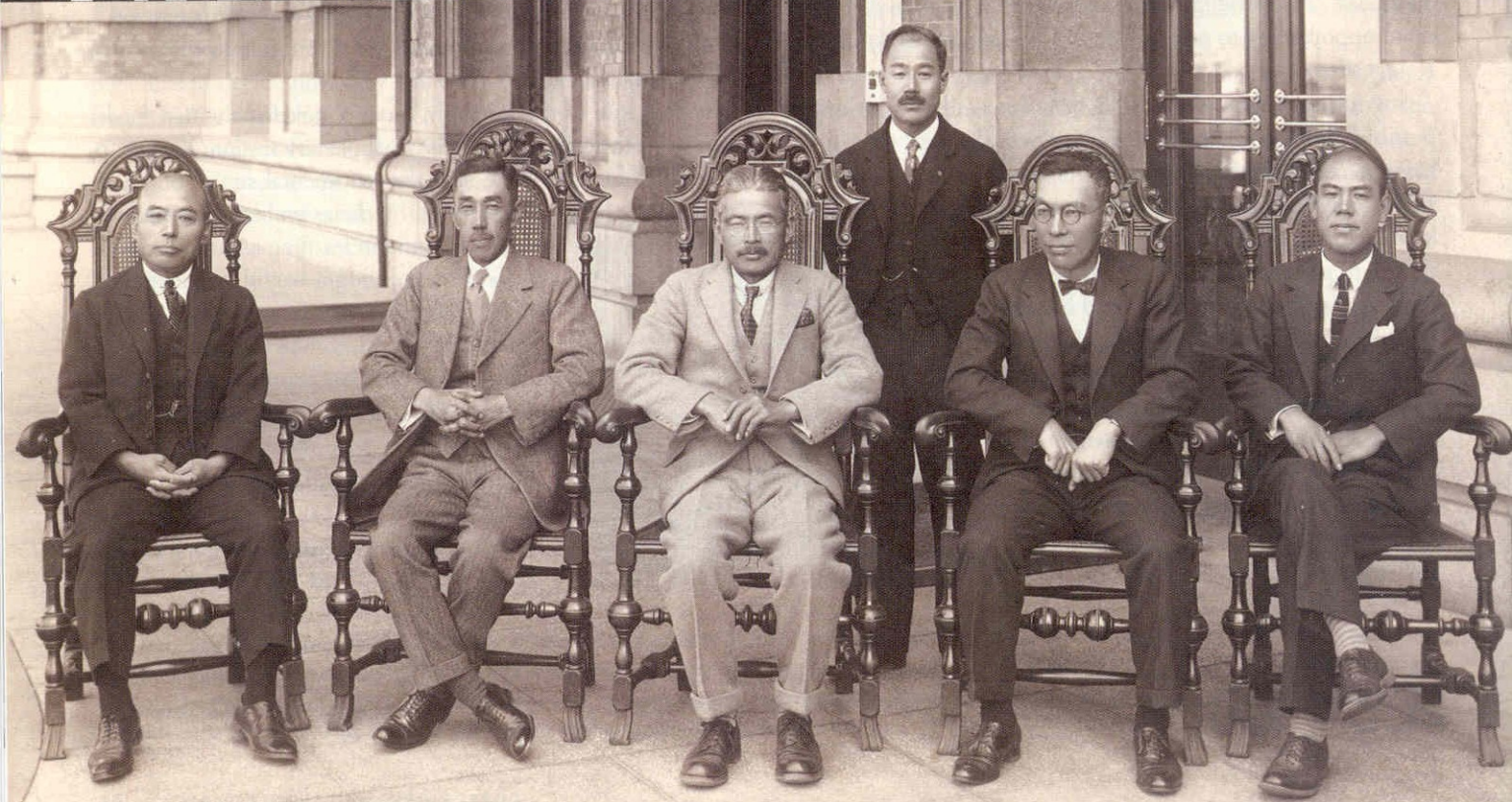




THE LONG ROAD BACK



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THE LAUNCH OF TWO PROVISIONAL CLUBS IN THIS ONCE ROTARY-RICH NATION HERALDS A NEW ERA OF EXTENSION IN ASIA, BY WEN HUANG



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TO CHINA

This month, RI President Richard "Rick" D. King leads a delegation of Rotary leaders to China and Southeast Asia on a mission with huge implications for Rotary growth through extension. The trip, which follows the Asian Presidential Conference in Taipei (22-24 March), gives President King the opportunity to personally welcome into

the Rotary family the members of the new provisional Rotary clubs of Beijing and Shanghai. The delegation will also meet with government officials to discuss policy issues relating to Rotary extension. Once the Chinese government finalizes policies and laws to allow international, non-governmental humanitarian groups, such as Rotary clubs, to operate freely, the provisional clubs can be officially chartered, opening up a golden opportunity for Rotary growth in this vast nation of more than 1.2 billion people.

The provisional clubs in Beijing and Shanghai continue Rotary's rich history in China, which dates back to 1919, when Seattle Rotarian Roger Pinneo, a world traveler, decided to bring the Rotary movement to Asia. That July, with the help of Dr. Julean Petit, a longtime resident in China, Pinneo chartered the country's first Rotary club, in Shanghai. Rotary's spirit of volunteerism took root, and the next two years saw clubs formed in other major cities, including Peking, Nanking and Soochow (now Beijing, Nanjing and Suzhou, respectively).

During the early days, Rotary clubs in China were actively involved in local community projects. Rotarians in the city of Hankou sponsored a leprosy clinic and raised money to support a school for the blind.

Opposite page, top: International Flag Day celebration at the Rotary Club of Shanghai in 1929; bottom: officers of a Manchuria Rotary club in the 1930s.

ROTARY ARCHIVES

During the early days, Rotary clubs in China were actively involved in local community projects. Rotarians in the city of Hankou sponsored a leprosy clinic and raised money to support a school for the blind. Shanghai Rotarians established “Beggar Town,” which at one time provided shelter, schooling and vocational training for more than 1,500 men, women and children.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, war often disrupted Rotary activities. But despite the constant threat of air raids, many clubs continued their humanitarian work. Rotarians who fled war zones in other parts of China gathered in Shanghai and Hong Kong and focused on refugee relief.

As an international organization, Rotary in China attracted a large number of local businessmen, as well as expatriates and visiting Rotarians from around the world. Regular Rotary meetings often became forums for cultural exchanges.

A Rotarian from DeKalb, Ill., USA, who was on military duty in 1943 in the southwestern city of Kunming, described a local Rotary meeting in a letter home: “One member of the club has recently been in Calcutta and he spoke to the members on life and customs of India. The talk was interesting. It was also of peculiar interest to hear a Chinese [person] describe the civilization, life and problems of a neighboring country.” By July 1947, Rotary in China consisted of three districts totaling 32 clubs.

AFTER THE People’s Republic of China was formed in 1949, the new Communist government associated many Western organizations with colonialism; and Rotary, which was founded in the United States, suffered. Most Rotary clubs were dissolved by the Chinese government by 1952, and Rotary International terminated the remaining ones in 1953. Many Rotarians moved to Hong Kong and Taiwan, where they joined clubs and remained a vital and continuing force in the Rotary movement. (The first Rotary club was established in Hong Kong in 1930, and Taiwan formed its first club in 1948.)

In the late 1970s, China ended decades of self-imposed isolation and opened its doors to the outside world, reviving a dream held by Rotarians around the world: to return Rotary to China. In 1982, RI President Stanley E. McCaffrey visited China to explore the possibility. Subsequently, the RI Board of Directors approved the formation of a pilot club in Beijing, but that action proved premature. After a 1987 trip to China by RI President-elect Royce Abbey, the board began to explore the possibility of organizing Group Study Exchanges to China. At the same time, Rotary leaders continued meeting with Chinese leaders, hoping to make Rotary known to the people of China.

I**N 1989** Rotary seized the opportunity to help improve the lives of children in China. As part of its PolioPlus program, The Rotary Foundation authorized a US\$15 million grant to the World Bank to construct a polio vaccine production plant in Kunming. The same year, the Foundation also donated more than \$900,000 to train Chinese technical personnel to manage the country’s polio eradication efforts.



International PolioPlus Committee Vice Chairman Herbert A. Pigman says the polio eradication program helped Rotary gain the trust and enthusiastic cooperation of the Chinese government.

“China did an excellent job in carrying out this massive public health initiative,” says Pigman, noting that more than 100 million children were immunized, reducing polio cases from 10,000 in 1981 to 1,191 in 1992.

During the last decade, the Foundation contributed another \$2 million, supplemented by \$750,000 from Japanese Rotarians, to buy oral polio vaccine. In appreciation, China invited Past RI President Royce Abbey, then RI Foundation Trustees chair, and then Trustee Jiichiro Frank Nakajima to observe a National Immunization Day in January 1994. Thanks to Rotary’s efforts, China, along with other countries in the western Pacific region, was declared polio-free in October 2001.

In addition to PolioPlus, other Rotary-sponsored service projects helped to build credibility for the organization in China. For example, Rotary clubs from Seattle, which helped charter the first club in China, have built Rotary schools and constructed water projects for villages in Shaanxi province. Rotarians in Hong Kong have donated money and labor to build housing and schools for flood victims in Jiangxi province.

In 1992, a Group Study Exchange team from China’s southeastern city of Hangzhou visited Rotary clubs in Tennessee and Virginia. Since then, many similar exchanges have taken place, with Rotary clubs in the United States and Hong Kong taking the lead.

THE IDEA of organizing a Rotary fellowship group in Beijing started in 1995, when Rotarian Hermann Heid, a German native, left Hong Kong to begin a new job in Beijing. At the farewell party organized by his club in Hong Kong, fellow Rotarians issued a challenge: “Why don’t you organize a Rotary-style meeting there?” Little did Heid realize that the challenge would become his obsession.

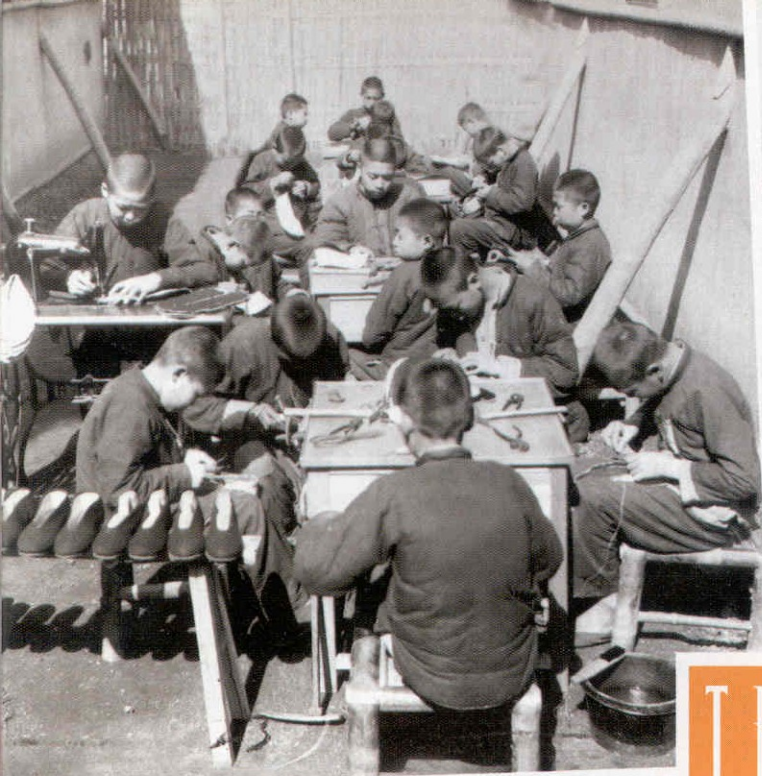
Building a Rotary fellowship group in Beijing was not easy. Heid started by searching for expatriate Rotarians in Beijing and contacting other foreign business people who had expressed an interest in joining Rotary. After six months of frenetic preparation, Heid convened the first Rotary fellowship meeting on 18 June 1996.

“Eight people attended, and I was the only Rotarian,” recalls Heid. “We decided at that meeting to continue to meet weekly and pretend to be Rotarians.”

That small group flourished. During a visit to Beijing in 1996, President-elect Bhichai Rattakul, who was then chairman of RI’s Asia

“Then” photos, left: Young residents learn shoemaking skills at a Rotary-supported shelter and vocational camp for Shanghai’s indigent population, circa 1941. Right: Physical education class at the camp.

“Now” photos, top: Rotarian Peter Finamore (center) and other members of the Beijing Fellowship Group (now the Provisional Rotary Club of Beijing) visit a fellowship-supported tent school for the children of low-income families in Qinghai province. Bottom: The children attend class.



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Extension Committee, encouraged them to continue. “Bhichai’s support was a major step forward for us,” says Heid.

“We were constantly under the microscope of the Rotary world,” he adds. “We were scrutinized by passing Rotarians and visiting Rotary leaders. Chinese government officials also wanted to find out who we were.”

Heid says the fellowship group lived up to the expectations of Rotarians and demonstrated the humanitarian nature of Rotary to the Chinese. During the past five years, members have donated clothing and air-conditioning equipment to an orphanage for disabled children, assisted in disaster-relief efforts, purchased tents to be used as classrooms in China’s northwestern province of Qinghai and worked with the Rotary Gift of Life program to send children from China’s inland provinces to the United States for open-heart surgery.

While the fellowship group in Beijing was taking shape, a similar Rotary group was started in Shanghai. When James Wang of Taiwan, a past club president, opened an ice cream factory in Shanghai in 1996, he invited many Rotarians who also did business in the city to attend the celebration. That event gave rise to the idea of forming a fellowship group. It won the support of the Rotary Club of Taipei, which named a China committee. The Taipei club offered Rotarian Jim Lee a small budget to coordinate the activities.

Starting in 1997, the group met bimonthly. In October 1998, Randy Eastman, a Canadian businessman, joined the group and began to play an active role. Under the leadership of Eastman and Andre Leys, the group started to meet monthly and published a monthly newsletter. The group raised funds to help children in China’s Nei Monggol (Inner Mongolia) region and today works closely with the Gift of Life program to provide open-heart surgeries in hospitals in Shanghai.

THE FINAL groundwork for elevating the clubs to provisional status was laid in November 2000, when China’s Ministry of Civil Affairs invited then RI President-elect King, RI President Frank Devlyn, and former RI Director Bhichai Rattakul (now president-elect) to visit Beijing. The Rotary leaders met with high-level Chinese officials and others to discuss the possibility of reintroducing Rotary to China. Rotary leaders also noted the impressive humanitarian work carried out by the two fellowships, which constituted a diverse group of 70 members from more than 20 countries. Finally, in June 2001, after careful deliberations, the RI Board of Directors formally recognized the provisional Rotary clubs of Beijing and Shanghai.

Perhaps this bright beginning to a new era of Rotary in China was foreshadowed a decade ago, when Hong Kong Rotarian Bob Wilson made a serendipitous discovery in a local antique shop. He noticed that the store’s doorstep was an old, brass bell. He looked closer and recognized the design of the Rotary wheel on its surface and this engraving: “Donated by Stanley F. Howard, 20 August 1925. Rotary Club of Peking.” Wilson immediately purchased this piece of history, which had already survived most of a turbulent century, and in June 1998 donated it to the Beijing Rotary Fellowship Group in honor of its 100th meeting.

“I can’t tell you how excited I was,” says Heid, who retired to Australia in 1998 but returned to Beijing in September 2001. “It was an emotional homecoming of a symbol, a link between our predecessors and us. I am waiting for the day when the bell rings in the coming of a new Rotary era in China.”

♦ *Wen Huang is RI’s senior public information specialist for Asia and the Pacific region.*



The RI delegation to China and Southeast Asia includes President Richard D. King and Cherie King, RI Director Keith Barnard-Jones and Judy Barnard-Jones, RI General Secretary Ed Futa, Presidential Aide Dan Mooers and Shirley Mooers, RI Membership Development Executive Steering Committee Chairman Ken Boyd and Susan Boyd, former ambassador to China Rotarian Christopher Bo Bramsen, and Presidential Conferences General Coordinator Bob Coultas and Cathie Coultas.

They will meet with members of the provisional clubs, including Jens Dreier, president of the Beijing club, and Ivan Polacek, president of the Shanghai club. This visit was preceded by a July 2001 visit to Beijing and Shanghai by RI Vice President Gary C.K. Huang,



of Taiwan, to congratulate the clubs on their new provisional status.

In China, the delegation will also confer with government officials in Beijing and tour a polio vaccine plant in Kunming, a facility funded in part by a major donation from The Rotary Foundation of RI.

The group then goes to Vietnam for exploratory talks with officials about Rotary extension there, following a December 2001 visit led by Past RI President M.A.T. Caparas, of the Philippines.

Above: RI President Richard “Rick” D. King’s last visit to China was in November 2000, when, as president-elect, he went with then RI President Frank J. Devlyn and Bhichai Rattakul, the current president-elect. The three presented a check to support a center for people with disabilities. The money was raised by the Beijing Fellowship Group. Right: RI Vice President Gary C.K. Huang (center, with Shanghai club members in July 2001) has played a central role in Rotary’s return to China.