

# **CURRICULAR CHALLENGES IN WARTIME: NORTHERN GUANGDONG UNIVERSITIES AND THE ANTI-JAPANESE WAR**

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## **ABSTRACT**

During the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, a significant chapter in modern Chinese history, higher education institutions faced numerous challenges. The Anti-Japanese War period presented a testing time for Chinese higher education. To sustain education and academic continuity, many colleges and universities in South China were compelled to relocate to the northern regions of Guangdong. This study focuses on the experience of colleges and universities that shifted to northern Guangdong during this tumultuous period, shedding light on the unique circumstances and features of their curriculum and teaching methods. This historical analysis provides valuable insights into the modernization of Chinese higher education and the localization of academic research. Understanding these aspects is essential to comprehend the context of higher education during this exceptional period in Chinese history.

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**Keywords:** Anti-Japanese War, Chinese higher education, curriculum teaching, wartime relocation, modernization.

## **1. Introduction**

The War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression was an unprecedented national war in modern Chinese history. The Anti-Japanese War period was a difficult period in Chinese history, and it was also a period when Chinese higher education faced great difficulties. With the change of the war situation, in order to avoid the war, continue the context and maintain education, a large number of colleges and universities in South China were forced to move to the north of Guangdong. Taking Northern Guangdong as an example, this paper conducts a study on the curriculum teaching of colleges and universities that moved to northern Guangdong during the Anti-Japanese War, aiming to comprehensively understand the situation and characteristics of the curriculum teaching of colleges and universities during the special war. This is of great significance for us to further understand the modernization of Chinese higher education and the localization of academic research.

## **2. During the Anti-Japanese War, South China's universities relocated to northern Guangdong to carry out education**

In October 1938, the Japanese army captured Guangzhou and Guangzhou fell, and the Guangdong Provincial government moved to northern Guangdong, and Shaoguan became the provincial capital and the center of the Anti-Japanese War. [1] After the victory of the Northern Guangdong War, a large number of colleges and universities moved to Shaoguan to carry out education, and Shaoguan became the "university town" at that time. In August 1940, a large number of universities in South

China that had moved out of the province and abroad moved back to Shaoguan, the wartime capital of northern Guangdong, and nearby Qujiang and Lechang, this stage was called "university return to the province". From 1938 to 1945, there were a total of 12 colleges and universities operating in northern Guangdong, of which 9 were relocated from overseas, including: National Sun Yat-sen University, Private Lingnan University, Private Guangzhou University, Provincial College of Education (later renamed Guangdong College of Arts and Sciences), Provincial Xiangqin Business School, Private Guangdong National University, Guangzhou Union Theological Seminary, Guangdong Provincial Art College, Private Soochow University. These colleges and universities relocated to northern Guangdong formed a "Implicit South China United University" and became "one of the three major university communities that coexisted with Southwest United University and Northwest United University and had a huge impact "during the war.[2]

### **3. During the Anti-Japanese War period, the curriculum teaching of colleges and universities relocated to northern Guangdong responded to the needs of the times**

Due to the severe situation of the Anti Japanese War, the Kuomintang government authorities at that time also formulated relevant plans for the curriculum of the relocated universities. At the same time, the relocated universities adjusted the curriculum based on their own actual situation to meet the needs of the war.

#### **3.1. The reference curriculum teaching policy and curriculum standards were unified**

At that time, the Kuomintang government formulated the "Outline of the Implementation Plan for Education at All Levels during the War", strengthened control over relocated universities, and adjusted the majors and courses of these universities. In terms of majors, public and private universities had been instructed to add engineering majors such as electrical engineering, civil engineering, and chemical engineering that were urgently needed by the country, and the engineering majors urgently needed by the national defense industry had been expanded. In terms of curriculum reform, after Chen Lifu was appointed as the Minister of Education in the spring of 1938, he comprehensively carried out the formulation of curriculum standards and issued the "Draft Method for Organizing Courses in Each Department of the Three Colleges of Literature, Science, and Law".[3]The first university curriculum conference was held in the same year, and a list of compulsory subjects for various colleges of literature, science, law, agriculture, engineering, and business was successively announced. In 1944, the revised list of common compulsory subjects for the branches of the four colleges of literature, science, law, and normal education officially included the Three Principles of the People and the study of Li Zexue. [4] All subjects in the natural and social sciences of various colleges are added with the word "ordinary". During the Anti-Japanese War, the policy regarding curriculum teaching was to place equal emphasis on "promoting wartime tutorials" and "improving scientific research", committed to seeking a balance between wartime needs and peacetime education.

#### **3.2. Many of the teachers who teaching courses were famous teachers**

Due to the war, a large number of college teachers were lost and relocated. At that time, the teachers of colleges and universities in northern Guangdong mainly included well-known professors, scholars, experts in the field and local intellectuals, among them, many famous teachers have emerged. Lu Hefu, the "father of Chinese nuclear energy", came back from studying in the United

States to conceive nuclear energy for people's livelihoods in dilapidated temples; Chen Huanyong, He graduated from Harvard University and returned to China as a "pioneer in botany"; Ding Ying, the principal founder of modern rice science in China; Wang Yanan and Guo Dali Teaching Capital; Xu Zhongyu, the "Father of College Chinese Language" in China; Huang Jiyu, the pioneer of modern higher mathematics education in China, who has a good knowledge of both Chinese and Western languages, literature and science; Chen Yinke, a historian who taught the history of the Wei, Jin and Southern and Northern Dynasties at that time; Ma Sicong, a famous musician; Hu Shihua, who deciphers computer technology; Zou Yixin, who studied the trajectory of celestial bodies at the Observatory; Yu Binglie, a famous professor of architectural engineering; Wu Shangshi, who established the "geography theory of the Pearl River Delta"; Du Dingyou, one of the founders of library science in China; and Zhu Qianzhi, an encyclopedic scholar, have all made outstanding contributions to the education and teaching work in northern Guangdong.

### **3.3. The curriculum objectives were clear and focused**

During the period of the Anti-Japanese War, the relocated universities not only carried out the work of saving the nation from extinction and striving for survival, but also fulfilled the social responsibilities that higher education should have. Therefore, the determination of curriculum objectives is particularly important. In January 1938, Chen Lifu pointed out in his "Letter to National Students" that "the task of education is to cultivate sound citizens in all aspects of morality, intelligence, and physical fitness, so that they can shoulder the arduous task of building a country. Therefore, when young people enter schools and study, from the perspective of the country, reading is actually their obligation, causing the phenomenon of youth dropping out of school, which is a crisis of national decline." [5] Different courses have different specific objectives. After the relocation of universities such as Sun Yat sen University and private Lingnan University to northern Guangdong, the curriculum objectives were mainly focused on the following aspects in the war environment: firstly, to strengthen the education of national spirit, patriotism and national consciousness: to cultivate students' national pride and patriotism through the curriculum; secondly, to attach importance to scientific and technological education: to cultivate students' scientific literacy and innovation ability, and to contribute to the development of science and technology of the country; thirdly, to attach importance to humanities: to cultivate students' moral qualities and build up cultural self-confidence; fourth, focus on practice: the curriculum includes experiments, internships, social surveys, etc., emphasising the combination of theory and practice, and allowing students to master theoretical knowledge in practical operation; fifth, cultivate international vision: foreign language courses are offered to encourage students to pay attention to international situations and developments, and to learn about cultures and science and technology in countries all over the world.

### **3.4. The construction of the curriculum system was a continuation of the past and an inspiration for the future**

Firstly, in order to maintain the academic network of higher education, universities in northern Guangdong still maintain their original subject curriculum system and implement a credit system for academic years. This is mainly reflected in the following aspects: First, the basic curriculum of the subject is relatively complete, such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, etc; Second, the professional curriculum is relatively complete, covering industry, agriculture, medicine, literature,

law, economics and other fields to meet students' learning needs in the professional field; Third, practical curriculum has been strengthened, mainly to enable students to master Anti-Japanese War skills, life skills and improve the ability to solve practical problems. For example, through teaching film projection, the Department of Social Education of Guangdong College of Arts and Sciences enables students to not only "thoroughly understand the structure and screening procedures of projectors", but also systematically master the procedures and methods of film screening and maintenance. Fourth, general courses are still attached great importance. The relocated colleges in northern Guangdong generally offer courses such as linguistics, literature, history, political science, sociology, ethics, philosophy, logic and physical education. At that time, the general courses of the relocated colleges were mostly offered in the first year of college. At that time, the courses of colleges and universities in northern Guangdong were divided into "compulsory courses" and "elective courses", and later divided into three categories: common compulsory courses, compulsory courses for each department and elective courses for each department. [6]After 1944, each college paid attention to basic subjects in the first year, regardless of the department, and provided practical subjects in the three or four academic years, and the graduation examination included important subjects in the four academic years. The graduation standard of university courses is 132 credits, 142 credits of engineering and law, and 170 credits of normal courses. For example: Sun Yat-sen University regulations, students study 8 semesters, in addition to the party, military training, physical education must complete 142 credits to graduate. [7]

Secondly, Due to the need of the war situation, universities relocated to northern Guangdong have generally added courses for resisting Japan and saving the country. For example, the School of Arts of Sun Yat-sen University offered anti-Japanese literature, national literature, war philosophy, etc.; Law School added air combat law; the School of Agriculture added rural services, wartime rural issues, etc; The School of Engineering has added aviation aircraft, anti-aircraft and anti-gas drills, ordnance science and internal and external ballistics, automobile repair and aircraft tank vehicles, etc.; The School of Medicine offered war surgery, anti-gas science, wartime rescue science, etc. In addition to adhering to its original educational characteristics, Lingnan University added military training courses to cultivate students' patriotism and military literacy. Each relocated university often holds lectures on analyzing the war situation, aiming to cultivate students' ethnic awareness and enhance their awareness of the war.

### **3.5. The teaching methods and evaluation methods were flexible and diverse**

During the Anti-Japanese War, there were various teaching forms in colleges and universities in northern Guangdong, including both in-class teaching and extra-curricular activities, both theoretical teaching and practical application. It is mainly manifested in the following aspects:

Firstly, the combination of theoretical teaching and in-depth discussion: At that time, many famous teachers teaching in northern Guangdong were academic masters. According to the wartime situation and curriculum objectives, they flexibly adjusted the teaching content, innovative teaching methods, shared theoretical knowledge and experience with students through lectures and other means, and actively organized students to conduct in-depth discussions based on the situation at that time, so as to stimulate students' self-learning ability. When Wang Yanan taught advanced economics to senior students, the students responded coldly at first because they did not connect with China's reality. Later, he changed his strategy and analyzed that capitalist economy was not

suitable for China's landlord economy and feudal society when he was talking about it. The students were very interested and some students from southern Hunan were attracted to attend the class. At the same time, due to the proposal of Needham Puzzle, Wang Yanan also organized teachers and students to engage in in-depth discussions and debates on the bureaucratic system and bureaucracy. Secondly, multi-disciplinary knowledge integration teaching should be carried out according to the local situation: at that time, due to large-scale migration, numerous resources such as books and materials were lost or unusable. Course teaching was more based on local conditions, fully utilizing local teaching resources, and focusing on comprehensive content and interdisciplinary knowledge integration teaching. For example, Guangdong combines the teaching of the Cantonese dialect with maritime knowledge, and Guangdong combines agricultural production with the teaching of agriculture and botany.

Thirdly, conduct on-site research and investigation: In the face of tight funding, relocated universities still attach great importance to students' extracurricular practice. At that time, Sun Yat sen University actively supported teachers and students to conduct research and investigation in various parts of the country. The accumulation of field investigations by teachers and students of the Department of Geography of Sun Yat sen University contributed to the birth of the theory of "red rock series" and the establishment of the concept of "the Pearl River Delta"; The Agricultural College utilizes the resources of the mountainous areas in northern Guangdong to collect specimens that reach a historical peak; The Folklore and Anthropology teachers and students of the School of Literature delved into the Yao Mountains in northern Guangdong to investigate various aspects of the Yao people's physique, language, history, economy, society, clothing, etc; The Judicial Investigation Team of the Department of Law visited Leiyang, Hengyang, Changsha, Guilin and other places to investigate the judicial situation of local courts and prisons.

Fourthly, extracurricular activities are actively carried out to promote teaching and learning: literary and musical schools have set up theatre troupes, choirs, singing groups and orchestras, and regularly carry out theatre performances and concerts, in which teachers and students often perform on the same stage. This not only allowed students to exercise, but also further demonstrated the teaching level of teachers and enhanced teacher-student friendship.

Fifthly, flexible evaluation methods for students: Due to limitations at the time, students' theoretical and practical abilities were mainly evaluated through written exams, experiments, project reports, on-site exercises, and other forms. At the same time, by assigning homework, students were required to think independently and comprehensively apply the knowledge they had learned, deepen their understanding and mastery of the course content, and pay attention to the evaluation of students' learning process.

### **3.6. The selection and compilation of textbooks and teaching materials were tailored to local conditions**

In order to cooperate with the implementation of the wartime curriculum reform in colleges and universities, in February 1938, the Ministry of Education stipulated that the teaching of various subjects "should supplement the teaching materials related to national defense production as much as possible according to actual needs." [8] The Ministry of Education established the University Book Editing Committee in 1939, which was initially attached to the Ministry of Education. In 1940, it was decided to first compile common subject books for each college, then compile compulsory



subject books for each department, and finally complete the selection of elective subject books for each department. Starting from 1940, the Ministry of Education solicited teaching material outlines for various subjects in various colleges and universities, invited hundreds of professors from various subjects, and held hundreds of meetings for deliberation. After two years of effort, 42 draft teaching material outlines for each subject were compiled by 1943, and 163 university textbooks were issued for reference by various colleges and universities.[9] During the special period of the Anti-Japanese War, the compilation of teaching materials and teaching books focused on combining the actual needs of the economy, culture, education and even the Anti-Japanese War in the rear, and some war-related textbooks were valued and applied, such as Guerrilla Tactics and Military Geography. Some colleges and universities in northern Guangdong had adapted and selected the existing teaching materials according to the war situation and teaching needs. Some teachers translated foreign monographs and textbooks into Chinese, Guo Dali and Wang Yanan jointly translated "Capital", He Sijing translated Marx's "Criticism of the Gotha Program", "Poverty of Philosophy", "On War", etc., for students to learn and use. There was a lack of textbooks and materials for some courses. At that time, teachers only wrote outlines on the blackboard during class, students mainly learned through listening and taking notes. Professor Ding Ying had also dedicated his personal collection to the teaching and agronomy group, so these personal collections have become the main reference books for students.

#### **4. The teaching effect of the relocation of colleges and universities in northern Guangdong during the Anti-Japanese War was remarkable**

Due to the relative poverty, harsh teaching environment, scarce teaching resources, and lack or outdated teaching facilities in northern Guangdong, teaching arrangements were relatively scattered. At the same time, teachers and students at that time were always prepared for wartime resistance and peacetime teaching. We have found that the war has indeed affected the teaching of relocated universities in northern Guangdong. However, through consulting materials, it was found that during that special historical period, good teaching effects were also received.

##### **4.1. Trained a large number of talents**

The relocated universities adhered to the concept of saving the country through education, continuously innovating teaching methods, actively tapping into the potential of students, and cultivating a large number of insightful individuals, patriotic figures, and pillars of the motherland. These talents played an important role in the national construction during the Anti-Japanese War and the early days of the founding of the People's Republic of China.

##### **4.2. Enriched the teaching content**

In colleges and universities in northern Guangdong, in universities in northern Guangdong, teachers adapted to local conditions and incorporated local culture, history, and revolutionary traditions into their curriculum, making the teaching content more diverse and conducive to inheriting and promoting national culture.

##### **4.3. Teaching methods were expanded**

Teachers in northern Guangdong made full use of existing local resources, actively explored teaching methods to meet the needs of wartime, and were brave to innovate, stimulating students' interest in learning. All these measures improved the teaching effect and left valuable teaching experience and methods for future generations.

#### **4.4. Enhanced the friendship between teachers and students**

Due to the lack of teaching materials at that time, teachers used to write blackboard books directly in class, while students took notes. After class, teachers often tutored students, and they shared joys and sorrows, overcoming difficulties together. The friendship between teachers and students was sublimated.

#### **4.5. Improved the level of academic research**

Through on-site inspections and academic exchanges, the teachers and students of the relocated universities collected a large amount of first-hand information on natural sciences and humanities. At that time, they also kept abreast of academic developments at home and abroad, which improved their academic research level and led to the emergence of many valuable research results, which were widely applied in society at that time.

### **5. Conclusion**

The history of the internal relocation of colleges and universities in northern Guangdong has become a scattered "lost pearl" in the research history of relocating colleges and universities during the entire Anti-Japanese War period. We persisted in scientific research and teaching under extremely difficult circumstances, insisted on saving the country through education, and integrated the revolutionary belief of saving the nation into curriculum teaching, which inspired teachers and students to overcome difficulties and hardships and persist in the war of resistance, and also preserved the lifeblood of China's higher education and stabilized the pace of the modernization process of China's higher education. It has had a profound impact on the local culture, education and economic development.

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