

**The Central School, Hong Kong**

The year of 1862 marked the opening of the first Hong Kong school founded and totally funded by the colonial government - the Central School (renamed Victoria College in 1889 and Queen's College in 1894). Providing upper primary and secondary education to the public, the Central School stood as the sole government secondary school in Hong Kong before the inauguration of the Belilios Public School (庇理羅士女子中學) in 1890.

2. The Central School has a history of well over one century. Initially named Central School, as aforesaid, it was renamed Victoria College in 1889 and, in 1894, again renamed Queen's College - a name that survives to this day. Over the years, the school location has changed. The original school campus at Gough Street, opened in 1862, was followed by relocation in 1889 to a much larger area at the juncture of Aberdeen Street and Staunton Street and, in 1950, by another move to the present site at Causeway Road, opposite the Victoria Park.

3. The founding of the Central School was attributable to the efforts of the Reverend Dr James Legge (1815-1897). A missionary and sinologist famous for his translation and annotation of the Chinese Classics, Dr Legge had served as the Principal of the Anglo-Chinese College in Malacca that was run by the London Missionary Society before his arrival in Hong Kong. In July 1860, shortly after he was appointed as a member of the newly established Board of Education, Dr Legge proposed a scheme that contained various suggestions regarding the reform of Hong Kong's educational system, including the establishment of a government-run Central School.

4. With Dr Legge's overwhelming influence in the Board of Education, and the support from the then Governor, Sir Hercules Robinson, the proposal for a government-run Central School was readily accepted. After the approval by the Governor in January 1861 and the authorization of the purchase of the school site at Gough Street by the Legislative Council in March the same year, the Central School was opened in February 1862. Mr Frederick Stewart (1836-1889), an energetic educationalist, was appointed the first Headmaster of the Central School (a post that he held until 1881) and at the same time the concurrent post of Inspector of Schools (predecessor of the present Director of Education).

5. The opening of the Central School marked a new phase in the development of public education in Hong Kong. During the early years of colonial Hong Kong, education on Hong Kong Island was offered in a few small vernacular schools run by the local Chinese. What the colonial government had offered to local education was only subsidies to some of the early vernacular schools since 1847. Public education, on the whole, was provided by the missionary schools which received practically no financial support from the government. The establishment of the Central School heralded the government intention to reform education on a secular basis and to establish her own school system under her sole control. Since then, the government's educational policy was to confine itself to secular instruction and such a

policy has been upheld till nowadays.

6. The Central School paved a path for the Chinese to be well grounded in the knowledge of Western learning and the practical affairs of the world. Its curriculum was based on a Western model of “secular” education, in which the emphasis on the teaching of various technical and scientific subjects bears significance. For instance, subjects such as Algebra, Arithmetic, Chemistry, Geometry and Geography were introduced and added to the curriculum, to provide for what was then thought to be lacking in the traditional pattern of education offered by those vernacular schools. Thus, the students educated in the Central School were better informed about the world and more receptive to Western ideas than their fellow students in the Chinese mainland.

7. The establishment of the Central School was significant in the way that due attention and emphasis was given on English education. By 1865, English learning was made compulsory in the upper section of the Central School, while in the preparatory section English was taught as well. As there was a great demand for interpreters and translators for government offices and western firms, not only in Hong Kong but throughout the Chinese treaty ports, there was a high practical and commercial value in learning English, and English education has continued to be popular among the local population.

8. The cultural environments of the Central School also helped the Chinese youths to develop a liberal and cosmopolitan outlook on life. At the very beginning, only Chinese boys were admitted, but in 1866, the School was thrown open to non-Chinese boys. In later years, the School consisted of boys of different nationalities - English, Japanese, Italians, Portuguese, Americans, Filipinos and others. Its second Headmaster, Dr G.H.B. Wright, who came in 1882, was able to claim that boys of twelve nationalities were already in his charge. In 1889, apart from the 790 Chinese and Eurasians, 131 boys of various creeds and nationalities (including English, Hebrews, Germans, Japanese, Moslems, Portuguese, one Hindu and a Parsee) were registered in the Central School.

9. Under the new curriculum introduced and the competence and efficiency of the Headmaster and the well trained teaching staff, the Central School appeared to be growing in popularity with the local population and admission was eagerly sought by many more than could be received. In 1871, for example, the number of students of the Central School accounted for 9.2 percent of the total school-going population of Hong Kong (249/2706), while in 1877, the proportion increased to 11.4 percent (455/4003).

10. The Central School is noteworthy for the training of brilliant figures who served Hong Kong and China with their bilingual abilities and cross-cultural experiences. Among the graduates, many emerged as Hong Kong community leaders, and many others held high posts in commercial firms and China's administration. For instance, Governor Sir George F. Bowen announced at the Speech Day in 1884 that twelve Central School boys had been invited to fill posts in the Chinese Imperial Service. Still, some other alumni played important roles in the Chinese revolutionary movement against the dynastic regime and in the establishment of the Chinese Republic.

11. Exemplary old boys of the Central School who became important figures in the history of China and Hong Kong included, but were not limited to (names arranged in alphabetical order) the Hon Mr Ho Fook (何福, 1863-1926), Sir Ho Kai (何啓, 1859-1914), Mr Ho Kom Tong (何甘棠, 1866-1950), Sir Robert Ho Tung (何東, 1862-1956), the Hon Mr Lau Chu-pak (劉鑄伯, 1867-1922) and, last but not the least, Dr Sun Yat-sen (孫逸仙, 1866-1925) who, after having received an earlier education in Hawaii, gained admission to the Central School in 1884 at the age of eighteen and left in 1886 for higher education.