

# The First Council on Legislation of Rotary International in 1934

## Who was the first China's representative attended this Council?

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The last Council on Legislation of Rotary International (RI) was met in 2013. The next will be held in spring of 2016, and would be followed by the next in 2019. But the first Council was met 80 years ago in 1934.

The Council on Legislation, Rotary's "parliament," (so as the "People's Congress" in China) meets every three years to deliberate and act upon all proposed enactments and resolutions submitted by clubs, district conferences, the General Council and Conference of Rotary International in Great Britain and Ireland, and the Rotary International Board of Directors. The Council itself also makes proposals.

The Council on Legislation is an important part of Rotary's governance process. This is the only time that Rotary International and The Rotary Foundation can make changes in the governance documents. While the Board of Directors sets policies for Rotary International, the Council is where Rotary clubs have their say in the governance of the association. Every three years, each district sends a representative to the Council, which reviews proposed legislation. Every club and district is entitled to submit enactments to the Council, and some of Rotary's most important work has resulted from Council action. Women were admitted into Rotary because of the action of the 1989 Council on Legislation, and PolioPlus was born as the result of the 1986 Council.

The Council comprises more than 500 representatives from every part of the Rotary world. Voting members include one elected representative of the clubs of each Rotary district. Representatives are selected from within each of the Rotary districts and to be qualified, must be a past district governor and in good standing with Rotary. Some non-voting members include the chair and vice chair of the Council, the RI president, members of the RI Board, and past RI presidents.

The Council was created by the 1933 Convention in Boston to serve as an “advisory body” to assist with the review of enactments and resolutions proposed at the annual Convention. The first Council was convened as part of the 1934 Convention, in Detroit, the year as Rotarians struggled with a worldwide recession, threats to world peace, and rising unemployment.

By 1954, the Council was well established. At that year’s Convention in Seattle, Rotarians decided to allow for longer intervals between legislative sessions and adopted a biennial framework for voting upon enactments and resolutions. The next deliberations were held at the 1956 Convention in Philadelphia.

The 1970 Convention, in Atlanta, further modified Rotary International’s legislative process when it decided that the Council should no longer serve in an advisory capacity, but instead become RI’s official legislative body, considering proposals to amend the Rotary International Constitution and Bylaws and the Standard Rotary Club Constitution. Four years later, delegates decided that the Council would meet triennially, still in conjunction with the Convention. Finally, in 1977, the Council adopted an enactment to meet independently of the annual Convention.

## The first China’s representative



FONG FOO SEC  
Shanghai, China  
*Director*

Dr. Fong Foo-Sec (鄺富灼博士), of the Rotary Club of Shanghai (上海扶輪社), was the first China’s representative to participate in the first Council of Legislation.

As mentioned above, the inaugural Council on Legislation was held in 1934 as part of the 25th Annual Convention held in Detroit, Michigan, U.S.A., on June 25-29. It was a result of action taken at the 1933 Boston Annual Convention. It was hoped that would provide a Rotary parliament for the adequate consideration of Rotary policies and problems. Being a pioneer body, it must for a time work under certain limitations until its functions and form were more clearly established. The provisions by the Boston Convention’s decision specified that the President of Rotary International with the approval of the Board of Directors should appoint to it 9 representatives at large, in addition to the representatives from each and every district. By 1 January 1934, there were 78 districts. The following 9 Rotarians were appointed:

- (1) Clinton P. Anderson, Albuquerque, New Mexico, U.S.A.
- (2) Samuel B. Botsford, Buffalo, New York, U.S.A.
- (3) Almon E. Roth, Palo Alto, California, U.S.A.
- (4) Otto Fischer, Stuttgart, Germany

- (5) Robert L. Hill, Columbus, Missouri, U.S.A.
- (6) Raymond J. Knoepfel, New York, New York, U.S.A.
- (7) Crawford C. McCullough, Fort William, Ontario, Canada
- (8) Luis Machado, Havana, Cuba
- (9) Will R. Manier, Jr., Nashville, Tennessee, U.S.A.

Also, similarly, the President was instructed to appoint representatives of non-districted clubs not to exceed 10 in number with approval of the Board, in compliance with which President John Nelson had appointed these 6 to the first Council:

- (1) Fong Foo-Sec (鄺富灼博士), Shanghai, China (中華民國)
- (2) Frederick E. James, Madras, India
- (3) Clare Martin, Cairo, Egypt
- (4) Federico Martins, La Paz, Bolivia
- (5) Cecil Rae, Ipoh, Federated Malay States
- (6) Paul T. Thorwall, Helsinki-Helsingfors, Finland

Dr. Fong Foo-Sec (鄺富灼博士), HonLLD (*Pomona*), MEd (*Columbia*), MA (*Columbia*), BLitt (*UC Berkeley*) (1869-1938), a Guangdong native, joined the Shanghai Rotary Club (上海扶輪社) on 4 April 1922 (*Classification: Books Publishing*), was the first Chinese who served as a director of Rotary International in 1933-1934, but very exceptionally not a past district governor. Other than that, Fong held a smart record of services to Rotary as the Shanghai Rotary Club President in 1931-1932; China's representative to the first Council on Legislation in 1934; Rotary International District 81 Governor in 1936-1937; District 96-97-98 Governor in 1937-1938; and finally, District 97-98 Governor on 1 July 1938 until 3 October 1938 when he passed away in office after two months of illness.

In 1905, Fong obtained the Bachelor of Letters (B.Litt.) from the University of California in Berkeley, followed by 2 Master degrees in Arts (M.A.) and Education (M.Ed.) from the University of Columbia, U.S.A. On 22 October 1907, Fong was conferred by Ch'ing Emperor Guang Xu the title of "Wen-Ke Chin-Shih" (大清國光緒皇帝御賜遊學文科進士) which was the equivalent of a Doctor of Letters degree from the European universities. In 1922, Fong was honoured a degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa* (LL.D.) by Pomona College, U.S.A.

In June 1922, Fong, a fresh member to Rotary, was the only China's delegate attended the 13th Rotary International Convention at Los Angeles, California, U.S.A. This Chinese Rotarian was so outstanding and easily be recognized. He was then invited for an interview by the staff writer Arthur Melville of the official Rotary magazine *《The Rotarian》* entitled *《A Chinese Dick Whittington》*. *《Dick Whittington and His Cat》* is an English folk tale that tells of a poor boy in the 14th century who becomes a wealthy merchant and eventually the Lord Mayor of London because of the ratting abilities of his cat. Probably the early struggling life of Fong, from a kitchen boy to a LL.D., was somewhat alike this poor boy Dick in this English tale. The article was published on the August 1922 Issue of *《The Rotarian》*. That was the first time in history for the Magazine to interview a Chinese Rotarian, whose profession was the Editor-in-Chief of The Commercial Press (商務印書館) which was the major English language text books publisher for Chinese learners during the era of 1920s to 1940s.

## Opening Address of the First Council on Legislation by R. I. President

The Council on Legislation, held in connection with the 25th Annual Convention of Rotary International at the Temple Auditorium, Detroit, Michigan, U.S.A., on 25-29 June 1934, convened for its opening session at 10:20 a.m. on June 25. Rotary International President John Nelson presiding:

Gentlemen, I welcome you to the first meeting of the Council on Legislation of Rotary International. I think you are to be congratulated. I myself feel that I am fortunate to have a part in this epoch-making development in the life of Rotary International.

The story of this organization has been a constant story of adaptation, of recognition of growing needs both within and without the organization, and we have all been conscious for some time that the machinery with which we are equipped, to deal with the legislative changes necessary in the life of a growing virile organization such as ours was very inadequate.

You are familiar with that machinery. The International Convention is the supreme court, the court of last appeal, the enacting court, always having had the assistance of a resolution committee whose labors were extremely arduous and who did preparatory work in bringing these enactments and resolutions before the Convention itself so that they could deal with them in an intelligent manner.

As our organization assumed the large proportions which it has attained, this method became obviously cumbersome and unwieldy and unsatisfactory.

A year ago a very strong committee was appointed to consider the whole matter in connecting with other matters and they made a recommendation which led to the adoption at Boston last year of provisions creating this Council on Legislation. It is not a final enacting body, as you know, but it is a deliberative body. It is a highly representative body. It represents the ripe experience of men who have come right up through all the ranks of Rotary and in that process have acquired a practical, working knowledge of the needs of Rotary, the methods of Rotary, the practices of Rotary and the degree to which these conform to the necessities of this growing movement.

So we come today for the first time in our history to devote ourselves to studying the proposed enactments and resolutions which have come up to us from the clubs and districts throughout this world-wide organization. Our task is going to be a heavy one. The time at our disposal is very limited.

It is going to require not only patience but the exercise of a lot of self-restraint on the part of some of us to curb our speech, to condense our remarks, so that we shall dispose of this business within the time available, having regard to the other sessions of the Convention.

Now I am sensible, as I know a great many here are, that we are participating in an epoch-making departure in our organization. We are members for the first time of a tentative parliament of Rotary. We shall look back on it, with pride I hope, in years to come, when it has developed and evolved, qualified, no doubt, by our experience from year to year, having defined its own rules to a large extent, having established its own procedure to a great degree, and having proceeded wisely, sanely and with vision and with courage --- let us hope with restraint --- in the consideration of the matters which come before us.

Now with regard to its composition, I don't need to remind you that the seats on the floor are reserved for the properly accredited members of this Council.

In connection with the setting up of an organization such as this, one has to have regard to the element of time, and it gave me a good bit of concern to know how far it would be wise to try and anticipate more or less formal action by this Council in order that at the very start we might get away with our business and not consume the whole morning in more or less mechanical processes. Therefore, I have taken the liberty of doing two or three things for which I wish your approval. First of all we must authenticate the credentials of those who compose this Council, and some days ago I asked a small committee to look into the credentials that were then available. We don't anticipate there will be much trouble, a little misunderstanding, perhaps, here and there, but we shall check over the credentials and try to regularize the personnel of this Council in so far as we can, so that we can at once proceed with the business which has brought us together.



*Paul P. Harris, Rotary Founder, greets Dr. Fong Foo-Sec at the Council of Legislation 1934*

## The Council “Today” and of the “Yesterday”

Technological advances have also had a profound impact on the Council. In the 1970s, delegates sported large headphones to follow the proceedings in their own language. Today's delegates have access to compact simultaneous interpretation equipment. The use of a single interpreter has given way to multiple interpreters working out of booths on the side of the Council chambers. Electronic voting was introduced in 2001. *(see photos on next page)*

What was happened at the inaugural Council on Legislation in 1934? For those who are interested in the “Yesterday”, full text of the proceedings is available from Herbert K. Lau upon request via e-mails to [herbilau@netvigator.com](mailto:herbilau@netvigator.com).





*Council on Legislation of Rotary International in meeting as it was in 1951.*



*Council on Legislation of Rotary International as it is in the new century, with voting screens on each side of the chamber reflect the Council's decisions.*