

## Rotary's Wheel of Misfortune

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The international service movement Rotary has run into an incomprehensible wall of official opposition in Shanghai. Hopeful organisers of a local chapter of the non-political businessmen's association have been warned not to proceed with plans to formally establish a Rotary group in the city.

Motives for the orders from the Shanghai Municipal Government are vague. Theories range from fears of a link with Taipei---where Rotary has a strong presence---to confusion over a name that sounds much like the banned *Falun Gong*. Attempts to resolve the cloudy issue have failed.

"It's a great pity," says Randal Eastman, a Canadian in the electronics business who now heads the semi-dormant Rotary movement in Shanghai. "We have nothing to do with politics. We stand for good-fellowship and good works, the same as any Rotary Club anywhere on earth." That's not how city officials in Shanghai see it. During a recent visit to Shanghai by the Rotary Club of Seattle, the body that sponsored Shanghai's first Rotary Club on October 1, 1919, official orders were given that the two groups should not officially meet.

The visitors were also astonished to learn that they were not permitted to visit Percy Chu, the ailing 101-year-old banker who was the first Chinese president of the Shanghai Rotary in 1934-35.

Mr. Eastman is unofficial chairman of Expatriate Rotarians and Friends in Shanghai and Frank Yih is secretary. "We simply do not know what has gone wrong," both agree.

Rotary in Shanghai has a long history. In 1919, the Seattle Rotary sponsored the infant Shanghai chapter. In 1952, Rotary found itself in a hostile, anti-business environment in post-Liberation Shanghai, with most of its members departed. The club closed down.

Mr. Yih, who was born in Shanghai, was taken to Hong Kong as a child in 1950. He has been an enthusiastic Rotarian most of his adult life. He wonders if cross-strait tensions could be one reason for the present strained situation for Rotary in Shanghai.

Businessmen in Beijing established a branch several years ago, and although it has well-attended weekly meetings, that chapter is not recognised officially by the Rotary International headquarters in the United States. The Beijing chapter has been allowed to operate unofficially but openly.

In Shanghai, it's been a different story. Tentative meetings to see Rotary reborn on the Bund started last year. A handful of interested people, mostly expatriates who had been Rotarians abroad, went to monthly gatherings. The pace began to pick up, with meetings now held fortnightly.

The Beijing Rotary had got off the ground by having new members fly to Hong Kong to be inducted. This meant they could meet in Beijing as members of a Hong Kong organisation. The Shanghai group chose a different route.

Not only was there quiet opposition from local officials, but Rotary International headquarters in Evanston, Illinois, seemed none too happy about Rotary starting in Shanghai. Once again, Mr. Eastman and Mr. Yih are puzzled.

Part of the disdain expressed by Shanghai officials may have been because of one early meeting where the home club banners of visiting Rotarians were displayed. One of these was from the Taipei Club.

A city official saw Taipei Rotary banners and although they promptly came down, never to go up again, suspicions seem to have been raised.

Then came another bombshell. City officials demanded to know if Rotary was connected with *Falun Gong*? An official pointed out that the names of the two organisations were similar in Chinese. Rotary is *Fulun Hsia*, roughly translated as "Charity Wheel Association". The sect's name is the three characters meaning "Helping Wheel" with the "*Gong*" linking it to martial arts teachings.

Rotary group members were astonished to be linked to the banned sect.

Mr. Eastman stresses the service aspect of the Shanghai group. "We're a group of people who are keen to help the community, just as Rotary does everywhere else. We've raised a little money from members and would like to find a good cause to support." The issue came to a head when the Seattle delegation arrived in June. The Seattle Rotarians were eager to see if they could once again sponsor a revitalised Shanghai chapter and Mr. Eastman and Mr. Yih were anxious to talk to the visitors to get sponsorship if Rotary was permitted to re-establish itself on the mainland.

The Seattle visitors wanted to go to the Red Cross in Pudong to present a cash donation. It was when Shanghai Rotary, using the name *Fulun Hsia*, began trying to locate the Red Cross that alarm bells began ringing. It is believed an official made a mistake in the name, thinking that Americans and *Falun Gong* were involved in trying to locate the Red Cross.

Warnings came that the Shanghai Rotarians were not to go to the Red Cross presentation and the Seattle visitors were not to officially visit their Shanghai counterparts.

"It's all an enormous pity," says Mr. Eastman. "All we want to do is establish an organisation in Shanghai similar to Rotary clubs worldwide. They bring benefits to every community in which they are found." "There's been a sad mistake here and we hope it can be corrected."