

Chapter Eleven

Turbulent times

(1923-1927)

In 1923, Dr Edmunds resigned from the position of Provost of Lingnan University, and returned to New York to serve as Executive Director of the Board of Trustees at that time. He later became President of Pomona College. He was succeeded by Dr James Henry. Dr Henry was the son of Benjamin Henry, Provost during the early years. Sixteen years younger than Dr Chung, he had been born and raised in Guangzhou, and was therefore a fluent Chinese speaker and could read some Chinese as well. Thus he was completely familiar with Chinese culture and customs. Returning to China after completing his education in the United States, Henry held teaching positions at Union and Pui Ying Middle Schools for ten years' time, and then joined Lingnan in 1919. In 1924, he received an honorary doctorate in the United States, and was appointed as Provost of Lingnan University. At the same time it was announced that Dr Chung would serve as Associate President. There was always a western female secretary in the Provost's Office, while

Tang Fook-cheung served as the Chinese-language secretary. Three secretaries worked in the Office of the Associate President: Ko Koon-tin, Chan On-yan, and Lei Hei-bun. Chinese people always referred to Dr Chung as President, viewing the western Provost and the Chinese President as equals.

The Provost received directions on handling affairs at Lingnan from the Board of Trustees, and consulted the Administrative Committee, also called the Executive Department, before making a final decision. The Administrative Committee was composed of the heads of the departments and colleges and individual faculty members who had been elected as representatives. In addition, the Accounting Bureau and the Academic Affairs Bureau managed relevant matters. Nonetheless, the university's academic program, appointment of faculty, and student registration were all managed by the Dean of Academic Affairs.

The political situation was turbulent in South China during the years from 1921 to 1926, as a succession of incidents occurred. There was a serious impact on teaching at Lingnan. The events may be summarized as follows: In May 1921, the National Assembly elected a President. President and Commander-in-Chief Sun Yatsen then went to Kweilin to lead a Northern Expedition. In 1922, when Chen Chiongming rebelled and attacked the Presidential Headquarters, President Sun was forced to flee on the Wing Fung gunboat. In 1923, the Yunnan

and Guizhou armies under Yang Ximin and Liu Zhenhuan attacked Chen Chiongming, and in 1924, the Guangdong armies under Xu Chongzhi returned to Guangdong. His Excellency Chiang Kai-shek received the order to establish the Huangpu Military Academy, and his cadet forces attacked and destroyed Chen Chiongming's former base in Huizhou in a single operation, and then restored command by resolving the problem of the Yunnan and Guizhou armies. Duan Qirui led the government in Beijing that year, and on November 10 President Sun issued a proclamation that he would go north to seek peace. On March 12, 1925, President Sun passed away in Beijing. On July 1, 1925, the Nationalist Government was founded in Guangzhou. Wang Jingwei was Chairman of the government, and Hu Hanmin, Xu Chongzhi, Liao Zhongkai, Sun Ke, and Tan Yankai were members of the Government Council. At Lingnan, crowds of students clambered up to the roof of Martin Hall to observe numerous military engagements on land and on the river, while the military cadets carried out their manoeuvres in the eastern suburbs. The Yunnan and Guizhou forces rapidly collapsed. Their officers fled, either on horseback or in sedan chairs, while battleships were massing in the river in front of the campus, moving forward and back to fire their guns from a distance. Classes were suspended as students watched this thrilling sight.

In December 1923, President Sun suddenly paid a visit to Lingnan, and was welcomed by Acting Provost Baxter and by faculty members and

students lined up on the river bank. When President Sun reached the Assembly Hall, he was escorted in by Yip Leung-choi, president of the students' union, and then addressed the crowd in a speech, expressing his determination to seize the Maritime Customs surplus funds in order to use them for military and government expenses. In addition, he praised the impressive development of the Lingnan campus. He declared that the school was administered very well, offering a fine education. He urged the students to study diligently rather than dreaming of becoming government officials and getting rich. Afterward, he was invited to the President's residence at Blackstone Lodge for tea with Dr Chung. President Sun then sat in an armchair in the middle of the sitting room, with the other Western professors and student leaders standing on either side. They discussed a variety of Chinese and international issues. President Sun spoke fluent English, and his ideas were trenchant. It seemed as though he could engage a crowd of scholarly authorities in combat with a single voice. The professors of Political Science and History were unable to challenge him. Newspapers around the world drew attention to this event, focusing on it in reports.

The next year, President Sun founded the Huangpu Military Academy, borrowing Lingnan's eastern embankment wharf in the eastern district of Guangzhou. The students of the two schools both used the same pontoons, and because many Lingnan students entered the Military Academy, they were very familiar with one another, just as though

they were going along with their old friends. President Sun also gave fourteen lectures on the Three People's Principles at an old academic site on Wenming Road. Lingnan's middle school students all assembled to listen respectfully.

On March 12, 1925, the sad news of President Sun's death arrived by telegram. He had passed away in Peking. The entire nation entered mourning. Flags were at half-mast at Lingnan, and the next evening Guangdong's first memorial service for President Sun was conducted at Lingnan.

Wong Po-shang, President of the Lingnan Student Council, presided over the college-wide memorial ceremony honouring President Sun. On this occasion, every member of the faculty, staff and student body wore mourning attire and black armbands, and the whole hall was silent. The four walls were draped with black and white streamers, and a portrait was mounted on the stage, flanked by sets of couplets and scrolls recording President Sun's teachings. Provincial Governor Hu Hanmin was unable to attend because of pressing duties. General Wu Te-chen represented the Governor. Wong Po-shang delivered a eulogy, and Reverend Chan Ts'ap-ng prayed. The whole assembly stood solemnly and bowed toward the portrait. His face covered with tears, General Wu spoke through his sobs, recalling President Sun's benevolence. After speeches by Provost Baxter, Secretary Ko Koo-tin, and a representative

of the workers at Lingnan, the service ended.

Chung Wing Kwong was President Sun's revolutionary comrade. Yeung Hok-ling, who was one of a group of "four bandits," namely Sun, Yeung, Chen, and You (the elder brother of Yeung Bingnan, Yang Sek-chung and great-uncle of Yeung Wah-yat), and Chan Shiu-paak (the father of Yeung Wah-yat's classmate Chan Kwan-king and uncle of his classmate Chien Nai-hsin), were also President Chung's close friends during their childhood. Bosom buddies during their youth, their ties dated back to early times. When Sun Yat-sen was alive, the Generalissimo's Headquarters was at the Cement Factory at Honam, very close to Lingnan College. On foot with only a few attendants, President Sun would often come to the campus to take walks, strolling to Blackstone Lodge and stopping there to relax, chatting pleasantly with Dr Chung. At this time, however, Dr Chung was away on a mission overseas. When the news of Sun's death reached him unexpectedly, he sent a letter to Secretary Ko Koon-tin, expressing deep regret that he would be unable to officiate at the funeral service.

On June 18, 1925, Reverend James Henry returned from the United States to take up his new duties as Provost. Affected by the political campaigns of that time, the situation within and outside Lingnan was deteriorating. The atmosphere was full of opposition to imperialism, Christianity, elitism in education, and capitalism. At this time, some

students and workers could not withstand the provocations of the situation, and were carried away by patriotism like unharnessed horses, falling under others' control. When Reverend Henry arrived in China through Shanghai, he heard about the May Thirtieth Massacre in the International Settlement, in which twelve persons had been killed and seventeen were wounded. Arriving in Guangzhou, he then heard that a protest demonstration was planned for June 23. Consequently he held a meeting of the College Council, in order to propose an early holiday before the term had ended. The graduation ceremony was then held on June 22. On June 23, over three hundred Lingnan students were among the participants in Guangzhou's mass demonstration including all sectors and schools. By the time the protestors' procession reached Shakee Road, at the Western Bridge of the Shameen foreign settlement area on the western side of the city, the soldiers and police forces of the foreign nations had prepared gun emplacements on the sandbags. All at once, there was a roar of gunfire, and the shots killed over one hundred persons and injured more than one hundred others. Unfortunately, a teacher at Lingnan named Au Lei-chau, and a student named Hui Iu-cheung were among the dead, and another student, Tso Iu suffered facial injuries. The student union held an all-night vigil, collecting and transcribing eye-witness accounts. The students assembled the accounts together with photographs in a book on the true events of the Shakee Massacre. A thousand copies of the book were printed and distributed in an appeal for justice. Seventeen faculty members from the United

States also jointly sent a telegram expressing regret at the violation of humanity of those responsible for firing on the crowd. They also urged the United States to do the utmost to support China's efforts to achieve equality by casting off the yoke of imperialism.

Alexander Baxter, Lingnan's British Vice Provost was not in agreement, however, and therefore went to Hong Kong to declare his personal viewpoint. Late at night, Lingnan students reported this to Provost Henry, holding copies of newspapers from Hong Kong, accusing Reverend Baxter of being anti-Chinese and demanding his expulsion. Thereupon Baxter left the school for Hong Kong.

The Shakee Massacre was like a spark igniting the powder-keg of the Hong Kong General Strike. Almost 100,000 labourers returned by land and sea to their homeland, and most Chinese residents also departed, paralyzing business and turning Hong Kong into a ghost town. The city of Guangzhou was also on strike and students boycotted classes in response. The Hong Kong-Guangzhou General Strike Committee was established, with the Eastern Garden (formerly an amusement park) as its headquarters. Every trade union pitched tents, rented houses, and opened canteens to accommodate the workers.

Thus the academic year of 1925 to 1926 at Lingnan did not begin until classes started on September 11, with a further three-week

postponement for the younger students. When the municipality of Guangzhou carried out a ten-day census, all students were recruited to participate, temporarily suspending classes so that the students could take part in this work.

When the summer of this year began, a large number of former Lingnan students held a meeting in Guangzhou. Nine of them submitted a letter to the Board of Trustees in New York, signed by Y. L. Lee, Y. M. Lin, Chan Shiu-cheung, Wong Kai-ming, Kwan Yan-cho, Chan Ting-hoi, Chiu Koon-hoi, Szeto Wai, and Wei Kok. They urged the trustees to consider the following points: 1) Because the movement of Chinese administrators assuming responsibility for managing the missionary-founded colleges was spreading throughout China, Christians and non-Christians alike were ardently advocating this. Nonetheless, there were two opposing viewpoints; one side advocated total abolition of the missionary-founded schools and the other side aimed to preserve the status quo. 2) In particular, some Cantonese intellectuals held hostile views toward the Christian colleges, and were doing all they could to damage their reputation, thus hindering their development and reducing their student numbers. 3) As the anti-Christian movement concentrated its strength in attacks on the Christian colleges, the situation was becoming more serious every day. 4) With the recent occurrence of the Shakee Massacre, every aspect of the anti-Christian movement had been strengthened. Consequently, the former students

proposed that to begin with the nature of Lingnan College should be defined. It was a private Christian college gladly accepting the support of Christian organizations in various countries. From this time onward, the Board of Trustees would increase the number of Chinese board members to the maximum appropriate extent, and would also be divided into two organizations, one based in New York and the other in Guangzhou. When the time was right, furthermore, it would be appropriate to appoint additional Chinese leaders, bringing the Board closely in touch with Chinese viewpoints and circumstances. Lastly, Chinese people were willing to share the responsibility of handling the college's financial affairs. Although their means remained limited, they were making gradual progress, and wished to repay the conscientious efforts continuously made by the western Board members. The letter also mentioned the fact that two Trustees, Reverend Benjamin Henry and Tsin Shue-fan, had also intended that the administration of Lingnan would eventually be transferred to Chinese hands. The Board of Trustees was in close agreement, considering that these proposals should be implemented when conditions were ripe.

As it happened, on November 16 of the same year, the Ministry of Education in Beijing issued a set of regulations governing the formal recognition of educational institutions established using foreign funds. The regulations specified that all schools of this type must be registered in accordance with the law (the Lingnan authorities handled this with

the government of the Republic of China in Guangzhou according to the college's interpretation) and that their primary mission could not be to proselytize. The regulations also specified that the established curricula must be in accordance with the Ministry's standards (in this respect Lingnan faced the problem that a university should consist of at least three colleges). Lingnan thus made Religion into an elective course, and the course content applied a "philosophy of life" approach together with optional meetings with an advisor.

On the surface, Lingnan appeared to remain calm and quiet in the turbulent climate of this time. Yet a storm was brewing on the inside. Three students with political ambitions, named Nan, Lee, and Wu, were continually stirring up the labour union organizations at Lingnan, agitating for shorter hours and increased wages, and demanding improved benefits, hoping to divide the students and staff at the school in this manner. By this time the municipal Kung Yee Medical College of Guangzhou had been taken over by the government because of the labor strike, while the Canton Hospital had also suspended operations because of the strike. On March 9, 1926, the workers of Lingnan presented demands, giving the college forty-eight hours to respond. Provost Henry immediately presented the matter to the Department of Agriculture and Industry for arbitration. The result was that only the demand for a wage increase was accepted. But the student groups organized a corps to protect the college, and held a general meeting,

at which there was a decision, by a vote of four hundred and eighty to twenty-three ballots, to request the expulsion from Lingnan of the three students who had stirred up the workers. The three students, Nan, Lee, and Wu, submitted a complaint to the Republican government, however, and an arbitration meeting was convened. Those in attendance included Wang Jingwei, Chen Gongbo, Hsu Chung-ching, and Chung Wing Kwong as members of the Educational Executive committee, Ko Koon-tin as a representative of Lingnan College, and Sum Lai-yin as the representative of the popular educational corps (he was a student of agriculture at Lingnan who represented the Guangzhou Students' Federation). The two sides did not insist on their demands, and a settlement was reached.

Earlier, Dr Chung was in the United States on a fund-raising tour, and Reverend Henry sent an urgent telegram urging Dr Chung to return to Lingnan to assist him in handling the critical situation. When he received the message, Dr Chung wrote in reply, "I can do nothing more by returning to China. Provide comfort to the workers and staff. Stay calm. I will carry on my work as usual." Nevertheless, Reverend Henry continued to send telegrams urging Dr Chung to return, and also on February 20 he wrote to inform Dr Chung that the Guangzhou government had established a five-man Educational Executive Committee, appointing Dr Chung as a Committee member, representing the interests of the private colleges. Two weeks later, Dr

Chung replied in a telegram that he had decided to accept the position. It would be impossible, however, for him to return to Guangzhou in time to attend the swearing-in ceremony to be held on March 1 at Guangdong University. When the time came, Secretary Ko Koon-tin represented Dr Chung, mounting the stage to accept the appointment.

By June 1926, Dr Chung had returned to Lingnan for some time and joined efforts with Reverend Henry to adjust and settle college affairs. Kenneth Duncan, the Academic Dean of Lingnan College, and Henry Graybill, Principal of the Middle School, had at the same time submitted their resignations and returned to the United States. They were replaced by the veteran Reverend Wisner and by alumnus Dr Ho Yam-tong. On June 29, Dr Chung himself officiated at the graduation ceremony. That year there were altogether twenty-seven graduates in the programs of Arts and Agriculture. Provost Henry decided to return to the United States in September, to arrange to bring his family back to China. On the eve of his departure, the Chinese teaching staff jointly composed and submitted a letter to him, declaring their respectful appreciation of how he had courteously and sympathetically responded to the government of China. They wrote: "With respect to the administration as well as the future of Lingnan, we are sure that some adjustment must be made in order to avoid some great damages which might occur." (Corbett 106) They also requested that Provost Henry respect the views of Lingnan alumni by setting an early date for

the registration of a draft proposal. After returning to the United States, Henry submitted a report on the true situation, upon which the Board of Trustees sent a special commission to Guangzhou composed of W. W. Comfort, Ralph S. Watts, and C. K. Edmunds, so that they could study the question together with Lingnan alumni and draft a proposal to serve as a guide to the Board of Trustees in its deliberations about appropriate actions.

During the Commission's visit to Lingnan, just when it was contemplating the drafting of an ambitious scheme for the future of the university, there were several incidents related to the labour movement on the campus. The five hundred members of the Lingnan Workman's Union, together with over one hundred members of the Union of Non-Teaching Staff, were all caught up in the turmoil, in the hope that they would reach the goal of sabotaging the university. On November 1, 1926, because of an agricultural worker who had been charged with stealing about fifty dollars from other workers housed in the same quarters and sent to the municipal authorities for judgement, the unions used threats to demand release of the man. In order to calm the situation, Dr Chung negotiated with the Police Bureau and secured the man's release and return to the campus. Nonetheless, after setting off a lot of fireworks, the workers called a general strike at 3:30 in the afternoon, cutting off supplies of food and water. For four days altogether they posted squads at the campus gates to prevent people from entering and exiting. Faculty

members, their families, and students were in a risky situation, and were compelled to organize self-defense. The foreign faculty members themselves took turns to guard the campus waterworks and electricity station, along with the school's three motor launches. Meanwhile the students purchased their own supplies of rice and prepared meals with their own hands. Fortunately, General Lei Chai-shum, Chairman of the Guangdong Government, stationed a unit of police on the Lingnan campus. At last the Department of Peasants and Workers sent an official to arbitrate the dispute, and order was restored for the time being.

In March 1927, the Union of Non-Teaching Staff also carried out a strike, presenting a long list of demands. The university's offices were closed. At last, because not many members had supported the strike, the troubles gradually died down. In another incident, an agitator entered the Third Dormitory during the night, and harangued the students before they chased him out. During the first incident, the workmen of the campus again went on strike and closed off the campus, cutting off food and water. The Chinese faculty members wished to send their families away but were prevented from hiring workers to move their possessions. Thereupon the Broadway crossing the campus became full of Westerners with PhDs, Chinese faculty members, and Lingnan students all carrying loads on their backs, in their hands, or in wheelbarrows, moving possessions for the women and children.

While these events were taking place, Provost Henry had returned with his family and reached Hong Kong. Dr Chung went to Hong Kong to meet him, informing him that because the situation was worsening day by day, there was no choice but to close the university so as to avoid the continuation of struggles that were obstructing studies. When Dr Henry stepped through the campus gate to return to Lingnan on April 10, he saw the university's herd of cattle being led from the campus to be fed, an operation that rescued the animals from starvation. Dr Henry then took off his coat and joined the cattle-herding brigade. On this occasion, Dr Henry led a cow and took the lead, while Dr Wisner followed leading another, and the others including Dr McDermott also each led an animal, forming a procession to exit by the south gate. Finally the herd was safely settled in a cowshed belonging to the Southern Enterprise at Nanxianji. The action of leading out the herd of cattle had proven to be very challenging.

Provost Henry and Dr Chung reached a decision to close the gates of the campus on April 14, ceasing operations at the school. All workers and non-teaching staff members received their wages and salaries and were dismissed. When this was complete, another day and night went by and then early in the morning of April 15, Commandant Chiang Kai-shek of the Whampoa Military Academy suddenly made a lightning strike in a coup against the Communists. At two o'clock in the morning, General Lei Fuk-lam sent special troops to Lingnan in search

of the labour agitators. Three of the strike leaders were taken away under arrest. Peace was instantly restored across the campus. No one had expected this outcome. At the same time, the Board of Trustees in New York telegraphed to urge the school to resume instruction immediately. Because the school had suspended operations, there was no justification for continued fund-raising efforts, and this would have a serious impact on the future of Lingnan. Receiving this command, Provost sent letters informing the parents of all Lingnan students, that the final examinations would be held for five days at the Lingnan campus beginning on June 20. The students reviewed their studies at home in preparation, finding ways to communicate by mail and taking make-up classes at the YMCA Middle School of Guangzhou, so that the needs of students at every level would be met. In this way, a graduation ceremony went forward smoothly on June 25, at which fifteen students received Bachelor of Arts degrees and three students received Bachelor of Agriculture degrees. Among them were seven women students.