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Managing Student Protest in Republican China: Yenching and St. John's Compared¹

Abstract Although similar in many respects, the two major Christian universities in Republican China adopted markedly different approaches to the common challenge of student nationalism. Case studies of the May Thirtieth Movement at St. John's University and the December Ninth Movement at Yenching University illustrate the consequences of these sharply contrasting experiences. Whereas St. John's was crippled by May Thirtieth, Yenching escaped December Ninth relatively unscathed. The explanation for the contrast, this paper suggests, lies not in any fundamental disagreement in the mission of the two universities or the philosophies of their famous and forceful presidents. It must be sought instead in the divergent urban environments in which the student protests originated and in which the universities were located: treaty-port Shanghai and post-imperial Peking.

Keywords

Introduction

Republican China's two leading Christian universities—St. John's in Shanghai and Yenching in Peking (Beijing/Beiping)—were similar in many ways. Both institutions had been founded by American Protestant missionaries with the aim of providing a religiously informed education equal in quality to that of the best liberal arts colleges in the United States. Both universities grappled thoughtfully and creatively with the tradeoffs between a Chinese and a Western academic curriculum. Both were directed by forceful and forward-looking presidents—Francis Lister Hawks Pott and John Leighton Stuart—who were ordained ministers as well as scholars and statesmen. Both institutions graduated some of China's best known intellectuals, officials, and businessmen. Both faced increasing pressure from a modernizing Chinese state anxious to exercise government control over the educational arena. And both were beset by a series of serious student protests inspired by a growing tide of nationalism that challenged the very existence of such foreign institutions on Chinese soil.

In their response to student nationalism, however, St. John's and Yenching differed markedly. At a superficial level, the contrasting approaches could be attributed to particular decisions on the part of the strong-willed and long-serving presidents of the two universities. (See Fig. 1 and Fig. 2) In Republican China, college presidents occupied highly respected and influential positions.² Francis Hawks Pott's insistent efforts to prevent St. John's from becoming embroiled

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² The upgrading of many professional schools into new colleges and universities in the early 1920s generated a rash of student revolts animated by the students' belief that "the college president should be a bigger and more

in political movements offered a sharp contrast to John Leighton Stuart's more conciliatory stance at Yenching.



Fig. 1 Francis Lister Hawks Pott (President of St. John's University, 1888–1940)

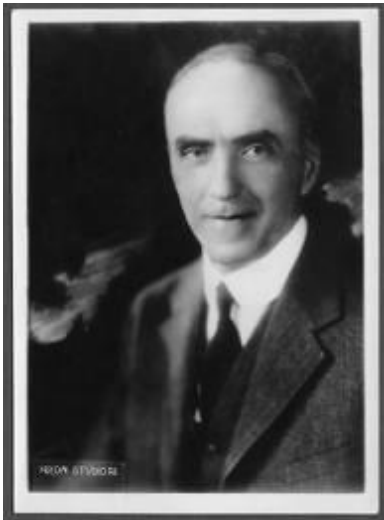


Fig. 2 John Leighton Stuart (President of Yenching University, 1919–46)

Such differences in tactical response did not issue from any fundamental pedagogical or theological disagreement between the two men. The missionary-cum-presidents of St. John's and Yenching in fact shared strikingly similar views about the purpose of their institutions and its firm grounding in the Christian faith. As Pott stressed in a 1924 article on the role of Christian colleges in China, "of paramount importance is that our institutions should be positively Christian.... [W]e will defeat our own object and stultify our whole *raison de'être* if we do not make it perfectly clear to our students that we put before them as the highest ideal in life, that of

famous man than their old school principal." Sanford C. C. Chen, "General Development of Education in China," 260.

becoming loyal disciples of Jesus Christ, and members of His Church.”³ Similarly, in an article the following year on the mission of his own university, Stuart emphasized that “the Christian college in China... exists for the purpose of winning its students to Christ and of fitting them for His service, as well as of doing its part in all other ways toward the strengthening of the Christian community and witnessing to the meaning and value of Christian faith.”⁴

Divergence in the management of student protest at the two universities thus cannot be attributed to contradictory educational objectives on the part of their powerful but likeminded presidents. At a deeper level, the differences in approach reflected the influence of the distinctive Chinese micro-environments in which the two men lived and worked. Republican Shanghai and Peking presented contrasting opportunities and obstacles for realizing a shared set of aspirations.

St. John’s, despite being located one mile outside the formal boundaries of the International Settlement, was nevertheless part and parcel of treaty-port Shanghai. And in both architecture and attitude, Shanghai’s International Settlement was unmistakably Anglo.⁵ A British diplomat observed, “A stranger arriving at Shanghai by the P. & O. would scarcely realize he was not in British territory. The Shanghai Foreign Settlement was mainly ‘made in England’ and a creation of which there was every reason to be proud.”⁶ Among the proud boosters and beneficiaries of the “model settlement,” as Shanghailanders fondly referred to the International Settlement, were the American faculty and administration of St. John’s University. Established and supported by the Protestant Episcopal Church (the American branch of the Anglican Communion), St. John’s enjoyed a close relationship with the Anglo-American authorities who controlled the Shanghai Municipal Council, the governing body of the International Settlement.⁷

Yenching University operated in a very different urban setting. The city of Peking was not a treaty port (nor was it the national capital from 1927 to 1949), and local political authorities did not enjoy the same prominence or exercise the same degree of power as was true in Shanghai. Moreover, whereas Shanghai had recently developed into China’s most dynamic commercial and industrial metropolis, Peking was better known as a center of education than of entrepreneurship. In earlier days, the city had been home to the Hanlin Academy and the Imperial College; in the Republican period, Peking boasted the country’s most prestigious universities, libraries, and research institutes. The fact that many of Peking’s universities, including most notably Yenching, were located on the premises of what had once served as the grounds of imperial palaces and gardens, underscored the city’s recent transition from a political and military hub into the national center of culture and education.⁸ A constellation of major academic institutions (Yenching University, National Peking University, Tsinghua University, Peking Normal University, Peking Union Medical College, Peking Institute of Law and Politics, Peking Industrial Academy, Peking Women’s University, University of China, University of the

³ F. L. Hawks Pott, “The Contribution of Christian Colleges to the Life of China,” 129, 131.

⁴ J. L. Stuart, “The Religious Policy at Yenching University,” 159.

⁵ Of course many of the ordinary inhabitants of Republican Shanghai lived well outside the confines of the International Settlement, culturally as well as administratively. See Hanchao Lu, *Beyond the Neon Lights: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century*.

⁶ Quoted in Nicholas R. Clifford, *Shanghai, 1925: Urban Nationalism and the Defense of Foreign Privilege*, 5.

⁷ Shanghai served as the headquarters for many mission groups, but the largest among them was the American Church Mission of the Protestant Episcopal Church, whose diocesan office was located in the Jessfield district near St. John’s University. The head of the Episcopal mission, the Right Reverend F. R. Graves, served also as the Anglican bishop of Shanghai. Nicholas R. Clifford, *Spoilt Children of Empire: Westerners in Shanghai and the Chinese Revolution of the 1920s*, 53.

⁸ Yang Dongping, *Chengshi jifeng: Beijing he Shanghai de wenhua jingshen*, 139–40.

Republic, North China University, and Furen University among others—not to mention Nankai University and Beiyang University in the nearby city of Tianjin) contributed to a vibrant and volatile educational atmosphere in which the political concerns of intellectuals loomed large: “Not many people enjoyed a higher status than intellectuals in Beijing; there they occupied the upper echelon of the social hierarchy... they believed their intellectual and academic work was significant to the nation.”⁹

The difference with Shanghai, a city of traders more than of thinkers, was considerable. Although Shanghai also hosted an impressive number of colleges and universities, the most influential among them (St. John’s, Aurora, Shanghai Baptist College, Suzhou University Law School) were Christian schools founded by foreign missionaries.¹⁰ In contrast to Peking’s reputation as the repository of “traditional” Chinese pedagogy, Shanghai was known as the center of a new Westernized education designed to satisfy the economic and cultural demands of the city’s rising bourgeoisie.¹¹

The contrasting educational atmosphere of the two cities was already visible in the late imperial period. As historian Xiong Yuezhi observes, the nineteenth-century institutions established for the translation and transmission of Western learning—the Guangfangyan guan in Shanghai and the Tongwen guan in Peking—developed very differently in response to varying local demands:

Because at that time many young people in Shanghai were eager for an opportunity to learn English, Shanghai’s Guangfangyan guan could recruit the most outstanding students. By contrast, Beijing’s educational atmosphere was much less open. In the 1870s and 1880s, Beijing intellectuals still considered any contact with foreigners to be humiliating. The Tongwen guan could not attract the top students and its students converted a school for the study of [Western] science into a hall for [Confucian] examinations.¹²

Distinctions in the academic climate of the two cities were part of a broader cultural divergence that gained expression in the realm of art and literature through the famed competition between the so-called “Jingpai” (Peking style) and “Haipai” (Shanghai style).¹³ The inter-city rivalry in culture and education was also evident in the contrasting lifestyles of the urban elite:

While Beijing stood for the refined and distilled high culture of the gentry-official-literati, Shanghai was the emporium of the trendy, the gaudy, the decorative, the conspicuous, and the city of the newly rising bourgeoisie. Unlike the rich merchants of late imperial China... the Shanghai bourgeoisie did not seek to emulate the style of life of the landed literati, nor did it try to gain admission into the state bureaucracy. The upper-middle classes of the city flaunted their commercial wealth as well as Westernized cosmopolitanism. It was in this sense that Shanghai had truly become a cultural rival to Beijing.¹⁴

⁹ Madeleine Yue Dong, *Republican Beijing: The City and Its Histories*, 277.

¹⁰ Yang Dongping, *Chengshi jifeng*, 144.

¹¹ Wen-Hsin Yeh, *Shanghai Splendor: Economic Sentiments and the Making of Modern China, 1843–1949*.

¹² Xiong Yuezhi, *Xixue dongjian yu wanQing shehui*, 275.

¹³ E. Perry Link, Jr., *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: Popular Fiction in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Cities*.

¹⁴ Wen-hsin Yeh, *The Alienated Academy: Culture and Politics in Republican China, 1919–1937*, 56.

The rival metropolises, which claimed the two biggest concentrations of universities in the country, gave rise to the two largest and most influential student movements in Republican China.¹⁵ Both were fueled above all by nationalist sentiments. But in Shanghai resentment against foreign incursions was complicated by cosmopolitan inclinations.¹⁶ Moreover, anti-imperialist protesters in Shanghai were subject to the surveillance and suppression of the foreign concessions. In the lightly governed academic hothouse of Republican Peking, by contrast, university administrators could not turn to sympathetic treaty-port officials for aid in dealing with nationalist explosions on the part of agitated students and faculty. For these reasons, we might have expected St. John's to withstand the challenge of patriotic protest more effortlessly and effectively than its northern counterpart. But just the opposite turned out to be the case.

The divergence in campus politics was symptomatic of other political differences between the two universities. To be sure, both St. John's and Yenching enjoyed close connections with key members of the central government. Minister of Industry (and later Premier) H. H. Kung served for years as chairman of the Yenching Board of Trustees, while his brother-in-law, Minister of Finance and Foreign Affairs T.V. Soong, was an alumnus of St. John's who passed along confidential intelligence to President Pott about impending Ministry of Education changes and provided assistance to his alma mater in acquiring a new library.¹⁷ Yet despite these similar advantages, the two universities' relationship with the Nationalist regime diverged along lines that paralleled their variant approaches to student nationalism. At President Stuart's urging, Yenching was one of the first Christian colleges to seek and receive Chinese government registration (which required downplaying its Christian mission and accepting government-mandated changes in its governance structure, admissions policies, and teaching curriculum).¹⁸ It would take St. John's another twenty years to attain Chinese accreditation.¹⁹ Yenching's comparatively favorable treatment from the Nationalist government evoked some resentment toward Stuart on the part of those associated with St. John's, whose president was subject to more restrictive ecclesiastical procedures than his northern counterpart.²⁰

Differences in the management of student protest at St. John's and Yenching became apparent during two of the most celebrated nationalist uprisings of the Republican period: Shanghai's May Thirtieth Movement of 1925 and Peking's December Ninth Movement of 1935. Following

¹⁵ Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, *Student Protests in Twentieth-Century China: The View from Shanghai*, 6–7.

¹⁶ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China*, chapter nine.

¹⁷ Number Two History Archives (Nanjing), File no. 5-2255; Shanghai Municipal Archives, File nos. Q243-1-22; #U104-0-74.

¹⁸ Number Two History Archives, File no. 5-2255.

¹⁹ Not until 1947 was St. John's accorded registration by the Ministry of Education. Shanghai Municipal Archives, File no. Q6-15-442.

²⁰ The Anglican bishop of Peking wrote scathingly of Leighton Stuart in a March 21, 1927 letter to Francis Hawks Pott, "I have had a somewhat thorny correspondence with Stuart about Yenching's having registered without the regularization of formal approval from nominally responsible bodies: really because Stuart had made up his own mind (or what he calls his mind)." Shanghai Municipal Archives, File no. Q243-1-19. Although Pott himself initially opposed registration for St. John's under the conditions set forth by the KMT regime on grounds that it would mean abandoning the Christian character of the university, by 1930 he had reached the conclusion that the best course for St. John's was to apply for official registration in order to avoid the risk of closure. Shanghai Municipal Archives, File nos. Q243-1-19; Q243-1-21; Q243-1-22. However, the intransigence of the Right Rev. Graves, the Anglican bishop of Shanghai, stymied Pott's own inclination to bow to nationalist currents. Shanghai Municipal Archives, File nos. Q243-1-23; Q243-1-24; Q243-1-25; Q243-1-28; Q243-1-29.

in the footsteps of their famous forerunner, the May Fourth Movement of 1919, these momentous events reflected a growing sense of national identity on the part of Chinese youth. Replete with resentment against foreign incursions on Chinese soil, the movements posed obvious concerns for Christian colleges led by American missionaries.

The May Thirtieth Movement

The May Thirtieth Movement began as a protest against the killing of a Chinese worker by a Japanese security guard on May 15, 1925 during a strike at a Japanese-owned cotton mill in an industrial district of Shanghai. When more than 2,000 students from St. John's and other Shanghai schools marched down Nanking Road through the heart of the International Settlement on May 30th in solidarity with striking workers, British police (and their Sikh patrols) opened fire. At least four students were killed on the spot; another five died soon after. In the days that followed, further clashes with the International Settlement police left two dozen Chinese dead and another three dozen seriously wounded.²¹

The heartrending spectacle of patriotic Chinese students gunned down by foreign police ignited a nationwide outpouring of sympathy for the victims and outrage toward the imperialist presence. Huge demonstrations erupted across urban China, fueling an emergent sense of civic consciousness. As David Strand writes of Peking, "During mass events like the May Thirtieth Movement the logic of basic level city life was suddenly projected onto the larger screen of citywide assemblies and processions."²² While few urban universities were unaffected by the protest, the Christian colleges found themselves in a particularly difficult position when their students joined nationalistic demonstrations that railed against foreign privilege and cultural imperialism.²³

At St. John's, on the evening of May 30th a former student who had witnessed the bloody Nanking Road incident earlier that day returned to campus to relate his experience to an impromptu gathering of students and faculty. When President Pott caught wind of the event, his first concern was to shield his university from the political storm brewing just beyond its gates. He rushed to the scene of the assembly to insist that the speaker leave campus at once on grounds that his talk had not been properly authorized. As Pott put it bluntly, "You have no right to speak here!" The speaker quickly departed (sharing his eyewitness story instead with students at St. Mary's Hall, the Episcopal school for girls located just across the railroad tracks). Agitated by the President's stern stance, however, St. John's students responded by organizing a students' association. The new association met the next day to agree upon a political platform demanding that the Peking government enter into hardline negotiations with Britain. The students also pledged to send propagandists into the surrounding industrial neighborhoods to spread the message of anti-imperialism among the factory workers and their families.²⁴

²¹ F. L. Hawks Pott, *A Short History of Shanghai*, 287.

²² David Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing: City People and Politics in the 1920s*, 198.

²³ The Christian colleges of Hangchow University (in Hangzhou), Ginling College (in Nanjing), West China Union University (in Chengdu) and Huachung University (in Wuhan) were all faced with major student protests in conjunction with May Thirtieth. See Clarence Burton Day, *Hangchow University: A Brief History*, 57; Lawrence Thurston and Ruth M. Chester, *Ginling College*, 50; Lewis W. Walmsley, *West China Union University*, 48; John L. Coe, *Huachung University*, 43–44.

²⁴ *Shen bao*, June 1, 1925: 13; June 9, 1925: 10.

A day later, on June 1, the newly formed St. John's students' association convened a second meeting at which the decision was made to undertake an all-student strike of indefinite duration. For the period of the strike, students would not be permitted to leave campus except to conduct political action. To enforce the injunction, a team of boy scouts was assigned to guard the front gate. Each morning at 11 AM students were to assemble to salute the national flag (to be flown at half-mast in honor of the victims of the Nanking Road massacre) and sing the national anthem. In a letter to the St. John's faculty, the students' association explained that the planned boycott of classes was directed against the killings by the police of the International Settlement and was not aimed at the American members of the faculty, toward whom they harbored no ill will.²⁵

Relations between the students and their American teachers quickly deteriorated, however. The conflict revolved around competing understandings of Shanghai's political sovereignty and its implications for the university community. At a hastily convened faculty meeting that evening, several American professors expressed the opinion that because the campus was under the de facto jurisdiction of the Anglo-American Shanghai Municipal Council, the students had no business staging a protest directed against the governing authorities. A demonstration against the International Settlement police, they argued, would call into question the University's own privileged status. As one of them put it, "St. John's is administered under the protection of the International Settlement. To allow students to remain on campus and engage in anti-British propaganda would be treasonous."²⁶ President Pott indicated his personal opposition to the proposed boycott of classes and his view that student strikers should be expelled from campus. Majority opinion did not support the president's position, however. A show of hands by the faculty at the meeting—most of whom were Chinese—revealed that thirty-one of the fifty in attendance believed that the students should be permitted both to stage a strike and to remain on campus throughout the duration of the class boycott.²⁷

The active involvement of the Chinese faculty was a key factor in the subsequent radicalization of the May Thirtieth Movement at St. John's (in stark contrast to the May Fourth Movement six years earlier, whose impact on the university community had been slight). Since 1917, when the study of Chinese Literature and Philosophy was made optional for college students at St. John's, the Chinese faculty had been relegated to second-class citizenship: "The Chinese teachers either did not appear at all at the faculty meetings, or if present, took no part in the discussions which were conducted almost entirely in English."²⁸ The segmentation of the St. John's faculty reflected the Westernized culture of treaty-port Shanghai, where economic demands had put a premium on the teaching of foreign languages, particularly English. The prioritization of English drove a wedge between faculty members of different nationalities: "As the English Department increased in popularity and importance, there grew up a rivalry between the teachers of English and the teachers of Chinese and they were largely cut off from each other because they could not speak each other's languages."²⁹ The decision by Chinese faculty members to turn out in force for the emergency faculty meeting on June 1, 1925, and to raise their hands and (Mandarin speaking) voices in support of student nationalism, challenged the habits of a university that had heretofore been dominated by the Americans.³⁰

²⁵ Shi Jianguo, *Bu Fangji zhuanji*, 237, 245.

²⁶ Xiong Yuezhi and Zhou Wu, *Sheng yuehan daxue shi*, 196.

²⁷ Shi, *Bu Fangji zhuanji*, 239–43.

²⁸ Mary Lamberton, *St. John's University Shanghai*, 89.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Xiong and Zhou, *Sheng yuehan daxue shi*, 195–96.

Buoyed by the backing of their Chinese teachers, the St. John's students' association cabled the major newspapers with an open message addressed to "elders and brethren of the entire country," announcing the start of their strike.³¹ In response, Dr. Pott called a meeting of faculty and student representatives at which he attempted to defuse the heated atmosphere by announcing a seven-day school closure. He further agreed to a request from the campus boy scouts that the national flag be flown at half-mast for the duration of the recess. As honorary director of the Shanghai boy scouts, a post that he held from 1911 to 1936, Pott's acquiescence to the scouts' request was welcomed by the protesters as a sign of the president's tacit support for their strike.³² But students' spirits sank when they learned that the university had notified their parents to take them home during the recess in order to ensure their safety.³³

Mounting tension between Dr. Pott and the protesters reached the boiling point the next day when students gathered at the campus flagpole to salute the national flag at half-mast, only to discover that the President had removed the national flag along with the American flag that usually flew beside it. Pott refused to return either flag, on grounds that it was a breach of university protocol to fly a flag when classes were not in session. He added that the American and Chinese flags were normally raised to the same height, and that it looked out of place to have one of them flown at half-mast.³⁴

Pott's sudden reversal was not the product of a unilateral change of heart on his part. It reflected the influence of the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of St. John's, the Right Rev. Frederick R. Graves, who was also the Episcopal bishop of Shanghai—and thus Pott's religious as well as academic superior. As it happened, Bishop Graves (whose office was located in the diocesan headquarters on Jessfield Road adjacent to the St. John's campus) had expressed dismay during a visit to St. John's earlier that morning to see the Chinese flag flying at half-mast, a gesture which he interpreted as the university having taken sides in an international conflict even before there had been a full determination of the facts surrounding the Nanking Road Incident. Graves communicated his disapproval to Pott, insisting that any appearance of condoning the student protest exposed the university to unacceptable political risk.³⁵

The unsympathetic position of the St. John's administration to student activism during the May Thirtieth Movement contrasted with its relatively relaxed stance toward student protesters during the May Fourth Movement of 1919. The earlier demonstrations, however, had targeted Chinese officials in Peking rather than foreign authorities in Shanghai. As the St. John's *Newsletter* of July 1919 characterized the May Fourth protest, "it was a strike directed, not against the school and college authorities... but against the obnoxious officials in Peking."³⁶ During the May Fourth Movement, for about ten days students had been permitted to remain on campus to convene political meetings, publish a daily newspaper, and organize an educational campaign aimed at surrounding villages. In that earlier protest, President Pott (also acting on the advice of Bishop Graves who argued that it was unseemly for the University to encourage students to protest against their own government) did eventually close down the campus a few weeks before the regular end of the school year. But in order not to inconvenience the May

³¹ *Shen bao*, June 2, 1925, 14.

³² Shanghai Municipal Archives, File no. Q243-1-833.

³³ Shi, *Bu Fangji zhuanji*, 239–40.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 240, 245.

³⁵ Xiong and Wu, *Sheng yuehan daxue shi*, 197; Shi, *Bu Fangji zhuanji*, 245.

³⁶ Quoted in Lamberton, *St. John's University Shanghai*, 78.

Fourth protesters unduly, the administration cancelled final examinations and granted degrees to graduating seniors on the basis of work previously completed.³⁷

May Thirtieth, in which student ire was aimed against the powerful authorities of the Shanghai International Settlement, rather than against the incompetent Peking government, was another matter altogether. After only a few days of protest, both sides dug in their heels. Unable to soften the intransigent position of the St. John's administration, the students tried to raise another national flag in their possession. This blatant disobedience infuriated President Pott, who snatched the flag from the shoulder of the student attempting to hoist it and summarily announced that the university would close and that all students should return home at once. The students responded with loud shouts of "Long Live the Republic of China!" and "Down with Imperialism!" and drafted a collective petition indicating their intention to withdraw permanently from St. John's.³⁸

The total breakdown of trust could be seen in a June 9 manifesto, printed in the *Shen bao* newspaper in the name of the St. John's student body, which accused President Pott of having committed crimes every bit as heinous as those of the police who had gunned down innocent students on Nanking Road. The police were guilty of having murdered Chinese bodies, the statement charged, but Francis Lister Hawks Pott—despite his self-presentation as a "friend of the Chinese people"—had murdered their patriotic spirit.³⁹ While the manifesto was issued in the name of the St. John's students, it is clear that Chinese faculty members played a catalytic role in stoking student indignation. A few days before, the same newspaper had published a proclamation addressed to educational circles around the country on behalf of seventeen St. John's professors of Chinese nationality who announced their resignation from the University in protest over the June 3rd flag incident.⁴⁰ A total of 262 college students (58% of the student body) along with 290 secondary-school students (some 75% of the total) along with virtually the entire faculty of the Chinese Department decided to withdraw at this time.⁴¹ Prominent St. John's alumni such as the industrialist Liu Hongsheng (known variously as China's "Coal King," "Textile King" and "Match King") stepped forward to try to mediate the conflict, but neither side was willing to compromise. In the end the renegade students and faculty established a new rival university, which they named Guanghai (or "Glorify China"), at a location not far from the St. John's campus.⁴² The May Thirtieth Movement dealt a huge blow to St. John's in terms of both personnel and prestige. Not for many years, if ever, would the University fully recover its former standing.⁴³

The hostilities at St. John's were in some respects a microcosm of wider national and international political currents. As President Pott observed in a thoughtful retrospective on the May Thirtieth events, the confrontation occurred in a general climate of anti-foreign and anti-Christian propaganda being vigorously promoted by the "extreme wing" of the Nationalist Party, which at the time was operating "under the influence of the Russian Bolsheviks." In this intense propaganda campaign, the Christian colleges were depicted as willing instruments of imperialist

³⁷ Xiong and Wu, *Sheng yuehan daxue shi*, 190–91; Lamberton, *St. John's University Shanghai*, 78.

³⁸ Xu Yihua, *Shanghai sheng yuehan daxue*, 35; Shi, *Bu Fangji zhuanji*, 245.

³⁹ *Shen bao*, June 9, 1925, 10.

⁴⁰ *Shen bao*, June 5, 1925, 10.

⁴¹ Yeh, *The Alienated Academy*, 84.

⁴² *Shen bao*, July 13, 1925, 2.

⁴³ Pott admitted in a letter to the Episcopal Church headquarters in New York several months after the incident, "There is still a good deal of hostility to St. John's and I am inclined to think it will take some time to remove it." Shanghai Municipal Archives, File no. Q243-1-289.

expansion in China. Their religious orientation was condemned for neglecting the teaching of Chinese culture in favor of fostering “superstition” among the students. An aim of this “well organized” campaign, according to Pott, was “to cripple the work of Christian schools and colleges.” He speculated that St. John’s had been “singled out as an institution that should be injured, especially because it enjoyed so high a prestige.”⁴⁴

Important as the broader anti-Christian movement undoubtedly was in exacerbating the conflict at St. John’s,⁴⁵ this explanation begs the question of why other schools—most notably the other leading Christian college in China, Yenching University—escaped the challenge of student nationalism comparatively unscathed. Some of the answer lies simply in personal temperament: Pott’s own imperious manner (induced though it may have been by his bishop’s orders) surely contributed to the intensity of the animosities on the St. John’s campus. But personalities were not the whole story. After all, President Pott’s northern counterpart was no shrinking violet either. Nor was President Stuart particularly fond of Chinese student protests, which he would later denounce as “herd movements”:

I had during my life in China ample opportunity to observe an unpleasant phenomenon of Chinese student life picturesquely described as *feng-ch’ao*, “wind and tide.” These organized outbreaks gained force and their most effective technique in patriotic demonstrations. But, having discovered their power when thus organized, aggressive students in schools all over the country began to use such strikes as a means of remedying real or fancied internal complaints, anything from the personality of the President to the flavor of the food. When once swept by impassioned oratory or led into making commitments through skillful manipulation, even the most orderly and friendly students would join recklessly in these herd movements, and if not handled satisfactorily a hopeless crisis would easily be precipitated. We were very fortunate at Yenching in never having a *feng-ch’ao* that got out of hand, but we came sufficiently close to such a break for me to have a wholesome dread of mass psychology especially when this affected Chinese students with their peculiar weaknesses and social inhibitions.⁴⁶

Despite his dim view of Chinese student activism, Stuart deserves much of the credit for having prevented protests at his university from escalating into full blown campus crises. As soon as rumors of the May Thirtieth killings were confirmed, on June 3, 1925 (the same day as the fateful flag incident at St. John’s), President Stuart convened a meeting of the entire staff of Yenching to endorse a statement strongly condemning the violent actions of the Shanghai International Settlement authorities.⁴⁷ As a consequence of the university’s liberal attitude, faculty and students at Yenching felt free to voice anti-imperialist sympathies. The Yenching faculty issued a widely publicized manifesto expressing their “profound disquiet at the treatment of Chinese in recent events in the International Settlement in Shanghai” and calling upon the foreign community to remedy the “estrangement and misunderstanding... by means of a more sympathetic press in closer touch with the movements of Chinese life; by readiness to revise the treaties which have long been out of date; and by actively working to put Chinese foreign relations on a basis of mutual good will rather than on the forcible retention of resented

⁴⁴ F. L. H. Pott, “Recent Events in China in Relation to Christian Higher Education,” 15-17.

⁴⁵ Jessie G. Lutz, “Chinese Nationalism and the Anti-Christian Campaigns of the 1920s.”

⁴⁶ John Leighton Stuart, *Fifty Years in China*, 79.

⁴⁷ Shi, *Bu Fangji zhuanji*, 255.

privilege.”⁴⁸ Many Yenching students, allowed to join the patriotic demonstrations without fear of jeopardizing their academic progress, became politically active for the first time during the May Thirtieth Movement.⁴⁹ In fact, students from Yenching assumed a leadership role in Beijing’s rendition of the May Thirtieth Movement—a pattern that foreshadowed the future reputation of the Yenching campus as “a hotbed of communism.”⁵⁰

Yenching’s accommodating approach toward campus activism placed the intransigence of St. John’s in an especially unfavorable light. President Pott complained after the May Thirtieth Movement that had torn apart his own university:

At St. John’s we found ourselves in an awkward situation. My policy heretofore has been to suspend the work of the institution during a period of a student strike, and to request the students to return to their homes, and it was known that I advocated the same policy on this occasion. Unfortunately for St. John’s, the authorities of many of the Christian schools and colleges have thought it wise to adopt what they regard as a conciliatory policy and to yield to the demands of the students. My position is that a mission institution under foreign control should, when a conflict of a political nature occurs, observe strict neutrality, and that it is wrong to allow an educational institution to become involved in political propaganda.”⁵¹

Although the presidents of both universities were required to navigate the stormy waves of anti-Christian and anti-foreign protest that rolled across Republican China, their leeway for maneuver was dictated by very different micro-environments. Much as President Pott condemned political involvement, his own approach was in fact deeply influenced by local political considerations. Despite its physical separation from the territory of the International Settlement, St. John’s had long been regarded—by its own administration as well as by the Shanghai Municipal Council—as falling within the latter’s jurisdiction. The nine members of the Municipal Council (six Britons, two Americans, and one Japanese) quite naturally viewed the Episcopal university as an integral part of their own international community.⁵² During previous upsurges of civil unrest (e.g., the Revolution of 1911 and the May Fourth Movement), American as well as Chinese members of the St. John’s faculty and student body had enjoyed the protected status of a foreign concession.

President Pott himself had served for over a decade as chairman of the Municipal Council’s General Education Committee, and enjoyed close connections with the leaders of the International Settlement. According to a Municipal Council regulation (promulgated two years earlier and communicated to Pott in his capacity as a member of the General Education Committee), no assemblies, marches, demonstrations or partisan political activities could be carried out in the Settlement without official authorization. Anyone seeking permission for such activities was required to submit a formal request to the police headquarters of the Settlement forty-eight hours prior to the proposed event.⁵³ In the eyes of President Pott, his bishop and his American faculty, spontaneous and unauthorized student protests were clearly illegal. To

⁴⁸ Quoted in Dwight W. Edwards, *Yenching University*, 146–47.

⁴⁹ Xu Ying, “Wusa can’an huiyi,” 72.

⁵⁰ Philip West, *Yenching University and Sino-Western Relations, 1916–1952*, 95.

⁵¹ Pott, “Recent Events in China in Relation to Christian Higher Education,” 16–17.

⁵² Clifford, *Spoilt Children of Empire*, 21–22.

⁵³ Shi, *Bu Fangji zhuanji*, 258.

condone them would signal engagement in a Chinese political conflict that the foreign staff feared could put the operations of the university itself at risk. As Pott wrote in an August 15, 1925 letter to the parents and guardians of St. John's students, "Christian institutions have no right to allow their premises to become centers of active political propaganda. Although students may be allowed freedom of thought in regard to political matters, yet they cannot involve the institution in politics."⁵⁴ For the Chinese students and faculty, however, the fact that the St. John's campus was located outside the formal boundaries of the International Settlement meant that it was in Chinese territory and subject to Chinese law, rather than to the regulations of the foreign-controlled Municipal Council. According to this logic, protest actions were a perfectly legitimate affirmation of national sovereignty.

Treaty-port Shanghai was a divided city, in which administrative cleavages were refracted in cultural and political allegiances. Western and Chinese intellectuals congregated in separate social circles and identified with competing political projects. Although President Pott sought to insulate his campus community from wider national and international conflicts, St. John's could not escape these broader currents. The strife that seized the university, pitting Chinese and American faculty against each another, was a direct by-product of the segmented urban environment in which it occurred.

The December Ninth Movement

With the May Thirtieth Movement having originated in Shanghai, it was not surprising that it would have a greater impact on St. John's than on Yenching. But that was not the case for the next major upsurge in Chinese student nationalism, which erupted a decade later: the December Ninth Movement. Not only did the latter movement begin in Beijing; it originated on the campus of Yenching University. As Jessie Lutz observes,

The student movement of December 9, 1935 was very much within the tradition of Chinese student movements of the previous decade.... In certain ways, however, the December 9th movement differed from earlier campaigns. Students at a Christian institution, Yenching University, played a significant role in launching the December 9th Movement, whereas during the nineteen twenties the Christian colleges had often been the objects of nationalist attacks.⁵⁵

Since the Mukden Incident of September 1931, the Japanese military had made increasingly clear its intention of occupying China proper. In November 1935, Japan announced what it called an "autonomy" movement, intended to sever five northern provinces from Chinese central government control. In response, anti-imperialist fervor swept the Peking intelligentsia. As had been true in the May Thirtieth Movement, Yenching University again adopted an accommodating approach toward political agitation by its students and faculty. Responding to the public outcry, President Stuart convened an emotional all-campus assembly in early December 1935 where he pledged his support for patriotic resistance.⁵⁶ The student reaction was

⁵⁴ Shanghai Municipal Archives, File no. Q243-1-864.

⁵⁵ Jessie G. Lutz, "December 9, 1935: Student Nationalism and the China Christian Colleges," 627.

⁵⁶ Stuart concluded the speech, however, by pleading with the students to confine their activities to campus, cautioning that the university could not guarantee the students' safety if they ventured into the city. Many years later, a Yenching student leader (possibly influenced by decades of unfavorable propaganda surrounding

swift. On December 9, 1935 more than half of the 850 students at Yenching (joined by students from neighboring Tsinghua) marched to the walls of the city in a display of nationalist sentiment. Blocked by police barricades from entering the center of Peking to link up with thousands of other student demonstrators parading through the streets of the city, the Yenching protesters returned to campus to announce a university-wide strike that would last for nearly two months.

Periodic pronouncements by President Stuart in support of student patriotism helped to dissuade the protesters on his campus from redirecting their anti-imperialist ire toward the university administration, as had occurred at St. John's during the May Thirtieth Movement. Although Stuart spent much of the December Ninth strike period in the United States on a fund-raising trip, his public statements—designed no doubt to reassure foreign donors who might recoil at the prospect of bankrolling anti-imperialist student protesters—went so far as to draw a parallel between the contemporary Chinese situation and the American Revolution: “British military officers said that if they could only suppress the students in Princeton, Yale and Harvard, they could soon put down the revolution.”⁵⁷ The Chinese Chancellor of Yenching, Lu Zhiwei, offered a less exalted defense of the protesting students: “I am quite in sympathy with their actions. When a pig is slaughtered, it is natural that there be some squeaking, though perfectly useless. The students are the only people that can do the squeaking.”⁵⁸

The tolerance of the Yenching administration was an important factor in enabling the students' prolonged activism.⁵⁹ And although the campus solidarity did not long outlive the December Ninth Movement, Yenching never suffered the mass defection of nationalistic students and faculty that had decimated St. John's a decade earlier. To be sure, December Ninth was “a definite watershed” that contributed to a “growing separation between the political sentiments among student leaders and the basic assumptions of senior faculty and university administrators.”⁶⁰ Unlike the tensions at St. John's generated by May Thirtieth, however, the cleavages which emerged at Yenching in the aftermath of December Ninth ran as much along generational, as along national, lines.

Young foreign members of the Yenching faculty were in fact an important source of campus radicalization during the December Ninth Movement. Several American teachers, including most notably Edgar Snow and Randolph C. Sailer, energetically encouraged student protest and offered their own homes on the Yenching campus to serve as command posts for protest leaders.⁶¹ Snow, who had been teaching journalism part-time at Yenching for a couple of years, began to agitate for a university strike in late November 1935, calling for “a massive student demonstration... to take place no later than December 10.”⁶² He and his wife played a significant role in fostering political activism among the Yenching students:

Edgar Snow was a twenty-nine-year-old free-lance writer and part-time lecturer at Yenching. His wife, Helen, was a writer and part-time student. To these sympathetic young Americans... came a steady stream of young visitors. Their anxious voices filled the Snow

Stuart) recalled of the president's speech, “At that time we already sensed that he wanted to prevent people from joining the demonstrations. We students immediately decided to participate in the demonstrations.” Wang Yuanmei, “Yier.jiu yundong de huiyi,” 20–21.

⁵⁷ Quoted in West, *Yenching University and Sino-Western Relations*, 166.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 165.

⁵⁹ John Israel, *Student Nationalism in China, 1927–1937*, 146.

⁶⁰ West, *Yenching University and Sino-Western Relations*, 152.

⁶¹ *Yanda wenshi ziliao*, no. 1 (1988): 1–2.

⁶² Israel, *Student Nationalism in China*, 119.

house during the twilight afternoons of late autumn. As left-liberals reacting to the international scene of the mid-1930s, the Snows saw a world threatened by fascism.... Between them, the young couple helped the Yenching students sift through ideas and grope toward a solution.⁶³

Edgar and Helen Snow also leveraged their journalistic connections to ensure that the student protests received sympathetic coverage in the foreign press.⁶⁴

The Snows were not alone in introducing their students to incendiary political ideas. Randolph Sailer, a Presbyterian missionary and popular psychology professor, furnished the student leaders with books that presented favorable accounts of the Soviet Union.⁶⁵ Sailer also passionately defended the students against the criticisms of skeptical colleagues during Yenching faculty meetings.⁶⁶ When the students marched toward the Peking city gates on December Ninth, Sailer and the Snows were among the dozen or so younger Yenching faculty members, American as well as Chinese, who trailed the marchers in university vehicles in order to supply them with steamed buns and offer the weary among them a ride back to campus after their twenty-mile hike in ten degree temperatures.⁶⁷ As such actions indicated, Chinese and foreign faculty at Yenching did not inhabit separate political and cultural worlds. Randolph Sailer's identification with things Chinese was even evident in his demeanor. A Yenching alumnus recalled Sailer's penchant for dressing like a humble Chinese scholar,

The strongest impression in my memory was the way Dr. Sailer walked to work every morning. In the idyllic corner of the Yenching campus, when the morning air was so stimulatingly fresh, when the pagoda-shaped water-tower began to cast its extending shadow over the lake... there appeared along the lakeshore a tall slender professor, carrying a beaten-up briefcase, Caucasian but dressed in a blue Chinese gown, typical of the "never-get-rich" scholar.⁶⁸

Living in the cultural capital of China, Yenching's American professors demonstrated an empathy for Chinese customs and colleagues that was relatively rare among their counterparts in Shanghai. Hiring practices at Yenching also helped to blur national and cultural distinctions. In contrast to St. John's, whose foreign faculty was drawn overwhelmingly from educational missionaries appointed directly by the American Episcopal Church, Yenching relied upon a more variegated recruitment strategy that included a sizeable number of local hires as well as missionaries representing multiple Protestant denominations. The result was a less homogeneous and less compliant faculty, "uneven and underrated," who were not easily controlled by university administrators or church superiors.⁶⁹

E.R. Lapwood, a British missionary who had taught in Shanghai since 1932, was one of the foreign instructors hired locally by Yenching. Joining the faculty shortly after the December

⁶³ John Israel, *Rebels and Bureaucrats, China's December 9ers*, 31–32.

⁶⁴ Lutz, "December 9, 1935: Student Nationalism and the China Christian Colleges," 637.

⁶⁵ Israel, *Rebels and Bureaucrats*, 43.

⁶⁶ Zhang Yan, "Yige jirenqiede de Meiguoren," 24.

⁶⁷ West, *Yenching University and Sino-Western Relations*, 164; Wang Yuanmei, "Yierjiu yundong de huiyi," 26; Lutz, "December 9, 1935: Student Nationalism and the China Christian Colleges," 637.

⁶⁸ James T.C. Liu, "Dr. Randolph Clothier Sailer (1898-1981) in Memory," 202–3.

⁶⁹ Israel, *Rebels and Bureaucrats*, 23.

Ninth Movement, Lapwood found the atmosphere at Yenching a refreshing contrast with what he had previously experienced in Shanghai:

I joined Yenching in 1936. I had come from Shanghai, where I had... lived among foreigners who had little appreciation of Chinese culture, and with Chinese colleagues who did not admit their foreign acquaintances into their most deeply committed professional or patriotic activities.

I found Yenching University very different. The faculty members were mainly Chinese, but there were also western professors of intellectual distinction and strong appreciation of both traditional Chinese culture and also immediate social and political movements in China.

In Yenching University there were no distinctions between Chinese and non-Chinese in treatment—status, salaries, housing duties or privileges. I joined at the bottom of the scale as an Instructor (which was the grade below Lecturer).⁷⁰

Although Yenching was unabashedly Protestant in both its origins and its orientation, it did not fall under the aegis of any single mission board. Its religious identity was defined primarily by an inter-denominational association, known as the Life Fellowship (生命社), which was the outgrowth of a Christian discussion group that had been founded in Peking in 1919 by a number of the leading lights of Yenching University, foreign and Chinese, including John Leighton Stuart, Lucius Porter, Howard Galt, John Stewart Burgess, Luella Miner, Liu Tingfang, Wu Leichuan, Xu Baoqian, Zhao Zichen, and Hong Ye (William Hung). The Life Fellowship enjoyed close connections with the YMCA and YWCA, and like them advocated a reformist theology of social justice.⁷¹

Yenching University itself was formed between 1915 and 1920 through an amalgamation of four existing Christian schools, which had been founded by four different mission boards: Methodist, Congregational, Presbyterian, and London Missionary Society.⁷² The Board of Trustees of Yenching University, incorporated in the state of New York in 1916, was composed of more than twenty mission board executives, philanthropists, and church-oriented American businessmen representing a range of Protestant denominations.⁷³ (By contrast, the Board of Trustees of St. John's University, incorporated in the District of Columbia in 1905, "were the members of the Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church of America—sixteen bishops, fourteen clergymen and fifteen laymen."⁷⁴) Yenching's mixed pedigree meant that it was not subject to either the limitations or the largesse that St. John's unalloyed Episcopal lineage bestowed.

Unable to count on a dedicated mission board for a steady supply of faculty and funding, John Leighton Stuart was ever on the lookout for alternative sources of support to meet the needs of his growing university.⁷⁵ That search had led to Stuart's central involvement in the founding of

⁷⁰ E. R. Lapwood, "Memories of Professor Randolph C. Sailer," 192–93; Ralph and Nancy Lapwood, *Through the Chinese Revolution*, 151.

⁷¹ West, *Yenching University and Sino-Western Relations*, 17–22.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 34–35.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁷⁴ Lamberton, *St. John's University Shanghai*, 58.

⁷⁵ In 1934, for example, Stuart embarked upon a million-dollar capital campaign that took him to Shanghai at the invitation of the mayor of the Chinese sections of the city, Wu Tiecheng. *Yanbing xinwen*, 1.

the Harvard-Yenching Institute with money from the Charles Martin Hall Estate in 1928.⁷⁶ Within a few years, grants from the Hall Estate accounted for nearly 70% of Yenching University's total endowment and over 30% of its annual budget.⁷⁷ This generous infusion of funds, earmarked for the study of traditional China, permitted the building at Yenching of one of the finest research libraries in Chinese studies in the country and the ability to attract to the university many of China's most distinguished Sinologists along with serious students of China from across the globe: "The Hall Estate funding made Yenching an instantaneous international center for Chinese studies."⁷⁸ The Peking office of the Harvard-Yenching Institute, located on the Yenching campus and administered first by Lucius Porter and then by William Hung, contributed to a multicultural educational ethos in which the value of Chinese civilization was esteemed alongside that of Western learning.⁷⁹ As Stuart acknowledged, "the Harvard-Yenching Institute enabled us—and through us several other Christian colleges in China—to develop Chinese studies fully up to the best standards of any purely Chinese institution."⁸⁰

The support of the Harvard-Yenching Institute for advanced research and coursework in Chinese studies, according to Stuart, made those Christian colleges which were fortunate enough to receive Institute funding "appear less alien to Chinese life and thus [gave] them added prestige and goodwill."⁸¹ It was probably not coincidental that the student leadership of the December Ninth Movement was drawn disproportionately from the very Christian colleges that benefited the most from Harvard-Yenching Institute support for Sinological studies: particularly Yenching, but also Nanking University, Central China College in Wuhan, and Shantung Christian University.⁸²

Again the contrast with St. John's University, where Chinese studies were undeveloped and undervalued, and where Anglo-American traditions of pedagogy predominated, was striking. With the majority of its disaffected students and faculty having stormed out a decade earlier, St. John's saw no resurgence of campus activism in 1935.⁸³ Attempts by foreign journalists to play a role similar to that of the Snows at Yenching bore little fruit. As the radical writer Agnes Smedley, then residing in Shanghai, wrote of her efforts to Helen Snow, "Everytime they [the Peking students] do anything or send down a magazine or a leaflet, I get these to those I can. A St. John's boy grabs them and disappears from his house in a trail of smoke, going from house to house with these, showing friends, trying to organize, trying to shame them for their

⁷⁶ Paul Daniel Waite and Peichi Tung Waite, "China's Christian Colleges and the Founding of the Harvard-Yenching Institute."

⁷⁷ West, *Yenching University and Sino-Western Relations*, 110.

⁷⁸ Susan Chan Egan, *A Latter Day Confucian: Reminiscences of William Hung (1893–1980)*, 117; Edwards, *Yenching University*, 176–77; 274–78.

⁷⁹ Chen Guansheng, "Hao yanjing xueshe yu yanjing daxue zhi guanxi," 18–21; Chen Jianshou, *Yanijing daxue yu xiandai Zhongguo shixue fazhan (1919–1952)*; Edwards, *Yenching University*, 279–82.

⁸⁰ Stuart, *Fifty Years in China*, 64.

⁸¹ J. Leighton Stuart, "Foundations and Christian Higher Education," 279–80.

⁸² Kiang Wen-han, "Chinese Students on the Move Again," 207.

⁸³ Jesse Lutz's contention that students at Christian schools which were located in the Yangzi valley, where Nationalist control was strongest, "were hesitant to resort to direct action because the risk of government reprisal was high and because the Kuomintang seemed clearly the legitimate authority bringing some stability to central China" might at first seem like a plausible explanation for St. John's lack of participation in the December Ninth Movement. However, the prominent role in this movement of students at both Nanjing and Central China universities belies such an explanation. Lutz, "December 9, 1935: Student Nationalism and the China Christian Colleges," 638.

backwardness.”⁸⁴ Chastened by the experience of May Thirtieth, the students and Chinese faculty at St. John’s were now reluctant to participate in public protests.

At Yenching, however, the diversity of the faculty and curriculum stimulated an eclectic intellectual atmosphere, in which current issues and “isms” were discussed with remarkable openness. A lively faculty discussion group met regularly at the President’s House to consider such weighty and timely topics as capitalism, communism, fascism and the New Deal. In the spring of 1935, only a few months before the outbreak of the December Ninth Movement, the group convened a discussion on the theme of “Is Socialism the Way Out?”—led by one Gideon Ch’en, an instructor at Yenching who in recent years had been teaching courses on socialism at the university. As the campus newspaper advertised the upcoming event, “Discussion with respect either to socialism in general or to its applicability in China will be welcomed.”⁸⁵ It was hardly surprising that faculty members who participated in such discussions might feel some affinity toward the protest politics brewing among their students.

The vanguard role of Yenching in the December Ninth Movement was not only a product of campus climate; it also revealed the impact of the wider urban setting. That Yenching was located in Peking, the center of national culture, was one of the things that most obviously recommended the university as a worthy beneficiary to the Trustees of the Charles Martin Hall Estate.⁸⁶ Contemporary political currents further favored Yenching as a protagonist in the December Ninth Movement. By 1935 an important shift in the axis of Peking’s student activism had taken place in which National Peking University (Beida) lost its position as protest pacesetter, acquired during the May Fourth and New Culture movements. A new chancellor of Beida, a man with close ties to the Nationalist regime in Nanjing by the name of Chiang Monlin, had been appointed in 1929. Chiang was an outspoken opponent of student involvement in politics who put in place an administration committed to discouraging campus activism.⁸⁷ John Israel writes of Beida’s diminished political influence at the time of the December Ninth Movement,

As a government school situated inside Peiping’s city walls, it easily succumbed to pressures of local and national authorities. Though maintaining its reputation for scholarly excellence, Peita, in the firm hands of Chancellor Chiang Monlin, had become a political backwater. Gone were the excited and dissonant voices of the New Culture Period, gone the brave banners of radical protest. This time the political initiative would have to come from elsewhere.⁸⁸

The fact that the private Yenching University was located on a residential campus more than five miles outside the city walls afforded it a degree of separation and insulation from the growing government pressure to which Beida was increasingly subject. It was in this context that Yenching students like economics major Huang Hua (later to become one of China’s most

⁸⁴ Ibid., 640.

⁸⁵ *The Yenching News*, May 4, 1935, vol. 1, no. 80.

⁸⁶ Although the Hall Estate, via the Harvard-Yenching Institute, funded Chinese studies at six Christian colleges located in different provinces of China, Yenching received the lion’s share of the support. No Shanghai institution, including St. John’s, received Harvard-Yenching funding. Waite and Waite, “China’s Christian Colleges and the Founding of the Harvard-Yenching Institute,” 249–55; Edwards, *Yenching University*, 278.

⁸⁷ Israel, *Rebels and Bureaucrats*, 67–69.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 23.

prominent diplomats) stepped forward to assume a leadership role.⁸⁹ Once the December Ninth Movement got underway, a number of Beida students (including, most famously, the future mayor of Tianjin, Huang Jing, and the future President of Peking University, Lu Ping) defied university regulations and emerged as leaders.⁹⁰ But without the initial impetus of the Yenching students (joined by students from neighboring Tsinghua), the movement would probably never have begun.

Although the December Ninth Movement marked the advent of what would eventually become bitter ideological disagreements at Yenching, the two-month student strike ended without the debilitating strife that May Thirtieth had brought to St. John's. In mid-April 1936 John Leighton Stuart, who had recently returned from his lengthy fund-raising trip to the United States, presided over an all-campus assembly in which he complimented the students for having carried out a meaningful political action without sacrificing their academic progress. Referring to the recent student movement, Stuart offered an upbeat assessment that stressed the commonality between China and the United States:

I feel proud of the two things which you students have done. Had you done only one or the other, it would not be useful but probably harmful. These two things are the blend of patriotism and fidelity to academic work. You took part in the movement and you took your examinations. It is an excellent training for democracy. China and America cannot be anything else but democratic. We need real freedom, a voluntary subjection to legitimate authority. I believe that the real government of China should be the power of public opinion, and so long as all of you are absorbingly interested in the great movement, you can sooner or later demonstrate to the world the cohesion and unity of China. It is time to be determined, not discouraged.⁹¹

The contrast between Yenching's pride in its patriotic students in the aftermath of December Ninth and St. John's irreparable rift with its activist students and Chinese faculty a decade earlier could hardly have been starker. Unlike Francis Lister Hawks Pott, who was pilloried in the Shanghai press for his hostile stance toward student nationalism, John Leighton Stuart's sympathetic approach prompted effusive praise from the students of Yenching.⁹²

Conclusions

For good reason, the May Thirtieth and December Ninth movements figure prominently in general histories of modern China.⁹³ Influential expressions of student patriotism, the movements served to instill anti-imperialist sentiments among the citizenry at large, and thereby to promote widespread support for revolutionary change. Mao Zedong referred frequently to both movements as precursors of his own Communist revolution.⁹⁴ The Chinese Communist Party's

⁸⁹ Ibid., 32–36.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 72–76.

⁹¹ Quoted in Hubert Freyn, *Prelude to War: The Chinese Student Rebellion of 1935–1936*, 79.

⁹² Bing Xin, "Situ Leideng xiaozhang de ai yu tongqing," 3–4.

⁹³ See, for example, Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 340, 341, 350, 352, 420, 422, 507, 664, 719.

⁹⁴ Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. I: 16, 18, 20, 21, 119, 172, 173, 265, 288, 294.

rise to power undoubtedly benefited from the swelling tide of nationalism reflected in such events.⁹⁵

The *macro* significance of these historic movements should not, however, cause us to overlook their close connection to the *micro* environments of the cities and campuses in which they took shape. While both Yenching and St. John's recruited students from all across China, their signature policies and practices reflected local pressures and priorities. This was true not only of their student movements, but of their curricula as well. Thus Yenching—situated in the cultural center of China—gained a well-deserved reputation for Sinological studies, whereas St. John's evinced a more practical orientation. Responding to the exigencies of its treaty-port economy, St. John's was among the first universities in China and the very first among the Christian universities to offer courses in business; it also established renowned professional programs in medicine, law, engineering and journalism.⁹⁶

Treaty-port Shanghai and post-imperial Peking were distinctive and unusual urban contexts with few obvious analogues. But the core conclusion that emerges from this St. John's-Yenching comparison—namely, that differences in campus culture and protest reflect differences in the particular places in which the protests occur—does evidently have wider applicability. A study of student protests at seven American universities following the Kent State killings in 1970, for example, revealed a range of administrative reactions with different consequences that varied in tandem with their local settings.⁹⁷ Among the seven cases considered in the Kent State study, the one deemed most successful in terms of forestalling student violence was that of Illinois State University, where the “deft diplomacy” of ISU's president, Samuel Braden, is credited with leading to an unusually harmonious result: “Because of Braden's ability to compromise and to listen to student concerns, without risking the university's credibility, ISU's campus was relatively free from the violence that was evident on the nation's other campuses.”⁹⁸ This characterization of President Braden calls to mind President Stuart's accommodating approach during the December Ninth Movement, but the Illinois State example is also intriguing in light of a striking parallel in student behavior to the May Thirtieth incident at St. John's University. Much like the St. John's students who demanded that the Chinese flag on campus be flown at half-mast in honor of the students gunned down by police on Nanking Road, at Illinois State the protest began when “a number of students demanded that the U.S. flag be lowered to half-mast to honor the four students killed at Kent State.”⁹⁹ However, unlike President Pott, who reneged on his initial agreement to the students' request, President Braden “allowed the U.S. flag to be lowered to half-mast.... In so doing, Braden resolved ISU's conflict in a way that would not give students a pretext to carry out broader, and maybe violent protests.”¹⁰⁰

Important as responses by university presidents clearly are in shaping the trajectories of student protest, they do not occur in a vacuum. The above study of post Kent State protests found that “the variety, intensity and resolution of the unrest was dependent upon the culture of the campus”; campus culture, in turn, mirrored the particulars of the wider urban context.¹⁰¹ Whether

⁹⁵ Tetsuya Kataoka, *Resistance and Revolution in China*; Suzanne Pepper, *Civil War in China: The Political Struggle*, Chapter 3.

⁹⁶ Shanghai Municipal Archives, File no. Q243-1-411.

⁹⁷ Brian K. Clardy, *The Management of Dissent: Responses to the Post Kent State Protests at Seven Public Universities in Illinois*.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 145.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

in the U.S. or China, urban culture exerts influence through the actions of real people whose decisions are often colored by mundane calculations—a constraint from which college presidents are certainly not exempt. The fact, for instance, that Francis Lister Hawks Pott was financially dependent upon the Episcopal Church (which enjoyed close relations with the Anglo-American authorities of Shanghai), whereas John Leighton Stuart was beholden to the Harvard-Yenching Institute (which enjoined its grantees to champion the grandeur of Chinese civilization), was undoubtedly instrumental in inducing these likeminded Christian college presidents to adopt sharply contrasting positions toward the shared challenge of student nationalism on their campuses. Culture is critically important, to be sure, but it gains traction only when values are translated into action by flesh-and-blood individuals subject to a host of humdrum pressures. In the end, even devout ministers and missionaries are compelled to serve *both* God *and* Mammon.

That the contrasting approaches to student unrest under consideration here were driven more by context than by conviction is indicated by the very different posture that Stuart adopted once he had left Yenching to become U.S. Ambassador to China. In the spring of 1947, for the first time since the May Thirtieth Incident, significant numbers of St. John's students again took to the streets in strident anti-imperialist protests.¹⁰² In a speech on June 4, Ambassador Stuart sternly warned the student protesters that their anti-American movement was apt to have dire consequences. Stuart's threat did not sit well with the Chinese public, and even his defenders were hard pressed to find excuses for his hostile statement:

Some tried to explain it by suggesting that Ambassador Stuart had been forced to make the statement as the representative of the U.S. Government. They believed that were he still President of Yenching University—a post he held for over twenty-five years until he was named U.S. Ambassador in 1946—Dr. Stuart would never have made such inopportune comments.¹⁰³

Once hailed as a friend of Chinese nationalism for his tolerance of student unrest at Yenching University, John Leighton Stuart was now evolving into an emblem of American imperialism—an image that would be sealed by Mao Zedong himself on the eve of the Communist victory. In an August 1949 essay entitled “Farewell, Leighton Stuart,” Mao characterized Stuart as a “symbol of the complete defeat of the U.S. policy of aggression.”¹⁰⁴ Just three years later, Stuart's beloved Yenching University, along with St. John's and the other Christian colleges in China, were shut down by the new Communist regime. Variegated though their responses to the challenges of Chinese nationalism had been, all of them in the end were condemned to a common fate.

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¹⁰² Although the American-owned newspaper, the *Shanghai Evening Post and Mercury*, denounced the protests, the closure of the International Settlement which had occurred during the Japanese occupation meant that Shanghai no longer had an Anglo-American governing authority to back up such denunciations. Pepper, *Civil War in China: The Political Struggle*, 75.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹⁰⁴ Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. IV: 433–40.

- Bing Xin. "Situ Leideng xiaozhang de ai yu tongqing" (The love and compassion of Leighton Stuart). *Yanqing zhouban* (Yenching weekly), June 12, 1936: 3-4.
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