

Chapter Fourteen

Meeting the challenge of national crisis (1937-1940)

As well as working throughout his life to fulfill his vision of “Great Lingnan,” Dr Chung never stopped travelling. He was always on the move. While constantly transferring between boats and vehicles, he even forgot his own age. But the years went by nonetheless and in 1937 he was seventy years of age. In 1933 he underwent a medical procedure for treatment of the urinaria, and then spent several months in convalescence. Thereafter his physical strength was not as great as it had been before. Mrs Chung, moreover, suffered from a chronic asthma condition and could not travel easily. Yet the two aged gradually without giving any thought to how to arrange a program of rest. Completely without plans for his own future, Dr Chung felt that he would worry about tomorrow’s concerns when tomorrow arrived.

In March 1937, Chairman Lin Sen of the National Government travelled on a tour of inspection from Nanjing to the southwestern

provinces. Previously, when Chairman Lin chaired the National Assembly, he had frequently visited Lingnan to give lectures and sightsee. On March 29, he arrived at Lingnan to visit Dr Chung. He was accompanied by Deputy Commander Heung Hon-ping, by Ngai Wai, head of the Secretariat, and by Lui Chiu, chief of staff. Acting Dean of Studies Hui Ching-yeung (Dean of Studies Chan Wing-tsit was teaching in Hawaii as an exchange professor during 1935), led part of the student body to assemble in formation to welcome Chairman Lin at the pier by the north gate. Upon his arrival, he was escorted to Blackstone Lodge, where he was welcomed by Dr Chung. While drinking tea together, they had an intimate chat to catch up with one another. After quite a while, Chairman Lin then visited various places to see the sights. Afterward he got into a car at the south gate, returning to the city by the Huangpu Road.

In July 1937, at the early stage of formulating the decision for a protracted war of resistance, the central authorities called a consultative meeting at Kuling. The meeting was a full gathering of representatives sent by every national party and non-party organization. After the war of resistance began, the central authorities invited the Chinese Youth Party, the National Socialist Party, the Chinese Communist Party, and intellectual leaders to establish a Consultative Assembly for National Defense, to serve the government as an advisory body.

Dr Chung was invited to participate in the consultative meeting, and thus went by air to Jiujiang. He then transferred at Kuling in Lushan. In the past this place was an excellent summer resort for Western preachers. The mountain peaks were lofty and the ridges were steep, with forests touching the sky. The spring waters were clear and the stones were lovely. The mist was light and the air was fresh. Dr Chung gazed with delight on the scene. Immediately, he had an idea for long-term convalescence, and had no thought of returning to Lingnan. Because Dr Chung appreciated natural scenery, he once, after summer school classes ended in 1909, took three boys, Lau Tai-chee, Chung Kai-cheung, and Kong Yue-yam, on a trip to Laufo Mountain in eastern Guangdong. They climbed to the highest point, called Flying Cloud Peak. Along the path ran a splashing stream that dampened their clothing. The cries of monkeys reached their ears. The old pine trees of Huanglong Temple, and the curious stones of Old Man's Peak filled their eyes. Dr Chung especially enjoyed keeping a record of couplets, such as the former Viceroy Shum Cheun-heun's words to describe the Dragon Pearl Pavilion:

Exhaled breath changes to worldly raindrops
 Inhaled breath transforms to universal light

Dr Chung read this and said, "This is very skilfully composed, but has too much the sense of a fairy tale!"

An area of summer residences lies in the eastern valley of Kuling. At that time war was looming nearby, and rental rates were low, so Dr Chung rented a flat, living quietly and seldom going out. Lingnan alumnus Lam Chik-ho was also taking a vacation in the area, and sometimes crossed paths with Dr Chung. Dr Chung said to him, "Now I have been concentrating on writing my memoirs, and they are already finished. If the Lingnan alumni can someday publish them, they would be a useful to future generations as a reference work. (Later the manuscript was lost, as described in an earlier chapter.)

Earlier, in June that year, the Lingnan University Board of Directors met in Guangzhou, and discussed the question of selecting a successor to Dr Chung as president of the university because of his advanced age. It was resolved that Dr Chung would be permitted to retire, receiving a new appointment as President Emeritus, and that Dr Lei Ying-lam would serve as president.

After Lei Ying-lam took up the position of university president, he appointed Dr Chu Yu-kwang as Academic Dean. Also, feeling that the school's administrative work had become rather heavy in recent years, becoming an obstacle to academic advancement, he therefore instructed every department to be directly responsible to the Academic Dean. Lei Ying-lam also simplified the administrative structure of the school, dividing the faculty of arts and science into a College of

Arts and a College of Science. The former colleges of engineering and commerce were scaled down, however, becoming departments within the College of Science. He also suspended all instruction in the agricultural and commercial vocational programs. The Colleges of Agriculture and Medicine continued in operation provisionally. He also set up an institute for postgraduate research in natural sciences.

On July 7, 1938, the National Consultative Assembly was established in Hankow, and representatives from all political parties, ethnic groups, occupational sectors and regions convened for a joint discussion on guiding principles for the war of resistance and national reconstruction. Dr Chung was a Counselor of the assembly, and thus travelled from Kuling to Hankow. Many Lingnan alumni were in Hankow then, having retreated from Nanjing, Shanghai, Hangchow, Peiping, Tientsin and other places. Among them Ng Shu-wing was an overseas Chinese student who had boarded at Lingnan since a young age; he respectfully invited Dr Chung to lunch at the Railway Hotel. Because the service provided by the waiter at the hotel was not satisfactory, Mr Ng called to the waiter and questioned him. Dr Chung immediately stopped him, saying, "Stay calm –if the waiter had as much intelligence and opportunity as you, then you should be serving him. It happens that he did not understand clearly, so just let him go! Why should you get angry about it?" This made a deep impression on Mr Ng, and he afterward frequently told others that Dr Chung was always extremely good-natured in dealing with

people. Consequently his nickname was “Mr Four Goods,” which meant that every time, everything, every place, and everyone were good.

After the Consultative Assembly adjourned, Dr Chung took a flight from Hankow to Hong Kong, and then returned directly to Guangzhou. In September, he personally and formally transferred the presidency of Lingnan University to Lei Ying-lam, and stored the memoirs that he had composed in Lushan in an archive at the school. He then hurriedly moved his home to Haiphong in Indochina. Within the year, he made several trips by air from Kunming to Chungking, to attend meetings of the Consultative Assembly.

On October 22, 1938, Japanese forces landed at Bias Bay, and followed the railway line to push into Guangzhou. Within ten days they had occupied Guangzhou. At that time, President Lei Ying-lam was on a business trip to Hong Kong. Dean Chu led students and transferred equipment in an urgent retreat. Several hundred students reached Hong Kong. Vice-Chancellor Duncan Sloss of the University of Hong Kong lent them classroom space.

At the end of October 1939, Japanese forces attacked from the rear between Yamchau and Linkong and occupied Nanning. At that time, Lingnan alumnus Yeung Wah-yat was director of the Pearl River Bureau of the Water Conservancy Department. From the work site at Tsokong

he turned toward Zhennanguan, entered Indochina at Taiyuanfu, and travelled to Haiphong. There he visited alumnus Chan Kei-fun, an architect. It happened to be New Year's Eve, and he spotted Dr Chung and his wife sitting side by side in a sitting-room. Everyone was pleasantly surprised. Dr Chung asked Yeung Wah-yat whether or not all the alumni working in the Pearl River Bureau were safe. Mr Chan then told him, "Dr Chung and Mrs Chung have already been living here for some time. The weather is warm in this place, and everything is favorable." Dr Chung replied, "Last year I travelled several times from Kunming to the wartime capital in Chungking, and next month I must make the trip again. Shortly I will be going to Hanoi to visit a school managed by alumni Wong Kwan-lun and Ho Bik-wan." Mrs Chung said, "Dr Chung has recently suffered from a cough, and likes to drink some camphor liqueur, to relieve his throat and tongue. Mr Yeung immediately went downstairs to make the purchase, and then hurriedly said goodbye, catching a train to Kunming, and then to Chungking. He could not even wait for the New Year to share wishes for new good fortune. When Yeung was about to leave, Dr Chung requested that when he met Ma Chiu-chun he would ask Ma to reserve a room for him to stay in while attending the meeting of the Consultative Assembly that would soon take place. Not long after Yeung Wah-yat arrived in Chungking, Dr Chung called to tell him, "My flights to Chungking turned back twice because of bad weather, but the survey charts are all in a safe place. Don't worry." Mrs Chung repeatedly advised her husband to

consider his illness and not do so much rough travelling, but he paid no attention. Finally he reached Chungking. Attending the Consultative Assembly, he discussed several proposals with Counselors including Wu Chi-mui and Shum Wai-lin concerning educational measures and women's service during wartime. They racked their brains for the sake of benefiting the nation.

Dr Chung conscientiously kept a daily diary, and Mrs Chung liked to paste photographs in albums. She arranged all the material about his relatives and friends, students, scenery, and minutes of meetings in an orderly fashion, filling a succession of large volumes. They were fascinating to peruse. Dr Chung once pointed to the set, saying, "These bird's claws from around the globe are the marks of a life-span's journey of a man. Never in my life have I been short of clothing or food, and if I were to eat a meal at the home of each of my students, and then start a new round of meals, I could live out the end of my life that way." Ah! Confucius travelled widely, receiving accommodation from the princes of various states in succession, while Dr Chung has only his students to rely on. And now, as Dr Chung contemplates the situation sensibly while the war spreads everywhere –Where can he go? What to follow?