

Editor's Note: When she learned about the *EAA* special section on biographies and personal stories, National Chengchi University (Taipei, Taiwan) Art History Professor Jane C. Ju sent our office a copy of her mother's memoirs, *Popo's World* and an inquiry as to whether portions of the work might be applicable for the special section. I was particularly impressed, as was an external reviewer, with the memoirs and am pleased to publish two excerpts in this issue. They are preceded by Professor Ju's introduction. We thank the family for their permission to print the excerpts. A paperback of *Popo's World* may be purchased online at Amazon.com.

POPO'S WORLD *Youth and College Life*

By Chow-soon Chuang Ju (Hsin-jen)

Introduction by Jane C. Ju

INTRODUCTION

The following two essays, "Youth" (1937–1942) and "College Life" (1942–1946), are excerpts from my mother's memoirs, *Popo's World* (2010), which she wrote in Chinese and English. Born in 1924, my mother grew up in Zhangzhou, Fujian, China. Although not the center of political and social activities, it was very much part of a modernizing China. Fujian was one of the places where the British Christian mission was active since the late nineteenth century. My maternal grandfather, who was educated in mission schools, raised his family as Christians. He retired early from public office because of a disagreement with the local warlord. He opened a bookstore, which was patronized by the local elites and scholars, many of whom were also Western-educated. When my parents decided to marry, Lin Yutang (1895–1976), originally from Zhangzhou before becoming the renowned writer and translator of East-West culture, acted as my grandfather's representative and went to "check up" on my father's family in Jiangyin, Jiangsu, since it was considered the "barbaric" north.

When my mother was a young girl, Fujian was a battleground between the Nationalists and the Communists. She remembers the air attacks on her town by the Nationalist Army to suppress the National Revolutionary Army's Nineteenth Route Army rebelling against Chiang Kai-shek. Although hardly mentioned in history books today, the leaders of the so-called Fujian Incident (Rebellion) established the short-lived Fujian's People's Government in 1933–34, pointing to yet another complexity in the political history of modern China. In spite of the civil war and the war against the Japanese, my mother



Author standing in back row, second from right, at age 15 with her family. Photo courtesy of the author.

was able to take part in the educational reforms implemented during the Republican Period. The sagas of her educational experience, described as follows, demonstrate her determination to be educated and to educate others so as to save China and build a new nation. My mother is not listed in history books. Yet she is hardly ordinary. After all, she was the principal of an Guomin Xuexiao "Citizen School" at the age of fifteen.

Youth

(*Popo's World*, 82–85)

My high school had large new buildings. Miss Box the English teacher, a lady from London, was kind to me. The other teachers, too, were good to me. They encouraged me to participate in many activities: concerts, stage plays, athletics, and other kinds of competitions. I also worked hard for the government-sponsored New Life Movement. I joined the Great Cleanup and put posters everywhere. I really hoped a new China would appear soon.

News of the Japanese invasion grew more and more serious. The Sino-Japanese War broke out at last. By government order all schools were to move inland while fighting against the Japanese army continued. All the people of China prepared to face a prolonged defensive war, and war-time education became very important. The students and teachers of our school took wooden boats and sailed against the current to a little city in the mountains called Huaan. There we continued our schooling. When we came to rapids, boatmen carried coarse ropes on their shoulders and, jumping into the water or climbing up the bank, they pulled the boat forward. Step by step they moved ahead, making grunting sounds as they worked, until the boats passed the rapids.

After our boat ride we climbed several peaks to reach our destination, an old church, which was to be our temporary school. We had classes in the chapel of the church and slept on the chapel floor. As we had no mosquito nets, many got malaria. Others were sickened by the bad climate. Lacking medicines, the whole school later had to return to my hometown.

Our school soon moved again, this time to Guanxi, another small town in the mountains. The church in Guanxi provided us not only with classrooms but also our boarding rooms. My younger sister and I studied there together.

I graduated junior high school at a time when the government required junior high graduates who wished to enter senior high to complete a training class first. The trained students were sent to their hometowns to work for one year as teachers of the Guomin Xuexiao ("Schools for teaching people to be citizens of the nation"). As China had many illiterate people then, the government needed junior high graduates to work as teachers. My primary school diploma gave Huaan as my hometown, as it was customary to list one's ancestral home as one's hometown. Though I was born and raised in Longxi, Zhangzhou, I was assigned to work at Huaan. I knew nothing

about Huian. After much petitioning, the government permitted me to work in Zhangzhou. I was assigned to be principal of a Guomin Xuexiao of Longxi municipality. I was only fifteen years old, but I was fortunate to have an able assistant who taught classes of adult men and women while I taught the children's classes. There, in a Confucian temple, I helped my community reduce illiteracy and taught children to be good citizens. After a year, during which war raged, I returned to my original school to begin senior high.

My school settled down in Guanxi. Even though it was in the mountains, to reach the school students had to ride in wooden boats with bamboo covers. We came home for summer and winter breaks. Each boat could take only ten students and a teacher. We lay down in the center of the boat like sardines in a can. Our bathroom was either end of the boat next to the water. Though it was inconvenient, we talked and laughed together and forgot the difficulty of traveling. School life in the mountain town was comfortable.

Once, a mathematics teacher was forced to leave the school by government order due to some political problem. This news agitated the students. I do not know where I got the courage, but I lined up the student body and walked them to the local government office to challenge the action. The case was eventually settled. Yet I knew the difficult position of our school. It was a private girls' high school without enough money, and the government had shut down the senior high department once before. My

class was the first senior class since the senior high reopened. The heads of my school came from famous women's colleges. They had led the women's movement and participated in the Rescue Our Nation Movement. Our dean, Miss Liu, had been a representative to the National Assembly and was head of our Youth Corp. Several students joined the Youth Corp, where they gave public speeches and staged plays promoting anti-Japanese patriotism in hopes that the government would support our school.

Since we were in the last year of senior high, we knew we would be leaving school very soon. We worried not only about examinations and graduating, but also about how we could enter college, knowing the war would not be over soon and that my family could not afford to support a university education for me. I planned to take the joint entrance examination of several national universities, hoping that one of these universities would accept me and I could get financial aid. In the first year of junior high our class had forty students; we now had but ten in our senior class. We loved our school and wanted to donate money to it before we graduated. We planned to present a play and sell tickets to raise money. This project kept us busy. We went to bed very late. The school provided us with kerosene lamps and allowed us to cook potatoes for night refreshments. I cannot remember what words I put to the song "The Last Rose of Summer" that we sang on the farewell evening, but I remember my eyes were full of tears. It was thus I said good-bye to my romantic youth.

College Life (*Popo's World*, 85-93)



Group picture of the drama troupe at the war campus of Xiamen University at Zhangting. The author is circled in the upper right, back row. Photo courtesy of the author.

Germany and Italy, the Axis powers, occupied several countries as World War II raged in Europe. This seemed to make their Japanese ally more violent and wild. The Japanese army already occupied many of China's big cities, including Amoy (Xiamen, Fujian) near my hometown. The National Amoy University (today called Xiamen University, or Xiada for short) had evacuated to Changting, a small mountain city at the border of Fujian and Jiangxi provinces. By then, the highways were destroyed due to our government's "scorched earth" policy, designed to leave no facilities to the invaders when they occupied an area. There was no easy way to travel to Zhangting, the wartime campus of Xiada. But Xiada had a good reputation, and I wished to be accepted there.

Returning to Zhangzhou after my high school graduation, I asked my father for ten yuan, the fee to take the joint five southeast provinces college entrance exam in Zhangzhou. When a telegram arrived saying Xiada had accepted me, my father was dismayed. I understood why, because even if Xiada provided tuition, room, and board, we could not afford the travel

expenses. My mother, who herself could not read, used to earn our tuition by selling fruit from our orchard. She worked hard in the orchard, watering, weeding, and fertilizing. Now, she asked me to write to my brother-in-law, a country doctor, for help. Meanwhile, Mother chose our family's best clothes for me to use in college. She was not only a kind woman, but was also very capable as she took on all sorts of hardships which I will never forget.

My nine high school classmates faced their futures in ways different from the path I chose. I found traveling companions: some male Xiada students and one girl from my senior high who was to leave us halfway to go to another city. We would sail against the current in a boat with bamboo covering, toward Longshan. We would then travel on foot, climbing some big peaks to reach the bus station where we could board a bus to the university. The journey would be difficult, but it would have been more difficult to travel to the Women's Normal College in Sichuan Province, where I was also accepted, so my family decided I should go to Xiada.

At first, my father said he would not come to the riverbank to see me off. When the boat started to move, I saw Father walking toward us. He shouted and waved his hand, holding a bundle of money. "Do you need money?" I waved my hand and answered: "No, I do not need money." The boat was leaving. He stood on the bank disappointed. I could not help but cry. But before I even arrived at the university, he had wired me the money.

After I said goodbye to my elder sister and her husband (the country doctor at Longshan who had given me money for traveling), my companions and I continued our journey. We had to stay in an inn one night. This inn had only one bedroom with only one bed for me and my female schoolmate. The boys slept on the floor outside our room, guarding us from the other guests and their porters. We had peaks to climb the next morning, and I never had such an experience. I was thankful for kind people in pavilions along the way who gave us hot ginger tea to ease our thirst without charge.

We arrived at Pengkuo, where I said goodbye to the girl from my high school and I and the boys took the bus to the university. The boys escorted

me to the women's dormitory, called Duxing Zai (Work Faithfully Building). There were a few people from my town and older alumnae of my high school who looked out for me. I adjusted quickly.

Duxing Zai had a security system. At a certain time of night the entrance to Duxing Zai would close, and no one could get in or out. There were different rooms for upperclassmen and for freshmen and sophomores. Each room had two wooden double-bunk beds and a desk. The window was large. We used curtains in summer, and in winter we pasted rice paper in the window since there was no glass. Each bed had a straw mattress. Students brought their own blankets and mosquito nets.

We could use electric lamps until nine at night. After that we used candlelight or flames from dried grass burning in vegetable oil. A female worker brought us water for the toilets and the bathroom. By wartime standards, we eighty-some women of Duxing Zai lived like spoiled children of heaven.

These women included the best and brightest of the five provinces of southeast China. Some women came from areas occupied by the Japanese, and some from overseas. We wore long blue gowns for Monday morning assemblies. Otherwise there was no dress code. The girls of our generation got to do as the boys did. Like them, we strove to maintain good grades to win scholarships. Many girls also wanted affection and had boyfriends come over to visit. The dormitory had a porter's lodge where an old local woman would call a girl when she had a visitor. The old lady always called out the name of the girl quite loudly, embarrassing her. Hence many girls arranged their own times and places to meet their boyfriends.

Duxing Zai's students' association was in charge of room selection and social entertainment for the girls. It also opened the dormitory to the public once a year. One year I was elected President of the association. The job normally posed few difficulties, but that year our Women Student Advisor died, the association had to arrange the funeral affair. The Women's Advisor was a "widow" who had been a student in Japan but came home to "marry" her deceased fiancé's ancestral tablet in accordance with the old custom, so she was never actually married. Since I knew her only a little for she rarely joined in our activities, we found a male professor who knew her well to tell her story at the funeral. He kindly wrote a couplet to eulogize her: "You were the advance guard of the new era; you sacrificed yourself for the old custom." His sentiment was to the point: My generation lived at the intersection of the new and the old where contradictions happened about which we could neither laugh nor cry.

The women's dormitory was near the dining hall. I followed the other girls, bringing my own rice bowl and chopsticks to the dining hall for every meal. I brought my name tag, a piece of bamboo with my name on it, and handed it to those in charge of the meal. I would fill the bowl with hot rice porridge and get a plate of cooked soybeans for breakfast. Steamed rice with a plate of cooked vegetables was lunch, and dinner was the same. The food ration for the total eight hundred students every day was just two pounds of pork fat cooked with water, and salt, and some vegetables. To celebrate New Year, the president gave each student a piece of meat which we enjoyed very much, as we heard students at other campuses got no meat and had to fight for steamed rice.

Besides the dormitory and dining hall, I spent the most time in the library's reading hall. The reading hall never had an empty seat. If our assigned time for reading a reference book happened to be mealtime, we had to sacrifice the meal due to the limited availability of the book. The library provided electric lamps until nine in the evening. What a pity to see so many young men and women forced to leave the reading hall when the lights began to blink! I often saw students in thin and ragged clothes reading in the library. The spirit to endure a bitter life for the sake of higher education was common in my generation.

As a freshman, it was hard selecting courses to study. I chose some classes taught by famous professors in the hope I might learn more. But

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sometimes my high school preparation was not strong enough, and sometimes the regional accent of the professor was hard for me to understand. Because of this my grades did not qualify me for scholarships.

The famous courses offered were in science, technology, business management, economics, and political science. I was accepted by the Department of Chinese Literature. I did not have to choose from the tough courses, but I did select physics and political science, both of which made me work very hard. I learned a lot, but somehow the benefits did not seem worth the hardship.

I transferred to the Department of Law in my second year in hopes that I could become somebody in the field of Chinese law. I did not care that the Department of Law required students to have more credits than other departments. I worked hard to pass every subject. I had to take Family Law, but the Law Department did not offer it that semester. Professor Gao Mengxiong, once Judge of the Supreme Court, taught me the course at his home to allow me to complete my credits for the law degree. During my law school years I gave up many nonacademic activities: singing club, drama club, and youth corps. I could relax only in Professor Chen Liefu's International Law class, and under his guidance I received several prizes in essay competitions.

Even though the student population then was small (only about 800, versus 37,000 full-time students today), outside the classroom there were many student organizations. Students from varied cities and regions and with different political backgrounds organized various groups. There were students from Fuzhou, south Fujian, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang provinces. Some were right-wing and some left-wing. The students studied hard but still participated in many activities. The most common were stage shows, concerts, and the publishing of wall newspapers. Most academic departments, associations, and organizations posted their own wall newspapers to express their opinions. Sometimes they published love stories. Amazingly, these wall newspapers had many readers. These were posted on the outside walls of the Great Assembly Hall and the buildings near the Post Office. In the Great Assembly Hall, which was a Confucian temple, the university had a piano, a hard thing to find. People came to sing both solo and together. The music group called Iron Sound held successful concerts. The drama club performed at the Great Assembly Hall nearly every weekend. They presented ancient and modern stories, one act and multi-act plays. College life was varicolored in spite of the war.

During my first year I participated in many extracurricular activities. I was chosen for a team of fifteen from Xiada to join the summer camp in Shangrao of Jiangxi Province. This camp was organized by the government to gather youth from the universities of the five southeast provinces. We rode an army truck to the destination. I did not know at first that my Fujian-accented Mandarin had created a story during the trip. I was looking for a lost umbrella, but my teammates were helping me look for a lost fan. Ju I-Hsiung, also a freshman, was one of the fifteen from Xiada. He wrote up the story and sent it back to be published on the campus wall newspaper. We became acquainted because of this incident.

At the summer camp, the directors assigned me to edit the wall newspaper, and they put me onstage one morning to speak to the student body. I explained that I wanted to be one of the stones that make up the path to the ideal world. I got to know many people from other universities. I also took



The author was the only female student in her college law class.
Photo courtesy of the author.

serious military training. But I only went on one night march, finding it hard to take.

Upon my return to Xiada, I became more strong-willed and selfish. Completing my law studies was my main goal. Still, I often took walks with I-Hsiung to Plum Woods or accompanied him sketching or painting. We also spoke about our school work. People said I was in love but I denied it.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor brought the United States into World War II. Even as the Allies began winning in Europe the Japanese military intensified its efforts in Asia. The Chinese government therefore called for the youth to join the military with the slogan, "A hundred thousand youths are a hundred thousand soldiers!" Many college students, accepting the call, left their campuses. I was hearing another call and dreamt of being a pioneer in the border regions of China. I continued my studies at a time when China was in desperation about the outcome of the war. It was the atomic bomb that forced Japan to surrender. We were very happy and jumped in the air for joy at that outcome. And everyone began to make new plans.

I had to write a thesis for my fourth year in college. The new department head, Professor Chen Chaobi, was my thesis advisor. We selected "The History of the Chinese Legal System" as my topic, and I spent much time at the library. At last, my spectacular thesis was finished. Yet Professor Chen advised me at the end: "You are such a petite girl, without the severe face of a judge. I don't think you would enjoy working in the judicial world. I think you had better be a teacher." He said it so sincerely. Did he know I had plans to teach in the Philippines and so advised me accordingly? In any event, he did not encourage me to work in the field of law.

World War II ended with Japan's surrender. My cousin Chuang Nan-Ping, who earlier left our hometown for the Philippines, learned that I would soon graduate from Xiada. He suggested I go to the Philippines to teach in a Chinese school. My family liked the idea, and I also wanted to pursue graduate studies there. My cousin worked hard to make possible my trip to Manila and he got me a teaching job there, but he had to take my place for two months as school in China ran until June while in the Philippines school started in April. He wanted me to come to Manila as soon as possible. After my law course final examinations, I went home to prepare to go to the Philippines. I-Hsiung went with me to my home. His family in the province of Jiangsu wanted him, too, to go home. Pulled in all these directions, what could we do? Friends could only send their good wishes, for we each have to face our own future. At Gulangyu, I saw I-Hsiung off on the small boat that was to take him to the big Shanghai steamship. Then I went back to my friend's house alone. I cried. That was when I realized I-Hsiung and I could not be apart. ■

CHOW-SOON CHUANG JU (pen name **HSIN-JEN**) spent her early life in Zhangzhou, Fujian, China. In 1946, after finishing law at the University of Amoy, she left China, traveling by steamship to Manila, where she taught at Chinese schools, was a newspaper columnist and editor, and pursued graduate studies at the University of Santo Tomas in the Philippines. She left for the United States in 1968 and has served as president and trustee of the American Alumni Association, and the US-Canada Alumni Association of Xiamen University. She now resides in Princeton, NJ.