
In *War and Revolution in South China*, the historian Edward Rhoads recounts growing up in China during World War II and the Chinese Civil War. While Rhoads’ biracial family is at the center of the story, *War and Revolution in South China* is not a memoir, but rather an archivally grounded microhistory along the lines of Robert Bickers’ *Empire Made Me: An Englishman Adrift in Shanghai*. While written to address the relative lack of attention paid to grassroots perspectives and southern China in recent scholarship on China’s Second World War, this book is also in dialogue with broader trends in the study of war. I recommend it to any scholar or student working on modern China or war and society.

*War and Revolution in South China* substantiates Jay Winter’s claim that “the story of family life in wartime is the most powerful vector of transnational history.” Rhoads’ mother, Ngan Chi Kit, grew up in a wealthy Cantonese merchant family and received an English-language education at the missionary-run True Light Middle School in Guangzhou. In 1933, she took up a job as personal secretary to provost James Henry at Lingnan University, an institution in Guangzhou founded by American Presbyterians. Rhoads’ father, Howard Garrett Rhoads, left Philadelphia in July 1936 to take up an English-teaching position at Lingnan. Howard and Chi Kit married less than a year later, just three weeks before the Marco Polo Bridge Incident. Edward arrived in January 1938. The rest of the book follows his family through China’s devastating mid-twentieth century wars. His parents left few written records about their wartime experience, so Rhoads tells his family war story through Chinese and English-language sources from more than twenty archives in Asia, North America, and Europe. The result is a deeply informative history tracing what Hans van de Ven calls “wartime everydayness,” the war’s impact on daily life beyond the battlefield.

Rhoads’ microhistory approach offers rich detail on the history of Lingnan University. Lingnan was unique, Rhoads shows, among the thirteen colleges founded by Western missionaries because it was non-denominational, and


the first Christian university turned over directly to Chinese control, which occurred in 1927. Designed by American architects, it sat on a 600-acre campus across the Pearl River from the old city of Guangzhou. Most students came from wealthy Cantonese and overseas Chinese merchant families. Although Japanese forces left the campus alone when they occupied Guangzhou in October 1938, Lingnan's Board of Trustees decided to move its academic activities to British Hong Kong – though the old campus remained open. Lingnan shared facilities with Hong Kong University until the city fell in January 1942. It reopened in fall 1942 on an idyllic semi-rural campus in Qujiang, Guangdong's wartime provincial capital, though conditions were primitive, with no electricity or running water. Most students and Western faculty evacuated yet again during Japan's Ichigo Campaign, but the expected conquest of Qujiang did not materialize, which allowed Lingnan to resume operations in northern Guangdong later that year. In January 1945, however, students and faculty left for good after a new Japanese offensive captured the wartime provincial capital.

The fall of Hong Kong split Rhoads' family, with he and his mother remaining free while his father spent six months in the Stanley Civilian Internment Camp before eventually reuniting with his wife and son in China. Life was difficult for the camp's American, British, and Dutch internees, but fortunately their stay was relatively brief. In June 1942, intermediaries from Switzerland and the Red Cross helped negotiate an exchange of diplomatic personnel and enemy civilians. On June 29, the Japanese passenger ship Asama Maru picked up 377 internees from Hong Kong took them to neutral Portuguese East Africa (now Mozambique), where they traded places with repatriated Japanese and departed for New Jersey. Edward and his mother, meanwhile, relocated to Qujiang, where Chi Kit dealt with wartime inflation by supplementing her income from Lingnan with another typist job at the Maritime Customs Service. Howard returned to China in 1943 via an ocean voyage and Hump flight. After the family fled Qujiang as refugees during Ichigo, Howard found work with the U.S. government's Office of War Information (OWI) as chief of English publications.

The family returned to Guangzhou and Lingnan University after Japan's surrender and remained in the city throughout the Civil War except for a one-year sabbatical in the United States. Howard Rhoads continued part-time work in Guangzhou with the OWI – which was renamed the United States Information Service (USIS) and placed under the State Department. In USIS, Howard worked under the Harvard historian John King Fairbank, who would later supervise Edward's Ph.D. research at Harvard. Rhoads describes the impact of inflation and the Civil War on campus life and notes that the initial reaction to the CCP takeover was overwhelmingly positive at Lingnan.
The Communists initially refrained from making major changes, but the political atmosphere on campus transformed after the Korean War began. The CCP required Westerners to register and turn in firearms in early 1950 but allowed free movement within Guangzhou. University classes continued without interruption, as did church services, though a new “General Political knowledge” course was added to the curriculum at Lingnan’s primary school, which Edward attended (156). American and Chinese staff at Lingnan continued to get on well. All this changed when war broke out in Korea. “Political attacks on the United States increased exponentially,” Rhoads writes (159). Most foreign faculty decided to leave, but Rhoads’ parents opted to stay on while making contingency plans.

China’s decision to join the war in Korea marked the beginning of the end for Lingnan. Classes were cancelled on November 3 so all students and teachers could attend a mandatory anti-American rally chaired by provincial governor Ye Jianyang. Students began denouncing professors, including Howard Rhoads. From December 14 to 15, the anti-American campaign reached a climax on campus with a two-day denunciation meeting, in which almost all American employees at the university were attacked by name. Chinese staff deemed too close to the Americans were also criticized. Edward Rhoads and his parents left Guangzhou on February 3 after obtaining the necessary exit permits. Howard and Chi Kit never returned to Guangzhou again.

This engaging but scholarly study illustrates the importance of grassroots perspectives and regional approaches to China’s mid-twentieth century wars. Rhoads has written a first-rate microhistory.

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