

# Rotary International early policies paving Rotary's Road back to China

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This article aims to give readers some historical facts on the vision of our Rotary leaders about thirty years ago, and how was their wisdom put through in contrast to the Rotary movement realized today in China Mainland.

The leaders of Rotary International (R.I.), of course, were fully conscious that Rotary was no stranger here in China, but would be returning to a land where it had previously prospered. The first Rotary Club of Shanghai (上海扶輪社) was admitted on 1 October 1919. By the 1930s, the Board had authorized 3 districts for China's clubs. But in 1952, the Board was compelled to terminate the last Club on the Chinese Mainland. Rotary in China Mainland was silent for several decades when the country was practically shut behind the iron curtain where citizens were restricted to have free contacts with most parts of the world.

After the Economic Reform termed "Socialism with Chinese characteristics" in the People's Republic of China (PRC) (中華人民共和國) started in December 1978 led by China Communist Party (中國共產黨) supreme leader Deng Xiaoping (鄧小平), there gave green light to overseas NGOs in offering community service projects in the PRC. Rotary clubs from various parts of the world, not behind others, took the initiative to launch certain handsome projects – education, medicine, health -- for the good of the Chinese people. Sparks of successful Rotary action gave Rotary International the signal to pay attention.

In the mid-1980s, as the Rotary International Board of Directors reviewed the notable progress made in extending Rotary to all parts of the world, its attention was inevitably drawn to the People's Republic of China, by far the largest single non-Rotary country. Because of its vast size, huge population, rich culture, and incalculable potential, there can be no question that the PRC would increasingly be a leading country within the next few decades.

## *R.I. Board of Directors' decision 1987-88*

The extension of Rotary back to China was discussed in the third meeting of the Board of Directors 1987-88 of Rotary International held at the Acapulco Princess Hotel in Acapulco, Mexico, on 10-17 February and the Opryland Hotel in Nashville, Tennessee, U.S.A., on 25 February 1988.

The Board, while reaffirming its commitment to further Rotary in every country where it existed and its desire to extend Rotary in an acceptable manner to all countries (especially those where Rotary previously existed), recognized a fruitful opportunity to explore the extension of Rotary into all of China. In this regard, the Board:

- requested the World Community Service Committee to review the list of service projects compiled by the China International Centre for Economic and Technical Exchanges (中國國際經濟技術交流中心) and, where appropriate and feasible, to encourage response by Rotary clubs in selected areas to demonstrate Rotary's ability to respond to opportunities for service;
- encouraged suitable youth exchanges between Rotary clubs and appropriate groups in the People's Republic of China, and requested that Youth Exchange officers in clubs and districts – in cooperation with the Secretariat – devise suitable procedures for such exchanges and work through the All-China Youth Federation (中華全國青年聯合會);
- requested the president, president-elect, and general secretary to continue their efforts and contacts with officials of the People's Republic of China at the highest possible level to promote the development of Rotary in China.

The resolutions of this Board Meeting could be deemed as the early solid foundation stone laid on the paving of future policies.

### *The Hong Kong Workshop 1994 – Preparing for the return of Rotary*

Merely several months before the 1994 Annual Convention to be held in Taipei (臺北) (where was technically and practically the first ever Rotary International Convention held in China), in the spirit of restoration, the 1993-94 R.I. Board of Directors authorized a Presidential Workshop in Hong Kong (香港) on 14-15 January 1994. Its scope was not limited to the PRC but included several adjacent non-Rotary countries, such as Mongolia, Kazakhstan, etc. Twenty-seven participants from 13 Rotary countries, mostly in Asia, attended the Workshop which carried the purpose to assist the R.I. President in developing a strategy that could be recommended to open a door for introducing Rotary to the PRC. After the Workshop, R.I. President Robert R. Barth (巴斯) (*Switzerland*), President-Elect Bill Huntley (韓德立) (*England*), and Chairman Royce Abbey (藹比) (*Australia*) of The Rotary Foundation Trustees jointly presented a Special Report distributed to all Rotary International officers of the year.

The shortened and highlights of this Workshop Report is attached below on Pages 4-6. Readers may find more details on the recommendations.

In reflecting on the Workshop, Chairman In-Sang Song (*Korea*) stated that “since the PRC has been very successful in its national development and will no doubt become one of the major powers in the coming century, it will be very meaningful for Rotary International to help the PRC citizens also realize the joy of *Service Above Self*.”

### *R.I. Board of Directors' decision 1996-97*

The extension of Rotary back to China was again discussed in the third meeting of the Board of Directors 1996-97 of Rotary International held at One Rotary Center in Evanston, Illinois, U.S.A., from 27 February to 5 March 1997, and in Anaheim, California, U.S.A., from 12 to 13 March 1997.

Recognizing that all clubs in the British Crown Colony Hong Kong will become part of the People's Republic of China on 1 July 1997, the Board agreed to open the People's Republic of China for Rotary extension, beginning only when there is certification that the necessary requirements for extension into this area have been met.

### *A Special Communique' from R.I. President Carlo Ravizza in August 1999*

In the wake of a very successful international convention and two meetings of the Rotary International Board of Directors in Asia, questions have naturally arisen regarding the status of Rotary's re-entry into the People's Republic of China. In responding to the voice from fellows of various corners,

R.I. President Carlo Ravizza (賴唯捨) (*Italy*) wrote a special message 《Rotary and The People's Republic of China》 on the August 1999 Issue of 《*The Rotarian*》 magazine. In this special message, President Carlo emphasized that the Chinese Government had not yet approved the establishment of Rotary clubs in China. On this background he cautioned all clubs that violation of R.I. policy on extension into China could result in disciplinary action, up to and including the revocation of the Club's charter.

The full text for readers' perusal is attached below on Page 7.

### *The Groundwork in the Year 2000*

The final groundwork for elevating the modern Shanghai (上海) and Beijing (北京) Rotary clubs to provisional status was laid in November 2000, when China's Ministry of Civil Affairs invited then R.I. President Frank J. Devlyn (戴甫靈) (*Mexico*), R.I. President-Elect Richard D. King (金恩) (*U.S.A.*), and President-Nominee Bhichai Rattakul (陳裕財) (*Thailand*) (*a former vice-premier of the Thai Kingdom*) to visit Beijing. The Rotary leaders met with high-level Chinese officials and others to discuss the possibility of reintroducing Rotary to China. Accompanying were also R.I. Director Kenneth Collins (*Australia*), General Secretary Edwin H. Futa (布田), and the Royal Danish Ambassador to China, Mongolia & North Korea -- Rotarian Christopher Bo Bramsen (白慕申).



*November 2000 in Beijing, R.I. President-Elect Richard D. King (right) was greeted by China State Councillor Ismail Amat (中國國務委員司馬義·艾買提, 維吾爾族)*

Rotary leaders also noted the impressive humanitarian work carried out by the two ex-Rotarians fellowship groups located in both Shanghai and Beijing, which constituted a diverse group of 70+ members from more than 20 countries, the R.I. Board of Directors voted at its November 2005 Meeting to charter the Shanghai and Beijing provisional Rotary clubs, paving the way for a growing Rotary presence in China.

# The Hong Kong Workshop

*Preparing for the return of Rotary*

**A**s the R.I. Board of Directors reviewed the notable progress made to date in extending Rotary to all parts of the world, its attention was inevitably drawn to the People's Republic of China (PRC), by far the largest single non-Rotary country. Because of its vast size, huge population, rich culture, and incalculable potential, there can be no question that the PRC will increasingly be a leading country within the next few decades. It will therefore need Rotary all the more.

The Board, of course, was fully conscious that Rotary was no stranger there, but would be returning to a land where it had previously prospered. The Rotary Club of Shanghai was admitted on 1 October 1919. By the 1930s, the Board had authorized three districts for China's clubs, but in 1952, the Board was compelled to terminate the last club on the mainland.

Sparks of Rotary, however, still exist. A delegation from the Rotary Club of Taipei recently met the 96-year-old past president (1934-35) of the Rotary Club of Shanghai, who clearly recalled his meeting with founder Paul Harris in 1936.

In this spirit of restoration, the Board authorized a Presidential Workshop in Hong Kong on 14-15 January 1994. Its scope was not limited to the PRC but included several adjacent non-Rotary countries. Twenty-seven participants from 13 Rotary countries, mostly in Asia, attended the workshop, as well as two residents of the PRC. R.I. Director In Sang Song of Korea chaired the event, assisted by Past R.I. Director Bhichai Rattakul of Thailand. Both have been high government officials in their respective countries.

Chairman Song succinctly stated the workshop's purpose: "To assist the R.I. president in developing a strategy that could be recommended to the Board of Directors to open a door for introducing Rotary to the People's Republic of China

and adjacent non-Rotary countries."

Vice-Chairman Rattakul added other goals: to design a comprehensive vision of how Rotary might grow in China; to analyze the difficulties that might be encountered in bringing Rotary to the PRC; to discuss the steps that should be taken in the future, along with their timing and intermediaries; and to identify various administrative problems to be solved.

The participants noted the similarities between this meeting and the groundbreaking workshop in Vienna, Austria (June 1993), for extension to Central and Eastern Europe:

- The top leaders of Rotary had come to listen and learn from Rotarians knowledgeable about this area of the world;
- Discussion was free and continuous, with no sense of "hierarchy;"
- There was a renewed appreciation of the internationality of Rotary, as well as its non-political and open nature;
- The full participation of the chairman of the Trustees along with four past or current Trustees demonstrated the key role that The Rotary Foundation plays within R.I.;
- Participants recognized that East Asia faced some of the same fundamental problems in (re)establishing Rotary as did Central and Eastern Europe. Among them: difficulty in explaining the altruistic service ethic of Rotary; desire of some to join Rotary for unworthy motives; and the urgent need for a few concise, clear publications about Rotary in the local languages.

The participants also recognized some essential differences between the two meetings.

The Vienna Workshop had been greatly enlivened and enriched by the presence of nearly 30 Rotarians from the countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Their insights and concerns represented a rich resource that was unfortunately not avail-

able to the Hong Kong Workshop.

A second key difference was the political stance of governments. The Vienna participants were experiencing new or restored governments that were, to varying degrees, very interested in expanding their contacts at all levels and in all forms with Western Europe and beyond. It is quite otherwise with the governments of the non-Rotary countries in East Asia. Though their economic and trade ties are steadily strengthening with many countries, the governments of the non-Rotary countries in East Asia are unsure whether further contacts, particularly in non-economic matters, would be beneficial for them.

After two days of constructive exchange and debate, the Hong Kong Workshop reached general agreement on these findings.

1. In any extension of Rotary to these countries, R.I. must not in any way be perceived to be pleading for recognition. Rotary must instead always preserve its legitimate dignity and pride and adhere to its fundamental principles. President Robert R. Barth illustrated the proper stance: "We have the seed; have you the earth and climate for growth?" It is, of course, appropriate to stress the real benefits that Rotary can bring to any human society. However, there are some features of Rotary that cannot be compromised, that are not subjects for negotiation, such as the Object of Rotary, The 4-Way Test, and the association's participative procedures.

2. Workshop participants considered how extensive contacts already were between Rotarians and a large number of persons in the PRC, some at rather high levels in their businesses or professions.

3. Everyone recognized the danger in an uncoordinated or too rapid extension. R.I. has no need to hurry. Instead, it has an obligation to build soundly for the future and to ensure that the end product is genu-



inely Rotary. As President Barth remarked: "It is easy to have children (new clubs); it is not so easy to have a family (Rotarians dedicated to service)." Governors all over the Rotary world must therefore restrain any clubs and Rotarians in their districts that may not have considered all the important factors in their understandable desire to sponsor clubs in the PRC immediately, instead of following the Board's lead.

4. It quickly became apparent that Rotary has not always been properly understood by most governments of these non-Rotary countries. It may be seen as too Western or too "American" for some—despite the fact that only about one-third of the world's Rotarians are from the U.S.A. It is also wrongly seen as elitist, a rich man's club, and overly committed to a capitalist economic system. With this false perspective, government leaders could be loath to sanction such an organization in their countries.

5. The workshop participants were glad to learn that Rotary's image in the PRC is nevertheless becoming more realistic, mainly because of the service activities of Rotarians—and The Rotary Foundation of R.I. The Foundation has not only donated nearly U.S. \$19 million for PolioPlus in the PRC (including \$15 million for a vaccine production plant in Kunming); it has also sent to and received from the PRC several Rotary Scholars and GSE teams. Further, the PRC National Immunization Days in December 1993 and January 1994 would not have been possible without the Foundation's

contribution of 70 million doses of vaccine. As a result, the PRC Ministry of Health reported the successful immunization of over 100 million children between the ages of one and four; and the minister personally thanked Trustee Chairman Royce Abbey at a public occasion in Beijing.

In addition, every participant could cite a service project in his country that benefited PRC citizens. For example, Hong Kong Rotarians have aided victims of flooding in the PRC, and they annually award stipends to worthy medical and dental teachers in the PRC to study at a Hong Kong university. Japanese Rotarians have been equally generous to PRC students in Japan. "There is definitely a tale of Rotary humanitarian work in China," remarked President-Elect Bill Huntley, "but it is too little known."

6. Hong Kong Rotarians were clearly confident about that city's future after 1 July 1997, when it becomes part of the PRC. They felt that the published "basic law" documents afford both them and Rotary the necessary freedom for future activities. [Given Hong Kong's significant role in fueling and guiding the current economic boom in the PRC, these Rotarians argued that Beijing will significantly gain by maintaining current arrangements and procedures in Hong Kong.]

7. A strong consensus emerged that the time was right to offer the PRC the opportunity for Rotary to grow there. There were several reasons for this consensus:

a. The PRC is currently enjoying a far-reaching upsurge of economic activity, attaining one of the highest rates of growth among major nations. Millions of Chinese business people now have some "discretionary money" for use beyond their basic needs, which may make it easier for any new Rotarians there to carry out service projects and other Rotary obligations.

b. There is demonstrably an increasing understanding of and openness to ideas from "the West," as well as its products. This is true not only of ordinary citizens but also of governmental authorities, which desire to share in the benefits of certain

international organizations (such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) and are more open to sending their outstanding students and others abroad for specialized training.

c. The renewed interest in Confucian ideals, particularly its respect for family relationships and educational achievements, may make many Chinese more receptive to Rotary's ideals.

These findings from the workshop, as well as some concrete suggestions on the next steps forward, were conveyed to the R.I. Board for its March 1994 meeting. After due deliberation, the Board decided on the following strategies:

1. It reaffirmed its earlier decision on the extension of Rotary to non-Rotary countries, which had these main provisions:

- increasing the number of informal initiatives in the areas of education, exchange of persons, and humanitarian assistance;
- no formal extension without the prior explicit approval of the Board;
- and suitable assurance that Rotary clubs will be able to function freely, meet regularly, satisfy R.I. financial obligations, and plan and implement service projects, including participation in all Foundation programs.

2. It reaffirmed its 1991 decision opening Vietnam and Laos for Rotary extension, and agreed to open the PRC, Mongolia, and Bhutan for extension whenever the president and the general secretary certify to the Board that the above requirements have been met for a particular country.

3. It established an international committee, reporting directly to the president—with subcommittees for the above countries—to supervise, encourage, and coordinate the extension of Rotary and the introduction of Rotary service projects in these Asian countries.

4. Under the patient and careful guidance of the international committee, the subcommittees will seek the cooperation of the central government of each of the countries for reestablishment of Rotary there.

[continued on page 62]



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[Hong Kong . . . from page 41]

5. The general strategy in each country will be to select one key city (or perhaps two or three in a large country), where the first Rotary club will be chartered and in whose neighborhood additional clubs will in time be established.

6. As determined by the relevant subcommittee and the international committee, work with the central government and with prospective members at the local or provincial level may well proceed simultaneously.

7. In regard to the PRC, the first cities could be Guangzhou, Shanghai, and/or Beijing. Once Rotary is well established along the coast, extension can proceed inland, following the great rivers. There was a general agreement that the committee must respect the manner in which the Beijing government may choose to further the restoration of Rotary. Flexibility and patience must therefore be the hallmarks of Rotary's work towards restoration.

8. Every effort must be made to publicize the true story of Rotary, particularly the benefits it brings to communities. Governments must be encouraged to understand R.I. correctly, that is, as a cultural association and definitely not as a political organization. In portraying the service rendered by Rotarians, the emphasis should not be on charity (which may be misunderstood) but on educational exchange and improved health care among the many service projects of Rotary.

In reflecting on the workshop, Chairman Song stated that "since the PRC has been very successful in its national development and will no doubt become one of the major powers in the coming century, it will be very meaningful for Rotary International to help the PRC citizens also realize the joy of 'Service Above Self.'"

—ROBERT R. BARTH,  
President, R.I.  
—BILL HUNTLEY  
President-elect, R.I.  
—ROYCE ABBEY,  
Chairman,  
The Rotary Foundation Trustees

[This article is adapted from a longer report sent to district governors and others. —EDS]

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A special communiqué from  
R.I. President Carlo Ravizza

## Rotary and the People's Republic of China

In the wake of a very successful international convention and two meetings of the Rotary International Board of Directors in Asia, questions have naturally arisen regarding the status of Rotary's re-entry into the People's Republic of China. Many Rotarians are eager to start clubs in this country where Rotary was once an active force. While the R.I. leadership appreciates their enthusiasm, some roadblocks remain to extending Rotary into China, other than in the special territories of Hong Kong and Macau, where clubs have been active for some time.

For more than 50 years, R.I. policy has mandated that extension work in countries without Rotary clubs requires the approval of the R.I. Board. To this end, the Board established specific criteria that must be met before it can approve attempts to establish the first Rotary club in a country, including receiving the "express and concrete approval" of the government. R.I. leaders have met with Chinese officials several times over the past 10 years, but the government has not yet approved the establishment of Rotary clubs there. Communications continue, and we are hopeful that an agreement eventually will be reached.

In the meantime, I would caution clubs that a violation of R.I. policy on extension into China could result in disciplinary action, up to

and including the revocation of a club's charter.

Instead, I encourage you to channel your desire to extend Rotary service to China into specific projects. Support PolioPlus Partners efforts that fund immunization activities in China; apply for Helping Grants from The Rotary Foundation of R.I. to carry out international service projects in China; donate scholarships for Chinese students to study in your country.



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These are just a few ways in which we can establish a positive presence in China and reintroduce the concept of Rotary service, while promoting international understanding and goodwill. Then, when the barriers to Rotary in China have been removed, we will have a solid base on which to build. Having had an opportunity to see Rotary in action, Chinese business and professional leaders will gain a better understanding of what it means to be a Rotarian and of the ideals of service and fellowship that Rotary promotes.

Carlo Ravizza,  
President, R.I.



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