

War Refugee Rotarians' Fellowship Groups

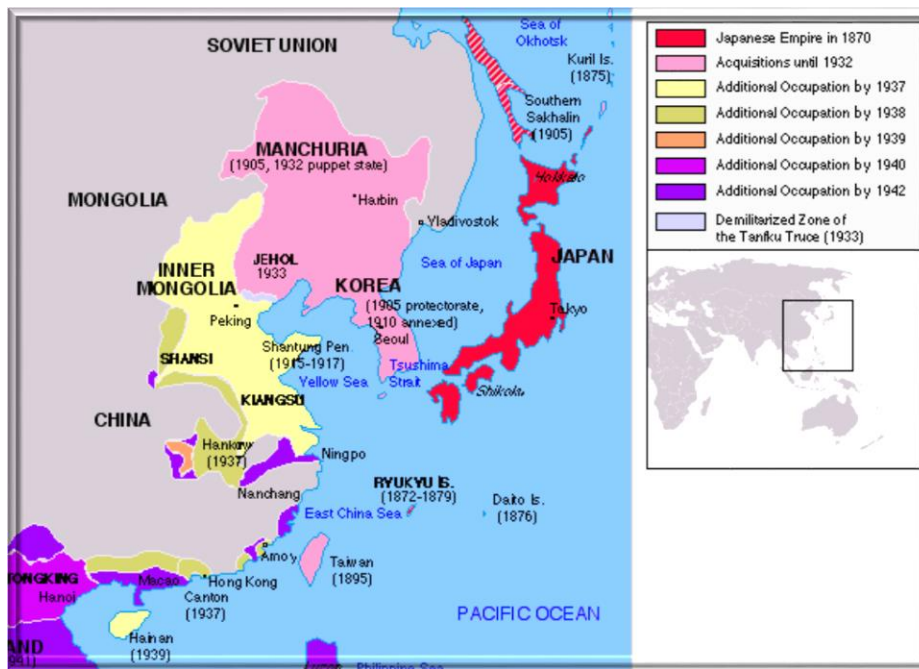
by Herbert K. Lau (劉敬恒) (Rotary China Historian)

3 September 2015 (70th Anniversary of Victory Over Japan Day)

It was the Second Sino-Japanese War which was a military conflict initiated by the Imperial Japan's full scale aggression to the Republic of China (中華民國) from 7 July 1937 until Japan's surrender on 2 September 1945. It began with the Marco Polo Bridge Incident (河北省宛平縣蘆溝橋事變) in 1937 in which a dispute between Japanese and Chinese troops escalated into a battle. It is known in the Chinese History as the "War of Resistance Against Imperial Japan".

The Republican China fought against the Imperial Japan troops with aid from the United States of America and the Soviet Union of Russia. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, in 1941, the War merged with other conflicts of World War II as a major sector known as the "China Burma India Theater". The Second Sino-Japanese War was the largest Asian war in the 20th century. It accounted for the majority of civilian and military casualties in the Pacific War (1941-1945), with roughly 25 million Chinese civilians and over 4 million Chinese and Japanese military personnel dying from war-related violence, famine, and other causes.

After the Marco Polo Bridge Incident on 7 July 1937 in Peiping (*Beijing*) (北平), within a year the Imperial Japan's troops quickly captured and occupied all key Chinese ports and industrial centers in the northern and eastern China, including the Chinese capital Nanking (*Nanjing*) (南京). Rotary activities in these localities were seriously disturbed and damaged.



Map of the Imperial Japan's full scale aggression to the Republic of China

The Outport Rotarians' Tiffin Club / The Vagabond Rotarians' Tiffin Club

What had happened to a number of Rotary clubs in this war-torn country China was not exactly known, but several Club bulletins arriving at the Rotary International at Chicago, U.S.A., indicated that Rotarians there were “carrying on”. The 25 clubs in China plus 1 club in the British Crown Colony Hong Kong (英國殖民地香港), 13 clubs of them were carrying on actively in their localities. Some of the clubs reported that even with members of 10 or 20 different nationalities, a cordial spirit of Rotary fellowship prevailed in the club. Community service activities included aid for refugees, the maintenance of clinics, support of hospitals and aid to relief organizations. Shanghai Rotary Club (上海扶輪社) located at the International Settlement of Shanghai (上海公共租界), being the home of the Districts 96-97-98 Governor, served as the national office of Rotary China (Room 103, Metropole Hotel, No.180 Middle Jiangxi Road, Shanghai 上海江西中路 180 號都城飯店 103 室). Of the remaining 13 clubs in various cities, some were in a state of suspense, or their members were carrying on with Rotary activities through their temporary association in the outport Rotary fellowship groups which were recognized by Rotary International.

During the early stage of the War before Christmas 1941, the International Settlement in Shanghai at the eastern China, and the British Crown Colony Hong Kong at the south China coast, respectively, were still the “safety zones” or not yet the war fields. Of special interest the outport Rotary fellowship groups served as meeting places for “refugee Rotarians”, who have had to flee their home cities. The first such group was in Shanghai in 1938, and it was called “The Outport Rotarians' Tiffin Club”. Later a similar informal group was established in Hong Kong and it was called “The Vagabond Rotarians' Tiffin Club”.

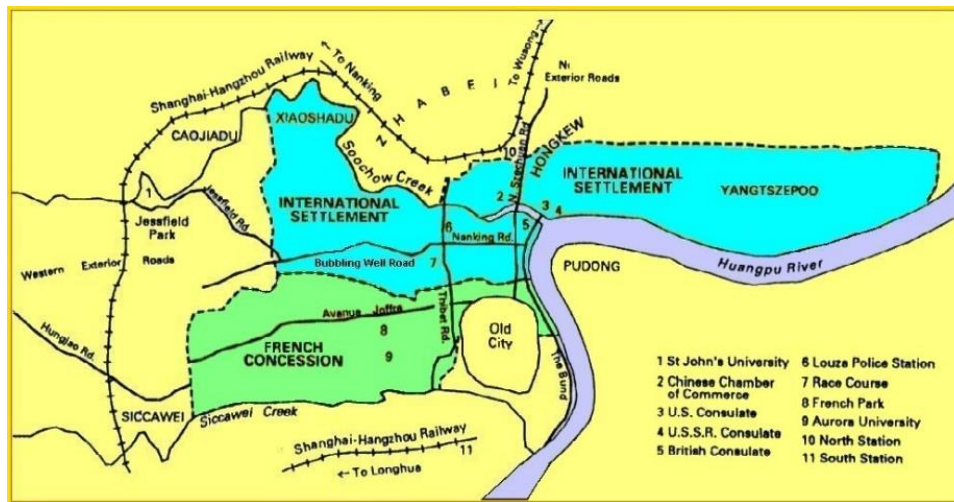
The names of these two Chinese groups tell a story. Shanghai being China's big port, the word “outport” was used to designate anything in China outside of that city. Remembering that “tiffin” over there means “luncheon”, you can then understand why Rotarians exiled from all parts of invaded China called their group the “Outport Rotarians' Tiffin Club”. At Hong Kong it was the even more descriptive “Vagabond Rotarians' Tiffin Club”.

The “Refugee Rotarians” were members chiefly from the Peiping Rotary Club (北平扶輪社), Tientsin Rotary Club (天津扶輪社), Tsinan Rotary Club (濟南扶輪社), Tsingtao Rotary Club (青島扶輪社), Soochow Rotary Club (吳縣扶輪社), Nanking Rotary Club (南京扶輪社), Chinkiang Rotary Club (鎮江扶輪社), Hangchow Rotary Club (杭州扶輪社), and Wusih Rotary Club (無錫扶輪社), etc. Because their home cities lied in war-distressed areas, which had meant the suspension or adjournment of their own Clubs, numerous “refugee Rotarians” exiled and resided temporarily in Shanghai International Settlement or the British Crown Colony Hong Kong.

Rotary clubs in China had long been outstanding for the high quality of their members, so it naturally turned out that both these “Tiffins” were rich in leadership. So many ex-Rotarians were in the Shanghai group that the Presidents and Secretaries of disbanded Rotary clubs presided over and planned their weekly or bi-weekly meetings at various restaurants in rotation, harking back to the original idea of Paul Harris from which Rotary took its name.

Shanghai International Settlement --the Isolated Island

Imperial Japan's forces attacked Shanghai (上海) on 13 August 1937. Three months later, Japanese forces captured the Chinese-controlled area of Shanghai (*see yellow-colored portion in the map below*), and isolated the International Settlement and French Concession from their occupation areas. The Japanese military encirclement of these foreign concession areas of Shanghai created what has been described as an "isolated island". Large quantities of refugees flocked to the "isolated island". The population in the International Settlement and the French Concession had quickly increased from 3 million in the pre-war period to 4.5 million at the end of 1938.



The sketch map shows the "Isolated Island" of Shanghai in colors green and blue

Dr. Alexander O. Potter, a member of the Rotary Club of Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, was called upon in early 1939 to render an important service for Rotary International in the Orient. As the Honorary Assistant to the General Secretary of Rotary International, he was assigned to confer with seven Rotary district governors and to visit some of the 140 clubs in Japan, China, The Philippines, Malaya, The Netherlands East Indies (portion of today's Indonesia), and India. His mission was to assist in consolidating and arranging for the further extension of the Rotary movement in Asia. Active in Rotary work in his Club and in the administration of Rotary International for 15 years, Dr. Potter was the European Secretary in charge of the R.I. Office at Zurich, Switzerland, for a long period.

No doubt, Dr. Potter visited Shanghai Rotary Club as well as the Outport Rotarians' Tiffin Club in the Shanghai International Settlement, China, in March 1939. In his report presented to Rotary International in April the same year, he described what he had seen in Shanghai:

"Fighting raged for three months in a part of the International Settlement of Shanghai and much of that part is now a mass of pulverized ruins. During that time both Chinese and Japanese planes flew over the other part of Shanghai, which was being defended by U.S., British, French and Italian troops. Bombs dropped from Chinese planes and poorly aimed at Japanese warships fell within that defense zone — killing thousands of people. One Chinese plane, for some reason which will never be known because the plane crashed shortly after, killing the occupants,

dropped a bomb which fell a mile from the river at the head of Avenue Edward VII just at the boundary of the French Concession and the British defense zone. It killed one thousand persons. The defense lines occupied by U.S., British, French and Italian troops were at some points only a few yards from territory where severe fighting — attacks and counter-attacks continued for months between Chinese and Japanese. Stray bullets killed or wounded some of those defense troops. Atrocities so horrible that they are difficult to believe were perpetrated within 20 yards in full view of those defense troops — working them up to such a pitch of frenzy that it was difficult for their commanding officers to restrain them, to prevent them from erasing the barricades and attacking the Japanese.

Under such conditions — under the strain of that three months' fighting it is remarkable that some incident did not occur to plunge the U.S. or Britain, or France — or all three into war with Japan. And it is a remarkable tribute to the spirit of the Shanghai Rotary Club that in all that turmoil and danger it missed only one meeting.

The Japanese now occupy the ruined part of the International Settlement which was their 'defense zone.' They have placed guards at their ends of the bridges across Soochow Creek. British or American guards are at the other ends, Chinese who are not persona grata to the Japanese may not cross Soochow Creek into that occupied part of Shanghai. Other Chinese and foreigners may -- But the Chinese who are allowed to cross must have Japanese permits. On the theory that a Japanese sentry is a representative of the Japanese Emperor, who, as the Son of Heaven and a descendant of God, is God Himself, the Japanese endeavored to get all persons crossing one of the bridges and passing a Japanese sentry to take off their hats in respect. Foreigners refused — and so they are not required to do so.

But Chinese are required to do so. I crossed the Garden Bridge alone — walked past Japanese sentries and experienced no difficulties, inconveniences or annoyances. Then I stood, watching as Chinese passed. As they approached the sentry they drew out their passes — took off their hats and bowed low — to go from one part of their country to another part.

I was told by men whose word I do not doubt that if a Chinese fails to do that he is lucky if he only gets his face slapped and does not have a bayonet poked into him sufficiently to draw blood. I was also told that in rural regions where Chinese do not wear hats, the Japanese sentry has one which he hands to the Chinese passerby, who dons it, then doffs it, bows low and hands the hat back!

The part of Shanghai not occupied by the Japanese ordinarily has a population of a million. To that two million refugees have been added — causing very over-crowded conditions. Streets are continuously filled with people, because they have to take turns sleeping and when it is not their turn to be inside, sleeping, the only other place is the street.

That part of Shanghai occupied by the Japanese contains the General Post Office. Hence letters are liable to censorship by the Japanese. That part also contains the main docks. The result of that is that the Bund, which was a beautiful waterfront driveway has become an overcrowded "wharf" for the loading and unloading of goods free of Japanese control. Some ships dock at their old wharves in the Japanese zone. But passengers do not go on board and freight is not loaded from the dock. Instead passengers take a tender (as I did for the 'Empress of Asia') and board the ship from the riverside. Freight too, is sent from the Bund, down the river and loaded from the riverside. And thus Japanese control is avoided.

Imagine the difficulties of carrying on business under such circumstances and imagine those business and professional men carrying on with Rotary with increased enthusiasm and activity. That will give you some appreciation of the splendid spirit and courage of Shanghai Rotarians.

The Shanghai Club is an excellent club, very well organized, carrying on many worthwhile activities and exceptionally well informed about Rotary details and procedure. That Club will ably serve as the keystone in rebuilding the Rotary edifice in China.”

Outport Rotarians’ Tiffin Club in Shanghai

With the spreading of hostilities in China, millions of people fled their homes. Those refugees include a very large percentage of members of Rotary clubs in communities now occupied by the Japanese. Rotary clubs situated in the occupied areas were forced to abandon their normal activities and were unable to hold regular meetings. Many of those Rotarians came to Shanghai. They were welcomed by the Shanghai Rotary Club as visitors to the meetings of that Club. But they felt ill at ease as “permanent visitors.”

Further, some of those refugee Rotarians did not understand English — and the meetings of the Shanghai Rotary Club were conducted in English. “Besides,” some of them argued, “why go to the Metropole Hotel and pay a big amount for food cooked in the European style when for a third of that amount we could get a Chinese luncheon.”

In view of the necessity of finding a way whereby members of such clubs residing in Shanghai could hold regular meetings and maintain Rotary fellowship, a meeting was called, at the initiation of Districts 97-98 Governor Dr. Yen Te-Ching (顏德慶博士), of the representatives of Nanking, Hangchow, Soochow, and Wusih clubs, at which a happy solution was arrived at by the formation of the “Outport Rotarians’ Tiffin Club” on 13 February 1938. The Outport Rotarians’ Tiffin Club served for members of Rotary clubs in China, other than Shanghai, who were “temporarily” in Shanghai. The backbone of that Tiffin Club consisted of Rotarians from Hangchow, Nanking, Soochow and Wusih. A few members came from Tsingtao, Hankow, Tsinan and Peiping. They also planned to “rotate” meetings, trying various restaurants, clubs, hotels, and the Chinese Y.M.C.A. (中華基督教青年會), until they find a satisfactory “permanent” meeting place.

Governor Yen was chairman, and Dr. Yang Yung-Ching (楊永清博士) (President of Soochow University 東吳大學校長) was secretary of the Tiffin Club. However, in March Yang was on his way to America, so the acting secretary was President Huang Sung-Ching (黃勝卿) of the Soochow Rotary Club. Each club selected 2 Rotarians to serve on the executive committee in steering the Tiffin Club’s business.

The Outport Rotarians’ Tiffin Club met once every two weeks. But members who understood English also attended the meetings of the Shanghai Rotary Club as visitor. Member clubs were by rotation responsible for getting the best of speakers for the regular meetings. A very friendly rivalry existed in this respect. Prominent leaders of the city and visitors from different parts of the world were invited to give talks at the tiffin gatherings. Visiting Rotarians also liked to be present that they might report to their home clubs the unique nature of this organization of which could not be found in the Rotary International Directory.

Although not an officially chartered club, this Tiffin Club had been functioning as if it were on a regular basis---all members assuming their obligations and responsibilities willingly as if in their home clubs. Individual Rotarians, though suffered a lot, were doing their bit in rendering their services in true Rotary spirit, such as contributing generously towards the refugee relief, etc. On the other hand, the meals at meetings were made as modest and economic as possible--in true refugee style.

Taking the opportunity of the visit of Dr. Alex O. Potter, on Saturday, 18 March 1939, a special meeting of that Outport Rotarians' Tiffin Club was held at the Chinese Y.M.C.A. in order to afford Potter a chance of meeting with and talking to those Rotarians — and to give them a platform to report on the status of their home clubs.

The meeting — at which a Chinese luncheon was served — lasted from 12.15 to 2 p.m. Forty-two members of the Tiffin Club were present. There were nine visiting Rotarians in addition to Potter. They came from Shanghai, Foochow (福州), Swatow (汕頭) and Peiping (北平).



18 March 1939, around the head table of the Outport Rotarians' Tiffin Club in Shanghai were (reading clockwise from lower left) – (1) Chang Ih-Pang (張一鵬) (Soochow Rotary Club 吳縣扶輪社); (2) Dr. Alex O. Potter (Assistant Secretary, Rotary International); (3) Dr. Walter B. Nance (文乃史博士) (Soochow Rotary Club 吳縣扶輪社/former President of Soochow University 東吳大學); (4) Z. V. Lee (李星垣) (Charter President of Tsinan Rotary Club 濟南扶輪社), (5) Tan Wei-Hsueh (譚偉學) (President 1937-38 of Shanghai Rotary Club 上海扶輪社); (6) Dr. Yen Te-Ching (顏德慶博士) (Nanking Rotary Club 南京扶輪社/District 97-98 Governor); (7) Frank F. C. Ling (Past President of Rotary clubs of Tsingtao and Hankow 青島/漢口扶輪社), (8) Soh-tsu G. King (金紹基) (Past President of Peiping Rotary Club 北平扶輪社)

After a Chinese tiffin the chairman, Dr. Yen Te-Ching, proposed that, in view of the fact that most of the members present understood English and also that Dr. Potter's stay of a few days in Shanghai did not enable him to fully grasp the Mandarin, English be spoken during the meeting instead of Chinese as was usually used in this Tiffin Club.

Yen then made a brief address of welcome to Potter and also explained the origin and nature of the Outport Rotarians' Tiffin Club as a unique organization — perhaps the only one of its kind

in the world. "This Club," he continued, "consists of Rotarians of various Rotary clubs in occupied areas and at present residing in Shanghai. Its object is to enable the members to promote their Rotary fellowship and keep them in closer contact with Rotary International and other clubs in the District."

Chairman Yen added that the Tiffin Club met twice a month and, although unlike a regular Rotary Club, the members thereof observed similar strict regulations regarding attendance, etc. In spite of their material losses, separation from their families and original fields of activities, they were able, one and all, to manage to remain cheerful and philosophic as well as optimistic, — quite characteristic of the Chinese race. In as much as there were several members present representing various clubs in occupied areas, each of them was requested to make a very brief resume of his own Rotary Club.

(1) Rev. Dr. Robert Johnston McMullen (明思德牧師), Charter President 1932-33-34 of the [Hangchow Rotary Club \(杭州扶輪社\)](#), reported on his Club as follows:—

"I am glad to represent the Hangchow Rotary Club at this meeting today. Hangchow (杭州) is a beautiful city on the coast of Central China and has numerous historic associations. Our West Lake (西湖) is known to the world. Our Club had a membership of about 38, with good attendance and splendid Rotary activities. It is the first club in China using Chinese as official language. Since the outbreak of hostilities our members have been scattered. Today we have about 10 of our members in Shanghai, 8 of whom are here this morning, 3 remaining in Hangchow, a few in Hong Kong, and others in Chungking (重慶), Chengtu (成都) and other interior cities, but we are all in one at heart regarding Rotary."

(2) Charter President Tang Ping-Yuan (唐炳源/唐星海) of the [Wusih Rotary Club \(無錫扶輪社\)](#) reported as follows: -

"Wusih (無錫) is a very prosperous industrial town situated about 90 miles away from Shanghai on the Shanghai-Nanking Railway. It has a population of over one million people including the suburbs. In the early spring of 1937 Wusih Rotary Club was organized. It would have become a full-fledged one were it not for the hostilities which started about a month before the scheduled Charter Day. But all the same it was quite active during that period of formation and organization.

Of 24 members, 18 are now in Shanghai, 4 in Wusih, 1 in Tientsin, and 1 in America. They are nevertheless bound in the same Rotary ties as they had been before they were scattered.

Perhaps this Rotary flag of ours speaks best for Wusih. In the foreground you see so many smoke stacks and at the background you find, the famous Tai Hu Lake (太湖) and Wei Chien Hill (惠泉山), which are quite famous scenic spots along the Shanghai-Nanking Railway."

(3) The following was a report on the [Soochow Rotary Club \(吳縣扶輪社\)](#) made by President Huang Sung-Ching (黃勝卿):-

"Soochow (吳縣) was once the old capital of the Kingdom Wu as well as the capital of Kiangsu Province (江蘇省). She is provided with all modern facilities of communication with other cities in China and it is only less than two hours travel by train from Shanghai. The sceneries round

about Soochow deserve special emphasis and most of them are full of historical interest. The population of Soochow is roughly estimated at one million.

The Soochow Rotary Club was founded in 1936 and sponsored by the Shanghai Club. In due time we were admitted to Rotary International as Club No. 4053 under District 97 and we had our charter celebration in January 1937. There are 35 members in our Club comprising of 3 different nationalities, namely, Chinese, British, and American, among which 18 are charter members and 2 honorary members. We held regular meetings at 12.30 p.m. and usually at 6 p.m. during summer months.

Owing to unforeseen circumstances, the members were obliged to disperse to various places. In spite of the recent condition, the 18 members residing in Shanghai meet at the Outport Rotarians' Tiffin Club twice a month."

(4) Rotarian Chen Yu-Hwa (陳裕華) of [Nanking Rotary Club \(南京扶輪社\)](#) made the following report:-

"The Nanking Rotary Club was organized in the fall of 1933. Dr. Yen Te-Ching, our District Governor, was the first president. Before we suspended our activities in November of 1937 due to the present hostilities, we had a membership of 76 composed of many nationalities. Community service activities of the Club were many. I just give you some of them:

The Boys and Youth Committee organized and built a supervised playground outside the city of Nanking. It also founded an employment service to recommend men to suitable positions.

The Housing Committee having made a very careful study and research of the need of the poor class of people, designed and built a model village outside the city with funds from the Municipal Government. Special attention was given to the sanitation of the village.

The Rickshaw Committee made many valuable and constructive suggestions for the betterment of rickshaw coolies in Nanking, which were very carefully considered and some of them were adopted by the Municipal Government. A rickshaw shed was also constructed in the center of the city by our Club.

In regard to Relief Committee activities, I may report that the Drought and Flood Relief Project built a road linking the Y.M.C.A. boys' camp with the Nanking-Hangchow Highway, a distance of about one mile long. This road is now called the Rotary Road. The War Relief Project provided many free beds in the hospitals of the city and food for the many needy ones.

At present our members are scattered all over the world, some in Germany, England, Denmark, and America. In China alone we have many members at Chengtu (成都), Chungking (重慶), Hong Kong (香港), Kunming (昆明), Kweilin (桂林), Kweiyang (貴陽), Nanchang (南昌), Nanking (南京), and Shanghai (上海). We have received frequent notices of the visits of our members to different clubs in whose cities they now temporarily reside."

(5) Frank F. C. Ling, past president of the [Tsingtao and Hankow Rotary clubs \(青島/漢口扶輪社\)](#), made a report on the two clubs as below:—

"Tsingtao (青島) is a fine seaport on the southern coast of Shantung Province (山東省). It has cool summers and is known as 'Riviera of China.' It is world-famous at the Washington Peace Conference in 1921.

We used to have an average membership of 30 and I was a charter member when the Club was organized. The Tsingtao Club adopted a unique method to raise funds for charity purposes, and that is when a baby is born to a Rotarian family, he is charged at the rate of \$ 1 per lb. of the baby.

Since the outbreak of hostilities a few thousand dollars were raised to do relief in Tsingtao. The Club supports an eye-clinic to take care of many poor people suffering from trachoma and general eye troubles.

Hankow (漢口) is in the center of the country and is often called the 'Chicago of China'. We had about 60 members, but due to present conditions the membership has been considerably reduced.

The eye-clinic operated by the Hankow Club saved the sight of many poor people, old and young.

Rotary clubs abroad, mainly those in America and Great Britain, responded generously to the appeal of the Hankow Club for funds to do relief work. The work was handled by the International Red Cross under the supervision of the Club. The Hankow Club has done a great deal in giving relief to poor and refugee children by entertaining them with outings, games, good treats, and looking after them in a general way. We held a field day for 'Warphans'. The Club also gave them medical aid and toys."



These war orphans found there was still fun left in the world when Hankow Rotarians took them on an outing with donkey rides, juggling acts, and lemonade too! – provided an afternoon they'll long remember.

(6) Reporting on the condition of the [Tsinan Rotary Club \(濟南扶輪社\)](#) by Charter President Z. V. Lee (李星垣): -

"Tsinan (濟南), the city in which our club is located, is the capital of Shantung Province (山東省), with a population of half a million. Shantung is known for many products, such as salt, coal, peanuts, fruits, eggs, silk, etc.

The Tsinan Club was organized in 1933, the Shanghai Club being the sponsor club. Charter membership is about 20. The main feature of our charity work is the establishment of an eye-clinic. Due to weather and unhealthy conditions of our locality, trachoma is common among the people, and it is one of the causes of blindness. It is only appropriate that a Rotary Club should render aid to many so afflicted in our city.

I may report that Tsinan Rotarians did the spade work in the formation of the Rotary Club at Sian (西安) and also were instrumental in organizing the Kaifeng Rotary Club (開封扶輪社).

Owing to present hostilities most of our members, especially those who were in government services, had to evacuate from Tsinan. There are now about 10 members remaining, mainly Chinese businessmen and foreign missionaries.”

(7) Past President Soh-tsu G. King (金紹基) of Peiping Rotary Club (北平扶輪社) made the following report:-

“I take great pleasure in speaking a few words at this moment on behalf of the Peiping Rotary Club. Peking (北京), or Peiping (北平) as it is now called, was the old capital of China and is a city of culture.

When the Club was first formed in 1923, it was called the ‘Thursday Tiffin Club’, and was only known as the Peking Rotary Club when it received its charter from Rotary International. However, it is the third oldest Rotary Club in China, the Shanghai Club being the oldest. We used to have about 50 members, but owing to present conditions our present membership is about 25.

In regard to community services, I may mention that the Peiping Club has been contributing funds to and generously helping the school for the blind in Peiping. As we have severe winter in the north, it has been and still in our practice to supply padded winter suits to the poor and needy. We also invite poor children to a free meal at Christmas thus making the Christmas season a bit happier and the cold winter a bit warmer for many of the poorer people in our city. The Club also grants scholarship to some school students who need help.”

At the end of each report, the members of that particular club rose to greet Dr. Potter. After the above reports had been made, Dr. Potter was asked to address the meeting. His speech was instructive and inspiring, and President P. Y. Tang of the Wusih Rotary Club made a brief translation of same into Chinese.

Dr. Walter B. Nance of the Soochow University, one of the oldest members of the Soochow Rotary Club, thanked Dr. Potter for his visit to the meeting and for his speech which was appreciated by all Rotarians present.

In the summer of 1940, despite war and numerous other obstacles, the Outport Rotarians’ Tiffin Club at Shanghai completed another successful year of regular meetings. The new officers elected were: Chairman---Rev. Dr. Robert Johnston McMullen (明思德牧師) (*Hangchow*); Vice-Chairman---Huang Sung-Ching (黃勝卿) (*Soochow*); Secretary---Tang Ping-Yuan (唐炳源/唐星海) (*Wusih*); Treasurer---T. T. Zee (徐振東) (*Nanking*).