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Veldman, Harold E and Pearl Oral History Interview: Old China Hands Oral History Project

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OLD CHINA HANDS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Dr. Harold E. and Mrs. Pearl Veldman

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Holland, Michigan
1977

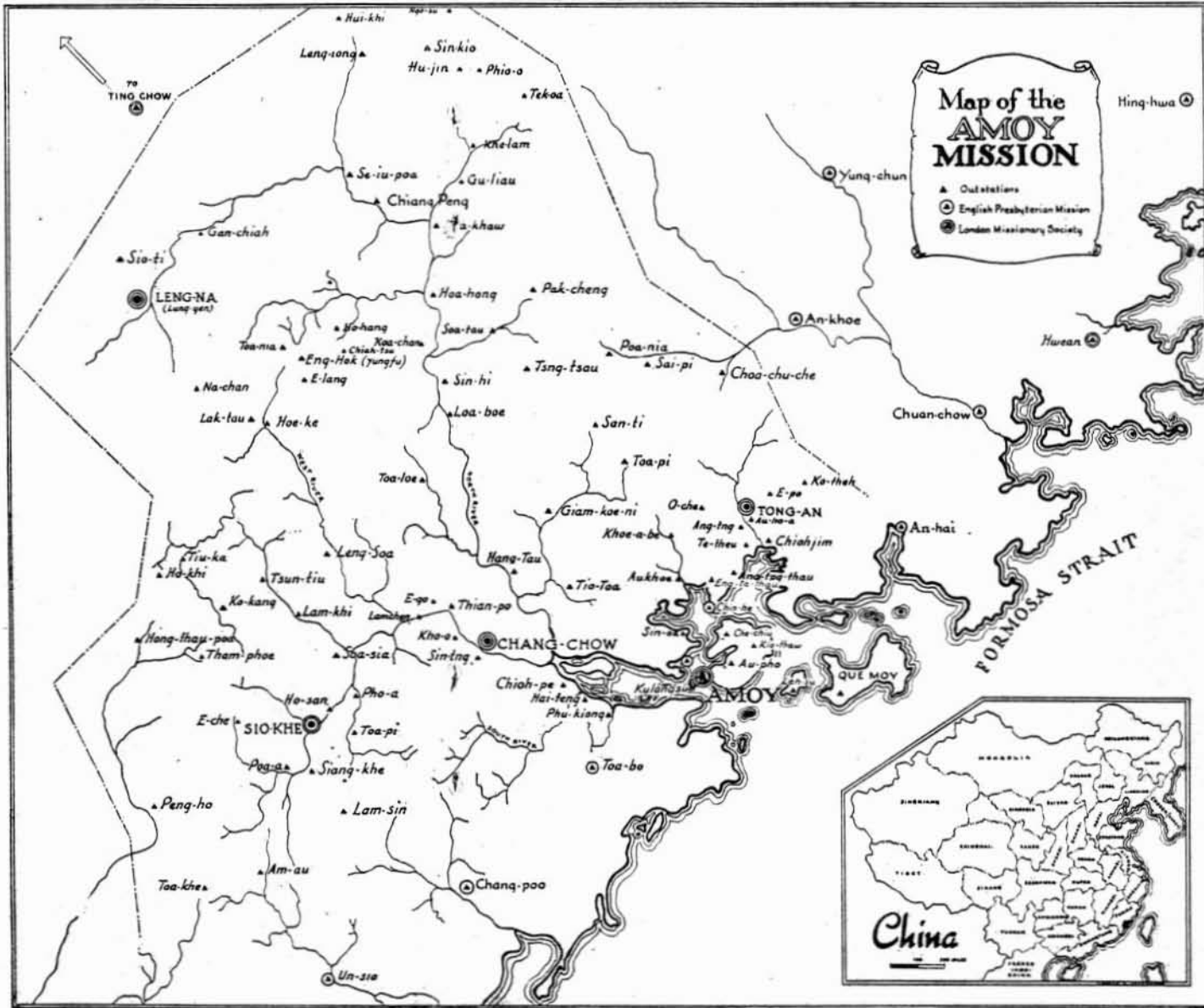


Fig. 1



Dr. & Mrs. Harold Veldman

Table of Contents

Preface	v
Biographical Sketch and Summary of Contents	vi
Interview I	1
Index	32

Preface

Interviewees: Dr. Harold and Mrs. Pearl Veldman

Interview I: July 23, 1976
Dr. and Mrs. Veldman's home in Grand Rapids,
Michigan

Interviewers: Mr. David M. Vander Haar
B.A. Hope College

Miss Nancy Swinyard
Senior, Hope College

VELDMAN, HAROLD E. AND

VELDMAN, PEARL E. PAALMAN

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH AND SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

Harold E. Veldman was born in Cedar Grove, Wisconsin, on March 26, 1897, the son of Henry J. Veldman, a clergyman born in the Netherlands on June 14, 1865, and Anna Knoll Veldman, born in Ottama County, Drenthe, on September 8, 1863.

Mrs. Pearl E. Paalman Veldman was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on November 22, 1901. Both Dr. and Mrs. Veldman graduated from Hope College, Dr. Veldman in 1921 and Mrs. Veldman in 1924. Dr. Veldman went on to earn his M.D. degree from Wayne University of Medicine, and in April, 1926, the Veldmans were married.

In September, 1926, they arrived in China as medical missionaries for the Reformed Church in America. They were stationed in Tong-an, Fukien, China, where Dr. Veldman was the foreign doctor at the Blauvelt Memorial Hospital. Mrs. Veldman taught at both the boys' and girls' schools. They returned five months early for their first furlough because of Mrs. Veldman's health. With ten other missionary families, they were forced to remain in the United States another year because of the Depression, and in 1933 they resigned from the Board of Foreign Missions because of their loss of financial backing. Dr. Veldman then took his residency in Grand Rapids, and he has practiced there since. The Veldmans have remained interested in mission work and Dr. Veldman has since served on the Board of Domestic Missions and as a consulting physician to the Boards. They are now retired and currently residing in Grand Rapids.

The Veldman interview is particularly interesting for a number of

reasons. Dr. and Mrs. Veldman were interviewed together, and each had an unusual recall of events and impressions. Mrs. Veldman had kept a diary during her stay in China, which, from time to time during the interview, she consulted. Unfortunately, about twenty minutes of the interview were lost because of recording difficulties. The problem was corrected and the interview continued. The Veldmans were kind enough to go over some of the highpoints of what they had said, but it is, of course, not as complete or as spontaneous.

Unlike some other missionaries interviewed, the Veldmans distinctly remember anti-foreign and anti-Christian feelings in Tong-an and the surrounding area. They recall being called "running dogs of imperialism" and other common denigrations under the Nationalists. They said it did not really affect their work, except for the frequent evacuations made necessary by the unrest, and that it could scarcely have been unnoticed by any foreigner. The Veldmans also discuss their initial difficulties in dealing with a Chinese staff, and the way in which they learned quickly the importance of not causing your Chinese co-workers to lose face.

In the first part of the tape which was lost, the Veldmans talked of the strength of feelings and the bitterness of dispute at mission meetings. This is mentioned briefly in the transcribed interview, as is an apparently heated controversy within the mission over obeissance to Sun Yat-sen's picture in the schools. The Veldmans also discussed conditions under the Nationalists, missionary attitudes toward ecumenicalism, and the Chinese acceptance of Western technology. They deny emphatically that the missionary was an imperialist, but they take a somewhat more positive and optimistic view of Chinese Communism than might be expected.

INTERVIEW I

VANDER HAAR: I think the part that was most interesting to me in what we just did was when you were talking about the preparation you had for China before you came, and then any surprising experiences you had.

SWINYARD: And the cultural problem in the hospital -- things like that you ran into.

VANDER HAAR: Perhaps we could go through that in an abbreviated form.

SWINYARD: That's what I was going to ask, too, to focus in on. One of the things you did say on your vita sheet as a problem was coping with a Chinese hospital staff, and I was going to ask if you could go into more detail there.

MRS. VELDMAN: I think probably when you come to that it really comes down to a matter of language: not being able to understand and also the ways that they are different culturally.

SWINYARD: How did you understand the culture? Did you have the other missionaries helping you along, or was it a Chinese co-worker?

MRS. VELDMAN: The books we read were very helpful. They go into detail about that matter of "face."

DR. VELDMAN: It was a book called Chinese Characteristics, by A.H. Smith, that we still have. It's an older book. It probably had been published at least 10 or 15 years before we went out -- actually in 1894 -- but it

still covered a lot of the ideas that we ran into and found they were quite true to fact.

MRS. VELDMAN: I think anyone who goes to live in the Orient finds that difference in culture and attitudes.

VANDER HAAR: Perhaps you could relate the experience of the Chinese doctor, Dr. Iap.

DR. VELDMAN: As I said, one of the things we had to learn rather painfully was that losing face was one of the hardest things for a Chinese to undergo, and that when you understood that, you learned to save face for them in many instances and in many ways. This time, I felt that Dr. Iap was being rather cruel in correcting one of the students. I immediately took the student's part and told Dr. Iap that I thought he was being unnecessarily harsh, and in that case, Dr. Iap was offended and immediately found that his mother was ill and had to leave the hospital for two or three weeks -- he didn't know just when he'd be back again. That took quite a little doing from the other missionaries to straighten that out. I don't know of any other instances of that which occurred just like that, in the hospital at least, and I think I learned rather the hard way that you had to be very careful in just how you asked for any changes to take place in hospital administration, or letting somebody go who was probably a favorite of the Chinese. We couldn't just dismiss people very easily. You had to be very careful in letting somebody go or making changes in staff or in hiring somebody who one of the staff didn't like. Very ticklish problems and personalities played a big part in how you ran the hospital there. Those things occur in this country, too, but there it is, I think, a little more emphasized.

VANDER HAAR: When you say a Chinese doctor, what kind of preparation did

they generally have to receive that title?

DR. VELDMAN: Dr. Iap had been trained in mission hospitals in the Amoy area for about 25 years. He had served as assistant to the missionary doctors, and in that way he learned his medicine. Medicine as a society wasn't very well organized in China. There were no formal societies for Chinese doctors. Many of them did belong to the Chinese Medical Association, but I don't think Dr. Iap ever did. The missionaries belonged to the China Medical Association, and they had yearly meetings, usually in Shanghai. But the ordinary Chinese doctor on the street who used all of the ground up seeds or bones or Chinese remedies with which there are about a thousand different things, he would have quite a different standing in the community than a Chinese doctor who practiced good Western medicine.

VANDER HAAR: What would his standing be?

DR. VELDMAN: Well, they'd respect him very highly. He would be one of the most respected people in the community because of his learning.

VANDER HAAR: This is the Chinese doctor?

DR. VELDMAN: The Chinese doctor, Iap.

VANDER HAAR: Much higher than a street doctor?

DR. VELDMAN: Oh, yes. They'd put him on an entirely different level. And then, some of our students who were with us for three or four years would go out and open a shop on the street. They would also have a little higher standing than the ordinary Chinese doctor.

MRS. VELDMAN: Medicine men.

DR. VELDMAN: The same way a graduate nurse in the hospital was tops. She

was very well respected in the community, far above other people -- probably above the teachers, eve,. Do you think so?

MRS. VELDMAN: No, I don't think so.

DR. VELDMAN: We had a couple of nurses who were trained in mission hospitals who did very well.

MRS. VELDMAN: I think that he's speaking about the hospital in Tong-an, which is smaller and not as active as a place like Hope Hospital in Kulangsu, and they had men who were highly trained. Not many of them, but there were other doctors in that area who had probably been trained in a place like Peking or Shanghai.

DR. VELDMAN: But our hospital was very rude. We had wooden boards on two horses for beds. That was the Chinese bed, covered by a thin straw mat. In the winter, they had a rather thick coverlet which was stuffed with cotton or kapok. The people of Central Reformed Church sent us a steam sterilizer in our second year and an operating room table.

MRS. VELDMAN: They also sent us money for some iron beds.

DR. VELDMAN: We got money enough to but iron beds in Shanghai, and they were shipped down to Tong-an. They had a spring, but a lot of the Chinese would still prefer to sleep on a harder surface and would sleep under the bed on the floor. We tried to keep things clean with disinfectant, but you couldn't walk into the hospital, if you had whites on, and you'd see fleas jumpling all over you in a matter of minutes. That was just the way the Chinese lived. They all had fleas in their homes, and they were used to them. We weren't used to them. When coming to the house, I always would search my clothes and try to find the fleas before they got into the house. But even in our house we had them, and every night when you went

to bed, we had a net over the bed to keep the mosquitoes out to try to avoid malaria and dengue, and then we would throw everything back and search through the whole bed for a vagrant flea or two, and we'd try to catch him before we went to sleep, otherwise you'd wake up with big welts all over you. I did have dengue the first month I was in China, which was break-bone fever and came from mosquito bites. But that wasn't too bad. I got through that all right.

VANDER HAAR: Mrs. Veldman, you said your first three servants spoke three different dialects?

MRS. VELDMAN: Yes.

VANDER HAAR: How did you communicate with them, being so new in China?

MRS. VELDMAN: I had to try to understand them. Our cook was from another area, not Amoy, and I had a cookbook that I translated into Chinese, and I tried to translate it into his dialect, from English to his dialect. That's the way I got along with him.

VANDER HAAR: We were also speaking earlier about the anti-foreign feelings in Tong-an, and it was particularly interesting because some of the missionaries really don't remember that type of feeling at all.

MRS. VELDMAN: They don't?

VANDER HAAR: I think there is a tendency sometimes in memories to idealize a little what it was perhaps like.

MRS. VELDMAN: They certainly would remember walking down the road from, say, the hospital. That road went through a village where they sold paper for the idol worshippers on the hillside with the graves and they sold incense, too. All those things were sold in that particular shop, and in the

next shop -- I can remember this quite well -- they also smoked opium. It was an opium shop. And those people were very anti-American and anti-Christian and they, particularly, talked of us as running dogs, devils, that sort of thing. We didn't pay much attention to it. We just knew that they didn't like us. But that road I traveled when I taught at the boys' school, and we also walked that road when we went to church. The girls' school and the women's school were in our walled compound. We went off the compound a short distance to the boys' school.

VANDER HAAR: This anti-foreign feeling didn't really affect the hospital work, then?

MRS. VELDMAN: No, it affected none of it, nor us, in hospital or schools.

DR. VELDMAN: No, except that I couldn't be there all the time. When Chiang Kai-shek came through with the Nationalist armies on his march from Canton to Nanking, we had to leave the hospital and go down to Amoy and stay there for about four months at one time. We stayed with other missionaries and part of the time we stayed in the girls' school. When school was out in the summertime, we took a room in the girls' school. That was our first full year, from March until September. And I would go back upcountry to see what the hospital was doing and see how things were going and look at the books and pay the staff people.

VANDER HAAR: So it sounds like there was a certain amount of independence there of the missionaries. What did you perceive your role to be as superintendent of the hospital? Was it any different from what it would be here?

MRS. VELDMAN: There, he was, what would you say, "chief cook and bottlemasher." He did everything.

DR. VELDMAN: I was a specialist in all diseases, (laughter) although I

didn't have to do all the surgery and all the medicine and see all the out-patients all the time. Some of that work was done by the students. But I did the major surgery. Then we had, also, the religious work to take care of. We had Bible women who had rounds every day and saw all the patients and we had to be interested in them. We had chapel every morning and I played the organ and taught one of the students to play the organ. I didn't give any chapel talks until, I think, in my third year. I didn't think I had the language well enough to do that. But there were other ways of showing that you were interested in people and that you were trying to show some Christian love toward them -- the reason that you were out there as a missionary. We would go around on Sundays very often to visit other congregations in nearby villages.

MRS. VELDMAN: We had a very wonderful Bible woman in the hospital. She did a remarkable job, and was known all over the area.

VANDER HAAR: What exactly would a Bible woman do?

MRS. VELDMAN: She would spend her day speaking, reading, praying, and counseling with the patients.

DR. VELDMAN: And reading with them and trying to teach them to read.

MRS. VELDMAN: And she usually lead the chapel service in the morning before rounds. And she often went out, and I often went with her, to the villages nearby.

DR. VELDMAN: There was another little conflict that came between the missionaries and the very well educated Chinese and that was the written language. The missionaries had devised a Romanized form of alphabet into which the Bible could be easily translated. The Bible women and the schools

could easily teach these women who had no training at all to read the Bible in from six to eight months, while to read the Bible in the character would take four or five years of study to learn enough characters to be able to read all of the Bible and the Scriptures. But a lot of the older Chinese would have nothing to do with the Romanized language. That was beneath them to study that or even to try to read it in the hymnbooks. They had to use the character or nothing because they were educated. So there was that little feeling, sometimes, that the foreigners were using something which wasn't very literary, in a sense, and making over their language to something that they didn't really believe was part of an educated person.

VANDER HAAR: What about the whole conflict over the picture of Sun Yat-sen? Could you relate that, too? I think that was extremely interesting.

MRS. VELDMAN: Did anyone else in education speak of that?

VANDER HAAR: No one else really spoke of that.

DR. VELDMAN: You mean about the picture and the obeisance in the schools. The Nationalist government, when it did get some power after they'd established themselves in Nanking, they made this rule that the picture of Sun Yat-sen had to be in every schoolroom, every classroom, and that in the morning there was a certain formula that the children had to go through which included bowing down to this picture. Many missionaries took offense at that and many of them thought that was replacing Jesus Christ as an object of worship and that this was an evil thing and they shouldn't allow any of their school-children to do that. So quite a few of the schools got in wrong because they insisted on not obeying this law which the Chinese were trying to put into effect. Not most, but I would say some of the missionaries were much in favor of it. They said, "We're living in China, we're under a Chinese government,

we have to respect the Chinese government and if that is what they are asking us to do, we must look on it as a matter of respect, but not worship. Gradually, I think, the schools did adopt this without too much trouble after we had made that type of interpretation.

VANDER HAAR: Were there other areas where there was confusion over how something should be interpreted?

MRS. VELDMAN: Oh, I'm sure there must have been.

VANDER HAAR: Or just conflicts within the mission?

MRS. VELDMAN: I think that would have happened anywhere.

DR. VELDMAN: I can't think of any other particular instances. We didn't have that problem in the hospital.

VANDER HAAR: And you were evacuated twice in your very first year. You spent a good part of the summer, at least, in Kulangsu, from March to September. Then you went back to Tong-an after that?

MRS. VELDMAN: And carried on normally.

DR. VELDMAN: Well, as normally as things could be with the changes of government.

VANDER HAAR: When you went back, were the Nationalists pretty well in control of the area?

DR. VELDMAN: Yes, but there would still be some fighting. There was quite a hill about a block away, and a temple there where the soldiers used to post themselves. The bullets would fly around every once in a while so we put our bed between the windows against the brick wall so that we wouldn't

be right in the line of fire, and our housewoman said, "You don't have to do that. The Lord will protect you." (laughter) We thought that maybe the Lord would like us to use our heads a little bit and not be right in front of the window where the bullets might come through.

VANDER HAAR: How aware were you, while you were there, of the whole type of struggle that was going on? Were you aware that Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists were going to...

MRS. VELDMAN: Maybe not at the moment because our news would always be delayed. We did get Time magazine and the newspapers, but they were always late, of course. I think the Chinese kept us pretty well informed.

DR. VELDMAN: The Chinese were very aware of what was happening, and most of them were on the side of the Nationalists. There wasn't much other side to be on. If you're on the other side, you'd be on the side of the local bandit chief, and nobody really cared for him very much.

VANDER HAAR: You said earlier that you had 13 changes of governments. Was that just the Nationalists that would come in...

DR. VELDMAN: Yes, changes of government in Tong-an.

MRS. VELDMAN: The Nationalists then the bandit chief or maybe some other chief.

DR. VELDMAN: Then another group of soldiers would come. It was very disorganized. The whole political situation was chaos in China at that time. Fukien province had its own organizations and the next province would be another local government. Local government was about all that you could say -- there was no real national government. No, they didn't even have

national currency because they wouldn't accept Tong-an or Amoy money over in Foochow. You'd have to pay...if you wanted to get it changed in the bank, you'd have to get it discounted. The only thing that worked pretty well was the postal system. That was run by the French government. Letters very seldom went astray. They always got to you somehow.

MRS. VELDMAN: He was asking whether life went back to normal. Our second Christmas, for instance, we spent in Tong-an, and then in March we traveled from Tong-an to Kulangsu and Amoy and then we went upcountry toward the North River District and visited Sio-khe and Chang chou. So it was that normal that we could travel without too much difficulty.

VANDER HAAR: While you were there did you see any changes once the Nationalists began to take over? Did it make any difference that there was a more unified government?

MRS. VELDMAN: In general life?

VANDER HAAR: In general life.

MRS. VELDMAN: No, I don't think so.

DR. VELDMAN: You couldn't tell it locally very much, but I think that there was more stability in our last two years and there was more development. They had no auto roads in Tong-an until '28, I think. The first road came from the ferry landing to Tong-an. We were on the mainland, you see, and most of our goods came from the island of Amoy by launch, and then across the mainland for six or seven miles to the city of Tong-an. Tong-an was a walled city when we first came there, but while we were there they took the walls down and made roads out of it.

VANDER HAAR: They did that so they could build the road, or was there some

other reason?

MRS. VELDMAN: That gave them the material.

DR. VELDMAN: Well, they found, I guess, that there wasn't any point in having a walled city any more, that it was out of date, and so to make some use of it, they took the stones and everything which had built the wall and made them into roads.

MRS. VELDMAN: It was hand labor, too.

DR. VELDMAN: That road went right in back of our compound.

MRS. VELDMAN: First, they had jin rickshaws, and then they got some Fords.

DR. VELDMAN: The Chinese had a lot of difficulty: not knowing how to get off a bus while it was still moving. Instead of stepping off in the direction that the bus was going, like we do, they would step straight off and go down. I had hip fractures and leg fractures in the hospital after the motor cars came through there. It was quite a while before they found out that there was a certain way to get off of a bus without breaking a leg. That was really surprising to see that sort of an age creep up on a country that had nothing like it.

VANDER HAAR: I'm sure that must have been a very unique experience. I noticed you were looking in your diary, Mrs. Veldman.

MRS. VELDMAN: Well, I just came across this. I said we took that trip and we had no trouble. Well, it says, "On the trip down, very slow, no motors. Soldiers everywhere. Long waits." So, we did have a little trouble, I guess.

VANDER HAAR: What was it like to be a Chinese Christian within that society?

Was it particularly difficult for them, and did the missionary try to play a role in easing the transition from a pagan society to becoming a Christian?

MRS. VELDMAN: I don't know I can answer that because I don't think one was aware of abrupt change from paganism to Christianity. There are quite a few steps. For instance, people that became Christian in the hospital often gave their idols, we have a few, to the doctor or a nurse or some missionary, as a symbol of their change of heart.

DR. VELDMAN: If there was a family, a Chinese pagan family, and one of the members, the son, would decide that he wanted to become a Christian, he would be cut off from the family entirely. From then on, he wouldn't have any real association with the family. So it was quite a step for a Chinese to become a Christian.

MRS. VELDMAN: I think probably that was true of the earlier Christians: by the time we were there, there were many, many Christian families and there were large churches in Amoy and in Tong-an. A tremendous number of people worshipping. In Tong-an, a small church, of course.

VANDER HAAR: Was there a real feeling that progress had been made on the mission field?

MRS. VELDMAN: Tremendous progress.

VANDER HAAR: You do read so much in...

DR. VELDMAN: The church was so well organized. In the Amoy area they had Synods, they had Classes, and the churches had their regular meetings. Dr. Eckerson always had a summer conference in the Tong-an area, and they would have about a week of organized meetings and instruction and teaching and

conferences with all the ministers and the Christian workers coming to those. It wasn't a new thing at all to see how the church was organized. It was organized very much like our Presbyterian system here, and in fact, it became the model for the Church of Christ in China which involved 19 different denominations, which had about a million members at that time. The Chinese church was well organized. There were two seminaries in the area, and a lot of the students were preparing to go into the ministry.

SWINYARD: Did you have any early contact at all with the Communists?

MRS. VELDMAN: We didn't.

DR. VELDMAN: We had no contact at all with any Communists that I know of. The only contact was in 1929 in Leng-na, when Mao made his first effort to establish a Chinese community up in Leng-na, which didn't work.

SWINYARD: Why didn't it?

DR. VELDMAN: I don't think the Chinese were ready for it. They weren't ready to give up a lot of the things which the Communists believed in: communal living, for one thing. It broke down the whole fabric of Chinese culture based on the family, and of course in Communism, the family is out. There is only the state.

MRS. VELDMAN: But Mao did go from Leng-na farther north and his army grew from then on.

DR. VELDMAN: ...until after the Japanese war and then he could take over when he defeated Chiang Kai-shek.

VANDER HAAR: I've heard so often the belief expressed by people who had been there, that they really didn't think that Communism could take place in a country like that, in a country that was so family oriented. Were you

surprised by their eventual success?

DR. VELDMAN: I think that after we left the mission and were in this country, we still felt that way, that Communism would never really take over in China.

MRS. VELDMAN: Although even when we were there and the Nationalists had some anti-Christian feelings, probably due to Russian influence on the Nationalists. They kept talking about the lists of Christians and people who were going to be killed when they could come in and take over. And it happened, too. They were, eventually.

DR. VELDMAN: I don't remember that so much.

MRS. VELDMAN: I remember that. When we were living at Dr. Strick's, they were talking about that.

SWINYARD: Did certain people know that they were definitely on that list, or was it just rumored?

MRS. VELDMAN: That I don't know, but I suppose any Christian would be concerned.

VANDER HAAR: During parts of those times, the Communists were tied in with the Nationalists, with Chiang on and off there in the '20's and '30's and it was a little questionable who...

MRS. VELDMAN: He had part of his training in Russia.

VANDER HAAR: Did that affect how you felt toward Chiang at that time?

MRS. VELDMAN: Were we alarmed by that? No, I don't think so.

DR. VELDMAN: There wasn't so much a feeling of Communism then, as a feeling of Nationalism. That was the dominant feeling that the Chinese had who were

in favor of Chiang Kai-shek. We heard about the Russian influence, and that the Russians were influencing Sun Yat-sen, but not as Communists at that time.

MRS. VELDMAN: I think the missionaries, I think everybody thought it was wonderful that the Nationalists could take over. And I think that if that later change hadn't taken place after the Japanese war, that Chiang Kai-shek might have kept the country solid.

VANDER HAAR: Do you feel that the missionaries, by their very presence there, contributed to the rise of Nationalism in China at all?

DR. VELDMAN: Well, I think in a way they did because many of the educated Chinese were brought up in mission schools. They began to learn about the rest of the world and what the rest of the world was like, too, through the missionaries and through the mission schools. So in that way maybe you could say that missions contributed somewhat to the development of Nationalist spirit, finding out that they were different from other countries and that there was something to be gained by becoming more proud of their country instead of just their own local little community.

MRS. VELDMAN: I don't know that we realized it at that time.

VANDER HAAR: But you were aware of the Nationalist-type feeling?

MRS. VELDMAN: You couldn't get away from it.

SWINYARD: After you got out of the country, did you find out more information than you knew at the time, or were you well informed as far as political events were going? Did that change your viewpoint at all?

MRS. VELDMAN: After we came back?

SWINYARD: Yes.

MRS. VELDMAN: I don't think so. We were always kept informed directly by missionaries. We often had missionaries in our home because we were here in Grand Rapids and they would come and stay with us. We kept track of these things constantly.

DR. VELDMAN: I think we still had that same feeling that the Communism in China was an agrarian reform more than a real, true, devout Communistic regime.

MRS. VELDMAN: But that was much later. We came back in '30.

DR. VELDMAN: And it was quite a while later that the Communists really had very much to say about China.

MRS. VELDMAN: First there was the Japanese war, and then after that the Communism started.

VANDER HAAR: Did you have to evacuate from Tong-an after you came back after that first year, or was it pretty quiet?

MRS. VELDMAN: We didn't go down and live except for vacations in the summertime. We didn't go down to get out again.

VANDER HAAR: So it sounds to me like you got there at the tail end of all that uproar.

MRS. VELDMAN: Not the tail end -- the beginning of it. It was when Chiang was coming from the south.

VANDER HAAR: Then you left in 1930.

DR. VELDMAN: November, 1930.

MRS. VELDMAN: The end of '30 in November.

VANDER HAAR: That was for a scheduled furlough?

MRS. VELDMAN: No, we were, we antedated our furlough by five months or so.

DR. VELDMAN: Five or six months. We were due to come home in the spring of '31.

MRS. VELDMAN: In the spring, but we came home in early winter, instead.

DR. VELDMAN: The term at that time was only five years.

MRS. VELDMAN: I had had an injury to my back, and there weren't any X-ray machines, so the doctors said to go home a little early and go to Mayo's, which we did.

DR. VELDMAN: That was one thing in the hospital we never had. We never had electricity. There was an electrical system there that one of the doctors had bought and put there, but it never worked, and we could never get an electrician to come up and get it going. They were unavailable. I tried several times on my own little knowledge to get that system to go. We had oil lamps and lanterns, and many times I would have a ring of them, oil lanterns, around the table in the operating room, and in 100 degree temperature, the lamps didn't make the operating room any better air-conditioned.

VANDER HAAR: What were your biggest problems while you were there, and what were the things that you enjoyed the most there?

MRS. VELDMAN: I think the Chinese were very friendly. I think we felt that the people we lived with for most of the time were very friendly people, a rather happy people. They like a good joke.

DR. VELDMAN: They like a good joke, they like music. We had a Victrola and records and they just loved that, to come over and listen to them. And we had a lot of good friends among the Chinese. They are a lovable people, and I think they still are, although they can't express themselves as much as they used to. Our missionary associations meant a lot to us.

MRS. VELDMAN: You get to feel that that's your family. You are very close to the people on the field.

VANDER HAAR: Despite the conflict in the mission meetings.

MRS. VELDMAN: Oh, that.

DR. VELDMAN: Oh, that was just some first impressions. We got used to that. We found out that those are just things that naturally happen to people. They happen in churches, too, don't they?

VANDER HAAR: Yes.

DR. VELDMAN: ...among good Christians.

VANDER HAAR: What were some of the hard things to get used to, in ordinary day to day living or things you were confronted with in your work, or teaching, or in the hospital?

MRS. VELDMAN: I don't think I had any problems in teaching. I taught in a boys' school and in a girls' school and then also had some teachers to whom I taught English. I don't think that I had any problems there. It was different than in a hospital.

VANDER HAAR: As a teacher, did you get the same kind of respect that was traditional for Chinese teachers?

MRS. VELDMAN: Oh, yes. A teacher is very much respected. You can't get anything more.

VANDER HAAR: More so than doctors?

MRS. VELDMAN: He would be called a teacher, too. Anyone with a degree.

DR. VELDMAN: And I think a doctor's wife had a little special place.

MRS. VELDMAN: But he's talking about the teaching.

VANDER HAAR: There was still that type of prestige even in the Christian schools, of you taught at the Christian school?

MRS. VELDMAN: Oh, yes. I think probably the problems come in day to day living because you have to get used to so many different things in food and water. You didn't have the conveniences. You don't have a refrigerator, so your food has to be purchased every day. That's a problem that comes up. You had to boil water for half an hour and then strain it through cotton and some other big filter to get out the algae from the wells. The people you've talked to have told you of all the problems of cooking.

VANDER HAAR: Yes, some of them have. Miss Walvoord told us quite a bit about that.

MRS. VELDMAN: She's a nurse, she would know.

VANDER HAAR: I think it was particularly interesting -- a little bit about the anti-foreign feeling -- because, if I can just get it clear in my own mind, in Tong-an it was there, but not as bad as other places you heard of. Is that a correct impression?

MRS. VELDMAN: I would say so.

DR. VELDMAN: I think in the port cities there was more, like Amoy and Foochow

VANDER HAAR: Was that an anti-foreign feeling, an anti-Christian feeling, or both?

DR. VELDMAN: I think it was both because the foreigners were mainly Christian.

MRS. VELDMAN: Not all of them. We had oil people, oil companies are very prominent in Amoy, and the bank people are there, too.

DR. VELDMAN: They were Christian people, too.

MRS. VELDMAN: Not always.

DR. VELDMAN: They were not Christianizing people. They weren't in the process, in the business of evangelism.

MRS. VELDMAN: I think the Chinese make a distinction, though, between the business people and the church people.

VANDER HAAR: You think that they were able to make a distinction?

DR. AND MRS. VELDMAN: Yes.

VANDER HAAR: I've read sometimes of how the American businessman or the American soldier goes overseas and just raises Cain and the attitude is reflected generally. You don't feel that that happened to the missionary, too? That they would say, "Look at your good Christian American boys...?"

MRS. VELDMAN: I don't think that ever came up in Amoy.

DR. VELDMAN: I don't remember that it came up, but I think that feelings

could be there.

MRS. VELDMAN: Yes, because sometimes the navy, the ships were in the harbor in Amoy, for instance, this wouldn't happen in Tong-an, that would be in Kulangsu and Amoy where the gunboats came in and the men would come off for a few hours and they did create a little problem once in a while, but nothing I ever heard of was very serious. It may have been so in other port cities that were larger, it might have happened, but I don't remember that kind of thing.

VANDER HAAR: What was the general Chinese attitude toward the missionary in China? I'm sure you came mostly in contact with Christian Chinese.

DR. VELDMAN: That's a little harder to judge about the average well educated Chinese and just what his attitude was. But I think that in our area they were generally respected and not hated. Not until much later, anyway. They could see benefits from the Chinese who were educated in the mission schools and later in America. There was one Chinese who had been educated in the Amoy area and then came to this country to learn engineering and then came back and established the best water supply company in all the coast of China. He had a beautiful dam up there in the hills of Amoy island and he had pure water there and he had it piped into practically all of the homes in Amoy city. There wasn't another place along the coast that had anything like that.

MRS. VELDMAN: He was a Christian Chinese.

DR. VELDMAN: That was a great demonstration of what, with education, could be done by the Chinese themselves.

VANDER HAAR: Was there, at the time you were there, any resistance to Western-type things: Western medicine, or, for instance, the water system?

DR. VELDMAN: No, they wouldn't fight that.

MRS. VELDMAN: That would be a great boon because water is very difficult to find.

DR. VELDMAN: No, but there were some things they didn't care for, like milk. They never used any milk upcountry where we were, or butter, or cheese. But in the port towns, they would have ice cream and all of those things. It was interesting: where the Chinese did learn to drink milk and use ice cream and things like that, then appendicitus began to appear. We never saw appendicitus upcountry. There was somebody in this country at the University of Wisconsin that had that theory, too, that appendicitus was caused by milk products. Nobody had ever demonstrated it conclusively before. It was very interesting in China that there were many diseases that we didn't have. They had no scarlet fever, for one thing. I never saw one case of appendicitus in the four years except one tuberculus appendix that I removed. It was tuberculosis of the bowel, it wasn't acute appendicitus.

SWINYARD: You said that there was no resistance to the Western technology. What about within the church: was there any degree of Western culture incorporated there, or not, and were the Chinese churches totally distinct?

DR. VELDMAN: The Chinese Christian church was based on the organization of the Presbyterian form of organization. I don't think the Chinese resisted that in any way or wanted to change it into any form of Chinese culture. There was nothing that you could compare it with. The idol worship was always a local thing, there was no generally organized idol worship for the whole area in which that one would link with another. It was something unique that developed in religion in the Christian form of organization.

VANDER HAAR: Did they Sinify the service at all: Did they take certain

things from their tradition at all and try to put that into the church context, in the church service?

MRS. VELDMAN: One thing that was different from ours was that a Chinese would stand to pray. We don't do that always here. A few little things, maybe, are purely Chinese, but I can't think of them.

DR. VELDMAN: Upcountry, too, the women sat on one side and the men sat on the other side.

MRS. VELDMAN: But that was not true in Kulangsu in the big churches.

DR. VELDMAN: But in the upcountry churches, all did that: they separated the men from the women.

VANDER HAAR: They had women elders then, too.

MRS. VELDMAN: Yes, they did.

VANDER HAAR: Coming from our tradition, how did you react to that? Was that shocking at all?

MRS. VELDMAN: It never seemed to bother us. I don't know that we even thought about it. Miss Broekema became ordained, of course. So was Miss Hoekelboer. I don't think that ever troubled us.

DR. VELDMAN: But did we have women deacons and elders in the Chinese church? The Bible woman? Was she an elder?

MRS. VELDMAN: I'm not positive now. Miss Broekema would have told you...

VANDER HAAR: I know there were women elders in the Chinese church.

DR. VELDMAN: They were far ahead of our country then, weren't they?

VANDER HAAR: That's one of the things that's interesting to me, because here you are on the mission field and just within the last five years we've been battling within the Reformed Church over this. It's interesting how you reacted to that over 45 years ago.

DR. VELDMAN: Well, I think all missionaries who have been on the field for a while have an entirely different attitude toward ecumenical things, too, than was true in this country. I think when you've associated with the English Presbyterian and London Mission people, lived with them and worshipped with them, you find out their beliefs are almost exactly the same. That was something we felt very strongly when we got home and got into church work here, that the missionary attitudes were much ahead of the general church.

MRS. VELDMAN: The English church in Kulangsu had a Presbyterian service one Sunday and an Episcopal service the next Sunday. We all worshipped together, that is, the British and the Americans. Then the Chinese church that grew out of all that missionary work became a Church of Christ in China. All these different denominations, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, London Missions, belonged to it.

VANDER HAAR: What you just said seems to be along the line of another question about how being in China perhaps affected or changed the attitudes of the people who went.

MRS. VELDMAN: I'm sure it does. It has to.

DR. VELDMAN. The same thing occurred in India.

MRS. VELDMAN: And Japan.

DR. VELDMAN: They all formed Union churches. They could worship together

very easily.

SWINYARD: And because the missionaries were so far ahead of, say, the churches around here, would you say the mission is essential to the health of the United States churches? Or is that something they can either take or leave?

DR. VELDMAN: No, I think mission work has always been essential to the health of the church.

MRS. VELDMAN: Something out-going.

DR. VELDMAN: The churches that have become very strong missionary churches have usually been the strongest churches in this country. It's so often said that if you want to increase your giving in your own church, take on a missionary.

VANDER HAAR: In that regard, as far as the missionary attitude toward union, I can see how easily that could turn into a more conservative church, seeing more liberal missionaries out there in the field and being somewhat concerned. Did you see that type of thing happening? While you were there or when you came back, did you feel like there were certain sentiments, in relationship to the mission field sometimes, that perhaps they were too liberal for the church itself, or wouldn't that occur?

MRS. VELDMAN: The people here feeling we were too liberal on the field? I suppose there were certain people who might.

DR. VELDMAN: Yes.

MRS. VELDMAN: But I don't know that it ever came to anything against the mission work.

DR. VELDMAN: I don't remember any restrictions the Board may have put on

missionaries telling them to be less ecumenical.

MRS. VELDMAN: No, because that was the way they were established.

DR. VELDMAN: There were difficulties sometimes in the seminaries between the London Mission and the Reformed Church missionaries.

MRS. VELDMAN: But that was on theology.

DR. VELDMAN: Differences of interpretation. But they settled them. They didn't split up or retract or get out or just become a Reformed Church seminary.

MRS. VELDMAN: You might be interested that in the Amoy area there was a Catholic Church also. And there was a Seventh Day Adventist that came in, and another group called the Little Flock.

DR. VELDMAN: Yes, a little church.

MRS. VELDMAN: The Little Flock, yes, the Little Flock. Although that wasn't a big problem, it was a thorn sometimes. You've probably heard of that.

VANDER HAAR: Yes, Miss Broekema told me. She asked, "Have you heard of the Little Flock?" I said, "No." (laughter)

MRS. VELDMAN: Now Miss Broekema...you were asking me about feeling against missionaries. She and Miss Nienhuis had had a very bad experience from the Communists. She probably told you all that. Otherwise, I can't think of anything.

VANDER HAAR: Do you have any other questions, Nancy?

SWINYARD: Is there anything you would have done differently, say, if you were to go back again?

DR. VELDMAN: Yes.

SWINYARD: What was that?

DR. VELDMAN: Well, after I got back here I was on the Board of Domestic Missions for a while, with the Dykstras, and then later I was on the Board of Foreign Missions (it later was the Board of World Missions). One of the things which I insisted on was that they should never send out another missionary doctor after an internship without a residency in back of him. Because it was just not the right thing to do. You didn't have the training that would give you the respect of the mission community and the educated Chinese community in any country. I think that was a very bad thing to do, to go out so unprepared really for what things could happen to you. You could get into a lot of trouble. Especially more now than of course at that time. At that time they accepted you. You were doing a better job than most anyone else could do, but still you knew in your own mind that you were so ill-prepared and so most of our missionaries since at least the time I've been on the Board have had residencies before going out. Either in medicine or surgery.

MRS. VELDMAN: And some training in other ways.

DR. VELDMAN: In linguistics and so on, too.

MRS. VELDMAN: They go to language school and have all this taught for a year, most of them at Stony Point. I think that's so valuable to have that training.

VANDER HAAR: Is that just part of the general movement throughout society to be more aware of the necessity of education before going out?

MRS. VELDMAN: I think that's true in every field. I think they all get

it now.

DR. VELDMAN: Yes, the career missionaries. People who go out just to work for a year or six months or so, that's a little different situation.

VANDER HAAR: Had you intended to be career missionaries when you went out?

MRS. VELDMAN: We expected to go back.

DR. VELDMAN: But then the Depression hit. All the first term missionaries were kept home.

MRS. VELDMAN: There were ten families.

DR. VELDMAN: We did deputation work for a year and then I took a residency in a hospital, general residency at Butterworth. Still the Depression was on so I went and spent another year with Dr. Southwick, doing surgery, and still there wasn't any money in our church that could support us, to send us back. I used up practically all the funds I had by that time and I had a family so I stayed home.

VANDER HAAR: Did you ever dream of going back?

MRS. VELDMAN: Well, then the Japanese war occurred and the missionaries all came home. And then after that the Communists took control. It was a good thing we didn't go back. We wouldn't have stayed there. We couldn't have stayed there.

DR. VELDMAN: It wouldn't have been a very stable life.

MRS. VELDMAN: We would have been going in and out.

DR. VELDMAN: We might have gone into some other mission.

MRS. VELDMAN: The Philippines or Hong Kong are where some of our people went.

DR. VELDMAN: Formosa, too.

MRS. VELDMAN: But that was a long time afterwards. By that time we weren't so sure our Chinese was adequate.

VANDER HAAR: In the four years you were there, were you able to pick up quite a bit of Chinese?

MRS. VELDMAN: Oh, yes, we got along all right.

DR. VELDMAN: We could get along in general conversation very well.

VANDER HAAR: How do you feel about the whole Communist takeover and then subsequently recent moves with the Nixon trip to Peking and...

MRS. VELDMAN: I thought that was wonderful.

DR. VELDMAN: We think it's a good thing and we, I think, have taken a little more liberal attitude toward Communism in China than we would Communism in Russia. We feel Mao has really done something for China that hasn't ever been done before. At least the country is under one government. It's regimented.

MRS. VELDMAN: That part I don't like -- the regimentation.

DR. VELDMAN: The life isn't just what it could be. But if he's cleaned up the cities and he's stopped the beggary that went on and given more education to the people, and there are no more flies on the streets...

MRS. VELDMAN: I don't believe it. (laughter)

DR. VELDMAN: Then I think he's done a tremendous job for China.

VANDER HAAR: How do you feel about Communist charges that the missionary was an arm of imperialism?

DR. VELDMAN: I think that was not true at all except in their own minds. If it was true for the way they thought, then it was true. But I don't think we were...

MRS. VELDMAN: We were not sent by the government in any fashion so we couldn't have been that. If such people were there as missionaries then I didn't know about it, nor did our people know about it.

DR. VELDMAN: When we were there, we heard those same things, that we were the entering wedge of imperialism. It was propaganda from the Nationalist side.

VANDER HAAR: You never felt like a wedge, though?

DR. VELDMAN: No, I never felt like I was being wedged in.

VANDER HAAR: Do you have any more questions?

SWINYARD: No, I think we've covered just about everything I've got notes on here.

VANDER HAAR: Well, thank you very much, Dr. and Mrs. Veldman.

INDEX

- Board of Domestic Missions 28
 Board of World Missions 28
 Broekema, Miss 24,27
 Butterworth Hospital 29
 Canton 6
 Catholic Church 27
 Central Reformed Church 4
 Chang chou 11
 Chinag Kai-shek 6,14,15,16,17
 China Medical Association 3
 Church of Christ in China 14,23-25
 Communists 14,15,17,27,29,30
 Eckerson, Dr. 13
 English Presbyterian Mission 25
 Flock, The Little 27
 Formosa 30
 Hoekelboer, Miss 24
 Hong Kong 30
 Hope and Wilhelmina Hospital 4
 Iap, Dr. 2,3
 Japanese War 14,16,17,29
 Kulangsu 11,22,24,25
 Leng-na 14
 London Mission Society 25,27
 Mao Tse-tung 14,30
 Nanking 6,8
 Nationalists 6,9,10,11,15,16,31
 Nienhuis, Miss 27
 Philippines 30
 Seventh Day Adventist Church 27
 Shanghai 3,4
 Sio-khe 11
 Southwick, Dr. 29
 Stony Point 28
 Strick, Dr. 15
 Sun Yat-sen 8,16
 Tong-an 5,10,11,13,17,20
 Tong-an Hospital 4,9
 Union Churches 25,26
 Veldman, Harold
 appendicitus 23
 attitudes of Chinese toward the missionaries 22
 auto roads in China 11,12
 changes of governments 10
 Chinese doctors, nurses 3,4
 conflict over Romanized alphabet 7,8
 consequences of a Chinese becoming a Christian 13
 dengue 5
 "face" 1,2
 malaria 5
 mission hospital 4,18
 obeisance to portrait of Sun Yat-sen 8,9
 postal system 11
 superintendent of the hospital 6,7

Veldman, Pearl

anti-Christian lists 15

anti-foreign and anti-Christian feelings in Tong-an 5,6,20,21

Bible women 7

communicating with servants of three different dialects 5

friendliness of the Chinese 18

Walvoord, Miss 20