

The Birth of Shanghai West Rotary Club in 1948 and its final months

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The Rotary Club of Shanghai West (滬西扶輪社), with a short life of merely three years, was born and died in a very critical transitional period of the contemporary Chinese history.

Proposal of a Chinese-Speaking Shanghai South Rotary Club

Soon after Dr. Chengting T. Wang (王正廷博士) was instrumental in establishing the 81st District in 1935, there were already plans to extend more new clubs in the nearby cities along with the 11 Rotary clubs in 11 cities of China. Shanghai then being the largest city of the country, or even the fifth largest in the world, was feasible to have one more club in the same city. Consent to this idea was already obtained from Rotary International.

However, when Dr. Fong Foo-Sec (鄭富灼博士) succeed as the next District 81 Governor, he and C. T. Wang both have a better plan---the formation of a Chinese-speaking Club in Shanghai. So, on 26 November 1936, Fong wrote to Rotary International:

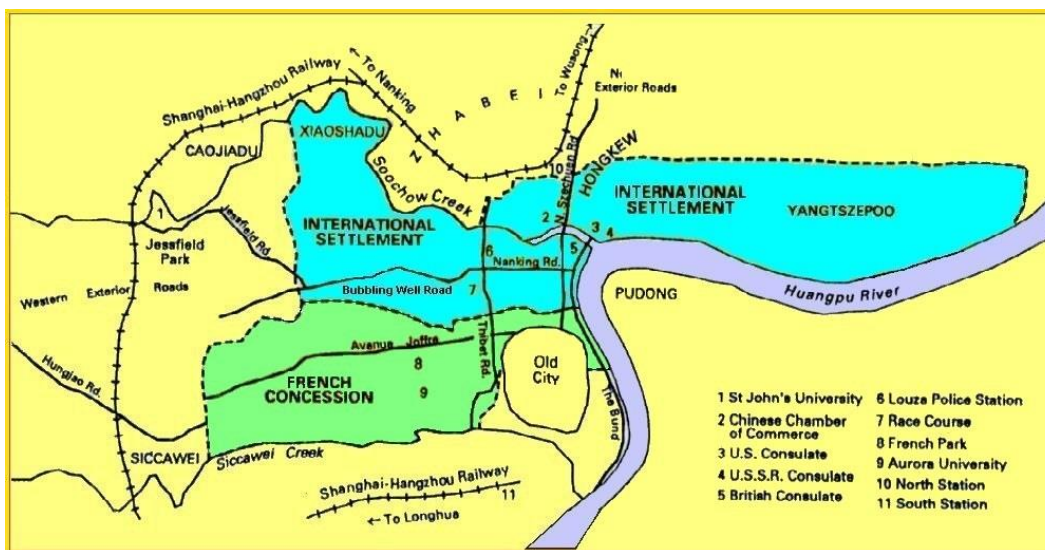
I understand that the matter of organizing a Chinese-speaking Rotary Club was taken up with Headquarters by Dr. C. T. Wang while he was in America. Upon his return to this country, a number of Chinese Rotarians gave him a reception on November 10, when the problem was again discussed.

It seems that Headquarters realized the situation and approved of the organization of a "Rotary Club of Shanghai South", which would take in all the territory south of Yang King Pang, including the French Concession and the Chinese City. Many of us felt the necessity for the new Club but not on the territorial basis, as the distribution of the present and prospective members makes it highly inconvenient to conform to any basis so fixed.

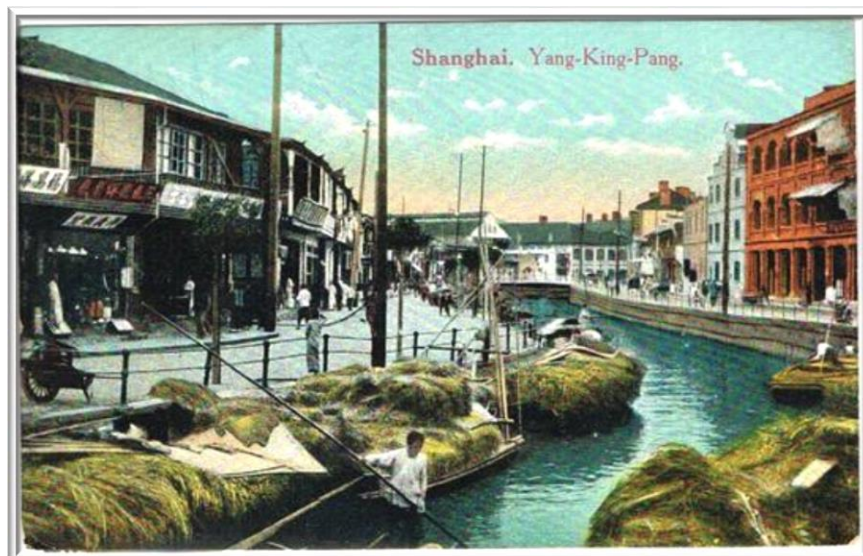
At that meeting a resolution was adopted to the effect that Rotary International be requested to make a small concession, to wit: that as the proposed new club would cover the districts of Nantao and the French Concession (leaving the International Settlement as the territory of the Shanghai Rotary Club), Rotary International would allow Rotarians domiciled in the French Concession and Nantao to have the choice of (1) retaining their present membership of the Shanghai Rotary Club, or (2) resigning and joining the new Chinese-speaking Club. This choice, it was suggested, should remain open to Rotarians

until such time as the “Rotary Club of Shanghai South” is formally established, from which date those domiciled in Nantao and the French Concession would have no alternative but to join the Club operating in that area.

I doubt if Rotary International has ever faced a situation similar to the one in this city. Shanghai is in China, but the existing Club makes use of the English language in its meetings. This means that many prominent Chinese businessmen cannot be reached by Rotary. As we see it, the only way to solve the problem is for us to organize a Chinese-speaking Club, drawing the members from all parts of Shanghai.



Sketch map of Shanghai showing the territories of the French Concession and the Old City.



Yang Kan Pang (洋涇浜) – It was the canal bordering the International Settlement (上海公共租界) in the north and the French Concession (上海法租界) in the south.

On 10 June 1937, Fong wrote to the incoming Rotary International 1937-1938 President Will R. Manier, Jr., elaborating the important points of the said proposal. The request met the favourable considerations of the Board of Directors. At its first meeting held on 1-3 July 1937, the Board of Directors laid down this resolution:

[No. 37. Chinese-Speaking Rotary Club in Shanghai, Organization of

Statement: Dr. Fong Sec of Shanghai, past director of R.I. and governor of the 81st District, writes that there are many Chinese business and professional men in cities like Shanghai and Tientsin whom Rotary leaders in China would like to bring into the movement but they cannot do so because these men do not understand English, the language in which club meetings are conducted. Governor Fong realizes that the constitution and by-laws of R.I. do not provide for the organization of a second Rotary Club in a city, on a native language basis, but he suggests that perhaps the board, as an experiment, might grant the Rotary Club of Shanghai authority to organize a Chinese-speaking Rotary Club in Shanghai. Copy of Dr. Fong's letter has been sent to each member of the Board.

Decision: As an experiment the Board agrees that there shall be organized in Shanghai, China, within the territorial limits of the existing Rotary Club, a second Rotary Club conducted in the Chinese language, provided that the establishment of such a Rotary Club is previously approved by the membership of the already existing Rotary Club in that city.]

Shanghai South Rotary Club Proposal Vanished

Unfortunately, the good news met the bad luck. Merely a few days later on 7 July 1937, there was the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in Peiping (北平) (*Beijing*) (七七盧溝橋事變日本侵華). The Imperial Japanese Forces soon flushed south to Shanghai by land and by sea. When war dawned again on Shanghai in August, tragedy and misery hit almost every corner of the whole city. The Battle of Shanghai (淞滬會戰) was the first of the 22 major engagements fought between the National Revolutionary Army (國民革命軍) of the Republic of China (中華民國) and the Imperial Japanese Forces. It was one of the largest and bloodiest battles of the entire war, described as “Stalingrad on the Yangtze”. Bitter and brutal fighting with intense bombings from ships and planes over, in and around the city, taking millions of civilians as actual though unintended targets, creating total chaos among the residents, and installing disorder as normality.

The Shanghai International Settlement (上海公共租界) became practically an “isolated island” which was the home of the only Rotary. Shanghai Rotary Club (上海扶輪社) strived to survive and carried on aids to refugees, erection of a beggars' home, etc. But, too sad, District Governor Fong died in Shanghai on 3 October 1938, after 2 months of illness, while he was shouldering the leadership of all China's clubs, as well as appealing overseas clubs and the International Red Cross for heavy war refugee relieves.

After the declaration of the Pacific War in 1941, the entire greater Shanghai, including all foreign settlements, was occupied and under the military control of the Imperial

Japanese Forces. All Rotary activities were suspended. Shanghai Rotary Club was even terminated by Rotary International on 31 December 1943.

The proposal for the establishment of “Shanghai South Rotary Club” ultimately so vanished.

Birth of Shanghai West Rotary Club in 1948

In early 1943, new treaties signed by the Republican China’s government formally ended the extraterritorial privileges of Americans and Britons, although its terms were moot until the recovery of Shanghai following Japan’s 1945 surrender. The French later surrendered their privileges in a separate 1946 agreement. All foreign settlements were then faded from Shanghai. The fall of the Japanese Empire in 1945 came the Victory. Rotary spirit resurrected. Shanghai Rotary Club soon re-chartered on 27 March 1946.

Again, Rotary Extension was placed on the agenda. On 30 September 1948, Shanghai Rotary Club conducted a close meeting and concluded with these 2 resolutions:

- (1) It is hereby resolved that this Club will sponsor a new Rotary Club in Shanghai to be called [Shanghai West Rotary Club 滬西扶輪社], and will assume the responsibility
 - (i) for assisting in planning and achieving the successful organization of the new club;
 - (ii) for arranging the early programs of the new club, and
 - (iii) for guiding the new club in its development as a unit of the Rotary Movement.
- (2) It is hereby resolved that out of the territory of the Rotary Club of Shanghai, as defined in Article V of the Constitution, that part lying west of Honan Road, bordered by Soochow Creek on the north and by Minkuo Road on the south shall be ceded for the purpose of establishing the new Rotary Club of Shanghai West.

The Extension Committee of Shanghai Rotary Club was assigned to conduct the survey, define the territory, select and approach prospective charter members. This Committee held over 6 meetings most of which were attended by District 97 Governor “Charlie” Wei Tsen-Fu (韋增復) (*Shanghai Rotary Club President 1946-1947*). Among the 22 names submitted, 4 were transferred from the Shanghai Club. They included Past R.I. 2nd Vice President Dr. Chengting T. Wang (國際扶輪前第二副社長王正廷博士), who signified his intention to become a member of the Chinese-speaking club, and 2 others were former Rotarians of Hangchow (杭州) and Chungking (重慶), respectively.

Membership Application was submitted to Rotary International on 21 October 1948 with a list of 23 charter members of all Chinese native. The Charter No. 7097 was soon granted on 16 November 1948.

The Club held weekly meetings on Wednesday, 12:30 p.m. at the Chinese Y.M.C.A. of Shanghai (上海中華基督教青年會) (*see photo on next page*). All Club meetings and administration were conducted in Mandarin.



The Chinese Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) (中華基督教青年會) complex, built in 1931, located at Boulevard de Montigny (Si-Tzang Road) (西藏路), Shanghai French Concession, was the home of Shanghai West Rotary Club (滬西扶輪社) where the YMCA general secretary Hsiao Yuan-En (蕭元恩) was one of the Club's charter members. One of the 3 architects who built this complex was a former Shanghai Rotary Club (上海扶輪社) director Robert Fan (范文照).



Shanghai in 1948



List of Charter Members – all Chinese -- with Classifications

1. [President] James Kofei Shen (沈克非) (*Hospitals*) (*Chung Shan Memorial Hospital 孫中山紀念醫院*) (*former Nanking Club charter member*)
2. [Vice President] William Shih-How Hung (洪士豪) (*Legal Practice*)
3. [Secretary] Wang Hsien-Ting (王顯廷) (*Newspaper Management*) (*The Shun Pao Chinese Daily News 申報*)
4. Carl C. K. Chang (章繼康) (*Chemical Industry - Pharmacy*) (*Pharmacy General*)
5. Hsiao Yuan-En (蕭元恩) (*Associations*) (*Chinese Y.M.C.A. of Shanghai*)
6. P. H. Hu (胡伯翔) (*Toilet Preparation Manufacturing*)
7. Koo Ping-Yuan (顧炳元) (*Government Administration*) (*Shanghai Municipal Government*)
8. S. B. Lai (黎薌斌) (*Medicine – Obstetrics*) (*St. Luke's Hospital No. 2*)
9. Stephen H. F. Lau (劉協勳) (*Hotels*) (*Great Eastern Hotel*)
10. Mason Lew (陸梅僧) (*Advertising*) (*Consolidated National Advertising Co.*)
11. S. M. Lee (李熙謀) (*Education*) (*Education Bureau, Shanghai Municipal Government*) (*former Hangchow Club charter member*)
12. Liu Teh-Chi (劉德啟) (*Medicine – Pulmonary Disease*)
13. Meng Kwang-Ming (孟廣明) (*Shoes Manufacturing*) (*Kumfort Shoe Manufacturer*)
14. T. C. Shaw (蕭宗俊) (*Dry Goods & General Merchandising*) (*Sun Sun Co., Ltd.*)
15. Sung Doong-Kyuin (孫同鈞) (*Banking*) (*Chinese Industrial Bank, Ltd.*)
16. Tsai Chien-Ching (蔡建卿) (*Restaurants*) (*Sun Ya Restaurant, Ltd.*)
17. James Tsao (巢紀梅) (*Accounting Service*) (*Da Doon Law & Accounting Office*) (*former Shanghai Rotarian*)
18. Chengting T. Wang (王正廷) (*former Shanghai/Peking/Chungking Rotarian; former Rotary International officer served in various positions as Honorary Commissioner, District Governor, Administrative Advisor, Director, Second Vice-President*)
19. Wang Hsin-Kang (王心康) (*Education – Private School*) (*Lowrie Institute*)
20. Lott H. T. Wei (韋憲章) (*Minting*) (*The Central Mint of China 中央造幣廠*)
21. N. S. Ling Wong (*Chemical Industry*) (*National Aniline & Chemical Company*)
22. Wu Ts-Chien (鄔志堅) (*Leper Mission*) (*Chinese Mission to Lepers*) (*former Shanghai Rotarian*)
23. Zau Zung-Dau (曹晨濤) (*Medicine – Urology*)



Shanghai in 1948



Shanghai in 1948

The changing of regime and the finale of the Rotary Club

In the final months of 1948 through to the spring of 1949, Shanghai was in total chaos. The Civil War between the Nationalist government and the Communists had entered its endgame. By late 1948 the Nationalists had begun their ignominious retreat to Taiwan (臺灣); the Communist People's Liberation Army (PLA) was taking city after city.

Shanghai's wealthy Chinese began to move their assets abroad, with people following shortly after. By early 1949, managers fearing confiscations and reprisals joined the taipans. The Shanghai docks were crammed with evacuation ships.

What foreign population remained of this once most cosmopolitan of cities also took flight. The Portuguese airlifted their nationals to Macao (澳門) at the south China coast; Pan Am Airlines sent extra DC-4s to meet demand from departing Americans. The British firms and families were moving southward to the British Crown Colony Hong Kong (英國殖民地香港).

Many refugees never made it. In December 1948, the steamer Kiangya (江亞輪) sank in the Huangpu River (黃浦江) with an estimated 2,000-3,000 passengers drowning — a higher death toll than the Titanic. The PLA arrived on 25 May 1949 and Shanghai was “liberated”. By then a million people, unable to see any accommodation with the Communists, had left China via Shanghai. In addition, many of the 2 million Nationalist troops fleeing to Taiwan did so through the city.



People's Liberation Army troops of the Chinese Communist Party entering Nanking Road, Shanghai, on 25 May 1949 declaring the “socialist liberation”. (Photo by Vladislav Mikosha, USSR)

Most of the foreign firms moved their offices from Shanghai to Hong Kong, specifically in the North Point District (北角), which became known as “Little Shanghai”. Although the Communists initially tried to allow the city relative autonomy, its economy declined due to a Taiwanese blockade and Communist restrictions on foreign trade. The exiles soon established themselves. Businessmen had been busy relocating money, machinery and key personnel.

There was great impact to the tiny membership of Shanghai West Rotary Club. Amongst the less than 30 members, there were 3 decisions: (1) Majority decided to stay well in receiving the establishment of the Communist China. Charter President Dr. James Shen (沈克非博士) was the good example who was appointed a Deputy of the National People’s Congress (i.e. a member of the parliament), and carried on his leadership in the military hospital. (2) Several members decided to go Taiwan following the Chiang Kai-Shek Administration. Dr. S. M. Lee (李熙謀博士) of the Education Bureau was one of them. (3) There were at least 2 charter members had the decision to migrate to the British Crown Colony Hong Kong and to carry on their Rotary services there: (i) Dr. Chengting T. Wang (王正廷博士) – joined Hong Kong Rotary Club (香港扶輪社) until May 1961; and (ii) William Shih-How Hung (洪士豪) – Vice President 1948-1949 and President 1949-1950, joined Hong Kong South Rotary Club (香港南區扶輪社), until November 1992.

Though the Rotary Club of Shanghai West had attempted the best to survive, obviously, the Club was not able to function properly. What was happening? The incoming Club President William S. Hung sent a message on 26 June 1949 from his office in Hong Kong (c/o The China Steel Works Ltd., Room 6, Mezzanine Floor, Exchange Building, Des Voeux Road Central, Hong Kong) to Edward Ryan, Head of Eastern Hemisphere Department, Rotary International:

As I presume that our Governor might have been out of touch with you on account of the suspension of mail service between the United States and Shanghai, which is now under the Communist control, I am taking the liberty as well as the pleasure to inform you of the result of the election of new officers of the Shanghai West held on June 8, 1949 as follows:

President: William S. H. Hung

Vice President: James Tsao

Secretary: Hsien-ting Wong

Treasurer: Tung-chun Sun

Other members of the Board: James Kofei Shen, Z. D. Zau, and Y. E. Hsiao

I came to Hong Kong on May 16, 1949 by one of the last few planes taking off from Shanghai amidst the rear of bombing and gunfire. I had a few occasions to communicate with Shanghai by letter when one of the steamers by chance found the possibilities to sail, but the telegraphic service has not been interrupted thus far. The result of the said election of officers was communicated to me by letter and I also received a cable from Secretary Hsien-ting Wong a few days ago urging me to return. I have replied that I would

do so by the first steamer leaving here. In view of the blockade and the recent bombing of S.S. Anthesis, however, I am afraid that the air and water way will not be resumed in the very near future.

Governor T. F. Wei is well and safe in Shanghai, but I have no information whether our new Governor Chen Yu-hwa has been able to leave for the Conference.

Both Rotary Club of Shanghai and Rotary Club of Shanghai West are going on smoothly without interruption. I have received a message from Rotarian Lew Mason, also of Shanghai West, in the following words: "Church services are being held as usual; meetings are not interfered with. Rotary, Y's Men, even Masonic Lodges are being held in both Nanking and Shanghai, so long they are not political and of subversive in nature."

If you have any message for Shanghai which you wish to communicate before the resumption of the mail service, it shall be my pleasure to relay by cable.

On 11 July 1949, immediate past Governor of the 97th District, Wei Tsen-Fu of Shanghai Rotary Club, gave his remarks to the Secretariat of Rotary International:

Shanghai Club's meetings went on uninterrupted in spite of political, economic and military disturbances. We even held a meeting on May 26th, the very next day after the Liberation Army entered Shanghai, and certain sections of the city were still under gunfire. This meeting would have had a much larger attendance if transportation and communication were not temporarily crippled at various areas within the city.

Shanghai West also showed great spirit in holding their meetings, even though their last meeting scheduled for May 25th had to be cancelled for on that day very few people were able to get around the city.

As most of the clubs in my district are now under the same rule---hereafter we expect to be able to correspond normally. I should like to hear from all the clubs east of Hankow and have them inform me of conditions existing in their respective locations and surrounding areas.

Soon after the establishment of the People's Republic of China (中華人民共和國) was declared in Peking (*Beijing*) (北京) on 1 October 1949, all of the civil organizations such as Rotary clubs, Lions Clubs, etc., were required to register with the local authorities and subject to new permission to be granted. However, none of the Rotary clubs was able to go through such requirement. Rotary clubs in China were gradually disbanded and terminated.

The political situation came much worse when the Korean War out-broke on 25 June 1950, and that the Communist China was in hostility with the United States and her Allies. Communications between China and the U.S.A. was disconnected. In view of such situation, Rotary International Board of Directors laid down its decision in January 1951 to dissolve on 1 July 1951 all of the 3 Rotary Districts in China.

The finale of the Rotary Club of Shanghai West was: The Board of Directors of Rotary International had decided to terminate on 24 January 1952 the last 3 remaining Rotary Clubs in China---Nanking (南京), Shanghai West (滬西), Tientsin (天津).



Shanghai in 1950 (Photo by Vladislav Mikosha, USSR)