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### Exchange student in China : an experiment in international goodwill

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## EXCHANGE STUDENTS IN CHINA

(An Experiment in International Goodwill)

by Edmund Meisenhelder III

(2125 words)

At Lingnan University in Canton, China, there is a group of American students pioneering in the field of Occident-Orient goodwill. Last year thirty-two young men and women from twenty American and Canadian universities pursued their studies on the Chinese campus.

This summer, despite the war in the East, and a possible compulsory return to the States, twenty students sailed for China, intending to take up their books in mid-September. Before them lies a year of rich experience, happy friendships, and valuable self training.

The Exchange Student plan had its beginning five years ago when Frank Wilson, an exchange student from the University of Redlands in California to the University of Hawaii desired to make a further step across the Pacific. Lingnan accepted him and the following year found him in Canton.

The plan appeared so successful that in the year after ten college men from America went out. An innovation was made in the fall of 1935 when, besides the increased number of twenty men, there were now five young women students. These numbers were enlarged to twenty-three and nine, respectively, in 1936, but in the best interests of the plan the total of thirty-two may well be considered a maximum figure. Too many foreign students might easily create a condition of unbalance in a college of only five hundred.

But what of the other part of the "Exchange" plan? What of the Chinese students who come to America? Unfortunately, due to the unfavorable exchange of money - five to one against the Cantonese, and, with the introduction of Chinese national currency, still three to one - plus the fact that few American universities have offered financial aid in scholarships, the list of Chinese exchange students studying in America is small. It is to be hoped that, in the near future, some kind of an arrangement will be made to give more students from China the same kind of opportunity which the Americans are finding there.

The undergraduate Exchange Student plan as in operation at Lingnan is unique in the Orient. The eyes of countless universities in China, and all over the East, are on this experiment in international goodwill. In a time when "Nationalism" rather than "Internationalism" is the cry, it is particularly important that such a plan as now exists at Lingnan be thoroughly understood.

With their present purpose "to strengthen the bonds of understanding and friendship between China and America", the administrators of the plan have taken the utmost care in selecting their students. Choice depends upon an examination of the candidate's record, letters of recommendation, and personal interviews. Among the qualifications required of the student are above-average grades, Christian character, a record of participation in extra-curricular activities, interest in inter-racial and international matters, and the ability to take part in one or more sports. The awarding of a scholarship exempts the student from tuition and room fees, but the cost of transportation, food, and miscellaneous expenses are borne

by him.

A pamphlet issued to prospective exchange students states that "Lingnan University is a private coeducational university under Christian auspices with an international faculty". It was founded over fifty years ago as Canton Christian College. Upon a shift in the management about 1928, in which the Chinese obtained more control, the name was changed to the present one. Besides a College of Arts and Sciences, there are a College of Engineering and a College of Agriculture. In addition, there is an elementary school and a high school for boys alone. Lingnan is also affiliated with a Medical College and a hospital in Canton.

The university is situated two and one-half miles out of the city on a large island in the Pearl River, a part of the West River delta. Communication with the mainland is carried on by launch, bus, automobile, bicycle, or river sampan. Barbed wire fences surround the spacious campus, allowing access only at the high plank or iron gates where armed Chinese guards stand on duty twenty-four hours of the day. Students are forbidden to return to the campus late at night by river, unless it be by the university launch, for robberies on the water are occasional. For protection these late launches carry armed police.

At Lingnan the foreign student lives right with his Chinese fellows. He shares their work and recreation, and they his. Each foreign boy has one Chinese roommate, while the girls have two. Students live in well-constructed brick and concrete dormitories, of Chinese architecture - with curving green or blue-tiled roofs. Furniture in the rooms consists of a desk and chair, a combination closet

and bureau, and an iron bed fitted with planks instead of springs, though foreign students are given thin mattresses for padding. Woven straw bed mats are used in place of lower sheets, for the weather is hot during a large part of the year.

Much fun ensues at first as the foreigners grapple with chop sticks and endeavor to learn to like the ordinary Chinese food. But neither is very hard, and several weeks' experience finds the visitors quite at home in both respects. An American mess, organized by the Exchange Students, provides them with foreign food whenever they want it.

Enrollment week finds the foreign students trying to take some of the fascinating courses whose lectures are given in Chinese, but whose reference work is partly in English. One by one they drop out, upon the plea that "it wasn't quite in line with my requirements at home!" However, sufficient courses in English are offered, and scholars soon find that there is ample work to keep them busy, especially in the sciences. Except for an excellent compulsory course in Chinese Civilization, taught last year by one of the Chinese members of the Lytton Commission, Exchange Students are allowed a free hand in choosing their studies.

When unpacking has been finished, and often before, the Chinese roommate usually offers to initiate his overseas friend into the secrets of that great metropolis - Canton, a teeming city of 1,300,000 inhabitants. The mysteries of her labyrinthine alley-ways, paved with hand-hewn granite slabs, are revealed to him. He marvels at the initiative which carved broad streets out of the maze of house and shop, that swung a steel drawbridge over the tangled boat

life of the river, that thrust a-loft a modern skyscraper where once were only shambles.

The foreigner sees the spacious edifices, blue-tiled and crimson pillared, erected by the provincial government as office buildings and reception halls. Yet not far off he sights a weather-beaten temple entrance, centuries old. To the west, he is shown the nine-storied Flowery Pagoda, the Temple of the Five Hundred Genii, and the memorial of the great house of Chan. On the hill to the north can be seen the imposing monument to Dr. Sun Yat-sen, father of the Chinese Republic. Perhaps the Chinese host will take his roommate to the famous Jade Markets, or Ivory and Silk Streets, where shop after shop displays the same kind of merchandise as practically all of its neighbors in the same block.

At night the foreign student finds the city ablaze with neon lights; more of them than he had ever expected to see in the Orient. They are particularly commanding because of their intricate characters. When the heat of day has gone, people throng the streets, walking idly before the countless shops. One observes closehand the magnificent struggle which is China's. The conflict of new ideas with old values, of the Occident with the Orient. Modern theaters advertise the latest foreign pictures, while men and women, pulling heavy wagons, pass before them in the street. Wealthy Chinese step from foreign motor cars upon a curb where homeless laborers lie asleep on dirty matting. Courteous, but firm, policemen guide across street intersections the crowds to whom such discipline is new. At every turn, one notices New Life Movement posters urging the abandonment of bad habits and the cultivation of new ways of living. The Ex-

change Student sees all about him signs of China's one day becoming a nation of incalculable power.

Back on the campus, as the weeks progress, the foreign students are often asked to participate in various campus activities, sometimes as a group, but more often as individuals in a joint program. All available musical, dramatic, and speaking ability is ferreted out. Of sports, basketball provides the greatest competition when Chinese students and their Exchange friends are pitted against other Chinese students and their Exchange friends. Tennis is likewise high in popularity. December sees the all-university track meet, with entries from the classes of 1949 and 1950 as well as those of '38 and '37. The foreign students participate enthusiastically in this annual event.

Dances and parties given by the Cantonese are eagerly looked forward to by the Exchangers. Besides private entertainments, there are several campus excursions and picnics. Upon one occasion, four flower boats - large rectangular house boats, used for gambling in the pre-New Life Movement days, and now maintained for parties of a more respectable nature - were towed a dozen miles down the Pearl River by a steam launch to the place where Canton is building its new port of Whampoa. Here, the several hundred students thronged a-shore to visit a large Chinese naval academy.

In return for the many parties given in their honor, the Americans give several each year for their Chinese friends. Most successful of last year's was a typical Hallowe'en costume party, with jack-o'-lanterns, black and orange decorations, and such games as bobbing for apples in a tub. It was a novel experience for many

Chinese, because they had never before celebrated Hallowe'en, while some had never been to a costume party at all.

Noteworthy among the events which an Exchanger is liable to remember is his first "date" with a Chinese member of the opposite sex. Hardly without exception the Chinese students are eager to make friends with the foreign students, but seldom will they take the initiative as their shyness prevents such action. Thus it is that "dates" are at first usually negotiated through the American roommate of the person desired. Chinese students when better known are congenial companions and loyal friends. There is no barrier of race, for students at Lingnan are surprisingly like Americans in most phases of social intercourse.

As it is the desire of the foreigners to visit many of the historical and picturesque places of South China, frequent weekend trips are organized. Usually Chinese students join these excursions and prove themselves invaluable by their ability to converse with the country people and to explain the sights and customs to their friends.

Acknowledged as the most successful trip of 1936-37 was a five day journey into the mountain regions of northern Kwangtung Province, with visits to several ~~of the~~ famous Buddhist monasteries. Despite rain each day, this group of thirty-five Chinese and American young men and women travelled several hundred miles by train, bus, river boat, and on foot through an intensely interesting part of rural China. For two days the travelers journeyed down the swift North River on a large flat-bottomed native boat, between fantastic sandstone cliffs that only a year before sheltered bandits. Abandoned



concrete turret houses on the prominences bore mute witness to the days when the right to use this vital water-way was still in dispute.

The months fly all too quickly and June soon appears with the hot, humid weather of early summer, examinations, and final packing. Exchange Students are torn between two forces - reluctance to leave their newly-found friends and the desire to reach home. With the closing of college, they scatter in the four directions of the earth. Siberia, India, Japan, and Hawaii see them homeward bound.

At last, back in their respective states, they settle down to accustomed routines, yet with a more mature outlook upon people and things. In their place, a new group repeats the experiences they have had.

Some day, it is hoped a wider Exchange plan can be effected. The erection of an International House at Lingnan would be the primary step. Within it would live exchange students from all over the world, not alone from the United States and Canada. The number would not be large; only the distribution. Under the same roof, and outnumbering the foreigners two to one would live those Chinese who profess the greatest interest in affairs of other nations. Dining and recreational facilities would be available for the occupants, in the house. It is believed that such a concentration of the most interested Chinese students and the foreign exchange students would favor a more complete exchange of ideas. Discussions on world matters would certainly flourish, fired, as they would be, by the opinions of representatives of perhaps twenty or more nationalities. Even more than it is now, Lingnan would be then a truly International University.

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