Disciples Near the Roof of the World: A Guide to Marian L. Duncan's *A Flame of the Fire*

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I had the good fortune to meet Marian Duncan, the author of this volume, along with her granddaughter, Karen Cantley, in 2007 on a People to People Ambassadors tour of institutions affecting women's access to higher education in China. During that thirteen-day sojourn, Mrs. Duncan shared memories of her missionary childhood, but it wasn't until the last day of the trip, while she and I spent several hours together in the Hong Kong airport, that I realized, first, that the mission had been sponsored by the Disciples of Christ and, second, that she had written an account of it and was carrying a copy of the document with her. I read a portion on the flight home and related it to the editors of the *Lexington Theological Quarterly*. Recent ill health has prevented Mrs. Duncan from communicating subsequently, but Ms. Cantley provided the *Quarterly* with a copy of *A Flame of the Fire: The Batang Tibetan Mission of the Disciples of Christ Missions*.

Mrs. Duncan was born in 1927 on what came to be known as the Tibetan Christian Mission (TCM) in Batang, a town just east of the Yangzi River on a trade route in Kham. Kham is a highly contested, multi-ethnic region that historically bordered southeastern Tibet and southwestern China, including what now are portions of Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu, and Yunnan provinces.*[1] Her parents, missionaries Marion and Louise Duncan, arrived in Batang in 1921. She was their third child (and only daughter) born in Batang, their eldest having died before her birth. The Duncan family visited the States on furlough in 1929, returning to Batang the following year. Young Marian was five years of age when the missionaries finally departed in August, 1932, following the closure of the mission and its virtual destruction during a siege by Tibetan soldiers unsuccessfully attempting to reclaim the town from China.

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* I have used the modern *pinyin* system of romanization while retaining the various systems of transcription, including Wade-Giles, used in direct citations of the source materials.

Back in the States, her family settled in Ohio and maintained lifelong communication with some of the other Batang missionaries. Her father returned to Tibet from 1934-36 as an interpreter and guide, and later worked as a translator and interpreter for the State Department in Japan, China, and Hong Kong. Mrs. Duncan herself graduated from Lynchburg College and, after preparation at the College of Missions, embarked with her husband, Raymond Adams, on a missionary assignment in India from 1951-1955, where she served as a social worker in Bilalspur and taught at the Woodstock School in Mussorie.[2]

Throughout her life, she was haunted by the memories of the Tibetan Christian Mission and what she perceived to be its impact on her parents. She was clearly not alone among these missionaries and their children in feeling lifelong repercussions from the events that transpired in Batang, whether directly experienced, indirectly recounted, or delineated by marked silence. Several of the Batang missionaries were drawn to continue their work overseas. Some met in 1939 with representatives of the United Christian Mission Service (UCMS, formerly the Foreign Christian Mission Service (FCMS)), seeking unsuccessfully to re-open posts in Tachienlu and Batang. Many wrote memoirs—professionally published, self-published, and unpublished—of their experiences. Those who learned the Tibetan language sufficiently translated scripture and religious teaching materials into Tibetan, or Tibetan documents into English.[3] Some who could do so, returned.[4] Mrs. Duncan herself traveled in 1998 with a tour group to China and Tibet, where she found a Tibetan woman whose grandmother had grown up in Batang and who helped Mrs. Duncan scatter some of her parents' ashes outside Lhasa. The interpersonal dynamics and the budgetary and administrative challenges, as well as the "scandals" that so divided the community during its last decade of existence, about which Mrs. Duncan's parents never spoke in her presence, took their toll: more than one of the missionaries had what was described as a nervous breakdown, and one eventually took his own life.[5]

Eventually, in 1988, several of the remaining Batang missionaries, along with their children and grandchildren, convened a reunion of what they called "the Batang Gang." That meeting prompted Mrs. Duncan to write *A Flame of the Fire*, which she self-published a decade later to address "the desire of us MK's ("missionary kids") to know the truth about the little mission so far away and so long ago – which our parents hesitated to speak about – it must have hurt too much! Now we know the what and why!" (260) She also felt an obligation to her father and to Dr. Elliot Osgood (see n. 1 below), both

of whom, she felt, "wanted to write this story" (*Flame*, 4).[6] Given that she was a child when the mission closed, her book can only marginally be designated a "memoir": most of the events she relates took place before her birth and are known to her only through her own investigation. Still, while a complex compilation and somewhat challenging to read (with no index), the volume is invaluable and appropriately issued by the *Quarterly* for several reasons, not the least of which is that it identifies and provides a biographical sketch for each of the Batang mission's 24 missionaries, plus Petrus Rijnhart.

It is a treasure-trove of rare primary, or near-primary, source materials: detailed summaries of monthly mission meetings and sub-committee reports, reports to the FCMS/UCMS—summaries and direct citations of both archived and private correspondence; published and unpublished journals, memoirs, and autobiographies; Christmas programs and other mission memorabilia, and interviews with the surviving missionaries and their children—the closest most readers will get to an archival experience of these sources without consulting the Disciples of Christ Historical Society in Nashville, Tennessee and the families themselves.

Mrs. Duncan's principles of selection differ markedly from those guiding writers of missionary reports, church or denominational histories, national or political histories, or biographies. Concerned only with making sense of the Batang mission experience and providing "healing truth" (262) to herself and her peers, she continually interweaves personal, administrative, faith-related, and political information, interspersing her own observations and opinions, often italicized, with emotion and exclamation points and without censoring what normally would be withheld by those seeking to impress either bureaucratic overseers or the public at large.[7] Indeed, the reader frequently feels less like an archivist than a fly on the wall. As a result, this document opens a unique window through which to observe both various facets of life within this community and the extraordinary political environment and historical moment in which the mission operated.

Most of the Batang missionaries took Chinese and Tibetan language study seriously as a prerequisite for preaching, teaching, and working with the local population. Preaching a sermon in Tibetan or Chinese functioned as a "graduation" exercise demonstrating language competence. Two of the missionaries worked together to design a device for affixing a Tibetan alphabet wheel to a standard typewriter, which they felt "sure will be of great value to the work all over Tibet, and will influence future generations" (*Flame*, 24, 85). A few studied Buddhism, as well, "to be comfortable debating with some of the

lamas," while most simply "enjoy[ed] the festivals and . . . preach[ed] against the status into which it placed the ordinary poor Tibetan" (*Flame*, 1). Some became adept ethnographers, documenting Tibetan customs in essays and photographs for both missionaries and the wider public. Mrs. Duncan notes that "developing film and printing was an activity of all missionaries," and the Batang missionaries apparently provided this service more than once for the British consul during his stay with them (*Flame*, 45).

In keeping with a nineteenth-century development, the TCM always maintained at least one, and generally more than one, missionary-physician who served the site and also "itinerated," combining healing and preaching to the region's populations of Khampas, Tibetans, and Chinese—ordinary folk as well as local and more distant government officials, lamas, soldiers, warlords, and bandits—even-handedly.[8] Along with the mission hospital, medical diplomacy generally garnered goodwill and protection for the Batang missionaries.[9] Other vehicles of good works, such as the mission's schools and orphanage, proved successful and popular (and a new opportunity for the local girls and young women), both for the services and the employment they offered. Some of the missionaries questioned themselves and each other as to the sincerity and sustainability of conversions, when they occurred, appearing to result from such material benefits, referring to converts by such means as "rice Christians," and thereby demeaning the colleagues who facilitated these changes in faith.

The Flame vividly documents the daily life of the Batang missionaries and the daunting logistical, administrative, and budgetary challenges they faced, both at the founding of the site and during its relatively more established years. The volume is replete with details pertaining to prices, wages, meals, plantings and harvestings, homemaking, and the weather, as well as progress made in baptisms and school and orphanage enrollments. Travel time overland and upstream from the coast could exceed three months (nearly six from San Francisco), delaying the arrival of both staff replacements and medical and other supplies. Harrowing first-person accounts excerpted at length by Mrs. Duncan of travel to and from stations, on foot and by mule and yak, on snow-covered trails and over narrow rope bridges at altitudes reaching 15,000-feet, often with young children, and in more than one case racing to beat a pregnancy due date, convey an urgency and danger missing from standard histories. At the same time, there is no doubt that those who chose to live and work in such circumstances were adventurers who took pleasure and pride in the "romance and remoteness" (see n. 13 below), both geographical and cultural, of this

"furthest outpost of the Christian faith on the western edge of China" (*Flame*, 5).

The isolation of the TCM affected its internal relations. While telegraph lines extended to Batang, letters to and from the States frequently crossed during their two-to-three month one-way route. Escalation of some of the interpersonal dramas Mrs. Duncan describes hinged on delayed reception of UCMS responses to missionary complaints. Excerpts from epistolary exchanges, diary entries, and meeting minutes detailing accusations, motions and challenges, misunderstandings, social snubs, and outright shunnings during the mission's later years graphically convey not only a small, but a suffocating, environment that exaggerated the import and impact of all gestures and interactions.

The Batang missionaries exhibited the focus, sensibilities, and blinders typical of passionate idealists living in intentional communities. Geographical and cultural isolation served to exaggerate individual differences, turn preferences into principles, and amplify the dissonance of competing ambitions. Mrs. Duncan periodically contrasts "independent" with "communal" missions and notes the paramount need to accept group decision-making in the latter context. While the group placed primary emphasis on (and felt most frustration and pressure from the UCMS regarding) increasing its tally of conversions, particularly among the Tibetan population, the 1923 UCMS *Survey of Service* drew closer attention to the importance of cultivating "native leadership." Some of the conflicts within the community came from differing views toward sharing and ceding decision-making to local converts (referred to by the missionaries simply as "Christians").

Mrs. Duncan's account also reveals the organizational growth of the Batang mission from a small, build-the-ship-as-it-sails outpost requiring improvisational ingenuity to a group of more than twice the original number of staff whose technical expertise was occasionally used to justify short cuts in stateside cross-cultural and linguistic preparation. The start-up work of cultivating land, constructing buildings, and establishing relationships with the diverse (and frequently warring) local populations that the Sheltons, Ogdens, and Hardys undertook as close friends was followed by the administrative difficulties of managing an influx of new recruits (hard-won, especially with the onset of the First World War); enlarging the hospital; starting and running a day and technical school, a Bible school, an orphanage, a shoe factory, and a rug factory; establishing organizational by-laws and rules of order for general meetings; standardizing accounting and auditing procedures; and justifying outcomes to the FCMS/UCMS.

The mission's relationship with its funding sources appears to

have been problematic in various ways. In 1917, the chairman of the Central China Mission's Advisory Committee apologized to Dr. Shelton for "years of neglect," assuring prompt deposits to the TCM's accounts without need for additional payment orders (*Flame*, 42). The missionaries, too, more than once expressed frustration that the Memorial Fund established in Shelton's memory was used to endow the Tibetan Library and a chaired professorship at the College of Missions in Indianapolis, rather than sent to meet the needs of the mission to which he had given his life.[10] Beyond denominational practices, the economic crash of 1929 and the ensuing depression severely constrained fund-raising and forced the closure of missions worldwide.

Scattered throughout the volume, interspersed among mission events of every magnitude—new births, holiday celebrations, correspondence both personal and professional, and meeting minutes—are "historical notes" and sometimes substantial digressions pertaining to the complex political developments of the first third of the twentieth century, which formed the backdrop to the TCM's operations. Batang lay at the farthest outskirts of the Chinese empire during the period of China's rapid and tumultuous transition from dynastic rule to modern nation state. At the end of the Manchu Qing Dynasty (1644-1912), Chinese rule over the area was tenuous. The successive governments of the twentieth century, including the Nationalist government of Chiang Kai-shek, claimed the boundaries of the Qing state. While Republican China was nominally unified, power often devolved to local strongmen, and the little town found itself periodically at the mercy of local warlords. Moreover, it was situated at the epicenter of Sino-Tibetan border skirmishes in a region some of whose Khampa residents claimed independence from both China and Tibet alike. Finally, it was located in a sphere of the world in which external parties, including Britain, the United States, Russia, and Japan took major interest.[11]

It is understandable why some have viewed missionaries during this period as pawns in an international chess tournament to protect and advance colonial and national territorial boundaries, siding even by denomination with one or another interest.[12] Still, during most of the nearly three decades in which they conducted their work, the Batang missionaries appear to have felt actively engaged within their political and cultural environment and, indeed, influential. Mrs. Duncan's sources depict the missionaries as having mediated in local disputes (arguably a fitting function for outsiders, but disallowed for American missionaries) and having been rescued by local officials when one such intervention backfired (a land deal in which local farmers would have lost their properties to an unscrupulous official had

one of the missionaries not held the titles until payment). On a grander scale, TCM leadership apparently was instrumental in convening key parties and providing translation and drafting assistance for the 1918 border agreement between China and Tibet signed by the Kalon Lama (Tibetan commander-in-chief), the Chinese general Liu Tsan-ting, and British consul Eric Teichman (*Flame*, 42-47, 75).[13]

The correspondence Mrs. Duncan cites reveals the various strategies that the Batang missionaries employed to get along and maintain safety in their milieu, despite local turmoil. In addition to good works (especially medical ones), language learning, relationship building, and a studied posture of "innocence" and political disinterest, they were adept at using both the Chinese and the Tibetans as shields, one against the other. Repeatedly, throughout her account, she remarks that the missionaries felt safe on their mission, if not always so off-site; even in the latter circumstance, they were scrupulous about not traveling where they did not have authorization, and they sensed that one warring party or another intentionally left the missionaries alone or watched their backs on the road.

Still, by the end of the mission, even prior to their wartime escape, one is hard-pressed not to picture them as bobbing like corks in a tidal wave of political strife and economic turmoil over which they had no control and by which they were eventually washed away. That most escaped with their lives, unlike the missionaries massacred in the anti-foreign Boxer Revolt of 1900, may be as much due to the historical accident that they departed when parties contending for regional dominance targeted each other with more enmity than they did "foreigners," as to the good relations that the TCM had cultivated assiduously with each of the contending parties.

The unevenness and selectivity with which the Tibetan Christian Mission at Batang has been remembered may reflect the conflicting assessments it received, contemporaneously and subsequently, from within the Disciples denomination and outside it, as well as ambivalence regarding foreign missions in general.

There is no question that, in the parlance of bureaucrats, "mistakes were made" in, and regarding, the Tibetan Christian Mission of Batang. Indeed, Mrs. Duncan confides that she was informed, years later, by a missionary in India that "every mission learned what *not* to do from the mistakes of the Batang Mission" (*Flame*, 47). These include an apparent inability to routinize the charisma of its inspiring founders, Drs. Susie Rijnhart and Albert Shelton; unrealistic expectations and ambitions and a lack of comprehension of local difficulties on the part of both incoming recruits and the stateside overseeing board; and inadequate and irregular support, both financial

and advisory, also on the part of the latter. Mrs. Duncan frankly concedes that "Those of us who mourned Tibet know it [the reason for its closure] was as much the inability to manage problems as that of the financial situation" (*Flame*, 231, 233).

Batang had been envisioned as a base camp, following Tachienlu, for advancing into Tibet proper, with Chamdo as the next step and Lhasa as the ultimate goal. By 1919, the FCMS was advertising for "three men and wives for Chamdo" (although as late as 1924 other possible sites east of the Yangzi were under consideration).[14] Still, one insider's view, shared the following year with FCMS president Stephen Corey, was that "as a strategic center for preparing workers for other places in Tibet, when the time comes that these other places can be opened . . . . Batang is a miserable failure." Inadequate staffing for even local operations and inability to rely on Chinese protection deeper into Tibet made expansion, in this view, "out of the question" (*Flame*, 56). The missionaries remained frustrated at the difficulty they experienced in bringing Christianity to the Tibetans, finding the Chinese much more receptive. That the TCM succeeded in providing services that were both needed and appreciated in the region under perilous conditions was recognized at one time, even by the UCMS. The Osgood report of 1926 noted "encouraging progress in Batang," with 80 church members, 120 pupils in the school, 70 children in the orphanage, and many served by the hospital. The annual report from that year counted "2765 patients, with 9844 treatments, but only 15 deaths among in-patients" (*Flame*, 156-157).

British consul Eric Teichman, normally disparaging of Christian missionaries as a lot, nevertheless extolled the TCM. The Batang missionaries, he wrote, "recognizing perhaps that direct evangelization amongst the Tibetans is at present hopeless, are engaged chiefly in medical and educational work, laying the foundations for possible evangelization later on. They are surpassed by no mission in all China in respect of the amount of good they do and the sensible manner in which they do it." Elsewhere he added (at which the Batang missionaries and those they served likely would have taken equal offense), "To evangelize the people in their present state is merely to add to the load of superstition with which their lives are already burdened. The Protestant missionaries at Batang appear to realize this, and educational and medical work stands in the forefront of their program."[15]

Teichman's latter assessment, however, is not borne out in Mrs. Duncan's account. Without question, "doing good" provided the consistent common ground that this remarkable group plotted out with its neighbors, but its evangelistic hopes never dimmed. Recalling his

conversations with the Kalon Lama about their respective religious beliefs, Shelton found "not a great deal of difference in some of the commands of our two religions, but naturally there were many things that we could not agree upon." At last, he proposed that "from this day you and I will work together for the good of our brother men," to which the Kalon Lama is said to have replied, "I can accept that with my whole heart."[16]

Still, throughout the mission's duration, all its good works remained, at least in intention, preparatory to Christianization. Shortly after arriving in Batang, Jim Ogden and Albert Shelton shared an early moment of frustration at the difficulty of impressing "these lama-bound people" and concluded that the role of the TCM might be only to prepare a path for those who would follow, akin to pulling up weeds and clearing away stones. Ogden reported to the FCMS Executive Board in 1906 that "Tibetans will not assemble in a hall to hear the gospel, as the Chinese, Japanese, Indians, or Africans. This is a different work and must be done in a different way. . . . We will gain a listener now and then through our kindness, medicine and love. (*Flame*, 163, 21). By 1926, the TCM was still affirming a two-fold purpose of its medical work:

1. Alleviation of physical suffering, curing of disease and saving of human life.

2. Evangelization of people- to win them to Christ, heal the sick as Jesus did and teach them spiritual truths. Each hospital and dispensary patient and other patient has the Word of God preached and taught (*Flame*, 158).

As late as 1929, at a program celebrating the tenth anniversary of the orphanage (held twice, once each in Tibetan and Chinese), a speech was made stressing that "we were in Ba [Tibetan for Batang] to make disciples and the Orphanage, School and Hospital were means to that end" (*Flame*, 199).

What does appear to have evolved over the years, however, was the perceived relationship between Christianization and Americanization and the varying degrees of acculturation undergone by both the missionaries and their potential and actual converts. Newly arriving missionaries wrote of sanitation, unsavory odors and flavors, and the efforts required to make their homes and grounds habitable. Most of the Batang missionaries came from the mid-West and mid-South, and in the early years of the TCM they planted peach, apricot, apple, and walnut trees; strawberries, grains and alfalfa; flowers and

shrubs; and a lawn of Kentucky bluegrass to create an island of Americana—where they also built and resided in Tibetan-style three-story stilt houses and employed Tibetan servants to help care for their children. The most culturally sensitive of the later missionaries, Raymond Peterson, worked actively to adopt more Chinese elements in the school, using Chinese gongs instead of bells to signal classes, upturning corners of the roof, and writing names in Chinese characters. He cultivated "native leadership" by promoting and rewarding local staff. Popular with the latter, he was vilified by a faction of the missionaries following the scandal, and he left with his family in 1930 (*Flame*, 186, 196). Still, by the 1927 TCM annual meeting, a "native Christian" was assigned to give a report for each mission department, and by 1930, the stated goal of the TCM was "to train them in character, not to Americanize them, but to study their own customs to train them to live the very best possible way" (*Flame*, 161, 211). When the missionaries left Batang in 1932, the church had 16 local Christians, led by one Lee Gway Gwong, on whom they had come to rely over the years, who "continued to preach both in Tibetan and Chinese as before and was still alive even up to 1954" (*Flame*, 243, 255). By then, Minnie Ogden, who read a letter aloud from Gway Gwong to the attendees of a Disciples' convention, could write of herself, "I think in the Tibetan language . . . almost feel like a Tibetan" (*Flame*, 220).

What are we to make of this extraordinary endeavor on the part of brave people who traveled across the earth to convert others to their understanding of what is true but who came back (those who did) themselves irrevocably altered and forever enchanted by the memories of a thwarted experiment in cultural and religious boundary dwelling, of failed attempts either to reach Lhasa or to convert the region? By today's sensibilities, past attempts to impose Christian doctrine on others seem outdated, insensitive, and irrelevant, at best, and the social mores governing and disrupting the missionary community itself feel, at worst, merciless. (Mrs. Duncan characterizes them repeatedly as "Victorian.") The inclination of modern, pragmatic, western sensibilities is to calculate the value of enterprises by assessing their enduring impact, their legacy, and it is hard to find much remaining of what was once the Tibetan Christian Mission.

Perhaps the mission's most visible and tangible material legacy, apart from its written records—is the array of Tibetan art and artifacts that Albert Shelton collected, brought to the United States, and sold to the Newark Museum. As for Batang, when Bill Hardy returned with his son to the mission site in 1987, he discovered only one of the mission buildings (the Mill House) still standing and in use by the local government.[17] The cemetery, where three adults and several children

were buried, had been razed, although Hardy heard that some of the tombstones were "with someone." Apple trees filled the valley—one was believed to be 80 years old—and were said to provide a sizeable source of local income (*Flame*, 259). Douglas Wissing traveled to Batang in 1999 "to discover the Tibetan legacy of Dr. Shelton." By then, he found no structures on the mission site except an earthen wall remaining from the Shelton home; the apple orchards were called "Yeshu apples," presumably begun by the trees originally planted by the missionaries. A local resident, who refused to divulge his name, had preserved Dr. Shelton's tombstone during the Communist upheaval in the 1980's and kept it at his home. Wissing interviewed the local head lama (Ba Lama), said to be the reincarnation of the Ba Lama who had befriended Shelton, and asked him what he thought of Shelton and his work. The Ba Lama replied that he thought Shelton was a good man who helped poor people and children by feeding and clothing them and teaching them English.[18]

Marian Duncan, however, does not frame her narrative in these terms. She merely records—with love for what once was, and sadness and regret for what might have been—the courage, passion, idealism, and contradictions of this very human community and its contact with the people and culture of the Batang valley and the larger areas of Tibet and China. Perhaps her account is so compelling because it is so passionate. In her own words, it is "a true love story" of many aspects: of the missionaries for their God and for Tibetans, of God for these missionaries, and of "these couples for each other" (*Flame*, 1-5, 262). That the "flame" igniting the Batang mission burned well beyond its closure is evidenced both by the arrival of Batang converts on the doorsteps of former TCM missionaries around the globe and by the reunion of the mission's surviving members and their children after nearly seven decades. The document that follows is a unique testament to the power of that flame and to the memory of those ardent souls.

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[1] The Foreign Christian Mission Society (FCMS) granted its approval to open a mission on the Tibet border in 1903, first at Tachienlu and then, in 1908, at Batang. A 1919 FCMS missionary recruitment pamphlet describes the Batang mission as the Society's "now famous mission to the 'Great Closed Land' . . . Dr. and Mrs. Shelton, together with Mrs. Rijnhart, [having been sent] to begin the work on the border between Tibet and Szechuan in western China" [Charles T. Paul,

Somewhere in All the World: Latest Call to Christian Students from Foreign Fields of Disciples of Christ (Indianapolis: College of Missions, 1919), 34-38]. It was understood that Dr. Shelton had secured an invitation from the Thirteenth Dalai Lama to do medical work in Lhasa (previously closed to Westerners), and the FCMS believed that the 1904-05 British military invasion of Tibet from India had "helped to break down the barriers of official seclusion." See *Fifty Years of Attack and Controversy: The Consequences Among Disciples of Christ* (St. Louis: Committee on the Publication of the Corey Manuscript, Christian Board of Publication), 1953, where United (previously Foreign) Christian Missionary Society (UCMS) president Steven J. Corey refers to the pressures leading to the decision in 1931 to terminate the Batang mission, not the least of which was the stock market crash of 1929 (160-162; see also 131-132).

Disciples historians William E. Tucker and Lester G. McAlister briefly describe the "fascinating . . . ill-fated venture into Tibet" in *Journey in Faith: A History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* (Saint Louis: The Bethany Press, 1975), 320-322, 389. They recount Dr. Susie Rijnhart's early forays into Tibet with her first husband, Petrus; his death and that of their child; her return to Canada and determination to continue the work of missioning in Tibet; and her return with Dr. Albert and Flora Shelton. Identifying additional missionaries, James Moyes (Dr. Rijnhart's second husband), "the James C. Ogdens," and Dr. Zenas Loftis, they provide a more extensive account of Dr. Shelton's kidnapping in 1919 and, three years later, his murder by bandits. Kenneth Scott Latourette's description of the Batang mission, in *A History of Christian Missions in China* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1929), focuses on Dr. Rijnhart and describes the Sheltons as having been "appointed to aid her" (579-580).

Winfrid Ernst Garrison and Alfred T. DeGroot are conspicuously silent regarding the Batang mission in *The Disciples of Christ: A History* (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1948), although they note the "independent work" of "Mr. and Mrs. J. Russell Morse" and "Dr. and Mrs. Norton H. Bare"(513). Mrs. Duncan reports that these four left the Batang mission during its years of internal dissension and served in Gartok at the invitation of Tibetan officials. T'ien Ju-K'ang also includes Morse among the independent missionaries (those supported by individual congregations, the latter sometimes referred to as "Living Links") on the Tibet border and in Yunnan province in *Peaks of Faith: Protestant Missionaries in Revolutionary China*, New York: E.J. Brill, 1993), 26.

Of the 140 missionaries listed in the UCMS roster, *They Went to China: Biographies of Missionaries of the Disciples of Christ* (Indianapolis: Missionary Education Department, UCMS, 1948), initially compiled by Edith Eberle and revised in 1948 by Lois Anna Ely, only two Batang missionaries are listed: Nina Hardy (who served nearly 18 years on the Tibet Christian Mission) and Grace Young (who served from 1924-1928, returning in 1931 and departing Batang in 1932). It could be argued that Batang was considered, for the purpose of this collection, as lying on Tibetan territory outside the Chinese border, although the oblique and minimal references made to it, when unavoidable, more likely reflect the fresh memory of this "ill-fated mission." (The map displayed in *Somewhere in All the World* depicts Batang squarely on the Chinese side of the Sino-Tibetan border.)

In the *Biographies*, Nina Hardy is described as having accompanied her husband, Dr. William M. Hardy, "to the work in Batang," where all four of their children were born (39-40); Young is described as "the first and only single woman missionary to be sent by Disciples of Christ to 'the roof of the world' [and] . . . . the only nurse in a hospital that was twenty days of hard travel from any similar institution." She and Minnie Ogden then returned to Batang from furlough, where the "unrest of the times caused them and their associates [*sic*] to carry on for months shut in at Batang by wars, the travel route closed. In August, 1932, the way opened for them to leave, and they made a safe return to China" (86). Grace Young arrived in Batang after Albert Shelton's death, but Mrs. Duncan notes that he had previously argued against bringing "young, unmarried women into the difficulties and isolation of Batang." He was outvoted by his fellow TCM missionaries and agreed to support their decision to recruit single women (*Flame*, 57).

Two other entries in the *Biographies* are relevant to the Batang mission:

1) That for Dr. and Mrs. Elliott Osgood, who worked mainly in Zhuzhou (Wade-Giles: Chuchow), includes the following information: "One of the most interesting of his experiences was his going to West China to rescue Dr. A. L. Shelton who had been captured by bandits. How he found him, brought him back to safety, and nursed him to health is a fascinating story. Later he was chosen to go to the far away mission station, Batang, where he helped solve many difficult problems" (*Biographies*, 23). Mrs. Duncan recounts Dr. Shelton's 72-

day kidnapping in early 1920 and Dr. Osgood's diplomatic intervention and surgical care (*Flame*, 53-54), as well as the latter's 75-day consultation to the TCM during the first half of 1926, including excerpts from his report to the UCMS Board (*Flame*, 45-56, *passim*).
2) The one for Dr. and Mrs. James Ware, who served mainly in Shanghai, notes that he returned to the States late in his career, where he was diagnosed with cancer, but decided to return to China to work and be buried there (*Biographies*, 15-16). Mrs. Duncan describes Dr. Shelton as preceding his own family on return from his 1910-1913 furlough "in order to accompany James Ware, seriously ill from cancer, who wanted to return 'home' to his family to die in China" (*Flame*, 29).

British diplomat Sir Eric Teichman refers to the Batang mission and its missionaries, particularly Dr. Shelton, throughout his account, *Travels of a Consular Officer in Eastern Tibet, Together with a History of the Relations of China, Tibet, and India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922). A photograph of Dr. Shelton and the Teji (Governor) of Markam appears as Plate XXXII. According to Mrs. Duncan, many of Teichman's photographs, particularly those taken in Chamdo, were developed by the missionaries of Batang.

Tucked away in the final chapter of his memoir, *Trente ans aux portes du Thibet interdit* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 1992 [Hong Kong: Maison de Nazareth, 1939], 379-380, 390), Fr. Francis Goré, a *Société des Missions Étrangères* (SME) missionary, includes a section on the TCM, called the "Foreign Christian Mission." Like Tucker and McAlister (above), Goré's account begins with the Rijnharts, continues with the Sheltons and Ogdens, and lays out the origins, accomplishments, and demise of the TCM, relying on Rijnhart's and the Sheltons' memoirs. He mistakenly has the Duncans departing permanently with the MacLeods in 1927 but notes, with admiration, that Mrs. Ogden remained in China until 1936.

A national figure by 1920 and compared by admirers to David Livingstone, Dr. Albert Shelton is less renowned in recent years. Although the Shelton Memorial Fund was established in his honor for the education of missionaries, including an endowed professorship, Mrs. Duncan found that his name "was almost completely forgotten in the Disciples Churches that [she] visited" (*Flame*, 253). Journalist Douglas Wissing's vivid and engaging biography of Shelton revives his memory. *Pioneer in Tibet: The Life and Perils of Dr. Albert Shelton* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004) covers the Batang mission

during the years of Albert and Flora Shelton's service, briefly summarizing the mission's remaining decade.

[2] She has resumed her maiden name.

[3] Susie Carson Rijnhart, M.D., published her sojourn through Tibet from 1895-1899 as *With the Tibetans in Tent and Temple: Narrative of Four Years' Residence on the Tibetan Border, and of a Journey into the Far Interior* (Cincinnati: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1901). Mrs. Duncan notes that it "became the textbook at the College of Missions for inspiration and for knowledge of Thibetan customs and life" (*Flame*, 10). The title of Mrs. Duncan's book is taken from a passage in Rijnhart's volume: "I longed to be a flame in the fire, continually glowing in the service of God and building Christ's kingdom to my latest, my dying moments" (*With the Tibetans*, 395, referencing the 18th-century American missionary David Brainerd; c.f. Psalm 104:4, Hebrews 1:7).

The author's father, Marion L. Duncan, described his years on the Batang mission and his subsequent two years of travel in the area in *The Mountain of Silver Snow* (Cincinnati: Powell & White, 1929) and *The Yangtze and the Yak* (Alexandria, VA: Ann Arbor, MI: Edwards Brothers, Inc.: 1952). A photograph of his young daughter, Marian (author of this volume), is on the insert facing page 205 of *Mountain,* and another appears on page 162 of *Yangzte*. His collections and translations were published as *Love Songs and Proverbs of Tibetans* (London: The Mitre Press, 1921), *Customs and Superstitions of Tibet* (London: The Mitre Press, 1964), *Harvest Festival Dramas of Tibet* (The Mitre Press, 1955), and *More Harvest Festival Dramas of Tibet* (London: The Mitre Press, 1967). He also published a novel, *The Cycle of Existence* (London: The Mitre Press, 1966), set in Tibet, and two volumes of poetry.

Albert Shelton shared with the American public his experience in Batang prior to his 1919 furlough in *Pioneering in Tibet: A Personal Record of Life and Experience in Mission Fields* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1921) and in "Life Among the People of Eastern Tibet," *National Geographic* 40(3), September, 1921, 293-326. His collection of *Tibetan Folk Tales* (Saint Louis: United Christian Missionary Society, 1925), which included a short section of lyrics and transcriptions of Tibetan songs, was released posthumously following his death in 1922 as he returned from his aborted trip to Lhasa. His wife, Flora Shelton, wrote an early account of her Batang experience,

Sunshine and Shadow on the Tibetan Border (Cincinnati: Foreign Christian Missionary Society, 1912), and a remembrance of her husband in *Shelton of Tibet* (New York: George H. Doran, Company, 1923), with an introduction by fellow Batang missionary J. C. Ogden. Their daughter, Dorothy Shelton Still, edited her mother's translations of *Chants from Shangri-La* (self-published). Still also wrote *Beyond the Devils in the Wind* (Tempe, AZ: Synergy Books, 1989) and *Sue in Tibet* (New York: John Day, 1942), based on her Tibet experiences. Mrs. Duncan refers to Still's *Chants of Milarepa*, with no publication information.

Zenas Loftis' diary was posthumously published, with a preface and closing remarks by Flora Shelton, as *A Message from Batang: The Diary of Z. S. Loftis, M.D, Missionary to Tibetans* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1911). The copy in Lexington Theological Seminary's Boswell Memorial Library appears to have been the personal copy of Stephen J. Corey, whose signature can be found on the inside cover page.

Other unpublished memoirs and reminiscences used by Mrs. Duncan include an unpublished essay by Albert Shelton, which may have formed the basis for a speech titled "The Highlanders"; Minnie Ogden's autobiography (1939) and journal; a "History of the Missionary Work of James Clarence Odgen and Minnie Asbury Ogden in Tibet (n.d.); "Diary of the Trip to Batang," by Mrs. Duncan's mother, Louise Duncan (1921); and a letter by Raymond Peterson recounting his early life, dated March, 1993.

It should be added that Batang missionaries found a place in the larger body of foreign missionary novels and adventure stories produced in the early twentieth century. Dr. Rijnhart was the subject, with China Inland Missionary (CIM) Annie R. Taylor, of Isabel Stuart Robson's *Two Lady Missionaries in Tibet* (London: S.W. Partridge, n.d.), and Dr. Shelton's photographs were used to illustrate Edward Amundsen's novel about a girl from Batang entitled *In the Land of the Lamas: The Story of Trashilhamo, a Tibetan lassie, in which are described Tibetan character, life, customs, and history* (London: Marshall Brothers, 1910) [see John Bray, "Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Missionary Images on Tibet," in *Imagining Tibet: Perceptions, Projections, and Fantasies*, ed. Thierry Doden and Heinz Räther (New York: Wisdom Publication, 2001), 31, 37]. Mrs. Duncan relates an episode related to Amundsen in her account. A Norwegian CIM missionary, who left his

station in protest of his country's neutral wartime stance toward Britain, Amundsen had sought to join the Batang mission in 1917. Shelton and Ogden proposed this to the FCMS Board, which rejected the idea because "he was not an American, he was too old, and he would not understand our ways." Mrs. Duncan describes the Board's refusal as "unfortunate" (*Flame*, 38).

[4] Russell and Gertrude Morse's second son, Robert, returned to Tibet as a professor of English at the University of Lhasa (*Flame*, 71). One of the TCM doctors, William Hardy (Nina's husband—see note 1 above), returned with his eldest son to Batang in 1987, over half a century after having left it, to see what remained of the mission buildings, land, and cemetery (*Flame*, 259; see note 17 below).

[5] Raymond Peterson fathered a son, named Alberay, by Ruth Ogden, the 16-year-old daughter of James and Minnie Ogden. Alberay was informally adopted by Norton and Lois Bare; always sickly, he died overseas at the age of four. Peterson later married Ruth, following the death of his first wife, Georgia. His other children learned the identity of their half-brother at the 1988 TCM reunion. Harold Ogden, Ruth's elder brother, fathered a daughter, Shirley Mae Ogden Lindsey, with a local resident, Yishi Chudren, for whom he was unable to obtain a visa to bring her to the States to marry. Many missionaries thought it important to take their children back to the States during high school, so that they would become socialized and integrated into American life. (The Sheltons and the McLeods did so). The Ogden children spent their adolescence in Batang and were thought to have accrued "Tibetany ways." Mrs. Duncan alludes periodically to the difficulties that missionary children had in fitting in, on either the mission site or stateside.

[6] In an italicized aside, she confides, "my father once said to me, 'to tell the story not enough people are dead yet'" (*Flame*, 212).

[7] To this point, John Bray observes, "[O]fficial accounts tend to gloss over—or ignore completely—the problems that occurred within missions and the strains faced by individual missionaries. Archival sources such as letters and diaries . . . may provide a corrective, showing the missionaries as less perfect, but also more human, than official versions would have us believe" ("Missionary Images," 43).

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[8] I am grateful to Jeffrey L. Richey, associate professor of religion at Berea College, for emphasizing to me that the term "'Khampa' is a catch-all term used by Chinese and Tibetans alike to refer collectively to a number of distinct ethnic groups which share linguistic, religious, and other cultural connections to the Tibetan ethnic majority in the Tibetan Autonomous Region. However, there are important differences among various groups designated in common as 'Khampa,' including mutually unintelligible and unrelated languages as well as forms of Tibetan religion that have different relationships to Tibetan Buddhist orthodoxy" (correspondence 10/19/2010).

[9] The frontispiece citation in Loftis' published diary, credited to "Dr. George E. Post, Syria" (professor of surgery, medicine, and physiology at the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut, 1869-1903) is telling: "You take the Bible to the heathen and he may spit upon it, or throw it aside as worthless or harmful. You preach the Gospel to him and he may regard you as a hireling who makes preaching a trade. He may meet your arguments with sophistry, your appeals with a sneer. You educate him and he may turn from a heathen to an infidel. But heal his bodily ailments in the name of Christ, and you are sure at least that he will love you and bless you, and all that you say will have to him a meaning and a power not conveyed by other lips."

Teichman appealed to Dr. Shelton to care for wounded soldiers in Chamdo, where he "saved a great many lives." Teichman later conjectures that "a certain much-travelled medical member of the American mission at Batang [referring to Shelton] can probably penetrate without danger into remote parts of the country where a Catholic priest could scarcely venture" (*Travels of a Consular Officer*, 120, n. 2; 134; and 227). For a useful essay on the strategic use of medicine as "the heavy artillery of the missionary army," with particular reference to China, see chapter 16 of Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 211-220.

[10] Mrs. Duncan wryly notes the following irony: "Irreverent, and it sounds crazy, yet 20 years later, unbeknownst to this author that $50,000 + interest was still paying for missionaries in training while the Batang Mission had been swept into the dustbin of history!" (*Flame*, 81).

[11] Bray sketches the history of both Catholic and Protestant missionary endeavors within and on the Indian and Chinese borders of Tibet and the external national interests to which they were subject, and into whose agendas they played, in “Christian Missions and the Politics of Tibet, 1850-1950,” in *Kolonien und Missionen: Referate des 3. Internationalen Kolonialgeschichtlichen Symposiums 1993 in Bremen*, ed. Wilfried Wagner (Münster: Universität Bremen, 1994), 180-195. He names Dr. Albert Shelton, “of the Foreign Christian Mission,” as one of three prominent Protestant figures in the Kham area (along with Norway’s Theodor Sörensen and Australia’s James Huston Edgar) and notes that the exceptional nature of both Sörensen’s and Shelton’s personal relationships with prominent Tibetans countered the prevailing hostility between Christian missions and Buddhist monasteries (“Christian Missions,” 190, 193-194).

Wissing’s *Pioneer in Tibet* provides a clear narrative of the political context in which the Batang missionaries worked and serves as an invaluable companion guide to Duncan’s memoir. For additional background to this period in the history of Tibet and China, see Tsepon W. D. Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 192-273, and Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 243-374 (see 206-208 on medical missionaries and the influence of missionaries on Chinese views of women’s roles and family structures). Denise Ho, assistant professor of history at the University of Kentucky, was helpful in clarifying for me the geopolitical dynamics of this period in Chinese history.

[12] In response to Teichman’s assertion that Catholic missionaries allied themselves with China and were therefore “hostile to the Tibetans” (*Travels of a Consular Officer*, 226-227), Fr. Goré links a series of missionary expulsions from 1865-1912 to political events unrelated to the missionaries themselves (*Trente ans aux portes*, 388-389).

[13] Teichman describes himself as the intermediary in this negotiation, writing that General Liu arrived accompanied by Dr. Shelton, both of whom were “received . . . as honored guests” by the presiding Khampa official in the Kalon Lama’s absence. Shelton left before the Kalon Lama arrived (*Travels of a Consular Officer*, 58, 131). Elsewhere, Teichman writes that he believed Dr. Shelton to have been “the only foreigner who has ever been to [Sangen, which the Americans called the Tibetan ‘Badlands,’ having] . . . visited the headmen of the country

on a peace-making mission at the request of the Chinese authorities . . . " (*Travels of a Consular Officer*, 142).

[14] The 1919 recruitment brochure, *Somewhere in All the World* (see n. 1, above), whose enthusiastic tone one cannot help in 2010 but find unspeakably poignant, opens with the declaration: "For romance and remoteness, with all the lure that these imply to select, ardent spirits, no other field is comparable with this rugged roof of the world, the dome of Asia, one of a trio (with Afghanistan and Central Arabia) of final strongholds against the march of Christian conquest . . . . Though no official assignment has been made, according to the principles of cooperation and comity which missionary societies are coming more and more to observe, yet the Disciples of Christ are regarded as having presumably pre-empted Tibet . . . . We must plant stations and send workers rapidly to show that we are able and worthy to occupy the land, or at least to take the leadership in the work of evangelization, with all the co-operation we can secure . . . . After splendid preparatory work far into the interior on the high-road to Lhasa, and in other directions, we are now ready to found a new center." The brochure includes a stately photographic portrait of Dr. and Mrs. Shelton and Dr. Rijnhart in Tibetan attire.

[15] *Travels of a Consular Officer*, 136-137, 229, cited by Wissing, *Pioneer in Tibet*, 167. Teichman reports that the missionaries were criticized at a West China Missionary Conference for "wasting too much of their time over medical and educational activities . . . and neglect[ing] their real duties, the more important work of evangelization" (229).

[16] "Life Among the People," 324.

[17] See note 4 above.

[18] *Pioneer in Tibet*, 239, 243-244. No Buddhist, of course, would appeal to long-term, let alone permanent, "outcomes" as a principle for evaluating the worth of any endeavor. In fact, the peaceful good works of healing and teaching undertaken by the Batang missionaries, the links of friendship and increasing understanding and respect that were forged between and among people who otherwise would never have encountered one another, and, perhaps most of all, the compassion that those involved in the Tibetan Christian Mission, as portrayed in Mrs. Duncan's recounting, gained in no small way through their suffering

and loss, render the TCM as interesting an episode to study from a Buddhist as from a Christian perspective. I am grateful to Laurence H. Kant for pressing this point to me.