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THE EUGENE EPPERSON BARNETT PAPERS IN THE COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
LIBRARIES: A RECORD OF THIRTY YEARS OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE IN
CHINA BEFORE WORLD WAR II

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Columbia's C.V. Starr East Asian Library holds over 400,000 volumes in the Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Manchu and Mongol languages, as well as significant holdings on East Asia in Western languages, with an emphasis on the humanities and the social sciences. The Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Columbia University houses the University's manuscript and archival holdings relating to East Asia with the exception of a half dozen manuscript collections. It serves to complement the printed record in the East Asian Library.

Personal papers acquired during the past thirty years have included not only a number of Chinese leaders who participated in the Chinese Oral History Program such as V. Wellington Koo, a Columbia alumnus who was a Republic of China career diplomat, but also the papers of one American family intimately involved with China since the beginning of this century: the family of the noted scholar, A. Doak Barnett, professor of political science at Columbia from 1961 to 1969. In 1975 he established a collection of the personal and professional papers of his father, Eugene Epperson Barnett (1888-1970), a YMCA official who served in China for thirty years, and the focus of this paper. Since then A. Doak Barnett has established a collection of his own papers on modern Chinese politics and economics; and his brother, Henry DeWitt Barnett, a missionary in China, has also donated his papers to Columbia.

Eugene Epperson Barnett was born into a family of Methodist preachers in Leesburg, Florida, in 1888. Although Eugene's parents had no opportunity to receive a college education, they instilled in their children the lifelong habits of reading and study. After a local country school elementary and secondary education, Barnett went on to receive his B.A. degree at Methodist-sponsored Emory University in 1907. It was at Emory that he first made contact with the Young Men's Christian Association, an active extra-curricular force on American campuses during the first decade of this century. His participation in YMCA activities broadened his outlook on the world, which by his own admission was "not intolerant" but admittedly narrow and Methodist. Although intending to seek a career in law, Barnett's participation in a student foreign mission group during his senior year convinced him to dedicate his life to "Christian work in some non-Christian land."

After graduating from Emory, he went on to graduate study at Vanderbilt University's School of Religion. Before completing his program there, he was offered and accepted in 1908 the position of YMCA General Secretary at the University of North Carolina where he planned to finish his graduate work. But his call to missionary work came, and by 1910 he had sailed to China for what was to become thirty years of service in China as Organizer and General Secretary of the Hangchow YMCA, (1910-1921), National Student Secretary for the YMCAs of China, (1921-1923), and concurrently the Associate General Secretary of the National

Committee and Senior Secretary of the International Committee for the YMCAs for China (1923-1936). In addition Barnett held numerous other religious and educational positions, including trusteeships in three Christian colleges in China. Following in the footsteps of his grandfather and father, Eugene Epperson Barnett continued the tradition of Christian service but broadened its scope by leaving his small north Florida community in order to serve the larger community in China from 1910 to 1930.

The papers of Eugene Epperson Barnett consist of correspondence, reports, speeches, notes, photographs, memorabilia and related printed materials that cover not only his thirty year's service in China but also his entire life: his travel around the world, his numerous positions with both the American and International YMCA, his activities as a lay leader in the Methodist Church, and his affiliation with the United Nations and such other international organizations as the Institute of Pacific Relations. All his activities are fully documented in his voluminous correspondence with family, friends and professional associates. The papers contain nearly 60,000 items in 113 archival document boxes or the equivalent of forty-seven linear feet of materials, one-fourth or nearly 20 boxes of which deal directly with China before World War II in approximately 15,000 items (8.5 linear feet). Because the Barnetts had the foresight to save their correspondence files, this personal and professional archive is a rich source of one American's dedication to international cooperation within the framework of human brotherhood.

The basic record of Eugene E. Barnett's active China years can be found in the first ten boxes of the collection's first series, the Chronological File, 1910-1970, which consists chiefly of Barnett's correspondence, but also includes some reports and speeches. In Box 1, 1910-1916, one discovers the initial correspondence surrounding Barnett's selection by the YMCA to serve in China; it pertains to training, qualifications, personnel matters and minutes of the General Committee of the YMCA Association of China and Korea. Barnett's first letter home was penned on the stationery of the Wayland Academy, an American Baptist school in Hangchow, dated November 7, 1910. It records his first impression of China on his second night in Hangchow, and is but one of many long, descriptive letters containing news, comments, and opinions characterizing his frequent correspondence which intertwines his personal life and personal religious experiences with his professional life and public experiences as a YMCA official in China. In his first letter, Barnett was overwhelmed with the sights, sounds and smells of Hangchow; and, while regretting the absence of his loved ones, he was so overcome by the excitement of his new, exotic world that he wished to transplant them to his side so that they might share his experiences instantaneously.

The letters are arranged chronologically and the researcher has the unusual added advantage of docketed letters, that is, short phrases on a letter which highlight the main topic discussed. Barnett has also summarized the contents of his letters on the file folders in which he stored them, many but not all of which are listed in Barnett's own partial inventory of his papers. The topics abstracted include personal references such as "first Christmas in his own home;" a 1912 letter which refers to the 1911 Revolution as well as the birth of his son, Robert; famine and famine relief; student troubles (1912); civil strife; a "second" revolution and Chinese feasts in 1913; the World War and Wen Shih-tsen in 1914. There is also a typescript copy of Barnett's first annual report as General Secretary of the Hangchow YMCA.

Barnett's files are almost entirely in English although among the many pamphlets scattered throughout the Chronological Files, there are locally published English-Chinese and Chinese materials. Barnett's partial inventory contains titles of printed items, a type of item level control which archivists, who handle hundreds of thousands of manuscript pieces each year, would not provide.

A signal two-page typescript located in the 1924 folder in Box 3 announces a "Pan-Pacific YMCA Conference" to be held in Honolulu during July of 1925. Over 100 representatives of the various national YMCA movements in countries bordering the Pacific Ocean gathered together to foster international understanding and mutual cooperation among the Pacific nations. This conference laid the ground work for the creation of the Institutes of Pacific Relations. The YMCA national movements emphasized the mustering of youth into a peaceful force for the future through the application of Christian, patriotic and humanitarian principles.

The files for the mid- to late-1920s reflect a China in turmoil. Topics discussed include student unrest, the anti-Christian movement in China and the conditions and status of missionaries. There are references to the May 30, 1925, shooting of unarmed Chinese students by the International Settlement Police in Shanghai and the Chinese Christian community's response, including several pamphlets, one of which is in Chinese. At the same time, Barnett prepared a fifteen-page typescript report on "Cooperative Christian Activities in China in 1925," dealing with the diversity and unity of Christian institutions and organizations such as workers, pastors, unions, other regional and national worker and industrial unions, committees, councils, the YMCA, and the effect of the anti-Christian movement on the Chinese Christian community. Box 5 has a general folder covering the 1920s and 1930s with additional pamphlets (several in Chinese), speeches, discussions, and a questionnaire relating to the anti-Christian movement.

As mentioned at the outset, family letters contain a wealth of information on conditions in China. Although Barnett kept no formal diaries, except for his yearly diary/appointment books (Box 48) which record daily activities, names and addresses and travel arrangements, his letters to the family constitute a diary of current events. In 1931 topics include Christians in the Nanking government, communists in Ch'angsha, the Soong family and a particularly intriguing document entitled "The Long March of Students from Changsha to Kunming; a Diary," translated from the Chinese by T.K. Wong.

Material on China before 1940 also turns up in the Subject File which is predominantly a post-World War II series. Box 33, which contains the topic Churches and Christianity, has a few printed items under the heading "Crisis in History of Christianity in China." The diary/appointment books referred to above are found in Box 48 with several gaps in the 1920s, but they are complete from 1930 to 1939. Unfortunately there is none prior to 1922. Box 53 contains two folders of Barnett's typescript and handwritten speeches, sermons and addresses from 1930 to 1936. The titles are not listed in the partial inventory, but they have the familiar themes found in the earlier Chronological File: political, religious and educational matters such as Christianity and communism; the rise of nationalism, secularism, communism, and fascism; "International Cooperation;" "The Crisis in the Christian Movement in China." Among the speeches is one untitled handwritten document containing Barnett's recollections of a trip to the Chinese Nationalist capital, Hankow, with his description of political conditions there and references to its Christian community (folder: pre-1936).

A 1937 looseleaf notebook records a trip to study religions and Christians in South America. Mixed in with Barnett's notes for this trip are many references to China.

In the YMCA subject files in Boxes 63-64, 72 and 82, are both short and long typescript biographical sketches of American YMCA officials, some of whom had China connections. Of particular interest were files relating to two prominent Chinese Christians, Zia Hong-lai (1873-1916) and Wen Shih-tsen. Zia was a dedicated Christian educator and publicist in the best sense of that word who edited, translated and wrote more than 200 books, pamphlets and articles. The folder deals chiefly with Barnett's correspondence and remarks at an annual Zia memorial weekend retreat in 1950. To refresh his memory for his talk, he included a typescript of his 1916 annual report as YMCA General Secretary, which devotes a long section to Zia.

Wen was first impressed by Christianity while a student at the Tientsin Naval College through his friendship with a fellow classmate, Chang Po-ling, who was also to become a Chinese Christian leader. After four years in the navy Wen held a series of diplomatic posts; while he was at one such post in Hangchow he met Barnett. Wen's function was to bring Chinese businessmen and industrialists together with their foreign counterparts in order to promote the development of Chinese business industry. It was in Hangchow that he was converted and gradually became a Chinese Christian leader in the YMCA movement. The Wen files consist of approximately two hundred items, chiefly correspondence with Barnett in English and related correspondence between Barnett and other American and Chinese YMCA officials. The bulk of the file covers 1916-1919.

The Barnett collection is described in an unpublished finding aid which consists of a one-page collection level description and a three-page box list showing the arrangement of the collection into the following series: Chronological (correspondence), Subject, Photographs, Memorabilia, Printed Materials and a 1979 Addition. Appended to this library guide is an eighteen-page partial typescript inventory which came with the papers and which provides a selective list of contents for the various files. Its main value is as a guide to the use of the Chronological File and to a lesser extent to some of the Subject Files. Letters of application for use of the Barnett Papers or any other Columbia manuscript collection are welcomed in advance of a scholar's visit. On short notice, however, a researcher may register in person at the Rare Book and Manuscript Library Reference Center on the east side of the 6th floor of Butler Library. All written and telephone inquiries should be addressed to Kenneth A. Lohf, Librarian for Rare Books and Manuscripts, Butler Library, Columbia University, 535 West 114th Street, New York, New York 10027. Telephone: 212-280-2231.