

FEATURE

Tsinghua University (Part 4)

By J. F. Lo

Return to Tsinghua Yuan 1946 - 1948

After enduring long years of aggression at the hands of Japan, the Chinese were faced with more daunting challenges after the end of the war in August, 1945. The destruction of the infrastructure was widespread in the occupied areas, and one of the most difficult problems was meeting the transportation needs of the massive number of institutions and people returning to their home bases. Breaking apart Southwest United University (Lianda) into its original components was not much easier than their merger seven years earlier. In order to resolve the logistical issues, it was decided that the university would remain in Kunming for the 1945 - 46 academic year, with classes ending a month early so that students, faculty and staff, books and equipment could be readied for the long northward journey. In May, 1946, non-graduating students were given the choice of affiliating with one of the three universities, Beida (Peking University) and Tsinghua in Beiping (changed to Beijing in 1949), and Nankai in Tianjin, and out of a total of around 2,000 students, half chose to enroll in Tsinghua. On July 31, Lianda officially went out of existence.

During the war years, the Tsinghua campus was occupied by the Japanese army, at one time housing as many as 10,000 soldiers. Later it was used as a military hospital, with the library converted into wards, the gymnasium used for storage and stables for the cavalry, and most other buildings ransacked and left in disrepair. Restoring the campus to serve its original functions required planning, time and large expenditures. With President Mei Yiqi at the helm, Tsinghua was able to utilize the accumulated interest payments from its endowment fund for the purposes of renovation,

replenishment, and new construction. Finally, the first contingent of students began moving back to the campus in early October, 1946. Classes, however, did not begin until November 5, with a total enrollment of 2,300 students and a faculty of 380.

Compared with the Tsinghua of 1937, the postwar university was able to realize its cherished plan of expansion, and became an institution consisting of five colleges namely: Arts and Humanities, Science, Social Science and Law, Engineering, and Agriculture, with a total of 26 departments. The student body was twice the size and the Engineering College was the largest, consisting of about half of the total enrollment. Although 23 departments intended to establish graduate programs, few were adequately staffed and equipped to attract student candidates at the beginning.

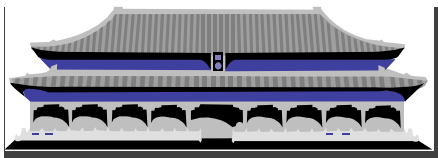
During the years 1947 and 1948, resumption of the civil war and the ensuing economic crisis adversely affected the funding source and the morale of all public universities in China. Tsinghua however, thanks to additional income from its trust fund, was better off than most of its peers. Its faculty remained loyal and supportive of its mission, and many new members were drawn from alumni who had recently returned from advanced studies abroad. When the Academia Sinica elected its first slate of 81 academicians in March 1948, 29 were Tsinghua alumni, and 10 were on the faculty of the university.

Back in Beiping, Tsinghua's academic reputation was combined with the tradition of student activism and a liberal faculty brought back from Lianda. Beginning in early 1947, agitation over political repression and

economic hardships led to several boycotts of classes and examinations. Increasingly, students were supported by faculty members sympathetic to their “anti-hunger” and “anti-civil war” demonstrations. In June, 1947, an underground branch of the Communist Party was established at Tsinghua to coordinate these activities. Clashes between the police and activists increased in intensity in 1948, and when the Communist forces were closing in on the city in November, the Faculty Council failed to reach an agreement to move the university to a safer location. In mid-December, President Mei and a number of faculty and staff evacuated to the south before the city was “liberated” on December 15. From that point on, Tsinghua University was to enter yet another new and unforeseen chapter in its history.

Adjusting to Change 1949 - 1952

On December 18, 1948, the Director of the Political Department of the 13th Division of the People’s Liberation Army proclaimed its control of Tsinghua, promising to maintain law and



order and normal operation of the university. In the absence of the president, the Faculty Council elected the Dean of the College of Arts and Humanities, Feng You-lan to be the chairman of the Committee on University Affairs, and when the second semester belatedly began on March 3, 1949, the faculty numbered around 150 and student enrollment was down to 1,800. Without its normal funding sources, the administration was confronted with difficulties in paying salaries, hiring new faculty, and subsidizing needy students. Organizational changes and adjustments had to be made in order to fall in line with the new directives issued by the Cultural Department of the Military Administration. After the establishment of the People’s Republic with its capital in Beijing on October 1, 1949, the university again came under the jurisdiction of

the Ministry of Education, and Professor Ye Qi-sun, Dean of the College of Science, took over the chairmanship of the Committee on University Affairs while awaiting the appointment of a president.

In June, 1950, Mao Zedong called for a program of “self-education” and “self-reform” for intellectuals engaged in cultural and educational work. In response, many prominent faculty members at Tsinghua began studying Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, in the hope of transitioning from their liberal pro-Western orientation. This campaign, however, was not officially launched until the spring of 1951, after the “Land Reform”, “Suppression of Counter-revolutionaries” and “Resist America and Aid Korea” campaigns had been completed.

From the spring of 1951 until the fall of 1952, Beida and Tsinghua were in the forefront of a campaign directed at the faculty of all institutions of higher learning. The goal was to purge from the educators the poisons of traditional Chinese culture and western capitalist ideology, and to replace them with lessons on socialist reconstruction from the Soviet Union. It became an imperative that all intellectuals adopt the standpoint of the proletariat, distinguish between enemies and friends, serve the people, reject individualism, uphold the primacy of the people’s interests, and support the government based on the principle of the “democratic dictatorship of the people”.

These objectives were to be achieved through mutual and self-criticism at each institution under the general direction of the Minister of Education. At the end of 1951, semester end examinations were postponed in order to carry out this campaign in conjunction with the “Three Anti” campaign against corruption, waste and obstructionist bureaucracy within the Communist Party. The humiliation heaped upon members of the Tsinghua faculty was painfully evident when the chairman of the Committee on University Affairs, the physicist Ye Qi-sun, had to listen to accusations by friends and colleagues and engage in selfcriticism three

times within ten days. Other prominent academics in the arts, humanities, and social sciences also suffered a similar fate, and nationally, an estimated 90% of university faculty and staff were directly or indirectly involved in this process. By the summer of 1952, an even greater challenge was to confront Tsinghua and all other major universities and colleges in the country.

The Great Academic Reorganization of 1952

Signs of the reorganization of China's higher educational system were already evident in late 1949, when Tsinghua lost its College of Agriculture which was combined with others to form the new Beijing Agricultural University. Subsequently, clear guidelines were established 1) to eliminate those institutions which were not suited to the training of cadres needed in national reconstruction, 2) to consolidate existing departments and colleges or to create new ones in order to improve training, 3) to centralize under-utilized or ineffective institutions and facilities, and 4) to close down institutions of inferior quality or combine them with others. Implementation of this policy was in full swing in the summer of 1952, and Tsinghua lost three more colleges — Arts and Humanities, Law and Social Science, and Science — to Beijing University. From the remaining College of Engineering, several departments were lifted out to serve as the cores for the new Beijing Institutes of Aviation, Iron and Steel, Mining, and Geology. On the other hand, Tsinghua was the beneficiary of the engineering schools of Beida and the disbanded Yenching University. Reorganized into eight new departments and 22 sub-specializations, Tsinghua was thus transformed from a Western-style integrated university to a Soviet-style multi-disciplinary technical mega-institute designed to produce engineers to work for the nation's reconstruction.

The reorganization of 1952 resulted in abolishing all private and foreign-supported universities and colleges in China, diluting the concentration of institutions of higher learning in large cities and coastal regions, and placing

overwhelming emphasis on technology in education. The initial impact of the drastic changes on Tsinghua was evidently very disruptive. The Soviet model not only severed the vital relationship between the sciences and engineering on campus, but also eliminated competition in research among different institutions. When the academic year began in October, 1952, Tsinghua faculty scrambled to translate textbooks from Russian to Chinese for 31 out of 104 classes. Furthermore, the Soviet curriculum divided into five years had to be squeezed into the four-year system at Tsinghua. Later the university changed all of its degree programs to five years, and by 1954, it had over 4,000 students in seven departments.

The demise of old Tsinghua's tradition of liberal education was probably resented by most of its senior faculty. The natural sciences were no longer taught at Tsinghua, while professors in the arts, humanities and social sciences transferred elsewhere increasingly faced the test of political correctness. In the mid-1950s, however, Tsinghua's leadership began to question the ability of China's "Cradle of Engineers" to produce truly competent engineers as well as others capable of carrying out high-level teaching and research. In response to these needs, measures were taken to broaden the curriculum by adding new departments such as Engineering Mechanics, Engineering Physics, Engineering Chemistry, and Electronics.

President Jiang Nan-xiang 1952 - 1966

Jiang Nan-xiang, appointed president of Tsinghua in late 1952 and serving until he was victimized by the Cultural Revolution in 1966, was an alumnus (1936) who had joined the Communist Party while a student. As a trusted party member and activist, he was concurrently the Party Secretary of the university, and personally taught upper level classes on Marxist philosophy. During his administration, he instituted a system of appointing a cadre of third year students with correct political beliefs as well as high

academic achievement to serve as student counselors. Among the faculty, he urged junior members to join the party in order to exert influence on their senior colleagues.

On the academic front, Jiang instituted graduate programs and “Committees on Teaching and Research” in each department, with the goal of promoting cooperation and enhancing academic quality. University policies were decided by the Committee on University Affairs made up of the president, the vice-president and department heads, a practice which on its surface was reminiscent of the tradition of old Tsinghua. When he realized that blindly following the Soviet model often led to negative results at the university, modifications were made contrary to the views of Soviet advisors.

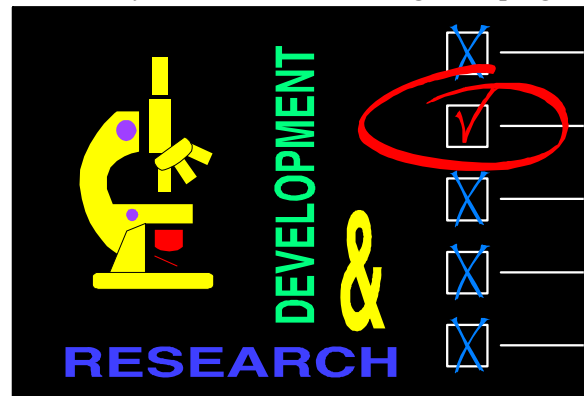
Holding the second longest tenure as the president of Tsinghua, Jiang Nan-xiang is credited with instituting new disciplines and departments in the latter half of the 1950s, which resulted in the emergence of new generations of teachers and researchers vital to China’s industrial development. In 1956, the Department of Nuclear Engineering was established in spite of objections from the Soviet Union. When the two countries became estranged in 1959 and the Soviets withdrew all support from China’s nuclear program, China set up its own Nuclear Weapons Research Institute. Headed and staffed by many Tsinghua alumni, faculty and graduates, it was responsible for the testing of an atomic bomb in 1964 and the subsequent development of other weapons and delivery systems.

It has also been said that Jiang’s leadership style and long-term vision contributed to the university’s energy and esprit, and to the physical expansion of its campus. Annual graduating classes increased in size from 665 in 1953 to over 2,000 in 1965. Of the academicians of the Chinese Academy of Science elected between 1955 and 1995, 34.4% were Tsinghua and Lianda alumni, who also accounted for 20.5% among members of the Academy of Engineering elected in 1994 and 1995. On the

political scene, an increasing number of technocrats have been emerging from among Tsinghua graduates, including the former premier Zhu Rong-ji (class of 1951) and the current president Hu Jin-tao (class of 1965).

Political Campaigns and Tsinghua 1956 - 1966

In April, 1956, Mao Zedong launched his call to “Let a hundred flowers bloom; let a hundred schools of thought contend”, which was followed by two waves of “anti-rightist” purges



aimed at weeding out those intellectuals who still had not forsaken their bourgeois liberal thoughts. Nation-wide, university faculty, staff, and students were first urged to air their criticisms of the new system, only to face relentless persecution as “rightists” from 1957 to 1959. Being the nation’s premier institute of technology, Tsinghua was nonetheless fully embroiled in this ideological struggle. From May to October, 1957, an official attack against the rightists at Tsinghua was ordered by President Jiang, involving criticism sessions in each department and campus-wide. Qian Weichang&, the prominent physicist, dean and vice president, and Meng Zhaoying, chairman of the Department of Electronics, both voiced their dissatisfaction with the party’s disregard for academic freedom and were harshly treated as a result. An allegoric novel written by a professor of Hydraulic Engineering was accused of being a veiled attack on the party and roundly criticized on campus.

A total of 571 persons were branded as rightists, of whom 222 were faculty and staff, and

349 were students. Punishment was meted out to them in early 1958, but soon another campaign followed. This time students expended much time and energy engaging in vigorous dialectical debate and targeting the bourgeois thoughts of their teachers by pasting “big character posters” all over campus. During these and subsequent campaigns until the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution, Tsinghua was fortunate to have suffered fewer disruptions and less damage to teacher-student relations than its neighbor Beida. There, its president was forced to resign in 1960, and among 76 faculty members in seven departments (literature, history, economics, law, foreign languages, physics and chemistry), 33, or

43.4%, were branded as rightists, and many of whom were on Tsinghua’s faculty prior to the reorganization. Before final examinations were held in the spring of 1966, the flames of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was lit at Peking University in May and soon spread to the Tsinghua campus. What ensued during the next ten years is another unprecedented chapter in the history of Tsinghua University.

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