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Memorandum from Mr. Allen Lau to Mr. Edward Chan to discuss the establishment of Lingnan College in Hong Kong

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MEMORANDUM

To: Mr. Edward Chan
From: Allen Lau
Subject: Establishment of Lingnan College of Arts and Sciences
Date: January 24, 1967

I wish first to express my satisfaction to learn that you have taken the leadership in calling a meeting to discuss the establishment of Lingnan College in Hong Kong. This is a project which is long overdue. From what I learned, there seem to be some honest differences of opinion among leading alumni on how this project should be gone about. Allow me to offer my personal comments on this very vital and worthwhile undertaking.

1. Businessmen Versus Educators. To begin with, let me say that this is not a simple situation which either the businessmen or the educators can effectively handle. Businessmen can make an institution financially solvent or even profitable, but that is not the primary function of education. Educators alone wouldn't do because they usually are poor fund-raisers and too preoccupied with educational problems. It takes money to run a school. The business group must be responsible for fund-raising and public relations. The academic group, trained and experienced in curriculum programming, administration and supervision, should have clear-cut, direct, unhampered responsibility in running the school. If we get the functions of these two groups mixed, we shall have trouble. Therefore, we need a board consisting of men of business and industry to bring in the revenue and a committee of scholars and educators to run the school.

2. Profit Making Motive. A second point I wish to make is that we must not be thinking of the type of profit making school that is flourishing in Hong Kong. This will be the lowest form of prostitution. The same is true with hospitals. No good school or hospital here in America shows a profit at the end of the year. For instance, Columbia University and the Presbyterian Hospital suffer a deficit of over a million dollars every year. The board of directors of both institutions have to raise money to carry on their programs. By the same token, no school which operates according to sound educational principles would purposely set out to make a profit as a business does. A school or the leadership of a school must strive unceasingly for improvement of its facilities and faculty so as to offer students maximum opportunity for the best possible education. Only by cutting down the quality with lower pay to faculty members, antiquated facilities and poor supervision can a school come out with a profit.

3. What Must We Do? One way to tackle this problem is first to understand our needs, potential support and assets.

Hong Kong is a place where free education cannot blossom. The educational institutions of the island, subservient to the dictate of the
colonial authorities, cannot by any stretch of one's imagination be of free men and free minds. Therefore we should not dream of an ideal type of institution under such circumstances. Then why should we have a college?

We need a Lingnan College in Hong Kong for two simple, clear-cut reasons: the hunger for the revival of the Lingnan spirit, at least to the extent permissible within the framework of the colonial system; the hunger for a school where our young men and women who have graduated from high school can go and have to some extent a baptism of the good life that we once enjoyed and cherished.

In the long view, I see Lingnan College of Arts and Sciences as a transitional institution to fill an urgent and vital need. When we have a humane and free government on the mainland, God willing, and we return to the Hong Lok campus, we should work with the legitimate board of directors of Lingnan University and the American board of trustees to rebuild Lingnan again. I venture to guess that when the time comes (this may be long in coming) the old members of the board of Lingnan University will be almost non-existent. Many of the Lingnan College board will have to fill the vacancies to carry the torch forward. Once Lingnan should return to Canton, the Lingnan College of Arts and Sciences will immediately lose a good deal of its significance. The Lingnan College in Hong Kong should be set up in such a way that it can still go on unhindered when this moment comes.

We should not think or plan in terms of an utopia, a grandiose scheme which could and would be self-defeating like the abortive amateur attempt which was tried in Taiwan. In our fervent desire to bring Lingnan back to life we should not be carried off by slogans (of which we have many) to become the Don Quixotes of our time. We must come to grips with reality and our ability to support the school.

4. Relations with the American Board of Trustees. This is one important factor we need to give some consideration. There are two things we should have in mind in our relations with the American board of trustees here in New York. First that we should not expect (or convey the assumption) that the American board of trustees give financial support for the Lingnan College. Second we should not aim to replace (or convey the impression) the still legally constituted, though inactive, board of directors of Lingnan University. Again, I'd like to cite the Taiwan attempt which resulted in creating the unwarranted concern in the minds of the American trustees. We shall let them know that we shall not come to them for financial support. Of course, this does not preclude us from accepting financial assistance if they choose to offer it. Should we appeal to the American board of trustees for financial support at this stage, I doubt they would comply. Let me call your attention to the Lingnan Middle School. For quite a number of years, the
American trustees had not given any financial support. Now, under the efficient management of Chien Nei-sien and the new board of directors, the American trustees have come to a realization that it deserves support and each year some support has been coming. This is exactly the point I'd like to leave with you: first we must build up a Lingnan College as a fine educational institution that is worthy of our heritage, then support from our friends will come, and not before.

5. The Question of Type of College. How then does one propose to start the school? Having set forth the conditions as I see them, we shall aim our target at a reachable range. Instead of a totally new school with new buildings and new staff, unless the funds are readily available, we should first see whether it is practical to have it in the present Lingnan Middle School. I'm sure some alumni have made a similar observation. I believe it has a lot of merit. When I was in Hong Kong last April, I discussed this same subject in some length with Lam Chik-suen and Chien Nei-sien. The Lingnan Middle School, due to its location and its physical facilities, seems to offer a good many advantages. Some new floors will have to be added and new classrooms will be required, but the total cost will not be nearly as much as starting a new school somewhere else. Also there will be some saving in administrative expenses.

We should not feel unhappy for not having new and impressive quarters. Many well known educational institutions in England, Germany, France and America, where past and present world leaders were educated, still use centuries-old buildings. Physical appearance, as the appearance of the individual does not make the man, does not make the school. It is the faculty, the students and the people who give leadership that count.

We must remember that we and we alone are the ones to bear the cross of Lingnan. This is true not only of a school, it is equally true of a nation and a people. Once one wears someone's collar, may they be Russian, American or British, everything is lost. Look what is happening in the mainland, how difficult it is for the Chinese Communists to shed the Russian collar from their necks. Once we begin life or build the Lingnan College on the charity or the grace of others, from that moment on we have voluntarily forfeited our equal rights with others, our dignity, our prestige and our souls. With the high and advantageous positions our Lingnan alumni in Hong Kong hold in business and industry, there is no need to go begging to rebuild Lingnan. Other institutions which have much less potential alumni support than Lingnan have done it. For this reason, each time I leave Hong Kong after my visits, I have a lump in my throat, a sadness in my heart. I feel that there exists a feeling of reluctance on the part of the "able-bodied" alumni to come forward to be counted. We only give lip service when the subject of revival of the spirit of Lingnan is raised. Otherwise the Lingnan College should and could have been started long ago. In fairness to all, I must say this weakness is not confined to Lingnan alumni alone. In my twenty-odd years dealing with both Chinese and Americans here in America, one unerasable set-back which caused me no end of sorrow is that, with few exceptions, we are not a generous people as far as helping our own fellow man is concerned. I can give you endless examples to support this
On the brighter side, I can cite one exception concerning Lingnan alumni that American trustees and friends in America were very proud to point out. If you should have time to read the History of Lingnan published by the American board of trustees in 1964, through the personal effort of Mr. Yorke Allen, Jr., you will find glowing praise of the Chinese board of directors and friends under the leadership of the late president, Chung Wing-kwong, for saving Lingnan from extinction during World War I when American Support was cut off.

What we need now is not to dream the impossible dream but to forge an unshaken conviction and a sense of rededication; to be willing to give till there is no more to give; to be willing to march into hell for a heavenly cause so our hearts will lie peaceful and calm when reach our quest.

In conclusion, it goes without saying that I and other alumni elsewhere would wish to extend our deepest appreciation to you and your fellow alumni for having taken this courageous step. We hope you will keep us informed of the progress. We wish you a speedy success.