

# The Birth of Soochow Rotary Club (吳縣扶輪社) 1936

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Soochow Rotary Club (吳縣扶輪社) was located inside the walled-city of Wu Xian (吳縣)---the superior jurisdiction of then Soochow (*Suzhou*) (蘇州)---which was one of the major counties of Kiangsu (*Jiangsu*) Province of the Republic of China (中華民國江蘇省). The Club was sponsored by Shanghai Rotary Club (上海扶輪社) and was admitted to Rotary International on 11 November 1936 with Charter Number #4053. Since then, the Club became the 21st member of the 81st District.

The name Wu Xian referred to its location at the heart of the ancient State of Wu (東吳). In 221 B.C., the Qin Empire (大秦帝國) established Wu Xian as the capital of Kuaiji Commandery (會稽郡治所). The city itself was often known as Kuaiji (會稽) from this role. Soon after the establishment of the Republic of China on 1 January 1912, Wu Xian was assigned under the administration of the Kiangsu Province, and Soochow District was the town center since 1928. Wu Xian has been the seat of the provincial government during the wartime in 1940-1945. Commencing from the establishment of the People's Republic of China (中華人民共和國) in 1949, the name of the city administration was changed. "Suzhou" was assigned as prefectural level city of Jiangsu Province, while "Wu Xian" was named as the surrounding sub-urban county until 1995 when Wuxian City (吳縣市) was established. Since December 2000, revocation of county-level Wuxian City was split into 2 administrative districts under Suzhou City (蘇州市) jurisdiction, namely Wuzhong District (吳中區) and Xiangcheng District (相城區), respectively. Thus, "Wu Xian" is administratively no longer existing, except the heritage.

## The Birth of Soochow Rotary Club in 1936

Soochow loosed up as a prospect for the organization of a Rotary Club in April 1935, as proposed by Rotary International Honorary Commissioner Ernest F. Harris (*Shanghai Rotary Club President 1932-1933*). Then in a letter dated 25 May 1935 to Rotary International, Harris wrote: "*I consider we should form Rotary club in Soochow ... .. I have made a specific appeal to the clubs nearest the place to set the ball rolling and promote clubs there.*"

Then when Harris was still in the office of Honorary Commissioner, in August 1935, he informed Rotary International that he had asked the Rotary clubs of Hangchow (杭州), Nanking (南京), and Shanghai (上海) to co-operate in trying to form a new club in Soochow. Letters were, therefore, written to the presidents of these 3 clubs and the necessary organizing supplies and material were provided.

On the other hand, it so happened on 26 August 1935, District 39 Governor Alf Marshall wrote to Rotary International enclosing a letter and a news clipping received from the Secretary George M. Frick of Homestead Rotary Club, Homestead, Florida, U.S.A., indicating their Past President Luther L. Chandler had just returned from the Orient, during which time he visited a number of Rotary clubs in China, the Philippines, Japan, etc. The letter from Frick mentioned that, while Chandler was in Soochow, he had largely instrumental in organizing a new Rotary club there, acting as a representative of his home club, etc. The newspaper clipping was to the same effect. Homestead Rotary Club expressed great interest to be the overseas sponsor from the United States.

However, Rotary International then replied to Governor Marshall's inquiry informing that Rotary extension in China was in the hands of the joint honorary commissioners for that region, i.e. Dr. Chengting T. Wang (王正廷博士) and "Peter" Ernest F. Harris, both of Shanghai. Moreover, when Harris was in the office a short time previously, en-route to Europe, he discussed with Rotary International the matter of extension in Soochow, and informed also that the Rotary clubs of Hangchow, Nanking, and Shanghai were invited to co-operate in forming this new club.

Soon later, after Wang was made Governor of the 81st District on 1 October 1935, he definitely assigned Shanghai Rotary Club as the sponsor club for Soochow. George A. Fitch (費吳生) (*Shanghai Rotary Club President 1930-1931*) was appointed as Governor's personal representative in help organizing a club in Soochow for which Shanghai Rotary Club would be the sole sponsor.

Letters of appeal to take initial steps in organizing were sent to Dr. Yang Yung-Ching (楊永清博士), President of the Soochow University (東吳大學校長), and Dr. John Abner Snell (蘇邁爾醫生), Superintendent of The Soochow Hospital (博習醫院院長), both of whom took interest in the matter. The University and the Hospital were both associate units under the same Methodist Episcopal Church (美國基督教監理會) of U.S.A. Unfortunately Dr. Snell was taken ill and died on 2 March 1936, which delayed the progress of the movement. Revd. Francis A. Cox, of American Church Mission, being a member of the organizing team was requested to carry on with the work left over by Dr. Snell.

Fitch in Nanking (*Nanjing*) enjoyed the appointment. He said: "*Twelve new clubs this year seems to be the motto of our District Governor, and the way he is going about things. I think there is very likelihood of his accomplishing it. I am trying to get a club going in Soochow, the city of my birth. But it is a conservative old place, and most unfortunately the man through whom I have been working died very suddenly only a fortnight ago of pneumonia. However, C. T. has promised to run down there with me some time soon, and together I think we can get things going.*"

Prominent citizens of Soochow were approached and many signified their inclination to join a Rotary Club when found. Subsequently, an organization meeting of the Soochow Rotary Club took place on 3 June 1936, at which gathering some forty people were present at tiffin. The 15 Rotarians delegation from the Shanghai Rotary Club gained a most enjoyable experience.

Membership Application was submitted to Rotary International on 30 July 1936. Charter Number #4053 was then granted on 11 November 1936. Soochow Rotary Club regular weekly meetings were held on every Thursday at 6 p.m. (but switched to 12:30 p.m. during winter season) at No. 16, Si Mei Hong, Soochow (蘇州胥門內西美巷 16 號).

The Club published the first issue of bulletin 《*The Soochow Spokesman*》 on 20 March 1937.

## List of Charter Members with Classifications

1. [President] Huang Sung-Ching (黃勝卿) (*Government – Foreign Service*) (*Soochow District Government*)
2. [Vice President] Francis A. Cox (客克私) (*Religion – Protestant Mission*) (*American Church Mission*)
3. [Secretary] Yang Yung-Ching (楊永清) (*Education – Universities*) (*Soochow University 東吳大學*)
4. Chang Ih-Bang (張一鵬) (*Native Goods*) (*Native Goods Company Soochow*)
5. Chang Pu-Yung (*Medicine – Surgeon*) (*Pu Yung Hospital*)
6. Chen Kan-Ching (*Public Utilities*) (*Soochow Power Company*)

7. Cheng Tso-Chu (陳祖桓) (*Customs Service*) (*Soochow Customs*)
8. Richard Chiang (*Medicine – E.N.T.*) (*Soochow Hospital 博習醫院*)
9. Robert T. Henry (項烈) (*Religion – Institutional Church*) (*Methodist Episcopal Church 美國監理會*)
10. Daniel Ho (*Fuel Oil Distributing*) (*Standard Vacuum Oil Company Soochow*)
11. Hsu Tsu-Kwang (*Postal Service*) (*Soochow General Post Office*)
12. Kao Kin-Sung (*Silk Weaving*) (*Tak Lai Company*)
13. Kawanishi Toyozo (川西豐藏) (*Consular Service*) (*Japanese Consulate*)
14. Kung Soh-Zen (*Banking*) (*The Manufacturers Bank of China*)
15. Liu Kong-Wak (*General Insurance*) (*China National Insurance Co., Ltd.*)
16. Loh Tse-Song (陸翥雙) (*Mortgage and Loans*) (*Tong Tai Mortgage and Loans*)
17. Nign Ching-Gee (嚴慶祺) (*Cotton Spinning and Weaving*) (*Su Lung Cotton Mill*)
18. Percy James Wilson (韋爾生) (*Illuminating Oils Distributing*) (*Asiatic Petroleum Co., Ltd.*)
19. Van Kwen-Puh (*Embroidery*) (*Van Yuan Tai Embroidery Firm*)
20. Wu Tseng-Zeu (*General Law Practice*) (*Soochow Bar Association*)
21. Yu Chen-Tsao (*Wood Oil*) (*Yu Pao Tah Tung Oil Company*)

## The Charter Presentation Ceremony on 16 January 1937

The event was reported by 《North-China Daily News》 on 20 January 1937:

### *Soochow Rotary Club Charter*

#### *Dr. C. T. Wang Makes Formal Presentation*

*With the New Year party given by the Soochow Rotary Club, the organization renewed the interest in their activities. Mr. Loh Tse-Song was the host on the occasion and it was an enjoyable affair. Many guests from the local community were present for dinner and to watch out the old year.*

*Then weeks of planning arrangements followed getting ready for the Charter Day. This was held on January 16. Charter No. 4053 was presented by Dr. C. T. Wang, former District Governor who outlined the growth and importance of Rotary for China and close by saying that the field of development had hardly been touched. He urged that the Soochow Club should spread Rotary to Wusih, a near neighbor.*

*More than 100 guests attended the tiffin served at the Kong Hong Institutional Church. Some came from out of town but quite a number were from the local community. Among those coming from Shanghai were President Berentz and Mrs. Berentz of the Shanghai Rotary Club as well as Messrs. Chu, Zee, March, Baboud Ponte, McCarthy, Little, Faupel and Mrs. Giovanni, Messrs. Tsai and Chang hailed from Hangchow and Dr. George Fitch and Mr. T. T. Zee came from Nanking.*

*Dr. C. T. Wang was accompanied by his wife and daughter and were the guests of Mr. Loh. Dr. Wang played a big part in organizing Rotary in Soochow and is a real organizer.*

*With the coming of the New Year, permission was granted by the local government for cars to enter the city. Local residents had secured city tags and the police permitted Rotary guests to drive to the venue in the city. This innovation is spreading up the life of the city and already 37 cars have been registered since the beginning of the year. All of them are for private use.*

*The dinner was served in New Life style and went through on schedule time. After lunch, guests gathered in the Church auditorium where the programme connected with the presentation of the*

Charter and the other tokens was carried out. The Municipal Band furnished music. Mrs. P. Y. Chang played a piano solo and Mrs. L. M. Dungan sang a solo. Representatives of local organizations spoke briefly on the feeling of appreciation already created for Rotary in Soochow. Mr. Chang Ih-Bang gave the address of welcome and Messrs. Huang Sung-Ching and Francis Cox responded on behalf of the Club. Dr. George Fitch spoke of his part in instituting Rotary in Soochow and he expected the Club to fill a real need.

Mr. Percy Chu on behalf of the Homestead Rotary Club of Homestead, Florida, presented a bell to the Club and struck the first official stroke. Mr. Berentz presented a clock with the admonition that promptness is essential to the success of any Rotary Club. Mr. Tsai, of Hangchow, presented a wheel pointing out that the strength of each spoke is essential to the whole. Mr. T. T. Zee spoke on behalf of the Nanking Club.

Many messages were read from all parts of China and from abroad, with the singing of the Club song 《The Spirit of Rotary》, guests and friends dispersed the lively strains played by the band. In the evening, the Bankers Association, the Su Lung Cotton Factory and the Chamber of Commerce were hosts to visiting Rotarians at a dinner given at the Manufacturers Bank.

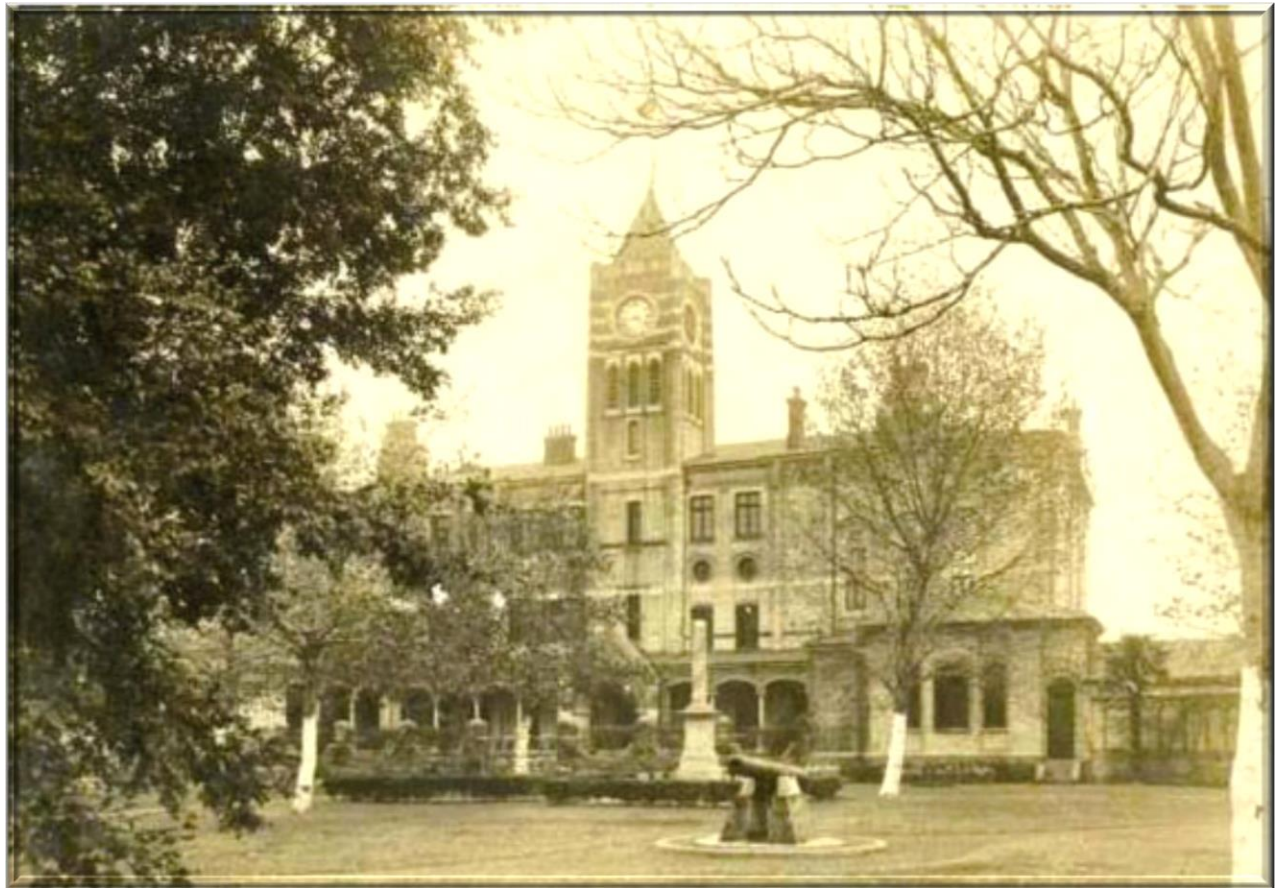
The local Club went to work in the spirit of service even before the Charter official was granted. Clothing and quilts were sent to needy prisoners at Christmas time. Just now plans are being worked out for a rest house for the rickshaw pullers which is to be erected near the Railway Station. It is hoped that with the coming of Rotary to Soochow there will grow up even a finer spirit of co-operation and mutual helpfulness.

吳縣扶輪社正式成立大會秩序 一月十六日		SOOCHOW ROTARY CLUB PROGRAM
(一) 開會		1. Call to Order
(二) 唱歌		2. National Song
(三) 致歡迎詞	本社代表 張一鵬先生	3. General Welcome.....Mr. Chang Ih-Bang
(四) 聚餐		4. Dinner
(五) 鋼琴獨奏	張卜熊夫人	5. Piano Solo..... Mrs. P. Y. Chang
(六) 介紹來賓		6. Introduction of Guests
(七) 來賓演說 (三分或五分鐘)		7. Speeches (three to five minutes)
(八) 獨唱	東吳大學音樂教授黃友葵女士	8. Solo.....Miss Eva Huang
(九) 演說	王正廷博士	9. Address.....Dr. C. T. Wang
(十) 授社證	鄭富灼總監	10. Presentation of Charter.....Dr. Fong Sec
(十一) 贈社鐘	美國哈姆司旦扶輪社 代表 朱博泉先生	11. Presentation of Bell from Homestead Rotary Club.....Mr. Percy Chu
(十二) 各地扶輪社代表致詞		12. Messages from Other Clubs
(十三) 答詞	本社社長黃勝卿先生 副社長客克私先生	13. Response (from Soochow Rotary Club)..... .....President S. C. Huang .....Vice-President Francis A. Cox
(十四) 唱扶輪社歌	本社社員	14. Club Song



吳縣扶輪社創社秘書 -- 楊永清博士(東吳大學校長)

*Soochow Rotary Club Secretary – Dr. Yang Yung-Ching, President of Soochow University*



*The Clock Tower Lin Hall, Soochow University 東吳大學教學大樓林堂*



*Soochow as in 1936 1936 年的東吳*



*North Temple Pagoda, Soochow 「吳中第一古剎」報恩寺塔（北寺塔）*



*Water streets in Soochow*



*Watergate through city walls and waterside buildings, Soochow*



*Xū Gate (胥門) where the Soochow Rotary Club was located behind this city wall.*