

DISPERSAL and RENEWAL

Hong Kong University During the War Years

Edited by
Clifford Matthews and Oswald Cheung



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Chinese calligraphy on front and back endpapers written by Tse Kui Yin.

Translation of the couplets:

Front: 才高德昭 功澤萬代

Ability and integrity combined bringing long-lasting merits to mankind.

Back: 春風沛雨 桃李芬芳

*Gentle breeze and caring rain united breeding fragrant fruits unbounded.
(In Chinese literature, teachers are likened to breeze and rain that nurture
peaches and plums, which symbolize students.)*

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Preface: *‘The Time is Ripe . . . ’*

Clifford Matthews

To explain how this volume entitled *Dispersal and Renewal: Hong Kong University During the War Years* came about, I think it will be simplest if I reprint the original letter of invitation I sent to possible contributors and then add material summarizing the substance of subsequent correspondence addressed to all our authors. Hopefully, this approach will succeed in giving a clear account of the genesis and evolution of our somewhat informal publishing venture.

Letter 1 (11 August 1995) begins with this

Invitation to contribute to
Dispersal and Renewal:
Hong Kong University During the War Years and After

Dear friends and classmates of Hong Kong University, World War II vintage!

I am writing to propose that we act promptly to produce a book recounting some of the experiences during World War II that changed our lives and the history of our *alma mater* so profoundly.

Three recent happenings in my own life have led to this line of thought pointing to the need for us to do something soon to define that era and our part in it.

1. Introducing my son Christopher to Hong Kong in the spring of 1994, I enjoyed taking part in many informal gatherings of alumni including a stimulating dinner in the Furama Hotel where ten of us renewed warm friendships from our days together on the old campus before the outbreak of the Pacific War.
2. I received an invitation from the ex-Prisoners of War Association to attend a celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Liberation of Hong Kong to be held this August 28–September 2. Included will be a Disbandment Parade of the Royal Hong Kong Regiment (the Volunteers) in which I served throughout the war, mostly as a POW in Hong Kong and Japan.
3. As an emeritus Professor of Chemistry at the University of Illinois at Chicago, I had the valuable experience this past year of editing a book with contributions by 24 authors entitled *Cosmic Beginnings and Human Ends*. This was based on a symposium with the same title that I had organized in 1993 for the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago.

Lately, too, I had been reading a couple of fascinating accounts of the war years seen from both military and civilian perspectives. They were: *British Army Aid Group (BAAG) — Hong Kong Resistance 1942–1945* by Edwin Ride (Oxford University Press, 1981) and *Stanley: Behind Barbed Wire* by Jean Gittins (Hong Kong University Press, 1982).

I also had the chance to read two books of memoirs privately printed in 1992 which told me a lot about distinguished Hong Kong families I knew and their war experiences: *All Our Yesterdays: A Song of My Parents* is by Brian Yu, whose brothers and sisters were friends of many of us at the university; *In the Web*, written by Peter Hall, outlines family connections within a major Eurasian community in Hong Kong.

Taken together, these many activities, some yet to come, made me realize that it was time to take note not only of the dramatic end of the war fifty years ago but also of the beginning then of a new era for the University of Hong Kong when a budding colonial institution of some 600 students expanded rapidly to today's international centre of learning with a roll call of thousands. I thought that a written record of those eventful times by the participants might be the most meaningful kind of memorial, perhaps in conjunction with an appropriate celebration at the university in the form of a symposium or conference on the war years.

After all, during this watershed period the university did not exist as a physical entity but only through the actions of its students, faculty and staff dispersed mainly in China but also elsewhere in a world at war.

As it happens, an attractive volume already exists entitled: *The First Fifty Years, University of Hong Kong, 1911–1961*, University of Hong Kong Press, 1962.

This collection of essays on the history of the university was commissioned for its Golden Jubilee in 1961. The editor, Brian Harrison, concluded his Preface with this prescient paragraph:

Many hands have joined together in the making of this book. Although war and the accidents of time have left wide gaps in the record, much has fortunately been preserved. But the task could hardly have been undertaken at all without the help of the University's Registrar, Mr. Bernard Mellor, who most generously placed his preliminary work and his collections of papers at our disposal. Had he the time to spare from his many duties he might himself have written the whole story. Better still, perhaps, the greater part of the story might have been told by graduates writing (as Dr. Irene Cheng writes here) out of personal memory of their own share in the University's life over the years. But that, now, would be another and a different book.

Surely, now is the time to put together that different book, centred on the war years, with contributions by all of us former students, faculty and staff with personal memories to share! The time is ripe, since we are each in our seventies and the university itself in its eighties is about to enter yet another new era in its evolving role as a bridge between East and West.

It seems that at least three books on HKU which include the years of war have already been published:

1. The above-mentioned jubilee volume has a comprehensive article (30 pages) by Lindsay Ride entitled 'The Test of War'.
2. *The University of Hong Kong: An Informal History* in two volumes by Bernard Mellor (Hong Kong University Press, 1980) has a chapter (10 pages) on 'The Strains of War' in Volume I, and another (14 pages) on 'War and After' in Volume II (a collection of photographs).
3. *Constancy of Purpose: Faculty of Medicine, University of Hong Kong*, compiled by D.M.E. Evans (Hong Kong University Press, 1987) has a

chapter (5 pages) entitled 'The Test of War' and an appendix (8 pages) on 'Wartime Degrees and Wartime Studies'.

I suggest that we reprint these published accounts as background for the personal recollections that will constitute the heart of our new book, which might be entitled *Dispersal and Renewal: Hong Kong University During the War Years and After*. Several of these overviews, plus our many individual reminiscences, long or short, light-hearted or serious, with maps and snapshots, could add up to a substantial yet readable volume. Hong Kong University Press is being contacted to act as publisher.

But we must act at once, if we are to have a completed manuscript by the end of the year. These past few weeks I received encouraging and helpful comments on an earlier draft of this letter by phone and mail from Oswald Cheung, Huang Hsing Tsung, Rayson Huang, Leung Man Wah, Leslie Sung, and especially Bernard Mellor, all of whom have had close connections with HKU as well as considerable experience in various kinds of editing. They are also extremely busy people widely scattered over three continents, who, it seems, will still find time to be involved in this challenging enterprise. I will be glad to start the ball rolling by coordinating activities at this early stage of what promises to be a most emotionally and intellectually rewarding experience for us all.

May I, then, invite each of you to submit to me, at the address below, a personal account of your wartime experiences (and their connection, if any, with the university). Please include an informal description of your prewar days at school and at HKU — work and play and friendships — and a brief summary of your subsequent career up to now, with comments, if appropriate, on the influence of those college days on your life. Use double-spaced typing for clarity and express mail or fax to speed up communication. It would be helpful if you could drop me a note as soon as possible to let me know you're planning to send in a reminiscence. Any suggestions you might have regarding the projected volume and possible contributors would, of course, be most welcome.

I look forward to hearing from you soon. Meanwhile, many thanks for your interest from your old (or new) friend,

Clifford N. Matthews

Letter 2 (8 September 1995) raises the question 'Why is this volume needed?' My reply is that 'we are in a unique position to help fill a gap in the history of the university posed by another question: What happened during the critical years when there was no institution, only the shell of a campus on Pokfulam Road? . . . The recollections and reminiscences of even a few of us should help to capture something of the spirit of those challenging times that eventually led to the re-establishing of the university in 1948 and its remarkable growth since then. What could emerge too is some expression of the special character of Hong Kong, its university and its people as exemplars of the fruitful interaction of cultures, particularly those of China and Britain, of East and West!'

The project was highly approved by the Vice-Chancellor of the university, Professor Wang Gungwu, who also liked the idea of holding a related Symposium on campus the following spring. Most helpful was the Assistant Director of External Relations, Dominic Cheung, who sent copies of our invitation to all ten Alumni Associations of the university, to be reprinted in their newsletters.

Letter 3 (20 October 1995) tells the good news that Sir Oswald Cheung had kindly agreed to be a co-editor of our projected volume, our man in Hong Kong.

Letter 4 (29 February 1996) suggests that 'we dedicate our volume to the memory of HKU alumni, faculty and staff who lost their lives as a result of the war.' An alternative title might be *Where Were We? Hong Kong University During the War Years*. The idea of holding a related Symposium turns out to be impractical and was abandoned.

Letter 5 (13 June 1996) considers the question 'Where are we?' in our planning. It seems 'we have already in hand enough material to make up an attractive volume of perhaps 330 printed pages, two-thirds consisting of contributed articles as listed in the accompanying sheet together with the remaining third made up of reprints of historical overviews that have already appeared in previous publications of Hong Kong University Press. The reminiscences range in length from four to thirty pages, double-spaced, averaging 12 pages each. Plenty of variety there! Also to be included are a prologue or preface, and possibly an epilogue or commentary, together with some last-minute reminiscences.'

Estimated publication expenses are discussed, based on information

supplied by Dennis Cheung of Hong Kong University Press. The Editor will be in Europe this summer and looks forward to meeting several contributors at Poon's Restaurant in London on 17 June, as guests of Rayson Huang.

Letter 6 (29 October 1996). The Editor will be in Hong Kong in November and will have the opportunity with Oswald Cheung to meet Barbara Clarke, publisher of Hong Kong University Press, with sample copies of our latest manuscript drafts.

Letter 7 (30 May 1997). Most contributions have been received and will be shown to Barbara Clarke during my next visit to Hong Kong, in June/July.

Our meetings with Barbara Clarke have been very helpful. She has been constructively critical and encouragingly supportive so that we feel we will be able to submit a complete set of manuscripts (with accompanying disks) by November or early December for consideration by the University Press Committee.

Letter 8 (16 December 1997). Final drafts of our manuscripts have been sent to Barbara Clarke, together with short biographical accounts of each contributor. Merry Christmas!

And so we ended up with reminiscences from twenty contributors presently residing in Hong Kong, China, Britain, Australia, Canada and the United States of America. Also with historical overviews by six authors, reprinted from various publications of the University of Hong Kong. These were interspersed with the personal contributions according to subject matter under five headings: The Setting, Dispersal, Prisoners of War, Grapevine, and Renewal. A preface, prologue and epilogue were added together with a dedication to those of Hong Kong University who lost their lives as a result of the war. Our memorial volume was finally entitled *Dispersal and Renewal: Hong Kong University During the War Years*.

Editing has been kept to a minimum to preserve the unique styles of each author, who often describe the same events in different ways. You will notice some inconsistencies in the spelling of names due to problems of transliteration from Chinese to English. For place names a glossary has therefore been added to explain how we have tried to keep the 'old' names

that were used during the war years. For names of individuals we have mostly used separate words, as in Huang Hsing Tsung, instead of the hyphenated form, Huang Hsing-Tsung. We hope our readers will draw our attention to spelling and other errors they may have noticed. We hope also they will forgive our inability to name everybody in the snapshots we have chosen, and will help us to fill in these and other omissions. Above all, we hope our readers will be entertained and enlightened by these personal accounts which reveal unexpected connections between the many wartime events emanating from the University of Hong Kong.

Epilogue: *‘A Bridge between East and West’*

Clifford Matthews

Appropriately enough, the preceding collection of papers on the war years and after ends with a chapter ‘A New Start’ from *The University of Hong Kong: An Informal History* by Bernard Mellor. Sadly, Bunny Mellor (as he was known to us all) died in Oxford this January at the age of eighty. Although Bunny had no prewar experience of the University, he was in many ways more at the centre of things than the rest of us, both in his capacity as Registrar from 1948 to 1974 and as a historian who himself participated in many of the events he was describing. His readiness to help colleagues on historical matters has often been gratefully acknowledged, as when Brian Harrison, editor of the Golden Jubilee volume covering *The First Fifty Years, 1911–1961* noted that ‘the task could not have been undertaken at all without the help of the University Registrar, Mr. Bernard Mellor, who most generously placed his preliminary work and collection of papers at our disposal.’ In a similar vein, Dafydd Evans commented in his preface to *Constancy of Purpose* that ‘I must reiterate my deepest appreciation of Dr Mellor’s interest and enthusiasm and his unfettered willingness to contribute from his storehouse of knowledge. Indeed, when I showed him material, he not only assisted on the substance but also corrected typographical errors.’

All this has a familiar ring to me, for I had come to know Bunny Mellor in just this way, as a stimulating and helpful colleague and friend who contributed greatly to our projected volume. Indeed, we tried more than once to persuade him to be our editor, but with no luck. He simply could not take on this added responsibility, being busy with several pressing literary projects on top of having to recover physically from a serious

operation. He offered instead his own breezy reminiscences, 'In India, in China, Twice in Hong Kong', as well as regular editorial advice by way of numerous air letters and long distance phone calls. I look back with pleasure to the three occasions when I had the opportunity to meet him in England with his wife Mauricette, first in London in 1996, then at their home in Abingdon near Oxford and finally, alas, last summer in a thatched Cotswold cottage my wife and I had rented for a few vacation days. In London we had been guests of Rayson Huang at a HKU reunion lunch in Soho and, indeed, it was Rayson who had originally put me in touch with Bunny, telling me that nobody knew more about the university, past and present. Glancing over our list of authors we find that Bunny had known not only Rayson (as Vice-Chancellor) and other university stalwarts such as Albert Rodrigues and Solly Bard, but also Ossie Cheung in China, Patrick Yu in England and Zaza Suffiad (Hsieh) in postwar Hong Kong. His amazingly detailed recollections tell, too, of his somewhat ambivalent but amicable dealings with Lindsay Ride and the British Army Aid Group in South China, and of how he enjoyed playing piano duets in Kunming with Gordon King, who first suggested Bunny might think of a career on the university staff. When this eventually came about, Bunny worked closely with these two escapees from the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong. Also with Duncan Sloss after his release from Stanley prison camp.

All in all, the writings in this volume by Bunny Mellor and many of our other contributors show how much the university owed to the leadership of this determined threesome. In pre-war days Vice-Chancellor Sloss and Professors Ride and King were known as progressive forces on campus, influential members of a number of important committees. During the period of hostilities, each revealed their own intrepid nature, while demonstrating exceptional organizing ability throughout those trying times. And when peace came about they acted decisively in their efforts to re-establish HKU. Well known to each of them was the story of how Sun Yat Sen, the founder of modern China, had in 1892 been one of the two original graduates of the Hong Kong College of Medicine for the Chinese. This became the University of Hong Kong in 1911, just when the Republic of China was being born. At a University congregation in 1923, Dr Sun told how as a student he had been deeply impressed by the peace, order and good government in Hong Kong, contrasted with the disorder and corruption he had known in China. He said, 'I began to wonder how it was that foreigners, that Englishmen could do such things as they had done, for example with the barren rock of Hong Kong . . . I got my

revolutionary ideas entirely in 'Hong Kong,' (Quoted from G.B. Endacott's *A History of Hong Kong*).

For our three university leaders, this sense of Hong Kong as a dynamic multicultural city was only heightened by their individual war experiences. We are reminded that speaking to students in late 1945, Duncan Sloss had this to say, as noted by Bunny Mellor in his *Informal History*:

I should like to express for myself and for the University the satisfaction we feel in the achievement of past and present students of the University during these years of horrors. Those who went in to China in various services and in the Universities, with very few exceptions, have won a high name. They have done more than anything achieved before to give Hong Kong University a reputation throughout South China. Those who stayed behind have helped us who were prisoners of war and interned in a way that has made the difference between survival and extinction, and this at great risks to themselves.

With all its modest scope and exterior, the University has justified itself. If, as many of us contend, the chief function of a University is to produce sound men and good citizens, then our University can proudly claim to be justified by its fruits . . .

My colleagues join with me in expressing a sincere regard for what you have done. We shall work together to get a University going of which we can all be proud . . .

We base our efforts on a realization of what China can do for Western civilization no less than what Western ideas and standards can do for China.

For Lindsay Ride, we need only consider how much his BAAG compatriot Francis Lee meant to him, as indicated in the following account by his son Edwin in his biographical volume *British Army Aid Group (BAAG) — Hong Kong Resistance 1942–1945*, Oxford University Press (1981). Ch. 1 footnotes 2, 17.

Francis Lee Yiu Piu played an outstanding part not only in Ride's escape from Sham Shui Po Camp but in the establishment and operation of the BAAG in which he rose to the rank of captain. His feats as an intelligence officer during the war earned him a place among the heroes of Hong Kong's resistance against the Japanese. For his meritorious service he was awarded a military M.B.E., having been honoured with the Military Medal in 1942 following his escape. After the war he was employed in private business in Hong Kong until 1960 when he joined the Auxiliary Medical Service. For a number of years he continued his association with the Hong Kong Volunteers, joining the Reconnaissance Unit of the Royal Hong Kong Regiment, RHKDF, as a captain. He died in Hong Kong in 1966 at the age of 49, of cancer. On his death Ride had the following notice published in the *South China Morning Post*:

“LEE — In humble thanksgiving for the life of Francis Lee Yiu Piu. An unselfish life of friendship, devoted wholly to the welfare of others. His was the greater love, the love of one who was willing to lay down his life for his friends. — LTR”

L.T. Ride died in Hong Kong on 17 October 1977 at the age of 79. He was born the fourth son of a Presbyterian minister at Newstead, Victoria, Australia, on 10 October 1898. Educated at Scotch College, Melbourne, the Universities of Melbourne and Oxford, and Guy's Hospital, London, he was appointed to the Chair of Physiology at the University of Hong Kong in 1928. He saw service as a private with the 38th Battalion, Australian Imperial Forces, in France during the First World War and was twice wounded. Following the events described in the book, he was in 1949 appointed Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hong Kong and served in that office until his retirement in 1964. During the period of his Vice-Chancellorship the University grew in size and reputation into one of the foremost institutions of higher learning in the Far East. His key role in this process was recognized by the Universities of Toronto, London, Melbourne and Hong Kong with the conferring of honorary degrees of LLD. His honours included OBE (Mil.) 1942, CBE (Mil.) 1944, ED (1948), and in January 1962 he was created a Knight Bachelor following the celebration of Hong Kong University's Golden Jubilee in the previous year. Outside his academic and military achievements, he was a man of wide interests. His favourite relaxations were sport and music. Towards the end of his life, he and his wife May devoted much of their time to the restoration and history of the Protestant Cemetery in Macau.

And for Gordon King, the following brief account personally communicated by his eldest daughter, Alison Kennedy, reminds us of a life firmly centred on China and Hong Kong.

Gordon King, the son of Rev. Fred H. King, was born in July, 1900, within the sound of Bow Bells in London. At the age of seven he moved to Bristol with his family. After an excellent grounding in the classics at Bristol Grammar School, he embarked on a career in medicine, specializing in Obstetrics and Gynaecology. He received his medical training at the London Hospital Medical College, University of London, graduating in 1924. In 1926 he became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, after which he sailed to China for his first teaching appointment in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the Peking Union Medical College (Rockefeller Foundation), when he also became proficient in Mandarin and learned to write thousands of Chinese characters.

It was in Peking that in 1927 he married his Scottish fiancée, Mary Ellison, a St. Andrews medical graduate who was already working in China. Their first two daughters, Alison and Margaret were born there during the following years. In 1929 he became a Foundation Fellow of the Royal College of Obstetricians and

Gynaecologists, remaining in Peking until 1932, when he and his family moved to the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the Cheeloo University School of Medicine in Tsinan, Shantung, where his third daughter Ellen was born. There he remained for six years, the last two under Japanese occupation, which he disliked intensely.

In 1938 the University of Hong Kong appointed him to the Chair of Obstetrics and Gynaecology and in 1940 he became the Dean of Medicine. After the Japanese seizure of Hong Kong, at the end of 1941 Dr King made a dangerous escape to Free China in early February, 1942, thanks to the planning of a former student, Dr Daphne Chun, who followed a few months later to work with him in Chungking, the wartime capital. Here he held a British Council appointment as Visiting Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology and organized a relief scheme for those students who had escaped from the island colony to the mainland. These events were graphically recalled in his own words when he was invited in 1973 to give the first Daphne Chun Lecture at the University, which he entitled *An Episode in the History of the University of Hong Kong* (reprinted here, on pp. 85–104). He did not mention then that in 1953 he received an OBE in the Coronation Honours List for services rendered to the colony of Hong Kong.

After his wartime experiences, referred to with gratitude by so many of the contributors to this volume, he resumed his post as Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (serving three times a Dean and also as Pro-Vice-Chancellor), operating mainly at the Queen Mary Hospital and Tsan Yuk Hospital, where he was widely known for his personal warmth, courtesy and kindness. Dr Daphne Chun eventually succeeded him in the Chair and also in the Family Planning Association of Hong Kong with which he had been associated since its formation in 1951.

Until the summer of 1956 Professor and Mrs King remained in Hong Kong where their two younger daughters graduated in Medicine, their eldest daughter having graduated in Arts in Scotland. The family lived in Lady Ho Tung Hall, a newly established residence for women undergraduates, of which Mary King had been appointed the first warden.

Leaving his beloved Hong Kong in 1956 to take up the Foundation Chair of Obstetrics and Gynaecology in the newly established Medical School in Perth, Western Australia, Professor King found another exciting place in which to work for ten years until his retirement in 1966. During 1965–1966 he also served as President of the Australian College of the Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, a high honour.

Upon retiring he accepted an invitation to become the Foundation Dean of the Faculty of Medicine in the University of Nairobi, Kenya, an opportunity to bring into existence yet another new Medical School!

His wife, Mary, died in 1967, to his great sorrow but in 1968 he married a long-time family friend and academic, Bek-To Chiu, who had lectured in Botany at the University of Hong Kong and then taught and researched at the University of London. They returned to Australia the following year and for two decades enjoying travelling and spending time in their riverside apartment in South Perth. During 1971 to 1973 they visited Taiwan, Hong Kong and Korea on behalf of the World Health Organization. Other notable visits to Hong Kong and the university were made; in 1973 to receive an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws and to deliver the first Daphne Chun Lecture in honour of his friend who had retired in 1972; and in 1987 for the Centenary of the Medical School, when his two younger daughters, Margaret and Ellen, were also present. He died quietly in Perth in 1991.

Looking back over the past half-century, we can see that through its enlightened administration and the quality of its graduates, the university played no small part in accelerating the postwar development in Hong Kong of a new attitude of respect and even, at times, admiration between the races of our polyglot colony, brought about by their shared wartime experiences, both civilian and military.

Among the Hong Kong-born contributors to this volume, who could have foreseen in 1941 that Joyce Symons, a former student, was to be the first postwar principal of the Diocesan Girls' School from 1953 to 1985, or that Rayson Huang, an alumnus, would be appointed Vice-Chancellor of the university from 1972 to 1986? Or that Albert Rodrigues would become Sir Albert as early as 1960, while Oswald Cheung (knighted in 1987) would be elected Steward (1977–1992) and then Chairman (1986–1989) of the Royal Hong Kong Jockey Club? Or that Patrick Yu would become the first Chinese Crown Counsel in 1951, resigning a year later as a determined opponent of colonial discrimination?

With Chinese, British, Portuguese, Russian and Eurasian backgrounds, our contributors embody the generation that made equality a reality in Hong Kong. We are grateful that they were able to record their watershed wartime experiences at this fascinating time when the university is entering another new era in its evolving role as a bridge between East and West. We admire the fortitude implicit in each of their accounts and congratulate them on their subsequent successful careers as doctors and lawyers, scientists and engineers, scholars and educators who acquired their life's direction on that cosy hillside campus in Hong Kong.

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