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Diocesan Girl's School

「An Overview of How the 2nd Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945)
Impacted Diocesan Girls' School and Her Development」

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6TH INTER-SCHOOL COMPETITION OF PROJECT LEARNING ON
HONG KONG'S HISTORY AND CULTURE

DIOCESAN GIRLS' SCHOOL

**An Overview of How the 2nd
Sino-Japanese War
(1937-1945) Impacted
Diocesan Girls' School and
Her Development**

Written by
Kristy Wu
Gabriel Sung
Regina Chung

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Abstract

In 1937, the Second Sino-Japanese War broke out and Hong Kong was occupied in 1941 after the Governor, Sir Mark Young surrendered to the Japanese Imperial Army. Diocesan Girls' School was also used as the headquarters of the Japanese gendarmerie in this occupation of Hong Kong.

This paper investigates the role of Diocesan Girls' School in the time period 1941 to 1949, which is before and after the war. It aims to look into several aspects of the school during that time: firstly, on the positive and negative impacts the war brought to the school; secondly, on how the school was able to recover quickly and continue to excel despite the wartime conditions; last but not least, on the school's unique values displayed in times of difficulty.

The paper is divided into three parts, firstly, the basics of the paper, including the historical backgrounds of Hong Kong during the time period of , the aims and scope of research, and the many points the paper focuses on; secondly, literature reviews done to provide summary of the important information used in the paper with their sources and authors and to support our thesis; thirdly, discuss, looks into the different impacts of the war to the school and analysis on the situation back then, coming to a conclusion from the research. Through this paper, we hope to be able to understand the school during the era and understand more about the school history, thus seeking ways to improve the school further for a better future.

Although the school faced multiple difficulties and challenges during and after the war, through investigation, we see that the school has done a lot to contribute to the society in return. This presents the characteristic of the girls of DGS, and is, also, the school motto- 'Daily Giving Service'. It is important to recognize the School's achievements, but more importantly, her contributions to the society. We believe that the School rose to become one of the esteemed schools in Hong Kong because of her contributions during and after the War and her persistence of the school motto.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 General background

Diocesan Girls' School is one of the most historic girls schools in Hong Kong. It was founded by the Anglican Church in 1860 as the Diocesan Home and Orphanage to provide all-rounded education to girls in Hong Kong. In 1878, the School was placed under the grant-in-aid scheme and established itself as an all-girls school. In 1937, the Second Sino-Japanese War broke out and lasted for 8 years. Hong Kong was occupied for 3 years and 8 months, during which DGS was taken over and used as the headquarters of the Japanese gendarmerie (*Diocesan Girls' School, 1978*).

We see that the Second Sino-Japanese War brought two aspects of impacts to DGS and Hong Kong. Firstly, on the hardware of the School, and secondly on the software, that is, the education system. On the hardware of the School, according to Miss Hurrell, the Headmistress of DGS in 1946, 'the difficulty after the war was the little education, no English and destruction of school buildings; no books or libraries. School furniture had been used as feeding boxes for Japanese horses.' This is because during the war, the Japanese troops occupied Hong Kong and used school buildings as their hospitals or their headquarters. As for the education system, the Grant Code (where the school is under this particular scheme) was suspended because of the war and was restarted in 1947 (*Education Department of Hong Kong, 1947-1949*). The war brought mostly negative effects to the school- despite these negative effects, the school was able to overcome these problems with little support from the Government.

1.2 Rationale of research

The school's rich historical background is one of the major foundations of its excellence in schooling. This paper further explores this background and learn about the school's origins, in hopes of understanding more about the school and appreciate its unique spirit. In this paper, the school's development from 1941 to 1951, which is before and after the Second Sino-Japanese War, will be elaborately described and analyzed on how the School overcame the impacts brought by the War.

Throughout the research for this paper, the school displayed its relentlessly contributed to the society despite the difficulties faced during and after the war, thus making it necessary to investigate what contributed to the school's withstanding in this period of time to learn about what makes it an esteemed school in the Hong Kong society.

1.3 Inquiry Questions

1. What was DGS's situation before the war?
2. How did the Second Sino-Japanese War affect DGS?
3. After the war, how was DGS able to recover from the damages (loss of students and staff members, damage of buildings)?

1.4 Definitions

'The School' is defined as Diocesan Girls' School, Hong Kong.

'The War' is defined as the Second Sino-Japanese War, which broke out in 1937.

'The Headmistress' is defined as the Headmistress of Diocesan Girls' School.

These definitions will stay constant throughout this paper unless otherwise specified.

1.5 Thesis Statement

Despite the difficulties faced during and after the Second Sino-Japanese War, Diocesan Girls' School's school motto, 'Daily Giving Service' withstood, thus leading to the prestigious position in the society today.

1.6 Research Methodology

Author of this paper read materials published by Diocesan Girls' School (*A Brief History* and *Quest* magazines published throughout the years) to gain an idea of the situation of the school during the war and post-war period as well as the Annual Government Records on Hong Kong in the years of 1947 to 1950 in order to understand the education system in Hong Kong during and after the War. The official website of the Diocesan Old Girls' Association also contributed as one of the sources used in the paper.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction to Literature Review

Today, the School is considered as one of the best schools in Hong Kong, and that we see the historical background of the School greatly affects the spirit of the School, thus leading to the prestigious position today. Throughout the years of war and terror, the School kept its spirit of recording all sources of school history and these sources: including publications from the School, newspaper cuttings from the press of the era and various photos and materials from former headmistress Miss J. Symons). These sources became a very important support for the paper. Aside from source from the School's archive room and information from the official Diocesan Old Girls' Association webpage also support many information for the paper.

It is suggested that the School rose to become an esteemed school in the Hong Kong society because of her contributions to the society after the War and her withstanding spirit of 'Daily Giving Service'. The literature reviews are done in the following parts to support this thesis.

2.2 Entries in the previous *Quest* magazines published by Diocesan Girls' School

2.2.1 Editorial written by Frances Jönsson in 1941

In this piece of editorial, Frances Jönsson talked about how the school was able to recover from the Sino-Japanese War in Mainland China despite the change of school building. He describes how the school could be quickly acquainted to the new building and thus increase the school's productivity and also being an incentive for the school to work at higher standard. Another matter discussed was the cause and impacts of war, bringing destructions and tragedies to the world. Despite these circumstances, there is still a sense of bringing back peace and equality in the people, and although some might seek to solve the problem through diplomacy or education, he believes that God's Word and the establishment of His Kingdom is the most effective way to bring peace to the world. This shows the deep-rooted faith of the Christian belief that runs in the school and the firm faith in God and Christ that had supported the school members in times of hardship.

2.2.2 Headmistress' Report by AW Hurrell in 1949

In the Headmistress's report of 1949, Mrs A.W. Hurrell appreciated the opportunity for the School to enjoy an undisturbed year of steady work and advance even there were so much political disturbance and interruption of study for young people. She highlighted that although the number of students in the School at that time was just over 600 (since 220 of them were in the separate Junior School), each department was able to preserve something of the family spirit which was such a strong characteristic of the smaller DGS in the war days. This shows that the School, though facing many difficulties, would still relentlessly persist in providing education and contributing to the society.

2.2.3 A Memory of a Refugee (Taonan Yishu) written by Ruan Yuling in 1951

This is a memoir of Ruan Yu Ling, a DGS old girl, on her refugee experience during the Sino-Japanese War lamenting when China would become prosperous.

At that time, Yu Ling's family had to flee to Guangxi from Hong Kong, from Guangxi to Guizhou before they could finally settled in Chongqing. During the journey to evacuate from Liuzhou to Guiyang, Yu Ling's family took a train and stayed in a bedroom with four beds with all their belongings there. The corridor outside the room was so crowded and impossible to make way. Suddenly, some Chinese soldiers started to climb into the train from the windows and got into Yu Ling's family bedroom. Although Yu Ling told the soldier not to come in, he still insisted. In the end, he still decided to leave his belonging there despite the fact that he would be staying somewhere else. Yu Ling questioned how China can have days of prosperity if their military had no discipline.

Although Yu Ling was frustrated, in the passage she did not focus on her frustration, instead, she pointed out the main problems of the mother country out of her love for it. This displays that, despite the girls of the School were treated unfairly, harshly and poorly, but as their love goes first-in-priority, they would not let their anger and frustration overcome them.

2.3 Other Sources

2.3.1 A Brief History 1860-1977 published by Diocesan Girls' School in 1978

In the publication 'Diocesan Girls' School, Kowloon: A Brief History 1860-1977', it outlined the key events happened during the world war II period in relation to DGS.

'In 1941 Occupation of the Colony by the Japanese. The DGS school buildings were looted and later taken over as the headquarters of the Japanese gendarmerie. Miss Gibbins was interned in Stanley camp.

On 4th September 1945, Miss Gibbins, accompanied by the Vicar of St. Andrew's and Professor Forster of Hong Kong University, succeeded in entering DGS before the Japanese left, thus preventing extensive looting by local people.

On 4th September 1945, Miss Gibbins has been joined by six former pupils and members of staff and on 1st October 1945 to reopen the school.

Miss A.W. Hurrell became the Headmistress of DGS in March 1946. She had to face different challenges and difficulties to recover the school and student education after the war.'

The contribution and courage shown by Miss Gibbins and Miss A.W. Hurrell are great demonstrations of the School's spirit of generosity in service.

2.3.2 'The Lessons of a Lifetime' written by Kevin Kwong, publishing year unknown

This newspaper article is about an interview of Dr. Symons, the former Headmistress.

'Ms. Symons remembered vividly she started the school after the war was over and had the most wonderful support from the services, the R.A.F. (Royal Air Force), the navy and army. She was coming back from Macau, where she stayed during the war, on a ship that belonged to the navy... As she headed towards the school, she found the headmistress outside with some RAF (Royal Air Force) men. She noticed as she passed Chi Wo Street, hundreds of people around and they were waiting to loot the school as they did in some other schools. Once the Japanese left, the looters moved in... half of an old tennis court made of concrete and Ms. Symons didn't have time to have the broken concrete removed. So, she asked an army officer for some Japanese PoWs (Prisoners of War) to dig up the concrete which there was a new order saying civilians couldn't use PoW labour.

On the following day, the admiral visited the school. When he came through the school gates, he looked at the Japanese digging. He looked very stern. Then Ms. Symons said, "I knew about the order and as you were coming, I wanted to ask you myself whether you can just allow the Japanese to finish up the job." The admiral replied, "young woman, I see you have a will of your own."

According to the report, Dr. Symons is 'a strong woman' and that she had contributed to the Hong Kong society in various ways, including in her position of urban councilor, she 'fought hard for redress in areas including education, corruption and traffic problems'; as legislative councilor, she argued for the reintroduction of the death penalty in Hong Kong. This is a common characteristic of DGS girls: after they graduated from the School, they would rise into Women of Excellence and as contributors to the society, they showed their love towards it and would, even when facing challenges and difficulties, incessantly help with the society's development.

Chapter 3: Discussion

3.1 The negative impacts of the Second Sino-Japanese War

3.1.1 Destruction of school building and facilities

In the War, the Hong Kong was occupied after the Governor of Hong Kong, Sir Mark Young surrendered to the Japanese Imperial Army after 18 days of fighting on 25th December, 1941 (*Snow, 2004*). Schools, including the School herself, were occupied as the headquarters of the Japanese gendarmerie. According to Mrs Gibbins, the school building was destroyed during the occupation and that the school furniture were used by the Japanese army for various uses, including the usage of these furniture as feeding boxes for Japanese horses (*Diocesan Girls' School, 1978*). According to *A Brief History*, Mrs Gibbins, after the Japanese evacuated, was 'accompanied by the Vicar of St. Andrew's and Professor Forster of Hong Kong University, succeeded in entering DGS before the Japanese left, thus preventing extensive looting by local people'. Also, from a news report on Dr Symons, the Headmistress in 1957, it was mentioned that the School's tennis court became a pile of concrete after she came back to the School after the War (*Kwong, year unknown*), showing that the School experienced great destruction in the War.

Despite multiple destruction and suffering, the School faced the difficulties caused by the aftermath of the War: the great population of people who evacuated during the war returned to Hong Kong after the War and victims of the civil war in Mainland China immigrated to Hong Kong. This made the demand for school places to rise greatly to 100000 pupils studying in over 500 schools in Hong Kong. The Grant Schools, including the School herself, were overcrowded as there was a high demand for places and a shortage of buildings (*Diocesan Girls School, 1978*). Under these circumstances, the School made developments: new classes such as Commercial and Domestic Science were introduced, expansion of school buildings, completion of the new Junior School building, etc.

Besides from in-School developments, the School contributed to the Hong Kong society through education. As aforementioned above, a large population of refugees from Mainland China immigrated

to Hong Kong to escape from the civil war. The School admitted a number of girls in the group of refugees and these girls, fortunate enough, done well in their studies in the School and the School saved these girls from losing at least one year of education (*Diocesan Girls' School, 1978*). This, we see, that are contributing to the first step of female education as there was a general misconception in the traditional Chinese society that females should not receive any education and that through providing education to a larger group of girls could mobilize the society into the mindset of education should be equally enjoyed by both sexes.

3.1.2 Casualties and loss of school members

In 1939, the Hong Kong Government and the Colonial Office of Britain were concerned about the threats posed by the Japanese. The Colonial Office monitored Japanese troop movement in South China closely and were alarmed by the Japanese's movement. The government started to consider evacuating all British female and young residents and the official Evacuation Order was carried out in 1940 (*Kong, 2015*). Students and staff of the School, including the Headmistress in 1941, Miss Sawyer, has to leave Hong Kong for evacuation, thus making her retirement earlier; also because of the War, many students of the School evacuated from Hong Kong to escape from the War (*Ruan, 1941*). The Japanese Imperial Army then occupied the School building and looted the School of her furniture, equipments and records in 1941, while the Headmistress after Miss Sawyer, Miss Gibbins, was interned in Stanley camp (*Diocesan Girls' School, 1978*), thus making teaching and education impossible.

Very fortunately, the School has received no reports on casualties of girls of the School, thus we believe that no girls were wounded or passed away due to the War. However, the War caused great impact to Hong Kong and China: most Western historians believed that the total number of casualties was at least 20 million (*Anderson, 2011*).

After the war, the School has barely over 600 students, but ‘each department is able to preserve something of the family spirit which was such a strong characteristic of the smaller Diocesan Girls’ School of re-war days.’ (*Hurrell, 1949*) However, the School recovered quickly and in 1947, the School became overcrowded as there was a big demand for places (*Diocesan Girls’ School, 1978*). This shows that the strength that the School could endure destruction and loss of students and staffs. We believe that this is one of the many reasons that establishes the School as an esteemed school in Hong Kong.

3.2 The positive impacts of the Second Sino-Japanese War

3.2.1 On the spirit of the school

Although the Sino-Japanese War brought to Hong Kong and the school both physical and mental trauma, there is still a way for the community to recover from the damage. Through this trauma, the school as a whole learned to become stronger, better and braver to contribute to the society and respond to her motto, “Daily Giving Service.”

A quote from the editorial of the first publication of the school displays the spirit of the school’s motto, “The fact that the School is always crowded to the maximum capacity consonant with the high standards it maintains has made it impossible for us to admit refugees on a large scale, but we have taken a number of girls from Shanghai and elsewhere into our higher classes and thereby saved them from losing at least a year’s schooling. Fortunately, many of these girls have done extremely well and proved a credit to the School.” (*Jönsson, 1941*) Despite the school still being in the process of recovery from the war, she did not fail to uphold the values of the school motto and continued to do all that she could to help girls in need, regardless of their family background and previous education. The war serves as a challenge against the core values of the school and nonetheless the school stood up to it, further proving the unyielding devotion it displays to the society.

Another value brought up by the War was the concern for the country students expressed during the war. The war brought Hong Kong and Mainland citizens together as a whole to help each other through the difficult times, and also helped some of them to realise the need for their country to improve. A contribution in a school publication tells the story of a student fleeing to Guiyang from Hong Kong.

During her journey to Guiyang staying in a room on a train, she understood why Chinese soldiers were much weaker those from other countries and the reason to China's failure: "We arrived at a small town at night and the train stopped. Suddenly, there was an outburst of noise from outside and some soldiers started to climb into the train from the windows. We immediately closed the bedroom door, but it was too late. A dirty hand snuck in and stopped us from closing the door. Our bedroom was already very crowded with my family and friends, there was also a woman with her baby in the room at that time. We told the soldier that we do not have room for him to come in, but he insisted on coming in. In the end, he still decided to leave his belonging here despite the fact that he would be staying somewhere else. Just basing on this incident, I thought: how can China have days of prosperity? Their military has no discipline!" (*Ruan, 1951*) The student, despite being treated poorly by the soldier, she did not focus her frustration onto the behaviour of him. Instead she remained her concern and love for her home country and pointed out the problem her country had. She did not blame her country for not being able to protect her people, but made constructive thoughts on the reason to her country's weakness. The sympathy and bond between Hong Kong and the Mainland is well displayed again in the Editorial of the first school publication after the war as aforementioned above: "...none has had a greater burden to bear than our neighbour, China. Whatever our private views as to the rights and wrongs of this bloodthirsty civil war, we cannot refrain from extending our deepest sympathy to the millions of innocent human beings affected by it, and especially to the teachers, students and school-children who have struggled manfully to keep the flame of learning alight right up to the moment when the tide of war engulfed them." (*Jönsson, 1941*) This quality of

being critical and also patriotic to the country despite the hardships faced is certainly a value that runs among the school's community in that difficult era.

Finally, a tradition that runs in the school as the core and utmost powerful strength, the Christian belief. Rather than loosing hope to reality and giving up, the school retained her diligence and faithfulness to Christ and God: "mortal humans are proved to fail maintaining peace through education and evolution, seeing that the inequality in power as the unsolved root cause of chaos and tragedy". (Jönsson, 1941) However, it suggests that how "some of us believe that the only solution to the world's chaos is the establishment of Christ Kingdom; men will then be united in the acknowledgement of the Creator as Lord of His creation" and through the school's faith and strength, the school continues to serve God's purpose and retain its reputation as a Christian school of virtue.

3.2.2 Learning from historic events

The war indeed brought sadness and sympathy to the school community, but the school never failed to learn from experiences. The spirit of learning is firmly established in the community, and the school learns in all circumstances, regardless of time and place. From the war, the school acquired the skills of crisis management and was able to put it into use and protect the school from further harm. It was mentioned that "the school buildings were looted of all furniture, equipment and records and were later taken over as the headquarters of the Japanese gendarmerie. Miss Gibbins was interned in Stanley camp. On September 4th (1945), Miss Gibbins, accompanied by the Vicar of St. Andrew's and Professor Forster of Hong Kong University, succeeded in entering DGS before the Japanese left, thus preventing extensive looting by local people." (1941 *Occupation of the Colony by the Japanese, A Brief History 1860-1977*) Mrs Gibbins was able to learn from the experience of the first looting to prepare to stop the next looting by locals, therefore successfully reclaiming back the school and was able to reopen it on September 5th. Although the school was able to reopen, it was left in a terrible state with many broken facilities and many items were looted and destroyed. Given the terrible conditions, it was recorded that "though faced with such difficulties as the destruction of the school

building, the absence of books and a library, Miss Hurrell was able to continue with the expansion of the existing school buildings, first with the conversion of a large dormitory from the old playshed.” (*A Chronological History of Headmistresses at Diocesan Girls’ School, DOGA Ltd*) The skills of crisis management is well developed during the era and thus allowed the school to continue excelling and developing throughout the difficult times.

While being able to manage the school well during the era of war and terror, the school also learned to be grateful of the times of peace and quietness. The Headmistress of Year 1949, Miss A. W. Hurrell states, “in a year that has seen so much political disturbance and so much interruption of study for young people in this part of the world, I think it should be a cause for great thankfulness that, in common with the other schools of this Colony, we have enjoyed an undisturbed year of steady work and advance.” (*Headmistress’s report, 1949*) The school was able to understand the importance of being grateful for every day of peace and cherish the moments of amity. The War serves as an opportunity to reflect on the past events and learn to be thankful of every passing day.

3.3 Analysis and Conclusion

The school endured hardships and difficulties in the war, and that the gain from these challenges was definitely greater than that which the school lost. The building was destroyed and so are the minds of many school children who had to experience the horrendous scenes of warfare, living continuously in a fear and agony. Some school members are unfortunately unable to return to their school again.

Friends and families are forced to separate in this chaotic time. The school, after the war, relentlessly provided education to those who are in need- the girls in the refugee groups. The school never forgets to love and serve the community, even in these conditions and continues promoting education. From this we can see the school’s sacrificial spirit and that this is actually what makes the school esteemed in the society and also changed how Hong Kong once viewed education. The society is a community where every member of it needs to provide and contribute, and the school had proven her

contributions to the society through the women of excellence that she trained; the girls of the school has a special quality that must be taken note of: endurance.

Dr Symons, who was the Headmistress for 32 years, was described as a ‘strong woman’ who ‘has a will of her own’ (*Kwong, year unknown*). We believe that is exactly what makes the girls of the school special and excellent. The aftermath of the war did not stop the school from making in-school improvements and societal contributions; it strengthened the school’s spirit that she was upholding from the establishment of the school: Daily Giving Service.

Based on the reasons aforementioned above, we see that despite the difficulties faced during and after the 2nd Sino-Japanese War, Diocesan Girls’ School’s school motto, ‘Daily Giving Service’ withstood, thus leading to the prestigious position in the society today.

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Appendix

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The original copy of *The Lessons of a Lifetime*