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LINGNAN IS BORN AGAIN IN FREE CHINA

By Sz-to Wai, Principal of the Middle School

The Storm Breaks

On the morning of December 8, 1941, Mrs. Mary Wong, our student leader, and I planned to go to the Lingnan Middle School, then at Castle Peak, Kowloon, to work for the million-dollar campaign. The students had some knowledge of it but we wanted to do some propaganda work and stir them up to work hard. The Middle School boys are often the backbone of financial campaigns. Mrs. Wong is a well-known opera singer; her son was in the Shanghai Branch School but intended to go to the school at Castle Peak, so she wanted to sing for the boys in advance.

At eight o'clock that morning, just as we were waiting for the ferry, airplanes flew over us and bombs and gun-fire all came at once. At first we thought that it was merely a maneuver and we stood on the Bund to watch, but after half an hour we realized that war had broken out in Hongkong and so we escorted Mrs. Wong back to her lodging. We then went to the St. Francis Hotel to see about our headquarters and what to do with all the printed matter there. President Y. L. Lee, who was over at Kowloon, got back with some difficulty to the Hongkong side, found some space in a downtown office building, Luk Yau Hall, belonging to one of our alumni, and moved in there with all our men, or as many as could get there. Many of our staff who lived on the mainland could not cross the harbor and we could not send them either messages or money. This we greatly regretted afterward. Fortunately the middle school at Castle Peak knew something serious had happened when they saw the small gunboat near them attacked, and gave orders to evacuate everyone from there immediately. In three days the mainland was lost and there was no more communication between Kowloon and the island.

After moving from one place to another during those days, we thought that the Branch School at Stubbs Road would be the safest spot. Our judgment turned out to be wrong for we were in the thickest of the fight! A few big guns and machine-nests near our place made it important strategically, so the enemy kept on shelling us - more than 300 shots actually - and many places on the roof and walls were hit. We knew then that we had to leave and changed to still another locality. Then came the surrender on Christmas Day.

Planning after the Surrender; President Lee Escapes

We hadn't the least hope or desire at that time of reopening in Hongkong. President Lee's name was on the black list and he was in hiding. Some thought of going back to their village, some of making a living temporarily; everyone was hard up. Fortunately President Lee was able to cross the harbor secretly during the Japanese three days holiday from January 1st to 3rd, and escaped into the interior. This was lucky, for puppets from Canton tried to catch him after he was beyond reach. The rest of us stayed
in Hongkong, sharing what we had with one another and trying very hard to send help to the teachers who were stranded on the Kowloon side. This we failed to do, however, as it was still forbidden to cross the harbor.

One day when the situation was a little better and we could move about more freely, a few of us got together in a small tea-shop and considered the conditions facing our fellow-workers. The greatest problem was money. All we had was in the bank - quite a big sum altogether - but no one in Hongkong could draw any money at that time, so only those people who did not believe in banking had any. We were finally able to borrow a few thousand dollars to buy food for a week or so. As conditions grew worse, especially for school people, most of us planned to go away. A few stayed behind to take care of our books and apparatus and furniture, but many important books and much apparatus were seized by the enemy.

We Return Home

Like many others, I was helped by good friends to buy tickets for my family and myself on one of the enemy boats, and we went back home by way of Macao, Pukai, Kowloon, Lantau, and so at last reached Free China and finally my home - Hoiping. Just before starting we heard that President Lee had safely reached Chungking after great difficulty on the way. He had been robbed and had been ill, but was finally well enough to undertake negotiations with the government and with many relief organizations and had hope of getting enough money to start the University again. (See President Lee's own report for the details in the first issue of the University Bulletin - Chinese.)

You do not know how good it was to get back to Free China and see the national flag flying high and wide! We saw a glorious sunset while we were crossing a river between Occupied and Unoccupied China in a refugee boat. We landed at a small village where students came to help us and to welcome us to the temporary quarters specially provided for refugees for overnight. They then destroyed our passports issued by the enemy and gave us new certificates for travelling all over Free China. When we at last reached Hoiping how happy my mother and our relatives were to see us! We had a great celebration. A few of our fellow-workers, two directors, Mr. Y. M. Lin and Dr. S. E. Chien, and several others were with us. I had a good month's rest and regained many pounds in weight. Among us we ate up about a dozen chickens raised by my mother and felt ready for work again.

Getting to Work; Winning Friends

I telegraphed Dr. Lee, "Here I am. Any suitable work for me to do?", and the answer was "Come. We should have Middle School between Kwailin and Kukong." Our journey to Kukong was interesting and exciting but not dangerous. Late in May I arrived there in native dress made of coarse cloth woven by my mother. Many of my friends did not recognize me, but this is the time to use and depend upon native-made things.
Dr. Lee had opened an office in the Methodist building where the Y.M.C.A. is also. When I went in there to report he said to me, "O Sz-to, there is an interesting piece of work waiting for you." I said, "What?" He replied, "We want you to go and open up Taitsuen." Well, it took me about eight seconds to answer because I had never been there and I did not know what the water was like, whether there was malaria, and how far it was from the frontier. So it took me eight seconds to answer. I then said, "All right", because I was sure my friend would not tell me to do anything which was not all right for me to do.

We went to visit Taitsuen once or twice and then on the 12th of May my colleague, Mr. Yeung Tsz Hin and I and two workmen went out on the morning train with some cooking utensils, some earthen jars, a few pairs of chopsticks and a few personal belongings. It was a rainy day. When we piled those things in the luggage car, they occupied about twelve square feet of space. I pointed at it and said, "Lingnan University starts again."

When we got to Sin Yan Miu, our station, nobody was there to meet us and the coolies wanted an unreasonable price for carrying our things, for no one of importance or with much luggage had ever come there, so they didn't know the right amount to charge us. We went first into the station and made friends with the station-master who told me that the chief engineer of this railway was one of our alumni as are also many other station-masters. He then directed the villagers to take our luggage to the mat-sheds at Taitsuen which once, long ago, were used as a training-camp by high officials of the Kwangtung Army. Not knowing the way we took the wrong path and had to cross several streams to get to the biggest and most substantial mat-shed, which we now call "Grant Hall."

Eight or ten soldiers were guarding this place and they grew enough vegetables near by to supply the needs of a battalion of soldiers. Before we came they had been given orders to clean up some of the buildings for temporary use, but when the corporal led us to the door of this building it was bolted and barred. When the door was finally opened the room was so damp that we asked the servants to kindle a big fire there while we explained who we were and why we had come. Some of the soldiers gathered twigs and branches for us and we soon had a big fire and boiled some tea which we shared with them. We had bought enough meat for a week so we gave half of it to them, but because they had been trained not to take things from people without paying for them, they refused at first to receive any. We insisted because we wanted to have their good will and after great persuasion they finally took some.

The soldiers on their part had nothing to give us. Some furniture they had somewhere, locked up, but without orders they did not dare to lend us even bed-boards or tables, so that first night we had to sleep on the floor. There was a big barrel, however, in the mat-shed, holding water for use in case of fire. We put our food-stuff in a bucket we had brought along and put this barrel over it, upside down, so that the rats could not get at our food, and used the bottom - now top - of the barrel as our dining table.
After a day or two we negotiated with the villagers and borrowed a very old and broken-down table. This we covered with a cloth and on it we laid out some stationery and so we opened our first office in the big hall. We had also one broken chair. The first thing I did was to make a new design for the college seal, symbolizing the rebirth of the University. On top of the old design - White Cloud Mountain, the lichee trees, Pearl River and the road leading to the college - is the National Star, and below the old design are flowers and leaves springing up around it, indicating that beneath the national star Lingnan University starts again from the ground like the flowers of spring.

We then started to work among the villagers, assuring them that we had not come to take land away and that whatever we did would be helpful in the end to them, and that they could help us. But as this is a mountain village and the people are very simple, they hesitated to supply us with vegetables or anything. In fact, besides rice they don't have much to sell. After a month or so we made good friends with the elders, however, and when the time was ripe we made use of the government connection. The magistrate of the Kukong district at that time was one of our old boys. I went to him and told him that I wanted his help. "We have made friends," I said, "with the village people, but we want more help from them." I then asked him if we would call together the chief men of the different villages near us and tell them about the University and why we had come and what we were trying to do. After a time he called together a large gathering, explained things to them and told them now they could help us. Some of the villagers asked me afterwards, "This magistrate, is he an old Lingnan student; did you teach him?" I said, "Ever since he was eight or nine years old."

After that everything was different; they came to see me often and advised me what to do in the village and how to use the land, and so on. Before that I had not known quite what I ought to do; which trees we might cut down, which piece of land we were not permitted to use. General Yee had given us a free hand, but he is a military man while we civilians have to be very careful. From that time on everything went very smoothly and we were treated like high officials by the villagers. They were so good to us that I got a moving picture machine and bought some precious gasoline and gave them two nights of moving pictures. They all enjoyed the show. After the second night they thanked us in their village way: "Sir, you spent much money, didn't you? It must be very expensive."

Building Amid Inflation and Threats of Attack

Dr. Lee chose this site out of two offered by the government. We engaged a good contractor and began to put up our buildings. Chau Leung is a reliable man and had built many churches and schools, Pui Ching Middle School among them. It is not fair to ask any contractor nowadays to work on contract, because prices rise several times in a month. At the end they may be twice or two and a half times what they were at the beginning of the month. We agreed upon 5% to Chau Leung upon any building and any material bought. Early in June we began to buy materials but after we had transported
a lot of timber and bamboo poles, order came for the evacuation of northern Kwangtung as a result of enemy advance up to the North River.

At that time Dr. Lee was in Linhsien. A few teachers and their families who had already come to Taitsuen to live, planned to move to Pingshek, but most of us waited for President Lee to return to see what he would decide. Mr. Yeung and I intended to stay no matter what came. Our servants showed their loyalty and courage, though they had been with us only a month, and decided to stay also. I myself wanted to remain because I like Taitsuen very much: huge camphor trees, cool weather, thirty kinds of birds, lovely wild flowers, and spreading rice-fields, the whole atmosphere artistic, and I thought I could go to the mountains further away from the railway if necessary, where it would be quite safe.

A few days later President Lee came back. After sizing up the situation he said: "We had better stay here and develop this place. Let us go on." I agreed with him perfectly so we began on Swasey Hall. When I was in America I had visited summer camps and student meeting places in the woods, and it now all came back to me. I recalled those dignified buildings with their solemn and impressive soaring roofs, so I thought of the pointed roof of Swasey Hall. This place is full of poetry, of music and natural beauty, so our first building, I thought, should be religious, artistic and poetic in atmosphere. I designed the building and carefully supervised it; I even nailed boards on top of one another. It is successful from the point of view of looks, it suits our present needs, and it will probably be good for fifty years to come.

Students and Teachers Arrive

After a month the situation eased up and students began to register and teachers to come to Taitsuen. This name we did not like; so we changed it to Ling Tai Tsuen. Our main job then was to put up buildings and repair matches for the staff and also find room for the students who were arriving from Hongkong. The University plans to have all buildings west of Swasey Hall used by the middle school and all north and east of Swasey used by the college. For the middle school, after repairing the matches already here, we had nearly enough, but for the college we had to build many new ones.

By July things were going strong. Many students registered and more asked to be allowed to enter. We had a rule that those who came must help to open up the place, help to beautify it and make it usable. We had many visitors every weekend. By that time building materials were swarming into Sinyunmiu station. The railway helped us a great deal and we had teams of workmen to transport these materials into Lingtaitsuen. Sawing went on in the carpenters' matches continually, as if a couple of hundred men were snoring in their sleep. At one time we had as many as 300 builders and carpenters, and at cooking time eighteen kitchens were sending up smoke. All these preparations without an actual school started did not satisfy us, however, so our next step was to open a summer school for the Middle School. On
August 1, 1942 this school opened and the work of Lingnan started again.

**Pioneer Work for Students**

To return to the development of the campus. Our first well was not very successful at first, but by the time we had gone down 52 feet we got enough water. In this region water is difficult to get and the wages for carrying it are very high; so the well was needed and we built our bath-house and kitchen near by so as to save labor. All the work in the dormitories and class-rooms was done by working students. Boys began to dig fields and make roads. We require everyone here to work if he wants to be paid. Some boys earned almost enough for their food and tuition in summer school. This work was not easy, because trees and stones and mosquitoes were plentiful, so we must give full credit to those boys who undertook it. Our few servants too should receive credit for they actually had to get down on their hands and knees to clear out the undergrowth in many places.

Dr. Lee had a great time getting workers and staff for the University. After the strong force we had had in Hongkong our numbers seemed very small, but his efforts were rewarded by many loyal teachers and workers coming back one by one. We took great pains to care for them and make them feel at home in this new place and when the full term opened, our old workers began to arrive from every quarter. They were given a needed subsidy to cover travelling expenses and board and we tried to house them all. For those who came with families a small house was built; for single teachers we built a good dormitory. Dormitories and class-rooms were ready at the beginning of September. If you stand on top of the hill, you will see fifty or sixty buildings, some half-hidden under big camphor-trees, some exposed on the mountain-side, with pink walls and purple roofs. Under the sunshine it is a beautiful sight. Lingnan is now well established at Lingtaitsuen.

**Sister Institutions Join Us**

The Union Theological College came to join us and we were glad to give them a number of matsheds at Wankong about twenty minutes' walk from our site. At the same time Soochow University which had fled from Shanghai to Fukien, joined us as another guest. As we are all fellow-refugees, we also gave them some matsheds in Wankong and their students joined our classes and shared our blackboards and desks. The Union Theological College has now put up some new buildings for their own use and Soochow University is also beginning to build west of us, near the station.

When Mr. C. K. Tse, our business manager, came, he took up responsibility. I had been called the "Mountain Chief", which meant that I did things differently and in any artistic way I liked, without much rule or order. But now the University was actually going and we needed a government, so Tse and others took over the business side. I was greatly relieved, but it has been a thrill to start something now like this.
With a big community such as ours, we needed a church. With some rearrangement inside Swasey, we easily got the atmosphere of a church. We did not have any musical instrument so we had to make up the organ part. (Now at last we have a piano.) We had no hymn-books so we had to write words on large sheets of paper and put them up high for everybody to see.

Many Eager to Enroll

Our entrance examinations were held in different places: Kweilin, Meihsien, Pingshek and Kukong. Around 2,000 students took them but, when college opened, we received only about 300 students - old and new, some of them from Hongkong University. It was a sight to see them in the dormitories and on the roads. Everyone carried an oil light and the song of the red lantern came immediately to mind. (Since this was written oil has climbed so high that many have to economize on even these small lights and grope their way precariously along the campus paths in the evening.) I am new to this situation for I used to work here alone and afterwards with only a few people. Now there are so many young people here beginning their studies again in Free China that sometimes you cannot keep back your tears at seeing them. It stirs something inside you.

At the time of writing this, the University and Middle School, Soochow University, and Union Theological College have been here more than a semester. There have been some malaria cases, but not so severe as we feared at first. In the beginning we had a nurse to look after our students and the villagers. Now we have a doctor and an infirmary also, but most of the time the infirmary is empty. That is something to be thankful for.

Life Becomes Normal Again

The University has seen more than ten plays in Swasey Hall and two or three big concerts have been given. Morning Service is held there every Sunday. The Student Christian Association is raising funds for a school in the village and for a club for soldiers and workmen. They are also planning some medical work for the neighborhood. Our numbers may be seen by the fact that there are 248 middle school boys and girls, with twenty full-time and part-time teachers. The University has 230 men and women, not including those in the College of Agriculture at Pingshek, nor the medical students in Kwongsi. A few nights ago we had a dinner to welcome Mrs. W. K. Chung and Mr. Y. M. Ling, and I was one of more than eight tables of fellow-workers. When you remember that at first there were only two - Mr. Yeung and myself, this is quite a contrast. Many shops and other buildings have collected at the Sinyanmiu railway stations, since we moved in here. At that time there was only one shop selling a few eggs, now there are a number of restaurants and small hotels.

This report is just an artist's impression. As to the financial side; as to curriculum, books and apparatus; the connections between the government and the University and its boards of trustees and directors, I do not
know much, but it seems to me that everything is going satisfactorily. I am glad that I could help to build Lingnan up again, and I feel that everyone ought to give his best and work like our leader, President Loo, who really works like a "buffalo" and carries a heavy burden. Judging by the subscriptions and money sent to us, I feel that Lingnan is still in the hearts of many good people and in the hearts of our alumni. I am glad to have been asked to come in and develop Lingtaitsuen. If I had not responded to the invitation and had let someone else do it instead I should have missed much and I should be quite ashamed now. As it is I am sitting here recalling the months of hard work, our hesitations, our fears and our trials and am glad that part is over. Lingnan is now stronger than ever before. She can fight for her existence and can stand any weather or storm. I am proud of Lingnan. I feel younger every day and more energetic from working side by side with all our comrades for the welfare of Lingnan.