

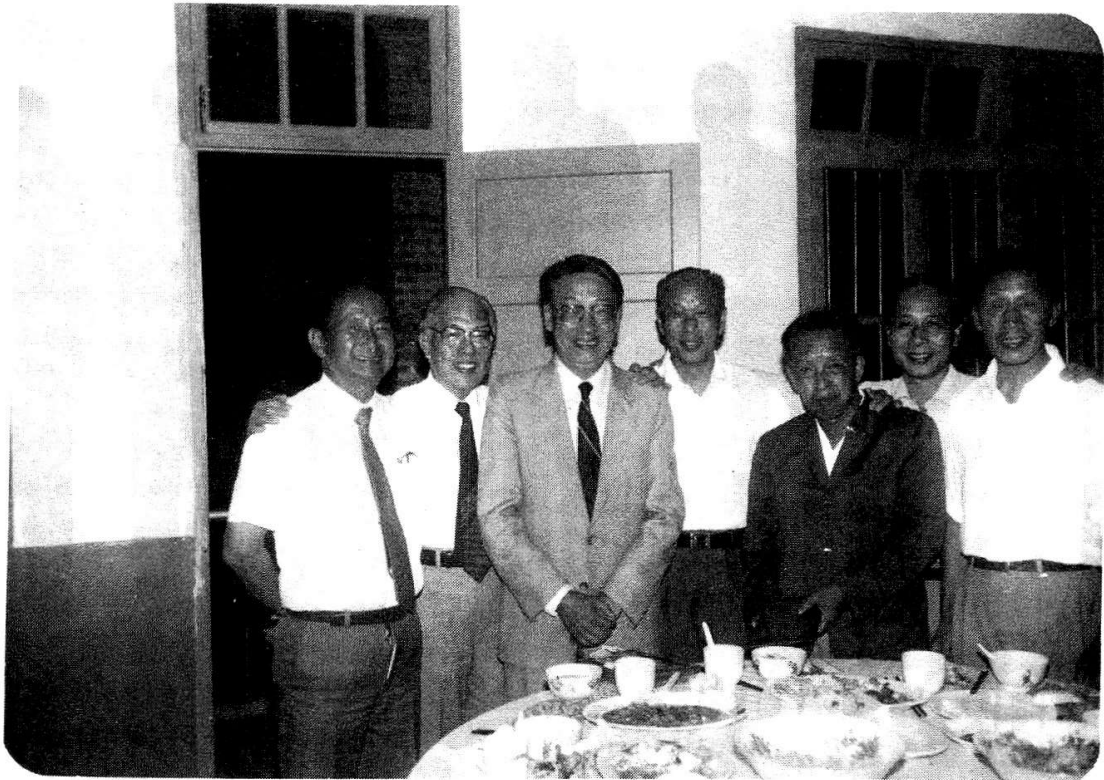


During the recent visit of the Shanghai Catholic delegation to Hong Kong, which we covered in our last issue, Tripod's regular contributor Father Elmer Wurth noticed a more than usual friendly relationship between a delegate and Dr. John Chen, one of Tripod's Board of Governors and the President of Lingnan College. Sensing a story, Elmer tracked down Dr. Chen in his office at Lingnan and came away with an intriguing account of the "seven Johns of Aurora University". We thought you would like to hear it, too. The Editor.

TRIPOD: When the Shanghai Catholic delegation was here in July, I noticed that you and Professor Wang Zhenyi spent a lot of time chatting about old times. I assume that you two go back a long way.

Dr. Chen: Indeed we do. In fact, we are only two of what came to be known in those days as the "seven Johns of Aurora".

Q: Tell us more.



*Reunion in Amoy, October, 1984  
From L to R, Chen, Young, Lo, Wang, Wu, Zhang and Cao*

A: All seven of us were classmates for three years in senior high school in Aurora, taking preparatory courses for our entrance into Aurora University. That was in 1939. When we graduated from senior high school in 1942, we spent a summer together forming a xiao xia hui or summer vacation discussion and work group. Each day we got together to talk about social issues, religion, the meaning of human life, and also to offer Mandarin, English and arithmetic lessons free of charge to children in the neighborhood. At the time two of the seven were already Catholics, John K. Young and John Wu, and they were anxious for us also to see the positive value of religion. By the end of the summer after many discussions, we the remaining five did come to view religion as indeed useful, educational, and as a help and guide to both educated and uneducated alike in leading a better life. That was the conclusion

reached by the five of us who were not yet Catholics.

Q: Did you follow up on your conclusions?

A: Yes, and that's the real story of all the Johns. Within a period of one or one-and-a-half years, the remaining five of us who were not Catholics all entered the Church. We were baptized after taking instructions from Jesuit priests at Aurora University. I was the first and I decided to take the name of John, to have St. John as my patron saint. The next one to become a Catholic was John Cao. He became my godson and I asked him to take the name John, too. So he became the fourth John. Then the others followed suit and when they became Catholics they all took John as their baptismal name. We then became known as the seven Johns of Aurora University.



*Dr. Wang (standing) with other members of Shanghai delegation, Hong Kong, July, 1985*

Q: What did you all study when you entered the University?

A: Of the seven of us, four (Wang, Young, Lo and Zhang) joined the medical faculty. John Wu and I entered the faculty of law - actually I studied economics

and political science within the faculty of law - and John Cao entered the faculty of engineering. John Young remained with the medical faculty for only one year and then transferred to another university to study business administration. John Wu was in poor health from the start and he was at the university for only one year before going back to Amoy.

Q: And after graduation, how did you keep in touch?

A: I left Shanghai in 1951. John Young and John Lo had left earlier in 1949, John Young going to Singapore and John Lo to France. We wrote to each other for some years after I left China, but then we stopped. (At one point it became dangerous for people in China to correspond with outsiders). So for many years we lost contact. It was not until 1980 that we began to get back in touch with each other. I went to France to see Dr. Lo and in the same year I met John Young again. I also went to Shanghai and found Professors Wang and Zhang, and Mr. Cao, my godson. Last year all seven of us had a grand reunion in Amoy, at the home of John Wu. John's health has continued to be poor even up to the present day.

Q: Of the seven, four Johns stayed in China and three left for overseas. What are you all doing now?

A: Well, I have been in education ever since I finished my university studies. I stayed on at Aurora after graduating in 1946 doing research, and working on a periodical dealing with Chinese economics. I was on the editorial board and did a lot of the translating and editing. From 1948 to 1951 I also taught economic geography at Aurora University. When I came to Hong Kong in 1951, I taught at Wah Yan College for five years, one year on Hong Kong Island and four years on the Kowloon side. Later I became a member and Senior Program Officer of the Asia Foundation. Then I served as Secretary of New Asia College at the Chinese University and later served as Registrar of the Chinese University. In 1982 I joined Lingnan College as Vice-President, and in 1983 I became President. John Young

has always been a businessman and is now the Chairman of the Board for John K. Young and Co. in Singapore. Professor Wang is presently the President of the Second Medical University in Shanghai where he is a hematologist. Professor Zhang is a professor at the same university and is in charge of the dermatology department at Rui Jin Hospital. Dr. John Lo was for many years the director of a medical centre in Alsace, France, before retiring two years ago. Mr. Cao is the chief engineer for the Zhejiang Provincial Power Company in that province. John Wu, as I have mentioned earlier, has been suffering from poor health for many years. So this is roughly the story of the seven Johns.

Q: Has the recent opening up of China drawn your overseas colleagues back to contribute to its modernization?

A: Well, John Young has been involved in some business ventures in China. His company has already entered into a cooperative relationship with a factory making sports goods. Dr. John Lo served as a visiting professor at the Second Medical University in Shanghai last year, and he hopes to go back again in 1987 to lecture there for a few more months. As for myself, Lingnan College has embarked upon a series of academic exchanges with Zhongshan University, Shanghai University and the Harbin Shipbuilding Engineering Institute. During the last two years, the College has sent teachers of English and lecturers in computer studies, economics, sociology and management studies. Hopefully, more can be done in the future.

Q: Are there any plans for another reunion?

A: Yes, we are hoping to get together again in 1987, perhaps in Hangzhou. We hope that John Wu will be in good enough health to travel there.

Q: Thank you, Dr. Chen, for sharing the story of the seven Johns of Aurora, and we wish you all continued success in your service to society wherever you may be.