in this paper is taken as the voice of the Lutheran Church." He said, "No, I'll put it down as my personal feeling." I said, "I don't care what you put down. It's taken by the Communists and by the rest of the people as the voice of the Lutheran Church. You can't

say, "Well, I'm speaking for myself now and not for the church, but now I'm speaking for the church. It doesn't go that way."

We used to have little news items and now, of course, they were pro-Communist. I couldn't fight that. I said, "What are you? A political paper?" He replied, "When the Communists weren't here, you were here. Then everything was pro-West. Now, if something isn't pro-West, it must be wrong. So, in other words, we do have a political bias." I couldn't fight that one too much. Then he said, "Now I've had many comments in letters saying the paper is better than ever. The Bible helps are better; the sermon helps are better. In fact, we published in the church paper a statement by the Communists that they would not take over the church schools. I got a letter from a woman up country who has one of the church schools. The Communists came to take her school. She showed them this article and they backed off." He said, "They will back down if you'll put it up to them and hold it up to them. Make them live up to their words. We've got to try."

It went on and on.. In the Christmas edition, "Thank God for the Communists." I called him and said, "Look. Where is the Christ Child in this paper? On page 36! Christmas edition-- Christ Child appears on page 36. Can you explain that to me?" Well, he hemmed and hawed, but I could see it was a battle that I wasn't going to win. He admitted to me privately, more or less, that he was sunk, that he was on the tiger's back. He had committed himself too much and he couldn't back away. I heard later after I left (I left in June) that he "ma-ed" me in public meetings. Technically, to "ma" is to curse, but it is not used very often in that sense. It means that he berated me for forcing him not to push the Communist cause and so on. Of course, he was protecting himself, trying to excuse the fact that the paper wasn't blatantly pro-Communist, and he took it out by blaming it on me. If it saved his skin--good, because it didn't hurt mine.

I don't know what has happened to the Lutheran Book Concern and the Board of Publications. I thought I closed the Book Concern and yet years later, my wife, Irene, was in Switzerland. There was an Indian (worked for the Indian Airlines or something) and above his bed (he was a Christian) he had a picture of Christ in Gethsemane. It was done in silk. We had sold them in the book store and that's where he had bought it. He'd been in Hankow, seen the book store, and bought that in Hankow many years after I left. So what the church can do and can't do, I've lost track of in the 27 years since I've left. I haven't been in contact and when I ask, I don't get much from the missionaries in Hong Kong.

I: Was the Sin I Pao published then after that Christmas Edition?

SOVIK: Oh, yes, I imagine it's still being published. I don't know that it's still being published, but, of course, it would be a different format, smaller, and carry a different message, some Christian message probably, together with instructions from the Communists and so on. But Chen may still be able to put in sermon helps and devotional material. It's possible, but I don't know.

I: What actually, then, precipitated your leaving in June?

SOVIK: The Communists came, as I say, in May. In the fall, the British said that they were going to recognize Communist China. At the time, we felt the Communists were interested in contacts with the outside, and we felt that the British would not do this on a unilateral basis. They would have consulted our State Department. We had not quite, but almost, said that if it worked for the British, we would probably follow suit. This was sort of a hopeful feeling. This was the fall and early winter.

Mao went to Moscow to get aid from the Russians but he got no place. Kruschev thought he was so stubborn they wouldn't see him anymore. Chou En-lai went. Chu Teh, the head of the army, went. The Communists finally got six hundred million over a five-year period. That's chicken feed. They came back with that and the Chinese were laughing. They said, "Well, at least Chiang knows who to call Grandpa. Chiang calls Uncle Sam 'Papa,' but Uncle Sam gives him something. These people, they give nothing."

In Peking you had the American Embassy, which was, I suppose, leased property, or maybe it was American property. But next to it was what was called the "Marine barracks." There was a Marine detachment up there and this "Marine barracks" became American through the Boxer Idemnity Agreement. In the latter part of the war, Churchill and Roosevelt declared an end to all extraterritoriality in China. This meant that all concessions and all property in there came under Chinese control. This meant that all concessions and property, for instance, the British Concession in Hankow itself, became Chinese. That did not mean that the building occupied by the Hong Kong Shanghai Bank was no longer theirs; it was theirs. It was like the English bank that owned property in Minneapolis and built a building there. It was theirs, but would be under Chinese jurisdiction, the Chinese police, and they would have to obey Chinese laws.

Then what became of such things as the fire department? That did not belong to any person; it belonged to the British Concession. The concession English school, the International Hospital: these things should all revert to China. Right after the war, Chiang was receiving a lot of help from the West. He wasn't about to make an issue over a piece of property. We had many soldiers up north helping to stem the

Communist tide and he wasn't going to say, "You can't use the Marine barracks. This is Chinese property." When the Communists arrived, the marines pulled out and the embassy people (why, I don't know) put a couple of families in there to try to hold that property. Once you get something, you don't want to let go of it. You seemingly never could turn anything over to the Chinese saying, "This is yours. We have no further need of it--help yourself." No, we try to hold it."

Then the Communists came in. There was a struggle at that time amongst the party leadership, the Li Li San and the pro-Russian Communists were one group. Mao was out of the country, so they precipitated an incident. They demanded the Marine barracks. Of course, all the American newspapers said, "Communists take American Embassy," which was not true. They had taken only property which was legitimately theirs. But I think that when Mao came back and found that, he probably gave up hope of coming to a modus vivendi with the West.

I got to feeling about the end of the year that maybe it was time to get out. But I was in charge of the Lutheran Board of Publications and the Lutheran Missions' Home and Agency, and I couldn't just dump them. I had to get instructions and, at least, permission to take the steps that I thought were necessary from the Board in Hong Kong, which I did. I got that all cleared up and I was ready to go in about April. At that time the Communists hadn't registered us yet. Then they notified all foreigners that they had to register. We should appear with our passports. I thought, "Now this is no time to ask to leave." When they ask to register, if I ask to leave, they'll say, "Why? Why are you afraid to go through registration?" This may have been true particularly since I worked with Chiang during the war. So I said, "I'll wait until this is over."

They took our passports and gave us a long questionnaire to fill out in Chinese. We filled it out and brought it to them. They looked it over and if they were satisfied, they gave us another sheet on which to copy the questionnaire in good form. Of course, we had our Chinese do it. When that was done, we brought it in and they returned our passports and gave us a date for an interview. The wives all got together and agreed that they would know nothing. "How much does your husband make?" "I never really pay attention to that." "How much do you spend for this or that?" "Well I don't know." All pleaded innocent. I was interviewed for an hour and a half. Of course they asked me and I told them that I worked with Chiang during the war. "Why did you do that?" I told them that I thought it would help the war effort. They said, "Why did you leave?" I said, "The war was over and now I could go back to the mission field." Finally, they agreed to that and I was registered.

Once I was registered I said, "Well, now is the time to apply to leave." So I went to the police and asked for a permit to leave the country. They asked why and I said, "I don't know how much you know about the Lutheran Missions' Home and Agency. Ordinarily we missionaries stay in China for seven years. I'll have been here six now and theoretically I should stay another year. But the Lutheran Missions' Home was meant not only as a hostel for missionaries, but as a shopping agency. If the glass was needed for the hospital, no one would have to come down to Hankow to buy it. They would send down the request to us. We would buy the glass and ship it up on the railroad and they would pick it up at the railhead. Wives needed material; they needed groceries. All these things we could ship without having people running back and forth. Now, of course, there is nobody up country.

I said, "I have two reasons--business and personal. In a year or so I hope things will quiet down. Maybe people will start coming back again. It seems to make much more sense to leave now when things are quiet. When things pick up again, I'm ready to come back and take over and do something." "Oh, you plan to come back?" I said, "Certainly I plan to come back." "What are your personal reasons?" I said, "I had a son born (which was true) in January. My father is an old man. So far as I know he is well, but this is his first grandson. My older brother has two daughters. One brother is married; one sister isn't married. This is the first grandson. And when you get as old as my father, you may go at any time. So I think it would be nice to get home and let him see his grandson."

The next question: "What do you think about our government?" I said, "I don't know what to think. I think you're taxing the people terribly. Now if you're going to rebuild a new China, it's understandable that you're going to have to tax. But if your taxing is to drive the individual merchants to the wall, I don't accept that. I don't agree with that. The Chinese people have eaten enough bitterness." He said, "What do you mean by that?" I replied, "I was born out here. The first thing I can remember was Pai Lang (White Wolf), the bandit. Then it was Wu Pei-Fu, then Chang Tso-lin and Feng Yu-hsiang. All these people have been fighting back and forth over the countryside. There weren't many soldiers killed, but the farms were burned and women raped. The houses and cities were destroyed. Then Chiang took over and it looked like he might be able to establish some order in the country. But the Japanese war came on and again it happened--fighting, looting, burning. Then the war is over and we all say, 'Well, now finally maybe China will get some peace.' Then you and Chiang start up. And I think that's enough." He said, "Are you really concerned

about the Chinese people?" "I was brought up on the Chinese amah's bosom. If I'm not concerned about the Chinese, I can't be considered human." He said, "All right, we'll let you know."

This was in April, but at that time Chiang's armies were still bombarding the Canton railway station and railroad. The Communists used that as an excuse, and it may have been a legitimate excuse, for not allowing anybody down the railroad. It wasn't until June that they began to let people out.

Now the procedure was this: they told you to advertise in the Chinese paper for three days saying, "I, so and so, am leaving for the United States, and if anyone has any claim against me, speak now or forever hold your peace." That type of thing. Once that had been in the paper for three days, we brought the paper, with the ads, into the Foreign Affairs Department. They would set a date for leaving and give us a passport-- a permit. We were all scared about this because this was a chance for blackmail. No one ever ran into problems except me.

One day, it was a Saturday afternoon, I was in my apartment. A Chinese came up with a letter which he said a man had brought for me. I didn't read much Chinese, so I said, "Read it to me." The letter was on the letterhead of the Ch'ang Chiang Pao, the Yangtze daily, which was a Communist paper. The letter said: "We saw in the paper that you are leaving. We know that you are a good man or you wouldn't have stayed around when we came in. However, there is one problem we would like to bring to your attention. There was an American doctor who died in Changsha. He had a son. This son had been sick. He's been in our hospital and we have healed him. But there is a question about his livelihood. Before you leave, would you be willing to contribute something?"

I called up the number two man on the Board of Publications and said, "Now read that." (He was kind of pro-Communist, not from a religious point of view, but he felt they were sincerely trying to run a government.) I said, "I don't know of any American doctor in Changsha who ever died there. If an American doctor had died there, certainly his wife and child would have left long ere this. Now if they are intimating that he had a Chinese wife and this is a Chinese son, I would like some proof. If they're trying to pretend or accuse him of having an illegitimate child, the man's dead. They better come up with some pretty good proof." He said, "Let me go and ask the paper about it."

In the meantime, I had sent word that the letter carrier should come back on Monday. The letter was written on paper which had the letterhead of the Ch'ang Chiang Pao, but the envelope was not an official envelope. The spokesman for the Ch'ang Chiang Pao said, "We know nothing about this." If he comes back Monday, talk to him, keep him in conversation, and call us. We'll come and pick him up. You probably won't hear from him because he just thought you would hand out a few bucks, and he'd be that much better off for writing a letter." And I heard nothing more of him. But I was sweating a bit for awhile. Then we left.

We were given a travel document for the 23rd of June, and we were supposed to be at the boat ferry. The ferry went from Hankow across the Yangtze River to Wuchang. The train took off from there to Canton and then to Hong Kong. We were supposed to be there at the Hankow ferry dock at 2:00 with our baggage (we had to list everything that was in every piece of baggage in triplicate), and they would examine our baggage. We were there at 2:00. In June it was hot and Karl was six months old. 3:00 came; they didn't show. So I said to

the railroad man there, "Do you have a telephone that I can call them?" He said, "Don't call them. Go see them." So I went over to the Foreign Affairs Department. It was closed. There was a man in uniform standing there. He asked what I wanted, so I explained. I said, "I've got to see somebody. They are supposed to come and check my baggage." He said, "This is Saturday and we are not open today." I replied, "They're not open Sunday. If I leave Monday, my travel permit will run out before I get to Hong Kong."

Just then another man came by and asked what the trouble was. I explained to him. He said, "Just a minute, I'll see if I can do anything." He came back in a few minutes and said, "Go back down. They'll be down shortly." At that time they didn't have their own people. They were using the old railroad men and people like that because they didn't have the technicians. So I went down there and the railroad agent said, "They're just trying to cause you "ma fan" (trouble). If your baggage doesn't make the 5:00 ferry, it's not going to make the train. When you get to the Hong Kong border, it's not going to be there and you're going to be held up for a day or more. So let's weigh it all now." So we weighed it all. He made out all the necessary slips and figured the charges.

At 4:00 they came and went through quite a number of pieces. At 4:45, they said we would go. I said, "Come on, men, let's rope the baggage." (I had a number of employees from the L.M.H.A. with me.) The railroad agent said, "Don't rope them. Send them on the ferry and rope them on the ferry." So they threw all the baggage on the ferry. My Chinese men went across and roped them en route. This way the baggage made the ferry on time. I think it was just a little more harrassment. Then when we got to Hong Kong, they were all talking about the Korean War starting on the 25th. I guess that just about covers the Communist end of it.

I: Did Palmer Anderson and Mrs. Stokke go out with you then?

SOVIK: No, they didn't. They came out a short while later. I don't know how many weeks later. Palmer came out and Mrs. Stokke came out.

I had been unable to make a booking on a ship because we didn't know when we could get out of China. So when we got there on the 25th, the President Cleveland was leaving on the 14th of July. I said, "I hope the only room they have is the honeymoon suite." They had only one stateroom left and I got that, so I went on that ship. On the ship, I met a fellow I had known in the College of Chinese Studies in Peking. He asked me what I was going to do when I got back to the States. I said, "I really don't know. I've never thought of being a minister in the States. I have always thought of the Far East, but everything is closed up now." He said, "There are some things opening up in the State Department. Maybe I can get you something if you give me a short vita," which I did. In time I received a routine application from the Central Intelligence Agency. I had never heard of them, but I filled out the form.

Eventually, I got a job in Taipei with them. I got a leave of absence from the church. I was there three years and by that time our organization there had been pretty well blown as being CIA. Some of the big military generals had come out and they blabbed. The higher the man, the more danger there is in security work, believe me. Then I realized that my usefulness in the mission field in the Far East was gone. No one would ever again believe that I wasn't using it as a cover. When I joined the agency, that was one of the prerequisites. I put down that I would never use the church as a cover. They wanted me to, but I said no.

Then I went from there to Saipan in the Marianas. At that time the church was reorganizing. The American Lutheran Church was being formed. They had quite a number of pastors on leave of absence. The church officers wanted this cleared up before the union. They said, "Look, what are you going to do? Are you coming back or not?" I said, "No, I'm not coming back." On my return to the U. S., I sent in my ordination papers. So I stayed on then with the Central Intelligence Agency for 20 years and retired from them.

I: Did you work after that primarily in the United States or did you have other foreign assignments?

SOVIK: I had other foreign assignments.

I: Were you able to capitalize on your knowledge of China?

SOVIK: I was always in the Far Eastern Division, except for three years in training. Otherwise, I was always in the Far East Branch.

I: When you left China in June, did you anticipate that you would ever be able to return?

SOVIK: I didn't know. It seemed doubtful. But things change. Maybe our policy toward China was right. I haven't bucked it. Maybe it was wrong. I think Mao was not an agrarian reformer as Davies and some others believe. I think Mao was a dyed-in-the-wool Communist all the way through. That did not mean that we could not have come to some kind of working relationship with him. We did with Russia. We've been in relationship with Russia since 1933. But our die was cast in a pretty hard line as far as Communist China was concerned and stayed that way for a number of years. But I'm not qualified to pass any judgments on that.

I: When you could see that the Communists were getting more active and perhaps had gained the upper hand, were you able to prepare the Chinese Christians in any way for the changes that were to occur?

SOVIK: I don't know how you could have prepared them. Anything you said might be used against you. I had difficulty with the Lutheran Missions' Home Agency. I had this big building and home and I had all these servants. So I called them together before the Communists came in, when it was evident that they were arriving, and I said, "Now look, I don't know what the future holds. This place may be empty most of the time. I don't know even what I can use for money that I can keep. I have silver dollars and what I'll do now is pay you each three months' salary in advance. I don't care what you do with the money. But I advise you to buy rice. You can each keep three months' supply of rice under your bed or something like that. I can't keep that much rice--they might claim I was hoarding. But individually, you could. If you want to leave and go back home up country, you're welcome to go. I don't promise you anything upon your return except this: if things quiet down and you do return and we need someone, you'll be at the head of the list. But supposing your job has been filled in the meantime and things quiet down and you come back, I am not going to oust anybody to put you in a job. But you'll be on the head of the list when we do need somebody." Only one man left. He went up country back to his home. To the rest I said, "I won't guarantee you anything. I'll pay you what I can, based on what we take in. And we'll just have to play it by ear. We can all get along some way." Of course, we managed.

Then we had a Communist who had been brought up in our mission schools. He'd been to the university and he'd gone up and joined with the Communists. Ho Wai was his name. He was executive secretary to the mayor at Hankow. Later he went on pretty high up in the Communist hierarchy. Where he is now, I don't know. I went to see him, but he couldn't see me-- he was busy. One night we were just getting ready to go out to a party and a Chinese came and said, "Ho Wai is here with Wong and he would like to see you." So I told my wife to go to the party and I would get there when I could. I went down and we talked awhile. He said, "You know I would like to move in here. When I went to school, I used to live here at one time. I know how to live in a foreign house. I don't spit on the floor and things like that. But over there where I'm now living, it's just so disturbed and confused. I would like to have some place where I could more easily relax."

So I said, "All right, you know the home has a central elevator shaft. (The elevator was gone. The building was kind of built around two wings and then the servants quarters.) I'll give you the whole fourth floor under certain conditions. You can have your guards up at the end of the entrance shaft, not at the front door of the building. I don't want people stopped at the front door here. You can protect yourself with your guards at the entrance shaft and the two ends if you like. Secondly, I'm not going to charge you any rent. But water and electricity is a city function. You take care of the water and electricity for the building." He was very happy about that. He agreed to that.

I asked him about the bookstore, what I should do with it. He said, "I suggest you close it. You would be better off." So I said, "Okay." You see, they didn't want people to close their businesses because the Chinese would have closed their businesses and hidden whatever money they had. If you wished

to close their businesses, you had to get a permit to close and your permits were stacked high in their offices. They weren't issuing any permits to close. But with his say-so, I felt that I could lock it up. A couple days later guards appeared at the front building. So I said, "No," and they were taken off.

Then later on this proved a very, very valuable thing for me because Communists would come and say, "We need some rooms. You have some rooms, don't you?" And I would say, "Oh yes, I have some. What do you need?" "We need fifteen rooms." And I would say, "I've got six on the sixth floor. I can let you have three on the fifth." "Oh no, we want them all together." I would say, "I can't do that. You know I'm cooperating. I gave the whole fourth floor, so it's not that I'm unwilling to cooperate. But right now I can't give you that many rooms together." This always gave me an out, you see. I had about the only big building left which they really hadn't taken over. They had taken a number of them.

I: Did you leave Chinese in charge of the building then?

SOVIK: No. Actually the man I left in charge was a local small businessman. I think he was a Frenchman. But there wasn't much he could do. I mean, if they took it over, he couldn't make any mint out of it himself. There was a foreign presence there. How long it lasted, I don't know.

I: As mission treasurer did you take the deeds to the buildings and the properties with you when you left?

SOVIK: No, I don't believe that I did. We had to re-register them and I don't remember ever getting any deeds back. I was also chairman of the International Hospital at that time and I

had to register that. It was quite a bucket of worms pushing that through. I don't think it would mean a thing to have the deeds. They were in a safety deposit box in a safe. We had a vault about the size of a door and I put them in there. I don't really remember.

I: Did you leave the stock from the bookstore when you locked it up?

SOVIK: It was just left. There was nothing I could do with it. There wasn't that much. Well, there were quite a few books. I suppose the stock in the bookstore when I left would amount to maybe two—three thousand dollars. The money I made in the bookstore was not made in over-the-counter sales. It was the sale to the universities which never came on the counters at all. They came in and were shipped out to them right away. We used to carry dictionaries and the Oxford Classics and all kinds of things like that for local consumption. We even had a little rental library, maybe 60 or 70 foreign paperbacks. Foreigners would like to come in and get something to read. But the whole value of the books was only three or four thousand at the most.

I: When you left Hankow, approximately how many foreigners were left in Hankow?

SOVIK: That I would hesitate to guess. In the first case, what is a foreigner? White Russians? Amongst the missionaries there were--I don't know if Pickens was still there or not--Palmer Anderson was still there. I think there were a couple of the Wuchang side of the schools that were there - maybe a couple in the hospital. Very few businessmen were left, maybe half a dozen.

I: After you left China, did you keep in contact with any of the Chinese that you knew?

SOVIK: No, I never tried to. It could well be the kiss of death to write them. No, I never did.

I: Did you hear any more in those first few years after you left of how the Sin I Pao was doing?

SOVIK: No, I was in Formosa and I never heard anymore about Sin I Pao. I don't suppose much of it ever came outside of China. If it was published, it was probably taken to the boundary of the country.

I: When you were in West China working with the Chinese government, what were your responsibilities there?

SOVIK: I worked with what was called the War Area Service Corps. It was an organization which helped in the billeting and housing of American troops in China. We manned the hostels, furnished most of the food, barber, laundry, and all that type of thing. We tried to keep the peace and support the American forces as much as we could from the Chinese side.

I: How did you get this job?

SOVIK: We left China in April '41. We got out before Pearl Harbor, so were not interviewed. The mission board was going to send a truck with some of the older missionaries up through the Burma Road through India into West China. So I went to the mission board and said, "I haven't finished my furlough, but I've seen my folks and friends, so if you wish I'll drive the truck." They seemed grateful for that and I went down to Jackson, Minnesota. It was a Saturday. One of our church fathers -- I forget his name now -- had a son who had an Inter-

national Harvester Truck Agency. He ordered a new International truck for me, with extra gas tanks and certain other equipment. That night I drove from there to South Dakota where I spoke on missions. The next day was Sunday. On the way to the afternoon service, we heard about Pearl Harbor on the radio.

Of course, there was now no question of leaving as our sailing date was the 7th of January - that was all off. The board asked me then to go down to Dallas, Texas. They had a congregation there that was changing ministers and they needed somebody in the interim. It ended up with my staying there for two and a half years. I wasn't drafted because I was a minister. And from what I heard, the First World War chaplains just showed movies and ran volleyball teams and I couldn't see much use in that. I wrote to the Army and I wrote to the Navy and said, "Look, I speak Chinese." And they said, "We thank you for your patriotism. We'll put your name on file and if we need you, we'll call on you."

I used to keep the Shanghai Evening Post and the Mercury, which used to be a daily publication in Shanghai. It was now published as a weekly out of New York in the format of the Stars and Stripes. In that I saw that Dr. Frank Price was coming back from West China and the Generalissimo had commissioned him to find some old China hands to go back and work as liaison officers from Chiang's side toward the Americans. That seemed to offer me an out, so I wrote and lined it up. We went out from California, sixty days to Calcutta, made one stop in Melbourne, Australia, then flew over the Hump to Kunming. Out of the group of seven of us, I think three or four were put into training translators, interpreters. And two or three of us went to the War Service Corps. That's the way that came about. My wife stayed here until the war was over.

I: Did your parents return to the field after the war?

SOVIK: Yes, they came in '46. They left again in '49.

I: What is your response to the changes that occurred in China during the past thirty years?

SOVIK: I don't know what to say. I don't think you can get a real reading of what's been done. People like to say, "Well, it's certainly different today from what it was thirty years ago." There's no question about that, but if Chiang had been in power, there would be a difference, too, in thirty years. Now whether the difference the Communists made and Chiang would have made or another government, a more democratic type of government would have made, that's a question that no one can answer, because there's no way of finding out. How much progress has been made? I think some, no doubt. No question about it, there's been some progress made. But I don't think everything is roses and cream and peaches as people like to believe. Of course, I have some information from other sources that I can't talk about, but I think things are pretty brittle over there.

Things aren't all that peaceful. You give them a couple of bad years and their status doesn't look too good. Things get pretty bad again. You see, China is a big country and it's so terribly mountainous. Only a very small percentage of the land is tillable, a much smaller percentage than in this country. And they have 800 million people. Now any progress in industrialization has to come from surplus. That's why we're so fortunate in this country; we have the natural resources. We have land in abundance and very soon after settling we were producing more than we needed to live, and that became surplus. That surplus could go into industry, development of mines, etc. This increases geometrically.

When you get into a country like China where to try to develop any surplus means cutting into an already marginal existence for the people, it's pretty hard to become an industrial nation, very difficult. They've tried to lift themselves up by their bootstraps, but they haven't been overly successful. They've tried communes, the communes haven't worked. Mao tried that. He tried the Great Leap forward, but that died afluttering. Everybody was supposed to do something. You know, the little blast furnaces in the backyard, but everything that was produced was of inferior quality and didn't meet standards. If people have their own land, they'll till it.

The Chinese are not farmers; they are gardeners. When you have a piece of land like the Chinese have, you don't farm it, you garden it. Actually, that way you get the maximum production of the land. You couldn't afford to farm China the way that we farm here. We talk about our wheat fields. Here if you got Ruth and Naomi, they could go and glean enough for a village out of our wheat fields after we've gone through with the combines. The Chinese don't do that. It's individually cut and harvested. That's just to maintain a basic livelihood, not surplus, just a basic livelihood.

Where's the money coming from for industrialization? Russia won't give it to them. We shouldn't. So I don't know what the future holds. Slow progress? If they make 50 percent progress per year, people say, "Well, we only progress at 6 percent and they'll soon catch us." But 50 percent of two is one, six percent of a million is 60,000. So I mean statistics can lie like everything. So they are not in an enviable position right now and they know it, I think.

Do you want to go into the whole thing of the Cultural Revolution? You hear the writers talk about it as Mao this and Mao that, but it was strictly a power struggle for Mao. Strictly a matter to keep on top. Everything he did went sour. Well, this isn't missions, so I don't know if you want to get into it.

I: No, that's fine.

SOVIK: In the early years the Chinese Communists were recognized by one country after another. The British recognized them. They had the Bandung Conference, the Afro-Asian Co-prosperity and you had all this stuff going for them. It looked like things were going fine. Then things started coming apart at the seams. Even as early as 1952, they came out with the "three anti" and the "five anti" movements. The "three anti-movements" were aimed at the small businessmen; the "five anti-movements" were aimed at the bureaucrats.

I remember when I went to register the Lutheran Home or the International Hospital, I went to the office and I was sitting there chatting with the young men around there. They were talking about the United States and they said, "We're not against the United States really, just against the kind of government you have." I said, "That's ridiculous. The government does what the people say it must do." One young man nodded his head saying, "I know, I know." Then it came lunch time and they brought in a great bowl of rice and just a little vegetable. So this one chap turned to me and said in Chinese, "See, we're eating very bitterly (poorly). But we're going to rebuild a new China." That sounds heroic: "Today we eat bitterness, but tomorrow things are going to get better."

But the years go on. There's no room for all these boys at the top. One guy gets a promotion because of his dad. We know in the church that there is no one that can be as devoted as a young person. When that person becomes cynical at 30, there's no way of touching him. And that's what happened to these people. They finally decided that they better get what they can out of it. They know how. They've learned to mouth the right things; they've learned to say the right things.

As early as 1952, Mao was fighting that type of thing, bureaucracy, in the old government. The Chinese were kicked out of several places in Africa because they were too brash. In area after area, they cut down their forces in the consulates and so on. In his own country Mao started the "Let all flowers bloom, let all thought contend." Now I actually think he did the one thing that is inexcusable and that is to believe one's own propaganda. That is what he did. He actually believed, I think, that he had the people where they thought as he did. When the Hundred Flowers Campaign started, he got such a blast of it he had to smother the whole thing and arrest a lot of people. That left an awfully nasty taste. "He tricked us," was what everyone said.

Then he started the Great Leap Forward, pick yourself up by your bootstraps. That didn't work at all. Everything he did began to turn to ashes. I don't care how strong you are in the Communist party-- you have to produce. That's why Khrushchev was bumped. Six months before he was bumped I told one of the senators he was going to be bumped and the guy told me I was crazy.

Mao was in a bad way so he went back to the young people. This was where he had started. He went back to the young people and told them all to come to Peking. They closed all the universities. The trains were loaded with people who could go up to Peking, free rides on the train. Peking was jammed with people, posters, writing posters and stuff like that. Things got completely out of hand. In the factories they used to have a factory committee. The number one man was the party man; now the number one is a military man, not the party man. In Peking, the military posted the traffic regulations. Now why should the military post traffic regulations? Isn't that the job of the civil police? But things got so bad in Wuhan there was outright fighting. In Canton there was fighting. Bodies were floating down the river into Hong Kong with their Little Red Books; they were all claiming to be Maoists, but different factions.

It got so bad Mao finally had to turn to Lin Piao, head of the military, to put things in order. So Lin Piao got his troops out and he squelched everything. He told everyone to go back home. Then you had Mao Tse-tung and his great friend Lin Piao. And everyone was saying, "Who is really boss?" Then Lin Piao disappeared. He was killed in an airplane crash. Mao was back on top. He removed all of Lin Piao's officers and moved in his own people. The whole thing was a power struggle in Communist China and he won out.

When he died the other side took over. Teng Hsiao-peng came back in. I don't know if Liu Shao-chi is dead or not. There's another change going on. Whoknows the future? There's only One who does.

I: When you look back over all of many years of involvement in China, and close association with the missions, what do you think were the lessons that were learned in the China mission field?

SOVIK: In the first place, China today is not the China the missionaries went off to for many years. It is very easy to find fault with the early missionaries; they built these big buildings and did this or that. Maybe they shouldn't have. But they were young men, too. They fell heir to what was generally the concept of the times. Certainly they did saddle the church with a lot of housing and buildings and so on that the church didn't need, would have done better without. I think this is pretty well accepted throughout the missionary world today. I don't think we're building the churches and so on; we're striving to make the church as indigenous as possible.

Yet this is not an easy road to go. You take the Africans, or the people in the various underdeveloped parts of the world. They may be quite devoted Christians, they may build their own places, but they're not (I don't want to say qualified) but they're poorly qualified to run things on the higher level. I think the individual congregations that form a church body which puts people to administer will find that it's going to be very disappointing. But it has to be gone through.

It's sort of like a teenager; ma and pa go nuts wondering if you'll ever grow out of it. Then, all of a sudden, after a while, they begin to take their own responsibility more seriously. I think that the church in the mission field is going through that same thing. Since '50, I've had really nothing much to do with the active work of the missions. I've seen a little here and there, but not much, and I've been out

of touch with the mainstream. I've been out in Washington and everything is up here and I really don't know whether real progress is being made in other parts of the world. I really don't know.

I: I really wish we had more time to cover the other years of your China experience, but we at least have gotten this portion. I thank you for giving us this time.