

## **Introduction**

### **Joseph W. Ho**

Good evening, brothers and sisters. My name is Joseph Ho, and I am a PhD student in the Department of History at the University of Michigan. I am currently studying the history of American missionaries in 20<sup>th</sup> century China. Tonight I have the privilege of introducing to you Professor Thomas Scovel, retired Professor of Linguistics at San Francisco State University. I hope that Professor Scovel's talk about his life and experiences with Christianity in China over 60 years will be an encouragement to many of us here tonight.

My friendship with Professor Scovel came about by a long but amazing route. Four years ago, in the spring of 2009, I was working at the San Diego Chinese Historical Museum as an assistant. An elderly man named Richard Henke (*Hengqi*) came in to donate Chinese artifacts to the museum; after chatting with him, I discovered that he was born in China to Presbyterian medical missionaries in 1934. At the time, I was just starting my research, and Dr. Henke allowed me to study some of his parents' photographs. He also introduced me to another missionary family, the Lewises (*Liu jia*) – Harry Lewis, the oldest brother of four siblings, are here with us tonight with his wife, Norma. We will be speaking together about the Lewis family's missionary work and photographic collection next month, on Saturday October 12. Harry Lewis introduced me Professor Scovel – who happened to live in Walnut Creek. I met with Professor Scovel for the first time almost exactly two years ago, in early October 2011. We have been working together since then.

Professor Scovel's parents were Dr. Frederick Gilman Scovel (*Si Fulai*) and Mrs. Myra Scott Scovel (*Si Tai'tai*), Presbyterian medical missionaries to China. Dr.

Scovel was born in Baltimore, Maryland in 1902 and raised in Cortland, New York. Dr. Scovel felt called to be a medical missionary from an early age; he earned his medical degree from Cornell University School of Medicine in 1929. That year, he married Myra Scott, a nurse who was born and raised in Mechanicsville, New York. Shortly after their wedding, Dr. Scovel applied to the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions for assignment. The Board assigned them to China. In August 1930, the couple and their first child – a 4-month-old baby named James – sailed from Seattle to Beijing, where they spent the next year in intensive language training at the Peking College of Chinese Studies (*Huabei xiehe yuyuan xueyuan*). During this time, Dr. Scovel completed a residency at Peking Union Medical School (*Beijing xiehe yixueyuan*). He was 28 and Mrs. Scovel was 25.

In 1931, the Board of Foreign Missions assigned the Scovels to Jining, Shandong, where Dr. Scovel was placed in charge of the Bachman Hunter Hospital (*Jining demen yiyuan*). Their chief duties during this time were running the 60-bed hospital and surgery, treating opium addicts using Western methods, and combining evangelism and medical care in rural clinics. When the area suffered heavy floods in 1932, the hospital also provided care for homeless refugees suffering from cholera and other diseases. Between 1931 and 1933, the Scovels had two more children, a son Carl and a daughter Anne. In 1932, Dr. Scovel's mother, Louise Kiehle Scovel, then 64 years old, traveled from New York to live with the family in Jining after her husband passed away; she also learned Chinese and remained in China until her death in 1948. In June 1936, the family went back to the United States for a year's rest in New York. In 1937, the Scovels returned to China shortly after the Sino-

Japanese War (*Kangri zhanzheng*) began. In one remarkable feat, the family (including their children's amah, *Zhang Dashao*) drove a Ford ambulance over 400 miles from Qingdao to Jining, arriving there on Christmas morning 1937.

Jining was occupied by the Japanese in January 1938. This time, the mission compound was filled with war refugees, and the Scovels took care of several thousand; wounded Chinese soldiers were also treated in the hospital, due to inadequacies in the Nationalist army medical corps. In May 1938, Dr. Scovel attempted to prevent a drunken Japanese soldier from harassing female nurses after the man had entered the hospital compound. The soldier loaded his rifle, shot Scovel in the back, and then attempted to shoot him twice more. Miraculously, the soldier missed on the second try, and then his rifle inexplicably jammed. Dr. Scovel survived and made a full recovery.

Nine months later, on January 10, 1939, Thomas Scovel was born in the Jining mission hospital. His Chinese name was *Si Dehua*, given so because he looked "German" with his blond hair (*De* for *Deguo* – Germany – and *Hua* for China). He was the fourth child, and was followed by a younger sister, Judy, in September 1941.

The day Pearl Harbor was attacked, December 8, 1941 in China, the entire Scovel family – the two parents and five children – was placed under house arrest by the Japanese military authorities. For the next year and two months, the family was not permitted to leave the mission compound. During this time, Chinese Christians and local Catholic missionaries helped them survive by donating much-needed food and supplies.

On March 19, 1943, the family was moved to the Weixian Internment Camp (*Weixian Jizhongying*) in Weifang, Shandong, where the Japanese military had imprisoned foreign civilians. The Scovels lived in the camp with a mix of Americans, Canadians, Australian, and British citizens, including the former Olympian and Scottish missionary, Eric Liddell. Harry and Charles's father, Dr. Ralph Lewis, was also imprisoned in the camp and worked with Dr. Scovel as the camp doctors. Mrs. Scovel was then pregnant with her sixth child, and had to drink tea made of crushed eggshells in order to have enough calcium. In September 1943, the family was repatriated back to the United States in a prisoner exchange with the Japanese organized by the International Red Cross; traveling on the Swedish passenger ship *Gripsholm*, they arrived in New York harbor on the morning of December 1, 1943. A few hours after leaving the ship, Mrs. Scovel gave birth to her sixth child, Victoria.

Soon after the Second World War was over in August 1945, Dr. Scovel returned China by himself to continue his medical missionary work. Because of Communist activity in Shandong, he was transferred to a hospital in Huaiyuan, Anhui, where he provided medical care through a cholera epidemic, two floods, and a locust plague. The family followed in December 1946.

In the spring of 1948, Dr. Scovel received a letter indicating that a teaching doctor was needed at Lingnan Medical College (*Lingnan daxue yixueyuan*) in Guangzhou. As Grandmother Scovel's health declining and the Communist armies approaching Huaiyuan, the Scovels decided to accept the invitation. The family flew to Canton on board the *St. Paul*, DC-3 airplane operated by Lutheran missionaries,

leaving Huaiyuan on August 18, 1948. On December 2 of that year, Grandmother Scovel passed away of Parkinson's disease and was buried in Canton.

Dr. Scovel taught at Lingnan College, in a modern and well-equipped hospital. He was also able to spend some time taking photographs with his 35mm Leica camera [**show remainder of photographs here.**] Since there was a larger medical and nursing staff at Lingnan, Mrs. Scovel did not need to perform as many nursing duties and spent more time with her children, particularly her younger three – Tom, Judy, and Vicki. It was this time period that Professor Scovel remembers well; he was nearly 10 years old at the time. I will now allow him to finish the story, telling us about those days leading up to and after October 14, 1949, when the Communists “liberated” Canton and his parents attempted to continue working in the Lingnan hospital under the pressure of the new government. He will then talk about his return to China 30 years later, in 1979, sharing with us his experiences of God's continued presence in the lives of Chinese Christians and missionaries to China.

Please join me in welcoming Professor Thomas Scovel.