



1. Boschtown as a place to rescue students from poverty

Following the conclusion of the Pacific War, Sophia University began to conduct classes again on October 25th 1945. Many students, demobilized out of the Mobilized Student Brigades, came to class wearing their military uniforms. Yet, many of them had to abandon their studies again because they didn't have food or a place to live. The Sophia University newspaper carried the following article in its June 1st 1946 edition, describing the dreadful situations:



Jesuit priest Franz Bosch

"Almost every day, the staff members of the student life section of the university heard the students' pleas: Do something right away to find me a place to live! Even if a student can find a place to live, he needs more rice than can be allotted. He cannot afford a six-mat room that costs one hundred yen a month. The fact that thirty percent of the student absences were due to troubles with living conditions is a big problem. Big unused residences should be immediately opened for these suffering students as well as for the victims of the war."

Sophia University was determined to provide student dormitories. Jesuit Father Franz Bosch, official in charge of student affairs, led these efforts. The university rented part of the former Nakajima Aircraft Company property in Kichijoji in 1945. Father Bosch decided to prepare there a dormitory that would house fifty students.

However, this property was quite far from the university and the arrangements



The Kamaboko Houses known as Boschtown

posed many inconveniences. Next, Father Bosch managed to acquire some semi-cylindrically (*Kamaboko* in Japanese) shaped metal barracks buildings that the American occupation forces were disposing of. He somehow moved these to the university property and started an on-campus student dormitory. He acquired twelve barracks buildings in all; five for the student dormitory, one for a students' meeting hall, and the remaining six for the housings of faculty and staff families and for the office of the alumni association.

The opening ceremony of the new complex of buildings took place on April 20th 1948. Each half-cylindrical building could house sixteen students, and eighty students in all became dorm residents at the beginning. In contrast to the Saint Aloysius Student Residence, where all the students were Catholics, the students living in the Kamaboko barracks dorm included Catholics and non-Catholics without distinction. The main criterion for acceptance was that the student came from outside of the Kanto area. The complex of dorms was popularly known as Boschtown, a reference to the fact that the prefect of the dorm complex was, indeed, Father Bosch. From 1948 until 1957, when a new dormitory building was completed, many students shared a life style in these dormitories along with some Jesuit priests who acted as prefects.

2. The management in Boschtown and the dormitory student life there

The nickname of Boschtown was also influenced by an American project for the improvement of the lives of young men, called Boys' Town. Father Edward Joseph Flanigan had set up this program. He came to Japan in 1947 at the request of the American occupation authorities to assist in creating systems to improve the situation for war orphans in Japan. He is also known for setting up the annual fund-raising campaign in Japan that uses a red feather as its symbol.

Although the rules at Boschtown were very strict, the students themselves enforced them. The dorm students were rudely awakened every morning by the wailing of a siren. They took their breakfast in the basement of Building 1. According to a book entitled "Thirty Years of History of the Sophia University Dormitories", breakfast was a long bread roll; lunch was porridge of a sweet potato, other vegetables and a little bit of rice; the evening meal was often udon noodle. This was a reasonable menu for a period when all Japan was suffering from food shortage. The Boschtown students could use the



Sophia students in one of the Kamaboko Houses

communal bath at Saint Aloysius Residence three times a week: on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. The time between 1900 and 2300 was free for their private study; lights were turned out at 2300. Other communal activities included a weekly hike, two group discussions each month, and sports such as volleyball, table tennis and baseball.

The new Sophia men's dormitory was completed at the end of 1956, as part of the Jochi Kaikan. The students both from Boschtown and Saint Aloysius student residence moved into the newly built facility in 1957. Later, the semi-cylindrical buildings of Boschtown were remodeled and became known as Q school buildings, with the letter Q standing for Quonset. One building could hold a classroom for fifty students and lectures could also be held in the same rooms. Student clubs used the buildings from 1962. When Building 5 was built for student club activities, Boschtown came to the end of its distinguished history. The buildings were torn down in 1967.

3. Who was this Father Franz Bosch?

Father Bosch was the anchoring pillar around which Sophia dormitories were built. The book about the thirty-year history of the dormitories contains the following typical episode:

“Once a student resident of the dormitory who had broken up with his girl friend tried to commit suicide by taking an overdose of sleeping pills. Father Bosch continued to care for the student, sitting by his side for three days and three nights without any sleep. Whenever the student regained consciousness for even a few seconds, Father Bosch would shout loudly ‘You are a complete idiot!’ as streams of tears poured from his eyes.”

Father Bosch was strict about following the dorm rules, but he deeply loved his dormitory students. In return, he was loved by the students, who called him ‘oyaji’, an affectionate term for one’s own father. Because he was very fluent in the Japanese language, the students called him the “white Japanese,” according to the dormitories’ history. The late Father Klaus Luhmer, a former Chancellor of Sophia School Corporation, and a fellow German who knew Father Bosch well, wrote about him as follows:

“Many young Japanese, especially after the war, felt betrayed, misguided, and accused.



The bust of Father Bosch at Edagawa Dormitory

They were looking for someone who would understand them, and help to solve their worries and problems. Father Bosch was the one. He thought through their doubts while seated alongside of them. He looked for ways to offer them hope and comfort, treating each one as a unique and valuable human being. Because Father Bosch was such a human being, his words impacted them powerfully.”

Father Bosch kept a plaque with this verse from the German poet Freidrich Hölderlin on his desk: When love dies, God also goes away. He continued to bustle about trying to save the dorm students from the miseries of their lives, while earning more and more of their loving respect.

Two years after the men’s dormitory was opened in Jochi Kaikan, Father Bosch died of heart failure on November 28th 1958 at the age of 48. His students dedicated in 1959 his bust statue, which stood in front of the Jochi Kaikan. Now it’s moved to the garden of the Edagawa Dormitory, where it keeps loving watch of dormitory students.