

IN PLEASANT PLACES: A STORY OF A NEW ZEALAND MISSIONARY FAMILY IN CHINA IN THE 1940s

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Introduction

In my own lifetime, China has gone from being a closed country, known only through myth, metaphor, and stereotype, to one that is on the cusp of being one of the most powerful countries in the twenty-first century, known through magazine covers, international scholarship, Free Trade Agreements, and the Olympic Games. This is nothing short of an astonishing transformation in a remarkably short period of time. Being so enamoured with the current preoccupation with China, we can forget that this Middle Kingdom has one of the longest histories of any region in the world. Yet despite it being a land of exotic mystery, it has attracted significant interest for centuries.¹ In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, much of that interest came from missionaries, driven by a mixture of motives, but following a long line of observers and commentators, self-proclaimed experts, and interpreters of China to the rest of the world.

This article tells the story of two New Zealand missionaries to China, Frank and Marjorie Duncan, within the context of the missionary endeavour more broadly and that of their mission organization, CIM (China Inland Mission), particularly. An article like this straddles disciplines, including theology (an area that, as Hugh Morrison rightly identifies, is still neglected in scholarship), sociology, and history. Morrison groups New Zealand literature on missions into four categories: (i) denominational or organizational mission histories, often written for centennials or anniversaries; (ii) a wide range of autobiographies, biographies, personal narratives, and reflections dating from the early-twentieth century onwards that seek to combine both description and devotional inspiration; (iii) unpublished university theses, emerging from the 1940s and ranging from studies of the New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society to missionary work in the New Hebrides, to, in the 1970s, the development of interdenominational missionary groups, to, from the 1990s, current historiographical concerns, such as women's history

1 Jonathan D. Spence covers this idea well in "The Worlds of Marco Polo," in *The Chan's Great Continent: China in Western Minds* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), using Marco Polo as a first and somewhat defining observer: "The China that Polo gave to the world in his own extended account was a benevolently ruled dictatorship, colossal in scale, decorous in customs, rich in trade, highly urbanized, inventive in commercial dealings, weak in the ways of war. Whether all that is true or not is only the beginning of the conundrum. Equally intriguing are two other aspects of the problem. Was Polo there at all? And was he writing about China or about something else?" <http://www.nytimes.com/books/first/s/spence-continent.html>.

and Pacific history; and (iv) works that reflect more widely and academically on New Zealand's missionary involvement, published from the 1930s and 1940s, but, in modern scholarship, are few and far between and largely discontinued.² Mission history, of course, is not always treated discretely in scholarship and may form part of religious or social histories generally. But that is not to say that it *should not* be treated discretely: as Hugh Morrison and Matthew Dalzell argue in their studies, there is still much in mission history that is untapped.

Having laid that charge however, this article is much more modest in its aspirations. If this article were to sit anywhere within Morrison's categorizations, it would be within the category "autobiographies, biographies, and personal narratives." This article takes stories and diaries, written some years after the events to which they are referring, and places them within the broader context of China, on the one hand, and the narratives of that "China," via the missionary encounter, reported back in New Zealand, on the other hand.

As Brian Moloughney has pointed out, much of New Zealand's knowledge of China, up until post-Second World War, came directly from missionaries, who interpreted their experiences and perceptions of the Chinese world to New Zealanders back home. The stories of missionaries were told and retold, often with vigour and enthusiasm, through the pages of mission journals, church newsletters, and, when missionaries returned on furlough to New Zealand, lectures to eager audiences. To the rest of the world, China was closed off. Inevitably, the translation process worked both ways: those Chinese whom the missionaries encountered likewise took the Western ideas they learned from the missionaries.³

Moloughney cautions against subjecting missionaries to undue criticism for wanting to convert Chinese.⁴ We have to be careful, I would add, that we do not read the expectations and aspirations of missionaries of the early-twentieth century through the eyes of our own and different expectations, aspirations, and perceptions of the early-twenty-first century. There is a twin danger of, on one hand, lionizing the missionaries and their work, which we see in early hagiographies of the missionary endeavour, or, on the other hand, demonizing missionaries' work and seeing conversion in the same way as we might see colonialism, influenced by, amongst others, Edward Said's work on "Orientalism."⁵ As the editors of the *New Zealand Religious History Newsletter* of 2002 note,

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- 2 Hugh Morrison, "Antipodeans Abroad: Trends and Issues in the Writing of New Zealand Mission History," *Journal of Religious History* 30 (1) (2006): 77–93.
 - 3 Brian Moloughney, "Translating Cultures: Rethinking New Zealand's Chineseness," Stout Seminar, Victoria University of Wellington, 12 March 2003: 4; subsequently published in Charles Farrell, Paul Millar, and Keren Smith, eds., *East by South: China in the Australasian Imagination* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2005), 389–404.
 - 4 *Ibid.*, 5.
 - 5 For example, see Matthew Dalzell, *New Zealanders in Republican China, 1912–1949* (Auckland: New Zealand Asia Institute, University of Auckland, 1995).

New Zealand religious history has sometimes (often?) been infected by hagiography and uncritical denominational triumphalism. Polemic and presentism in New Zealand history are no substitute for this. Instead, careful critical historical research, and writing which carries with it Michael King's concern for "compassionate truth", are to be encouraged.⁶

The point needs to be reiterated: these early interactions between Chinese and New Zealanders were formative in how one group perceived the other. At a time now when China is ubiquitous in the media and elsewhere, it is easy to forget that China was largely popularly unknown for most of the twentieth century. Missionaries, therefore, played a significant role—perhaps a more significant role than they themselves realized—in presenting and translating "China" to a New Zealand audience.

Whether these images sent back of China were in any way realistic or accurate is probably something of a moot point: "many Westerners with no previous language training began writing their expert books on the Chinese as soon as they stepped off the boat (if not sooner)."⁷ Likewise, the aspirations that took missionaries to the other side of the world to a largely unknown country are equally complex and speak to a number of factors, including national identity, theological enterprise, the biblical mandate, sacrifice (read in the context of the First World War in particular), the spread of the British Empire, and the need to "evangelise the dark races."⁸ From the 1890s onwards, missionary work was viewed as a response to a great need; the cause was buttressed by statistics of Asian populations and non-Christian religions and the humanitarian needs provoked by famines in India and China.

In this period, Asia was in New Zealanders' lives not through the trade or people-to-people links which characterize it in the early-twenty-first century. Rather, it came into New Zealand lives through the great and the good of the time—the explorers, writers, and humanitarians—and from missionaries, many of whom are absent from history books, but whose views of Asia and their missionary task reinforced the often stereotypical views about Asia held by the general public and those in churches in particular.⁹

The missionary endeavour from New Zealand increased significantly in the early years of the twentieth century. Until the 1890s, New Zealand foreign missionary numbers

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- 6 Janet Crawford and Allan Davidson, "Editorial note," *New Zealand Religious History Newsletter* 15 (August 2002): 1, <http://researchspace.itss.auckland.ac.nz/bitstream/2292/1961/8/nzrh2002.pdf> (accessed 9 November 2007).
 - 7 Eric Reinders, *Borrowed Gods and Foreign Bodies: Christian Missionaries Imagine Chinese Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 39.
 - 8 Quoted in Hugh Morrison, "'A great Australasian scheme': Australian Influences on New Zealand's Emerging Protestant Missionary Movement, 1885–1922," *Fides et Historia* 38 (2) (2006): 87; cf. Hugh Morrison, "'It is our bounden duty': Theological Contours of New Zealand's Missionary Movement, 1890–1930," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 89 (3) (2005): 123–28.
 - 9 Morrison, "'It is our bounden duty.'"

were quite low, with a total of around thirty-one missionary departures by 1890. The rate of growth was slow, at an average of only one missionary departure per annum, though there was noticeable growth from the mid-1880s. From 1890 to 1900, at least 136 missionaries left New Zealand.¹⁰ By the 1920s, missions occupied a prominent place in New Zealand churches and denominations.¹¹ One of the most prominent missionary organizations was CIM, an overview of which begins this article. Attention then turns to brief biographical information about Frank and Marjorie Duncan and their early years in New Zealand. The remainder of the article concerns their experiences in China: their departure from New Zealand; encountering the Japanese; teaching, marriage, and family; evacuation and escape; back to New Zealand; and their final return to China.

CIM: An Overview

CIM was established in England by Hudson Taylor (1832–1905). It was established on the principles of faith and prayer. From its earliest days, it recruited missionaries from the working class and single women. Its work was further characterized by giving priority to “unreached inland provinces”; identification with Chinese by wearing Chinese dress and worshipping in Chinese houses; indigenization through training Chinese co-workers in self-governing; recruitment based on spiritual qualification rather than education or ecclesiastical ordination; interdenominational, international leadership; and headquarters “on the field,” leaders and workers serving shoulder to shoulder. Even today, there are no appeals for funds; instead OMF missionaries are asked to rely on God alone for their needs. As the name suggests, China Inland Mission was initially dedicated solely to China until 1951, the year after the Chinese government’s crackdown on missionaries in that country. Thereafter, CIM redirected its efforts to other parts of Southeast and East Asia. The last CIM missionaries left China in 1953. In the years following 1934, there was a decline in the number of CIM missionaries in China, largely as a result of the Sino-Japanese War (1937–45). During that war, missionaries remained at their station where they could and cared for refugees and organized welfare camps. However, many missionaries were sent to the internment camps in Shanghai and Yangchow. In 1942, CIM’s headquarters was evacuated from Shanghai to escape the Japanese army, and temporarily relocated to Chungking. Staff moved back to Shanghai in 1945.

Hudson Taylor founded CIM after his first visit to China and subsequently encouraged others to go to China. By the end of the nineteenth century, CIM was well known for its missionary efforts in China, though it was by no means the first mission agency to enter the country. (There was a Catholic presence in China during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.) Figures from 1910 claimed that CIM had founded 611 organized churches through Imperial China, comprising 933 missionaries; by the mid-thirties, CIM had founded 1,281 organized churches and had 1,359 missionaries in the field.¹²

10 Morrison, “Australasian scheme.”

11 Morrison, ““It is our bounden duty.””

12 Dalzell, *New Zealanders in Republican China*, 27.

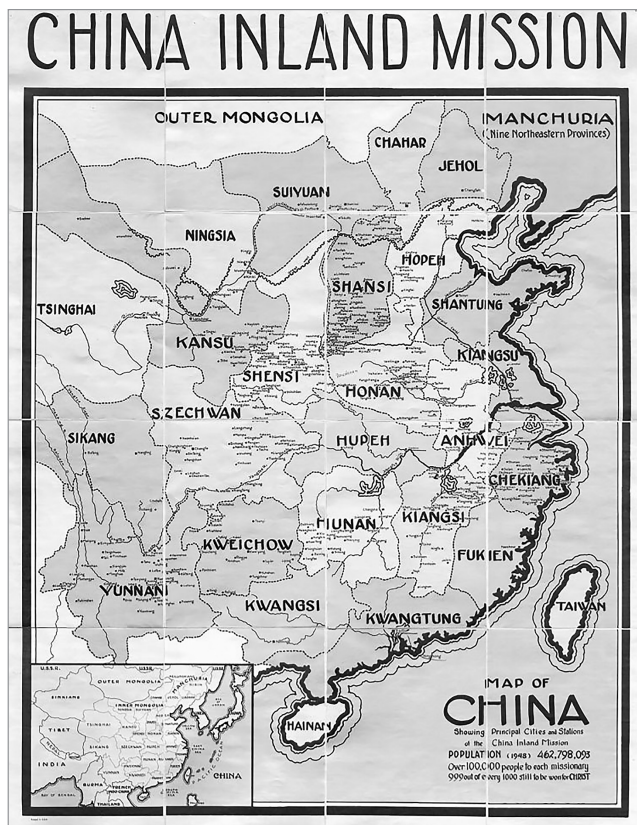


Figure 1. CIM map of 1948. (<http://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/images/CNs/231/231-os24/001a.jpg>.)

However, China was not an easy mission-field for CIM. In the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, CIM lost more missionaries (fifty-eight adults and twenty-one children) than any other mission agency. Yet, the CIM work was not hindered. Great expansion continued, following the Boxer Rebellion, the 1911 Revolution,¹³ and the establishment of the Chinese Republic. Yet missionary work remained dangerous. The Japanese invasion of China further complicated missionaries' lives, and, during the Second World War, missionaries were martyred or put into concentration camps, including the entire Chefoo School run by the mission at Yantai,¹⁴ where the children were separated

13 It occurred on 10 October, while the formal abdication was in February 1912.

14 Chefoo School, retaining the name, was temporarily relocated to Hong Kong in 1951, before being established in Malaysia (1952–2001), Japan (1951–98), the Philippines (1956–81), Taiwan (1954–61), and Thailand (1952–54).

from their parents for more than five years. After the victory of the Communists, CIM reluctantly pulled out its missionaries during the period 1949–51 and redeployed its efforts elsewhere, later renaming itself as the Overseas Missionary Fellowship, then OMF International.¹⁵ CIM sent more New Zealanders to Republican China than any other similar New Zealand institution.¹⁶ Two of the missionaries the CIM sent were Frank Duncan and Marjorie Stewart, to whose stories we now turn.

Frank and Marjorie Duncan

In 1988, Frank and Marjorie Duncan wrote their life stories in a private book published exclusively for their family called *Random Recollections*.¹⁷ The book drew on their extant diaries, memories of growing up in Dunedin and Invercargill respectively, their missionary work in China, Baptist ministry in New Zealand, and retirement. Where their book concerns China, it tends to describe events rather than people and incidents rather than impressions. There was much that, for quite good reason, they left unsaid. From their book we know little about *why* China was their destination of choice or, outside mentions of famine and war, what they thought of China as a country and the Chinese as her people. However, through their “random recollections,” we gain a sense of the chaos that marked China in the 1940s, the demands placed on both the Chinese and the foreigners, and how famine, war, and political chaos significantly impacted on the missionary work in that country.

15 “China Inland Mission,” Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China_Inland_Mission (accessed 26 November 2011); see also www.omf.org; Dalzell, *New Zealanders in Republican China*. There is an extensive body of historical research on the CIM, including a number of recent postgraduate theses. Some records are held at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, though its library website notes: “The headquarters of the CIM was in Shanghai, where a large volume of records accumulated, comprising extensive series of diaries and monthly letters written by missionaries, and quarterly accounts and statistical returns produced by senior missionaries from over 200 mission stations. Also held in Shanghai were records of mission properties in China, and other administrative records. It is probable that some of this documentation was disposed of once its utility had passed; disposal of records may also have occurred when the CIM premises moved from Wusong Road to Sinza Road, also in Shanghai, in 1931. Those premises were evacuated by the CIM when the buildings were taken over by the Japanese during World War Two. The CIM returned in 1945 but, following the Communist victory of 1949, evacuated its premises in 1951, destroying records which might contain data of interest to the Communist government. Consequently, very limited archival material survived in China. To a lesser extent some records held in London were also destroyed, apparently in particular during the move from London in the 1970s.” <http://www.mundus.ac.uk/cats/4/903.htm> (accessed 31 July 2009).

16 Dalzell, *New Zealanders in Republican China*, 20. The New Zealand branch of CIM was formed in 1939; before then, New Zealanders went out to the mission-field under the Australasian Council.

17 Frank and Marjorie Duncan, *Random Recollections: The Life and Times of Frank and Marjorie Duncan* (Wellington: Authors, 1998).

Early Years

Frank Duncan, born in 1913, was the son of a boot-maker (later a general store owner and butcher) and the fourth of six children, the youngest of whom died in an influenza epidemic on 21 October 1917 when Frank was almost four years old. Frank was educated for a year-and-a-half at Otago Boys' High School,¹⁸ and left school early (in 1928) to help in his parents' butcher shop, a consequence of the economic uncertainties of the 1920s and not uncommon for its time. Frank's interest in missionary work began while he was still living in Dunedin, when a preacher spoke at his church, Caversham Baptist. In 1935, Frank moved to Auckland to train at the Bible Training Institute,¹⁹ and graduated in 1936 with honours. In that same year, Frank applied to serve with the CIM and was accepted to sail in 1937. To gain experience, Frank spent six months of 1937 as pastor at Cambridge Baptist Church (commencing 7 March of that year).²⁰ Later that year, Frank returned to Dunedin to say his farewell to family and church.

A further farewell was given by Caversham Baptist Church on 12 August 1937.²¹ On his way north, Frank stopped off at Pleasant Point, where a day later he received a telegram to cancel all his plans as the Japanese had advanced into North China (February 1937) and Shanghai (August 1937), which followed an earlier advance into Manchuria and the Marco Polo Bridge Incident on 7 July 1937;²² a state of war existed between China and Japan. Frank ended up temporarily staying at Pleasant Point, where he served as pastor of a church for a few months, supporting himself by shearing sheep. In March 1938,²³ he returned to Dunedin, where, at the age of twenty-four, he was invited to be interim pastor of Georgetown Baptist Fellowship in Invercargill,²⁴ a position he held until February 1939,²⁵ although he returned temporarily later that year to fill in while the pastor was on leave.²⁶

His unexpected stay in Invercargill was fortuitous. As he walked up Dee Street, Frank walked into a chemist shop to buy hair oil for the little hair he had left and was

18 The Centennial Register at Otago Boys' High School records Frank Duncan's studentship as: "DUNCAN, Francis Andrew (1927–28), Baptist minister, Tawa-Linden Baptist Church, served as missionary in China 1940–50. 19 Beauchamp St., Linden, Tawa."

19 Which later became the Bible College of New Zealand and is now Laidlaw College and based in Henderson in west Auckland.

20 *New Zealand Baptist* (April 1937): 125.

21 *New Zealand Baptist* (September 1937): 280.

22 In *Random Recollections*, Frank Duncan notes that his delay was because of the Japanese advance into Manchuria (7–8), although this happened in 1931, consolidated in 1932–33. He may have meant the later advances, but wrongly transposed the dates.

23 *New Zealand Baptist* (March 1938): 91.

24 Georgetown Baptist Church closed circa 2000.

25 *New Zealand Baptist* (February 1939): 60.

26 *New Zealand Baptist* (December 1939): 390.

served by a young lady who caught his eye. A few weeks later he met this young lady again at a church function, and she was introduced to him as Marjorie Stewart. The rest, as they say, is history, and they subsequently courted and became engaged; Frank was aged twenty-five and Marjorie, twenty-one. Marjorie Stewart was born in Duke Street, Invercargill, in 1917, the seventh of eight children; her father was a professional gardener; and the family attended North Invercargill Baptist Church.

To China

After their engagement, Frank and Marjorie pursued going to China together, though Marjorie had to undergo training and attended the Bible Training Institute from 1939 to 1940. During 1939, Frank returned to Dunedin, where he preached and performed pastoral work at North East Valley Church. After Marjorie's training, plans were made to proceed to China; but after the Second World War broke out in 1939,²⁷ and after applying for their passports, they were told that, due to the military situation, all passports were being refused and all men and women of military age were being forbidden to leave the country. They gave up the idea of missionary work until the Second World War ended.

However, once more their plans were changed: this time because of royal intervention. Their request to leave the country had been granted at the specific request of King George VI, who had written to all dominions stating that it was his desire that people who had been trained for missionary service and were ready to proceed should be allowed to do so. They were given (another) farewell from Caversham Baptist Church, Dunedin, on 1 September 1940.²⁸

While Frank had waited the longest to set sail for China, it was Marjorie who was first to go, a month ahead (in July/August 1940), sailing on the *Mariposa*, first to Sydney, then to China. Marjorie's boat trip to China was largely uneventful, Japan not having yet entered the Second World War. Frank's boat trip to China a month later, on the *SS Tanda*, was a different matter altogether. They sailed under blackout conditions and frequently had boat drills to prepare for any emergency. On a ship that would normally hold sixty people, Frank joined 290 others as they set off from Brisbane. Because the ship was carrying a large number of pro-German Frenchmen,²⁹ it was given protective passage as far as Saigon (now Viet Nam) by the German navy.

27 Note that no Chinese document accepts September 1939 as the war's start.

28 *New Zealand Baptist* (October 1940): 326.

29 The British had offered to transport anyone from New Caledonia who wanted to join de Gaulle's Free French Government to the nearest pro-Vichy area, which in this case was French Indo-China (Saigon).

Encountering the Japanese in China

Once Frank arrived in Shanghai, one of his assignments was to go across to the Japanese sector (probably the Japanese sector of the International Concession³⁰) to teach English to German Jews, who were refugees from Hitler's regime;³¹ they had moved across Siberia into China and were now waiting for permission to go to the USA and living in abject conditions in an old temple in Shanghai. Even getting to the Japanese section was risking life and limb. When they crossed into the Japanese section, Frank and Marjorie had to carry all their certificates with them, as there would be British soldiers on one side of the bridge and Japanese soldiers on the other side, separated by no more than a few yards, and the Japanese soldiers would demand to see their certificates. It was said that, if the Japanese caught anyone without up-to-date certificates, they would produce a hypodermic syringe and give them an injection of cholera or typhoid.

The Japanese made life extremely difficult for the missionaries,³² so it was decided that all new missionary workers would be sent as quickly as possible to parts of China not under Japanese control. Getting to these parts involved travelling through Japanese territory in Japanese ships part of the way and being forced, because they were ("non-friendly") foreigners, to sleep in the hold of the ship without beds or any other comforts, closed in with all the others "cheek by jowl" who were travelling likewise.³³

To get to Free-China, Frank and Marjorie had to cross large tracts of land and water.³⁴ First, to get away from the Japanese, they had to escape through a hole in the city wall when the Japanese retreated behind barbed wire at midnight,³⁵ then they travelled at great speed across the countryside. En route, they entered areas controlled by Chinese guerrillas and had to pay protection money. Some of their travel was done

30 Shanghai had two parts at this time: (i) the International Concession, part of which was under full Japanese control and the other part, under international control, and (ii) the "Chinese" city, which was under the administration of collaborators with Japan.

31 Frank notes that many of these German Jews subsequently "made names" for themselves in America.

32 The extent of the difficulties experienced by the Duncans is reflected in a note in the *New Zealand Baptist*. Georgetown Baptist Church recorded: "During the evening a collection amounting to £29 was taken, and this will be sent as a token of the Church's love and sympathy to Mr and Mrs F. Duncan, of China, who have lost almost all their possessions through the Japanese advance" ([October 1944]: 238).

33 This was not the case for all foreigners, however. Italians and Germans, for example, were not treated in this way, and their boats had better cabins. Duncan and Duncan, *Random Recollections*, 10–11.

34 In mid-1938, when the Japanese were making rapid progress in China, the Chinese blew up the dykes of the Yellow River, flooding large parts of the surrounding country. The river soon settled into a new course, and any flooding in 1939 or 1940 was not directly linked to this event.

35 The city they escaped from was probably Ch'ingtao (now Qingdao). In *Random Recollections*, Frank Duncan writes that the last Japanese-controlled city they were in was Chingdere (11).

on foot, with small carts carrying their baggage. When they reached a flooded area, they had to live for “days and even weeks” on tiny junks, with about four people living and sleeping in an area about six square feet and not more than three feet from floor to roof.³⁶ The weather was so cold that there was ice in the water every morning.³⁷

After “about a month” travelling across road and river,³⁸ they arrived at their destination: language schools in Shenkiutien and Chowkiakow.³⁹ Soon after they arrived, in January/February 1941, it was time for both the Chinese New Year and Japanese bombing practice. The Japanese would practise pattern bombing, which they used to great effect later that same year at Pearl Harbour. The Japanese sent in their bombers and plastered the cities (including Henan) with small bombs right through the Chinese New Year season; Frank and Marjorie spent many hours ducking under stairways while bombs fell around them.

Teaching, Marriage, and Family

After the language school, Frank continued working in Chowkiakow, and Marjorie went to Linying. A year later, the missionary Superintendent moved Frank to Linying, and Marjorie was moved to Loho, twenty miles from Linying. Frank found himself to be the only English speaker in twenty miles. He needed to improve his spoken Chinese, and this was the time to do it. While in Linying, Frank read in the Chinese newspapers about the sinking of two British ships (*HMS Prince of Wales* and *HMS Repulse*) on 10 December 1941, the fall of Hong Kong in December 1941, and the fall of Singapore in February 1942. In what is surely an understatement, family historian Bruce Murray notes that, at this time, “Frank must have felt apprehensive and vulnerable, with the Japanese Army not far away in China also.”⁴⁰ Meanwhile, the county/prefecture where Marjorie was living was devastated by a severe famine; in two years, 80,000 people out of a population of 500,000 had died. Marjorie was appointed District Supervisor for the International Relief Committee, responsible for a thickly populated area of forty square miles. They were instructed by the headquarters of the International Red Cross: “People had to die so let it be the older people, save the children.”⁴¹ The famine dominated the Duncans’ early years in China. Frank Duncan records the following:

36 Duncan and Duncan, *Random Recollections*, 11.

37 It is unclear how there could be flooding and ice at the same time of the year, unless the chronology in *Random Recollections* has been shortened. The Yellow River wouldn’t flood in high winter: water flows peak in the late spring.

38 Duncan and Duncan, *Random Recollections*, 13.

39 In *Random Recollections* Shenkiutien is rendered as SKT; in pinyin it is Shenqui dian. Frank Duncan refers to Chowkiakow variously as CKK, Chaouchachow, and Choachacow.

40 Bruce Murray, *The Murray Family History, Volume II: The Duncan Connection* (Wellington: Bruce Murray, 2008), 55.

41 Duncan and Duncan, *Random Recollections*, 17.



Figure 2. Frank and Marjorie's wedding photo. (Photograph courtesy of Bruce and Shona Murray, Wellington.)

Our refugee camp was prospering but a similar camp run by the Government was in difficulties. Children were dying about twelve a day and in desperation the District Magistrate came to me and acknowledged that he didn't have the caring staff such as we had and that most of the staff in his camp were lining their pockets with much of the relief money. He asked me if I could use my influence to get some medical assistance. I got in touch with Dr Carllson who came with a well-trained Chinese nurse.... The main killer was hook worm and he [Dr Carllson] agreed to leave his nurse with us for a few days to administer oil of chenapodium which he warned would kill many of the weaker patients but was the only hope for the others. His prediction was correct. Many died but some were saved.⁴²

Eventually, Frank found himself in Loho (via a quite torturous journey accompanying a sick American missionary and his family to safer territory), and he and Marjorie prepared to marry there. Being outside the British Empire, their marriage celebrant had to be either a Bishop of the Church of England or a Consular Official, but the nearest official was 600 miles away in west China. It would have taken the marriage celebrant days to make the journey to Luohe,⁴³ and Luohe was only thirty miles from the Japanese front lines.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 22–23.

⁴³ This is probably Luohe on the Beijing-Wuhan railway. Locally, the unique reading of the Chinese character for this place is Luo, while atlases have Luohe or, more often, Tahe.

They also needed a ring. Frank's parents tried to send one to them via India, but the New Zealand Government refused to let that much gold leave the country. In the end, a Canadian dentist in Chengdu agreed to make a ring out of dental gold, a ring Marjorie wore her entire life. After some negotiation, the Church of England Bishop and British consul agreed that a minister of the Canadian church could marry them. According to the Duncans' *Random Recollections*, the minister biked 120 miles to marry them, and, the day after the ceremony, he biked the 120 miles back home again.

On their honeymoon, Frank and Marjorie went on a journey of forty miles across country, cycling on narrow tracks between wheat fields. After two weeks, they returned to Linying and began their life as a married missionary couple, working in a famine relief camp. Their first daughter, Shona, was born in 1943. She was very ill during her first few days of life—her “life hung in the balance”⁴⁴—the result, the doctor suggested, of Marjorie's poor diet during pregnancy because of the famine. Thanks to several transfusions of blood from Frank, Shona survived and was the first foreign baby to live in Linying.⁴⁵

Evacuation, Escape and a Coal Truck

In 1944, Frank and Marjorie received news from British military intelligence that the Japanese were going to push to capture the railway between Peking (Beijing) and Canton. This move was necessary for the Japanese because so many of the ships carrying supplies to their troops in the Indo-China area were being sunk in the China Sea by US submarines. The Japanese needed to have an inland supply route, and this one ran right through the Henan province. The news seemed genuine, so, around late March, Frank and Marjorie prepared to move. Frank took Marjorie and their daughter the twenty miles to Loho,⁴⁶ and saw them off on a charcoal-powered truck for the long trip of about 120 miles to Luoyang. From Luoyang, they would travel by train to Xi'an (Sian).

Because the train track ran along the south side of the Yellow River and the Japanese were just across on the north side,⁴⁷ it was necessary for the train to travel from one tunnel to another at night and stay in the shelter of the tunnel during the day. The plan was that Frank would follow the same route later. Frank would not hear from Marjorie for six weeks. There was a general evacuation on, and about forty missionaries were moving west on whatever transport became available, including, in Frank's case, mule carts and a wooden one-wheeled ox cart, and in very difficult circumstances. As Frank Duncan expressed it later, “it was a case of getting out with no more than you stood up in.”⁴⁸ Most of the Duncans' belongings had to be abandoned as they sought to get

44 Duncan and Duncan, *Random Recollections*, 20.

45 Shona Murray (née Duncan) now lives in Tawa, Wellington, New Zealand. Before she retired, she was Head of Music at Tawa College for a number of years.

46 Luohe was not taken because of the Yellow River's new course.

47 The train line from Fanshiu to Xiaoyezhen was along the Yellow River South Bank, but these places are east of Luoyang. The Luoyang-Xi'an railway was well to the south of the Yellow River for the first 100 miles, then it ran near the south bank in parts.

48 Duncan and Duncan, *Random Recollections*, 24.



Figure 3. The famine relief camp at Honan. (Photograph courtesy of Bruce and Shona Murray, Wellington.)

further southwest, into the guerrilla-run area of the foothills and away from the Japanese advance. When, years later, missionaries returned to the station on the way to Xi'an where the Duncans had left their luggage, they found all the belongings intact, including a portable organ, which was reunited with Frank in Hamilton, New Zealand, in 1966.

Six weeks later Frank met up with Marjorie and Shona in Xi'an—an encounter he briefly but meaningfully notes in the *Recollections*: “you can imagine the joyful reunion with Marj and little Shona”⁴⁹—but they were not to stay there for long. The war was becoming worse, and it appeared that the Japanese were going to finish off the China theatre and that all foreigners were being encouraged to leave China entirely and head for India. The Duncans’ evacuation began on a coal truck, which took them as far as Baoji (west of Xi'an on the railway),⁵⁰ then road transport took them to Hanchung,⁵¹ where some missionaries went onto India, but Frank and Marjorie stayed in the region and were assigned to a place called Yanchian,⁵² where they worked amongst students.⁵³

The war progressed, and at the same time Frank's health deteriorated. Having earlier suffered from appendicitis, then cholera, he later contracted diphtheria and

49 *Ibid.*, 25.

50 Baoji is the pinyin version of this place name. It may also be rendered as “Bowjee” (as it is in Murray, *Murray Family History*, 58). On the CIM map from 1948, it is referred to as Paoki, which is in Sheanxi (Shensi). The coal truck might have been on the railway.

51 Frank Duncan renders this as Hanju. He is probably referring to Hanchung (Hanzhong) in southern Sheanxi province. (On the CIM map, Sheanxi is referred to as Shensi; it borders Honan/Henan.)

52 Frank Duncan renders this as Yanchian. He is probably referring to Yanchien, also in Southern Sheanxi.

53 One of these students, Eric Su, became a life-long friend and went on to become Professor of Medicine and Bioethics at Xi An University.

peripheral paralysis, which left him very ill for quite some time. The Japanese war effort was being intensified in China as they were defeated elsewhere in the region, and again the British consul ordered that the missionaries be evacuated to India. When the US Army Air Force heard of the projected evacuation, they made representation on Frank and Marjorie's behalf to the British embassy, asking that the Duncans be left in China as their evacuation could have a terrible effect on China's morale; the Americans guaranteed that they would get the missionaries out of China, even if only in the bays of their bombers.

To India, Sydney and New Zealand

In May 1945, the Duncans first flew in a DC3 to Chengdu; from there Frank and a seven-month pregnant Marjorie were taken in an ambulance to the US base, twenty miles outside Chengdu. It was here that they heard, on 8 May 1945, that the German forces in Europe had surrendered. From the airbase in Chengdu, the Duncans went in a VIP's DC3 to Kunming in south west China, where they were delayed for several days. From Kunming to Calcutta they flew in a USAF Liberator bomber.⁵⁴ Frank Duncan describes the briefing they were given by the US military like this:

Before boarding a plane we had to go to a briefing room, don parachutes with jungle kits attached and be briefed as to the contents of the kit. There was a jungle knife and a booklet with illustrations of jungle vegetation that was edible and what was not... We were shown how to use the parachute and warned that if forced to evacuate the plane we were to jump without hesitation when told to. It was arranged that a member of the crew would take Shona in his arms in the event of having to bale out. We did strike it a bit rough on the crossing which was done at a fair height so we had to use oxygen tubes. The crew had radioed ahead that they had a missionary couple aboard with a child and then they landed at a base in Burma at Myitkyina for tea [dinner] and later in the evening landed near Calcutta at Berekpoor Airport... Within minutes a large staff car capable of holding at least eight people pulled up and we were told that this would be our transport into Calcutta about 25 miles, and that our baggage a mere 160 kilos of it would be along shortly, so we rattled around in a staff car and our meagre baggage was sent in a large truck behind us. Such was the hospitality of the US Airforce.⁵⁵

The Duncans' first son, Douglas, was born in Kalimpong, in the Himalayan foothills, on 19 July 1945.⁵⁶ Not long after his birth, the Duncans heard Truman announce

54 The Liberator was the name given to the B24 heavy bomber, a four-engine plane with twin tail fins. It carried seven to ten crew, had a ceiling of 28,000 feet, and had a range of 3,000 to 6,000 kilometres.

55 Duncan and Duncan, *Random Recollections*, 32–33.

56 Douglas died in October 2011.

that an atomic bomb had been dropped on Japan and the Second World War had ended. By the end of August, Douglas was old enough to travel, so the Duncan family headed back to New Zealand: through Calcutta, Ceylon, Perth, and Sydney. The war, famine, and ravages in China took place while much of the rest of the world suffered the horrors of war. Frank Duncan tells of being in a Sydney shopping centre when

We saw the Australian prisoners-of-war from Changi camp [in Singapore] who had been flown-in immediately after the war finished and from the area of the River Kwai passing through the city on the way to hospital. They looked like ghosts and were just skin and bone. There were some harsh things said by the bystanders about the Japanese treatment of their men.⁵⁷

After three months in Sydney, their return home delayed because troops coming home took priority of transport, the Duncans were keen to return to New Zealand. Stranded, Frank wrote to his parents and in-laws; Marjorie's parents showed the letter to their next door neighbour, Adam Hamilton (1880–1952), a personal friend, Leader of the Opposition, and Member of the War Cabinet, and Frank's parents showed the letter to the Honorable Fred Jones (1884–1966), a personal friend and Minister of Defence.⁵⁸ Hamilton and Jones went to the Prime Minister's secretary and said that the Duncan family should have priority, which they did. They set sail on the *Monowai* and were allocated Cabin Number 2; Cabin Number 1 was occupied by a major in the Army. They landed in Wellington late-December 1945 or early-January 1946, took the ferry to Lyttleton, and train to Dunedin. They were met in Palmerston by Frank's parents. Frank was aged thirty-two; Marjorie, twenty-eight; Shona, two; and Douglas six months old.

In January 1946 the *New Zealand Baptist* (NZB) noted that Frank Duncan spoke at Lower Hutt Baptist Church about his work in China, on "the day he arrived in Wellington from China."⁵⁹ It also records the Duncans speaking in Baptist churches and at Easter camps in and around Otago and Southland. One record, of Marjorie Duncan speaking at Caversham Baptist in March 1946, notes that she "gave a most informal and friendly account of her life in China and of her experiences of the goodness of the Lord in answer to prayer."⁶⁰

During their furlough, the Duncans pastored Esk Street Baptist Church, Invercargill, from mid-1946.⁶¹ Any expectation of returning to the mission-field earlier was not to be. As the NZB noted in September 1946, "As Mr Duncan is not permitted for health reasons to return to China at present, we are privileged to retain his services

57 *Ibid.*, 34.

58 Many years before, Jones had worked with Frank Duncan's father in a boot-making factory. Jones was a clicker, that is, a foreman shoemaker.

59 *New Zealand Baptist* (January 1946): 26.

60 *New Zealand Baptist* (May 1946): 142.

61 *New Zealand Baptist* (June 1946): 178.

for a few months longer”;⁶² and, again in February 1947, “Acting on medical advice, our pastor and Mrs Duncan will be with us for a further period. We are delighted to have them, although their hearts’ desire is to return to China.”⁶³ He was still in Invercargill in June 1947.⁶⁴ In October 1947, recognizing that it was unclear when (if ever) the Duncans would return to China, Esk Street Baptist called Frank as their full-time pastor.⁶⁵ Then, in June 1948, Esk Street Baptist recorded:

The call has come for our pastor and Mrs Duncan (after two and a-half years) to return to China. They expect to leave at an early date. We cannot adequately express our regret at their impending departure, as we have come to love them, but they feel their life’s work is in their returning to the mission-field.⁶⁶

The Duncans were given a full and fulsome farewell from Esk Street Baptist on 30 June 1948, where the congregation thanked Frank Duncan for “his services, for the enthusing of more missionary zeal and giving among us, for his work at West Plains and his zeal for the Master.”⁶⁷

After some delay the Duncans returned, as they had wished, to China. In September 1948 they set sail, now with three children (their second son, Gordon, was born in September 1947), on the first (and possibly only) boat from Bluff to Shanghai. En route to China in October, they sent a cable to Esk Street Baptist Church from Sydney,⁶⁸ where they were delayed until at least November.⁶⁹ The Duncans sent word back to Invercargill in January/February 1949 that they had arrived safely in China and “had left for Tchum [*sic*] in the Kiangsi Province.”⁷⁰

A Final Return to China

When they returned China was in a period of upheaval: the National Government was losing its grip, and the Communists were active everywhere. They could not go back to Henan, because it had been taken over by the Communists, so instead they went to Ichun (now Yichun) in Kiangsi (now Jiangxi) Province. Travelling to Yichun was itself quite

62 *New Zealand Baptist* (September 1946): 280.

63 *New Zealand Baptist* (February 1947): 41.

64 *New Zealand Baptist* (June 1947): 176.

65 *New Zealand Baptist* (October 1947): 311.

66 *New Zealand Baptist* (June 1948): 167.

67 *New Zealand Baptist* (August 1943 [*sic*]): 221.

68 *New Zealand Baptist* (October 1948): 281.

69 *New Zealand Baptist* (November 1948): 306.

70 *New Zealand Baptist* (February 1949): 52. Tchum is probably a misspelling of Ichun (now Yichun).

a journey. They were forced to stay at Hangzhou railway station for twenty-four hours, and the 100-mile journey to Yichun from Nanchang, where they stopped en route, took a full day instead of the four hours it should have done, because of the movements of military trains and flooding on the road. En route to Yichun, they stopped at a station and were told their wait would be sometime. Frank Duncan continues the story:

At this time Gordon [our second son] was being fed with powdered milk but there was not even water to be had on the Railway Station and the train looked as [if] it would be there quite a time. I didn't know the name of the area or if there were any missionaries in the area. I saw a schoolboy on the platform and asked if there were any foreigners in the city. He said he thought there were but didn't know them, however, I wrote a note and gave the boy a generous tip to deliver the message to the mission station. With hope and also fear that the boy would pocket the money and forget about the message. Imagine our delight and surprise when a foreigner walked into our carriage followed by a Chinese cook with hot water and food. From that time for the next 4–5 hours there was a constant coming and going with nappies to be washed and dried and delivered and supplies of food.⁷¹

As the Communists approached Nanchang, the heads of the mission gave the Duncans permission to move to Changsu, but they decided to stay where they were; ultimately, that meant trouble. Frank Duncan tells a story illustrating the trouble others found themselves in as well:

One day we were told that there was a group of [Chinese] young people about 15 of them, students who had left the Communist area and had come down south. We found that these students had moved from Honan [Henan] desiring to be free of the Communists. They came to the Communist frontline and told them that they wanted to cross over to the other side. They were allowed to proceed without inspection or hindrance. When they came to the Nationalists' side they were robbed of all their bedding[,] all their watches, all their pens and everything that was of value, they arrived at our station penniless.

The story continues, with potentially serious consequences for Frank Duncan:

We enjoyed several days of lovely fellowship before sending them off on the train to Canton. Their departure was not without incident. Lazarus Wong and myself with senior students escorted the students to the station and all was well. But after the train left one of our seniors told us that one of our girls had been taken away by the military. Lazarus and I went to the Senior Officer who was still at the station and said that some mistake had been

71 Duncan and Duncan, *Random Recollections*, 36.

made etc. We could tell the officer was drunk, he blew his whistle, pulled out the guard who marched us at gun-point along the station into a small guard-room. He began by asking how much we would pay for the girl and the reply was nothing....After further consultation and sharp discussion, he told us that we were free to go and that the girl would be released in the afternoon when enquiries had been completed (what he meant was after she had been gang-raped by his troops). And of course we refused to leave without her.... After sometime elapsed we heard conversation outside, it seemed someone who was sober enough to think approached the Officer and suggested that he might be able to treat a Chinese subject as he liked but taking a foreigner prisoner was a more serious matter so ultimately we were all released and returned to the mission compound amidst great rejoicing.⁷²

Trouble continued elsewhere too. The approach of the Red Army was signalled by the blowing up of bridges, the water tower, and the railway station by the retreating Nationalists, and, at Sunday lunch on 29 May, a soldier approached Frank Duncan with a red rag attached to his rifle, indicating that they had been taken over. Frank says more about this particular episode:

I went out to meet him and his name was “Wong” and he was a Major by rank. I invited him in to drink tea and I introduced him to Marj and the family. He appeared to be both thirsty and hungry as he drank several cups of tea and demolished the plate of scones. The object of his visit was to ask for the use of the school buildings for the use of his troops. I argued but not very convincingly as I knew it was a losing battle but he did promise that it would be for only 2–3 days—and they kept their promise. They were well disciplined troops and well equipped with arms captured from the Nationalists.⁷³

The incoming troops took over the school buildings; they were enamoured with the Duncans’ children, and soon the soldiers and the children were together singing songs, such as “without the Communist party, there would be no China.”

Knowing that the Communists had taken over, the Nationalists started bombing raids, several times a day. As they had done before, the family hid under the stairs or under a table as the planes came over with their bombs. As Frank Duncan recalls, “it was possible to follow the approaching track of the descending bombs, so I would stand at the door ready to duck for cover if one was coming too close but also ready to assure the family that the bomb was well off course.”⁷⁴ Eventually, a guard was placed at the Duncans’ gate, and they were confined to the compound; food was becoming difficult to buy, and the Duncan children’s health began to suffer. As Frank Duncan records,

⁷² *Ibid.*, 40.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

There was a local hospital staffed by fairly poorly trained doctors and with little equipment and we had to ask permission to take the children for examination when they were ill. They had constant colds and chest troubles and the local doctors who were very sympathetic suggested that we take the children especially Shona and Douglas to the hospital at Nanchung for detailed examination including X-rays. Our request was denied even when the suggestion was made that Marj take the children who were sick and I would remain behind with Gordon as security.⁷⁵

Because of the children's ill health, the Duncans applied in 1950 to leave for Hong Kong, which they were granted. (That is quite a story in itself, aided by Frank Duncan's ability to grow good tomatoes, which he gave to the Communists who stamped his visa to depart.) The Duncans were farewelled by their Chinese friends, who escorted them to the Railway Station; then, as the train pulled out of the station, they stood on the platform and sang "God Be with You till We Meet again." However, the Duncans would not meet any of these friends again. They never returned to China, and the Communists would later kill many, including one of their close friends, after a public show trial. Having left China, the Duncans sailed from Hong Kong on what Frank Duncan describes as "a very slow but very comfortable trip to Australia."⁷⁶ Frank recalls that

There was a special hostess on board to look after children on the after part of the ship and our three [children] soon found their way there and began as was their habit to play their games using Chinese language, as they had always done in China and in Hong Kong. But because people laughed at them they clammed up. From that time they never spoke Chinese again.⁷⁷

The Duncans returned to the South Island, first to Queenstown, then to Gore, where they settled. Their years in China (1940–45 and 1948–51) had come to an end, and, because of their ill health and the increasingly difficult situation in China, they would never return.⁷⁸ A letter from the CIM headquarters in Shanghai speaks of mixed feelings about the Duncans' departure:

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ The *NZB* recorded, "Advice has been received that Mr and Mrs F. Duncan and family are returning from China for their family's health. They were welcomed back to Esk Street Baptist on Sunday September 10, 1950" ([October 1950]: 315; *NZB* [June 1950]: 182). Dr J.H. Montgomery, who had examined the Duncan family in Hong Kong, reported that "had they remained much longer in China in their present state and lacking skilled care, irreparable damage might have eventuated." David Wood, *A Tale of Two Seasons: Tawa-Linden Baptist Church, 1948–2000, Volume One: The Ministers* (Wellington: Tawa Baptist Church, 2005), 32.

Nothing has or can be decided as to your future at this stage, thought it is doubtful whether it would be wise to bring Shona back to China, even if, as we earnestly hope may be the case, she makes a good recovery. So it looks as if you may be leaving China for a good long time. This is a real sorrow to us and, in spite of the difficulties of these days, and perhaps an avoidable [*sic*] sense of relief in going to the more peaceful atmosphere of New Zealand, a grief to you too. This last part of the way has been hard going, but I am certain that in days to come, looking back over the pathway you will see how truly God has meant it for good. As you go, the Lord will unfailingly open the way before you step by step.⁷⁹

Conclusion

China would loom large in the Duncan family: both Frank and Marjorie spoke Mandarin until they died, cooked and ate Chinese food with chopsticks, and reminisced about many of their experiences; family gatherings would centre around Chinese banquets; and, for many years, they displayed photographs of their Chinese friends. The Duncans' story resonates with those of other missionaries in China at that time, stories marked by frequent moves, the ravages of war and famine, and the difficulties of just trying to stay alive.

On their return from China, the family lived in Queenstown for a year. Frank Duncan then served as a Baptist minister in Gore (1951–57), Tawa (1958–66), and Nelson (1966–71) before retiring to Tawa, in Wellington, where he worked part-time as a bookbinder at Tawa College and continued occasionally preaching at Baptist churches in Wellington. However, his health never recovered from the illnesses he suffered in China. As David Wood notes in his history of the Tawa Baptist church, “while in China, Frank had been diagnosed with diphtheria that had weakened his heart. In his second year at Tawa (1959), a bout of hepatitis further sapped his strength. He developed pancreatitis and suffered a heart attack just before the opening of the new church.”⁸⁰ There are numerous references in the *NZB* to his convalescing from one ailment or another, and in the end he had to leave full-time ministry altogether because of ill health. As the *NZB* records in March 1971, “Rev. Frank Duncan has been forced by ill health to tender his resignation to the Nelson Church. Mr Duncan will require a period of prolonged rest and in all probability will be able to undertake only light work in the future.”⁸¹

Frank Duncan died of a heart attack (his seventh) in 1991 (despite his ill health, he lived until he was seventy-seven years old and outlived his four siblings). Marjorie Duncan died in 2004, also from a heart attack. Their five children, Shona (b. 1943),

79 Ernest Weller to Frank Duncan, 30 March 1950, in Duncan and Duncan, *Random Recollections*.

80 Wood, *Tale of Two Seasons*, 36.

81 *New Zealand Baptist* (March 1971): 3.

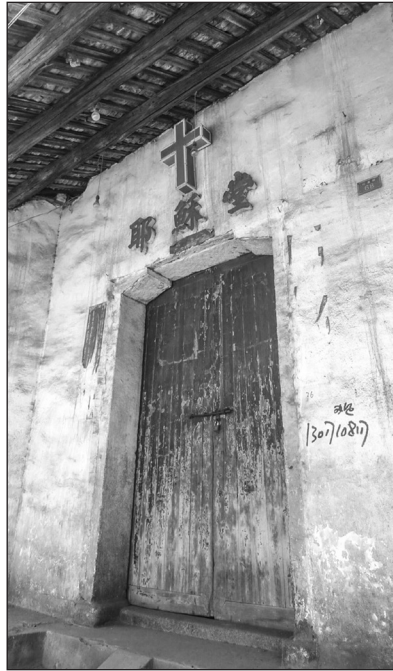


Figure 4. Frank Duncan's study in 2009. (Photograph courtesy of Bruce and Shona Murray, Wellington.)

Douglas (1945–2011), Gordon (b. 1947), Helen (b. 1951), and Alex (b. 1955), all lived in New Zealand. In 1991, just prior to Frank Duncan's death, the children travelled together to China to trace their parents' footsteps, and in 2009 Gordon then Alex and Shona returned again.

As Dalzell notes, the CIM's history in the Republican period is one of numerous attempts to diffuse the gospel, but these attempts were made even more difficult as missionaries were frequently moved on because of forces beyond their control: the Japanese invasion, evacuation, internment, and expulsion by the PRC government after 1949.⁸² Up to this point, missionaries had worked in China for well over a century. The impact of this missionary work, however, was not only one of exploitation, misunderstanding, and hostility. Both Catholic and Protestant missionaries had deep effects on Chinese society, particularly with regard to education and the efforts they made in improving the situation for women.⁸³ In addition to these effects, the long-term

82 Dalzell, *New Zealanders in Republican China*, 64.

83 Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 204.

impact on the Chinese Christian population has been significant, if difficult to measure (estimates of the number of Christians in China vary from 30 million to 150 million): it is estimated that the number of Protestant Christians has grown from 1.8 million affiliates in 1949 to somewhere between 17 and 26 million in the year 2000.⁸⁴

In the Bible, Psalm 16:6 reads, “the lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places, yea, I have a goodly heritage,” and this was Frank Duncan’s favourite verse. Perhaps ironically, China was anything but a pleasant place to be in the 1940s. It is remarkable that, despite famine, ill health, war, and evacuation, Frank and Marjorie Duncan and their family not only went to China, but remained there for as long as they did and that they were able to leave alive, albeit without many of their possessions. Their story is echoed in the stories of other missionaries. It is these stories that were relayed back to New Zealand, informing New Zealanders of life in China during some of the most extraordinary times in China’s modern history. When few others had access to China, missionaries had front-row seats, and, while they witnessed much that was never spoken of, they nonetheless had some stories to tell. But this is not just any story. Frank and Marjorie Duncan are my grandparents, and their goodly heritage, through their experiences in China and much else besides, is my heritage. Their story is my story too.

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Biographical Note

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