

# Ginling College

*Jinling da xue*

金陵大学

[Nanjing](#) (Jiangsu Sheng, China)

Planning for a Christian women's college in the Yangtze Valley began in 1913, with the support of five American mission boards: Northern Baptist, Disciples of Christ, Northern and Southern Methodist, and Northern Presbyterian. The first home of the Ginling College was two large rambling mansions outside of Nanking. Classes began in September 1915 with eight students and six teachers. Beginning in 1916, land was purchased, piece by piece, for a new campus to the west and south of the University of Nanking campus.

When the site of Ginling College was first proposed, few dared to believe that the low rice and wheat fields and lonely grave-covered hills of the area could ever be transformed into a college campus, especially a campus for young women students. In a 1928 tribute to Ginling's first president Matilda Thurston, Ginling faculty member Minnie Vautrin recalled those early days: Many were the discouraging words spoken. Some said there would be a constant menace from thieves, that the students would be afraid to live in such an isolated neighborhood, or that even the ricksha men would refuse to go out so far from the thickly populated sections of the city. Others said it was so low that it could never be drained properly, that it would be like a heated oven in summer, and the many graves could never be moved. In spite of every obstacle, Mrs. Thurston and her committee pressed steadily onward, buying bit by bit of land from this owner and from that, spending countless hours with middle men trying to determine fair prices for both the owners and the college.

The architect chosen to design the Ginling campus was Henry Killam Murphy of Murphy and Dana, a New York firm that had opened an office in Shanghai. The construction of three academic buildings and three dormitories began in 1921, after the arduous task of removing graves from the campus land had been completed. By the fall of 1923 all six buildings were ready for occupancy. The academic quadrangle was composed of a Science Building and a Recitation Building to either side of the Social and Athletic Building, which faced east toward the Purple Mountain.

The Social and Athletic Building was a gift of the alumnae of Smith College, Ginling's "sister college," and was considered to be an excellent example of the adaptation of Chinese style in architecture to a modern academic institution. Its large guest hall was the setting for art exhibits and a variety of musical and dramatic events. By 1924 the Ginling was supported by eight mission boards, Smith College, the Y.W.C.A., and the China Medical Board, with Smith College as the single largest contributor. In addition to its financial support, Smith also sent many visiting professors to Ginling over the years.

The almost "palace-like" buildings of the new campus were criticized by some, who thought that the Ginling students would become unfitted for the harsh realities of Chinese life, but most gloried in the spacious and well-designed setting. As one student wrote in the *Ginling College Magazine*:

*The Ginling campus lies in a beautiful valley. The glorious sunshine in the morning, the serenity at night, the music of singing birds, murmuring streams, and rustling trees, the lofty Purple Mountain and the constant changing of the beautiful landscape, are all the natural garments of Ginling. Here stand seven magnificent and temple like buildings containing a library, social hall, gymnasium, laboratories and dormitories. Every thing is provided for the development of an educated Christian woman leader. A new student wrote in a letter to her father: "Now, father, you have put me in a wonderfully wholesome position. Such a beautiful place and magnificent houses I never dreamed of! Not only these but also the teachers and college friends! I am living golden days. I am at work; I am content. I thank you and I am grateful to God!"*

The chapel and library of Ginling were originally integrated into the existing quadrangle, but by the 1930s the student body was large enough to warrant separate buildings for these purposes. Matching Library-Administration and Chapel-Music buildings were completed in 1934. The new library was prized for its provision of quiet study areas. The library collection suffered significantly during the Sino-Japanese War as most books were removed and sold to second hand dealers. Many books were eventually recovered, but it was a mammoth task to sort through and re-shelve the piles of returned books.

The Sino-Japanese War forced the removal of academic activities from the Ginling campus in 1937. Initially Ginling had centers in three cities: Chengtu, Wuchang, and Shanghai. By 1938 the college had migrated as a whole to Chengtu, where it shared the campus of West China Union University. Meanwhile, back in Nanking, faculty member Minnie Vautrin directed relief activities for up to 10,000 refugees who packed the Ginling campus, trying to escape the outrages of the occupying Japanese army during the so-called Rape of Nanking, December 1937 through May 1938. The Japanese army occupied the Ginling campus from June 1942 until the end of the war. Ginling students were finally able to return to their campus in Nanking in 1946. After the Communist government takeover of Nanking in April 1949, college life at Ginling continued in a fairly normal fashion for the next one and a half years. Early in 1951 Ginling College and the University of Nanking were merged to form the National Ginling University.

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### Further reading

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