

Tsinghua University (Part 1)

By J. F. Lo

An Introduction

When President George W. Bush visited China in February; 2002, the place where he chose to make a major speech was to an audience of students at Tsinghua University in Beijing. After an introduction by the then PRC Vice President Hu Jintao, a graduate of the institution. Bush began by saying that "Tsinghua University was founded, with the support of America, to further the ties between our two nations". Although this statement is factually accurate, the circumstances that led to the university's founding were far from ordinary. Unlike other colleges and universities in China established by foreign religious and philanthropic organization, the birth of Tsinghua University was directly linked to the Boxer Uprising and the ensuing mini-war between China and eight foreign nations in 1900. And the United States was among the nations that sent troops to fight against the anti-foreign insurgents.

War and Peace --1900 -1901

Having suffered a series of humiliating defeats by the Great Powers during the 19th century, China under the Manchus was unsuccessful in modernizing itself to meet the increasing challenges from abroad. Beginning in the late 1890s, the xenophobic and quasi-religious bands of fighters known as 'Boxers' launched their terror campaigns against foreign missionaries and residents as well as Chinese Christians in North and Northeastern China. Gaining support from the Empress Dowager and reactionary members of the Court in Peking, the Boxers entered the capital in May, 1900 and laid siege to the Legation Quarter where the foreign diplomats worked and lived. On June 21, the Empress Dowager, against the best judgments of the Emperor and many advisers, declared war on the foreign powers which had already prepared to

protect their diplomats and defend their interests. Eight nations joined forces in Tianjin and soon fought their way into Peking. The contingent consisted of 18,000 troops of which the United States' contribution was 2,100 marines.

The allied forces entered the capital on August 14, defeating the Boxers and the local military, and occupying the city until protracted negotiations ended with The Boxer Protocol in September, 1901. The terms of this document, among other demands, set the indemnity at 450 million taels of silver, to be paid by China over 39 years at 4 % annual interest and in foreign currencies. The share of the United States was 32,939,055 taels, about 7.4%, equivalent to \$24,440,000.

At the time. Secretary of State John Hay, who advocated the Open Door Policy toward China in 1899. Was well aware that this amount exceeded the damages suffered by the United States estimated at \$12,785,000. He. his successor Elihu Root, and President William McKinley all shared the intention of eventually returning the over-assessment to China However, it was the Chinese minister in Washington, DC, Liang Cheng who began lobbying members of the Administration and Congress in 1905 for the return to take place. Liang, who attended Philip's Academy and Amherst College in the 1870s as a member of 4th group of Yung Wing's students to study in the United States, had personally benefited from the experience. As this program was abruptly discontinued in 1881, Liang was convinced that the indemnity repayment was a golden opportunity to restart a study abroad project and create a larger pool of talents for China. In spite of many obstacles both at home and in the U.S., Liang's efforts finally resulted in a detailed agreement which cleared Congress in

May, 1908, followed by an executive order signed by President Theodore Roosevelt on December 28, 1908.

Birth of the Tsing Hua Plan

Roosevelt was convinced that using the funds for education would promote peaceful development in China., which would also be in the political and commercial interests of the United States. The agreement called for a total of 1,800 students to be sent to study in the U.S., with details to be worked out by the Chinese Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Education. In July, 1909, the Preparatory' Academy for Study in America, Liu-Mei Yi-Ye Guan, was set up using the imperial garden "Tsing Hua Yuan" as its campus site. When the first installment of funds arrived in 1909, examinations were held that summer and in the following year, when 47 and 71 candidates qualified. The two groups of students were dispatched abroad soon after completing short orientation sessions. In December, 1910, the name of the academy was changed to Tsing Hua Imperial College and formal classes began in March, 1911. The new all-male college consisted of a junior division and a senior division, each with four grades. Together, they were equivalent to six years of the junior and senior high schools and two years of the junior college in the United States. At the end of the eighth year, qualified students would be ready to transfer to the sophomore or junior year in American colleges and universities, with all expenses paid by the Tsing Hua scholarship fund. In the first year, a total of 430 students were admitted to the college after passing rigorous examinations, and a faculty of 20 Chinese and 17 Americans were assembled to teach them. Thus began a unique experiment in Chinese education which continued to for the next two decades.

After the Republican Revolution ended the Qing Dynasty in October, 1911, the new school was renamed Tsing Hua College and classes resumed in May, 1912. The campus was located in a scenic setting outside the walled city, and annual enrollment averaged around 600. At first, the college was administered by a president

appointed by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and overseen by a Board of Directors consisting of members drawn from the Ministry and the American Legation. In 1921, a Board of Trustees was established to set policy regarding the accrued trust fund and to preside over the board of directors. Initially, the three trustees were the Chinese Minister and Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the American minister (i.e., head of the Legation). Under this arrangement the power of Tsing Hua's president was circumscribed, but the institution continued to expand physically and organizationally. Under the leadership of successive presidents, the goal of academic excellence was consistently upheld, and Tsing Hua became the envy of the nation. While Chinese education suffered under prolonged warlordism and civil unrest after the establishment of the Republic, Tsing Hua's stable financing enabled it to move ahead in a peaceful campus environment. In 1922, the curriculum was further revised and based on the latest American model, and the new credit system ensured that students received a balanced foundation in the liberal arts and sciences without feeling the pressure for specialization. The student body consisted of youths from all over the country, ranging in age from 12 to over 20. Instruction in most subjects except Chinese was carried out in English, class size was consistently small, and faculty-student relations were informal and cordial. Students were encouraged to exercise initiative in classroom projects and discussions, and to organize and participate in western style extracurricular activities.

Notable Presidents of the College

All of Tsing Hua's presidents were Chinese who had studied in the United States and who were familiar with its educational system. Two presidents who served the longest during the first two decades were Zhou Yi-chun (1913-1918) and Cao Yun-xiang (1922- 1928). The former, who had earned degrees from Yale and the University- of Wisconsin, believed that progress in China should begin with education and economic development, which would then

lead to social stability and the eradication of poverty. Under his tenure, the basic infrastructure of the campus was established. Changes in the curriculum placed greater emphasis on applied and laboratory sciences in order to meet China's development needs. Zhou's vision for Tsing Hua was an institution based on the democratic principles of civic responsibility and academic freedom. In addition, he advocated a long-term plan for Tsing Hua to open its scholarship funds to all worthy students in China, gradually change its primary language of instruction to Chinese, and finally become a four-year institution and join the ranks of other universities in the country.

President Cao Yun-xiang had also been a student at Yale, and later studied at Harvard and the London School of Economics. He took office after the May Fourth Movement of 1919 had unleashed a wave of student activism and unrest throughout the nation. Tsing Hua came under increasing criticism for its pro-American orientation and its monopoly on the scholarship fund. With his business acumen and personal connections with the board members, Cao was able to push through several major changes in the structure and operation of the college. Mindful of the depletion of the Tsing Hua fund by 1940, his 18-year development scheme called for professional fund investment and fiscal planning, termination of the college's junior division and the phasing out of the senior division by 1927.

In 1925, he inaugurated a full-fledged university program which was detached from the scholarship system. A new Research Institute of Chinese Culture was created to counter-balance the western orientation of the university. It was also decided that beginning in 1929, the scholarship program would operate through competitive examination open to all students in the country. As former Tsing Hua graduates sent to study in the U.S. began to return to China in the 1920s, President Cao was able to attract many outstanding young scholars, thereby boosting the academic level, and increasing the proportion of the Chinese faculty. In 1926, he inaugurated two official bodies consisting of faculty members, a

Policy-Making Council and a Faculty Council. The Policy-Making Council, besides giving faculty greater control in major decisions affecting the institution, also had the authority to take on the duties of the president on an interim basis. This was clearly a bold step in faculty governance in China's higher education.

Tsing Hua Students in the U.S.

Because the Tsing Hua graduates were academically well prepared, and with all expenses fully funded, few encountered difficulties in their new American environment, even at the most prestigious institutions. According to the regulations established in the early days of the study abroad program, 80% of the candidates were to major in science, engineering, agriculture and medicine, while 20% were to major in the social sciences and humanities. However, since the curriculum at Tsing Hua was weighted towards the liberal arts and pure sciences, and once abroad, students were free to declare their own majors, the result turned out to be quite different. Of the 1,290 students who studied in America between 1909 and 1929, 48.4% majored in the social sciences and humanities, with economics in the lead; while 51% majored in engineering, science, medicine and agriculture, with more than half in engineering. Students were spread out over 128 major colleges and universities on both coasts and in the middle west, with 179 at Columbia, 113 at Harvard, 112 at MIT, 95 at Wisconsin, 92 at Chicago, 71 at Cornell, 62 at Michigan and 58 at Stanford. According to a survey of 969 respondents, 25% received bachelor's degrees, 45% received master's degrees and 19% completed their Ph.Ds. Many were recipients of honors and awards for academic excellence.

Tsing Hua's Early Decades (1909-1928)

For a poor country like China, an education through the Tsing Hua system was a costly one. However, most students were keenly aware that the country had paid a high price for their privilege, and were therefore eager to return and contribute what they had learned. By 1926, 300 Tsing Hua alumni were already working in

the field of education. Returnees were eagerly sought by government agencies and the private sector, and most were placed in responsible positions in commerce, technology, and especially in teaching and research. In sum, the students who went through the Tsing Hua system before 1928 and pursued their higher education in the United States yielded a large number of world-class scholars, intellectuals and professionals.

Their contributions were critical to China's cultural, scientific and technological development in the 20th century and this is attested by the first election held by the Academia Sinica in 1948. Of the 81 Academicians, 29 were Tsing Hua alumni, 8 of whom were in the Mathematics and Science Division, 9 in the Biological Sciences, and 12 in the Humanities. Four other alumni were added after the second and third elections held in Taiwan. Of these 33, five subsequently moved to Taiwan after 1949, and five others came to the U.S. while the rest remained in Mainland China.

Best known among the luminary intellectuals of this early period was Hu Shih (1891 -1962), a 1910 scholarship student. Among other things, he was a catalyst in the Chinese Literary Revolution, and served as Ambassador to the United States (1938 - 1942), President of Peking University and President of Academia

Sinica in Taiwan. In his lifetime, he received over 30 honorary doctor's degrees, mostly from American universities.

1928 was a watershed when the fledgling university became National Tsing Hua University under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education. It was no longer an institution which prepared its students just for study in the United States, and it was no longer governed by the Board of Directors made up of members from the American Legation and the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. After 1928, a new Tsing Hua was able to expand and grow in many directions, leading to a decade-long "golden age" in the university's history.

* The two characters meaning "purity" and "beauty" were initially Romanized as "Tsing Hua". Although the Wade-Giles and the Pinyin systems would render them as "Ch'ing Hua" and "Qing Hua", the old convention has been preserved by the two sister universities in China and Taiwan, and rendered as "Tsinghua University" and "Tsing Hua University" respectively. In this article, both styles are chosen according to the time period and place where the name is used.

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