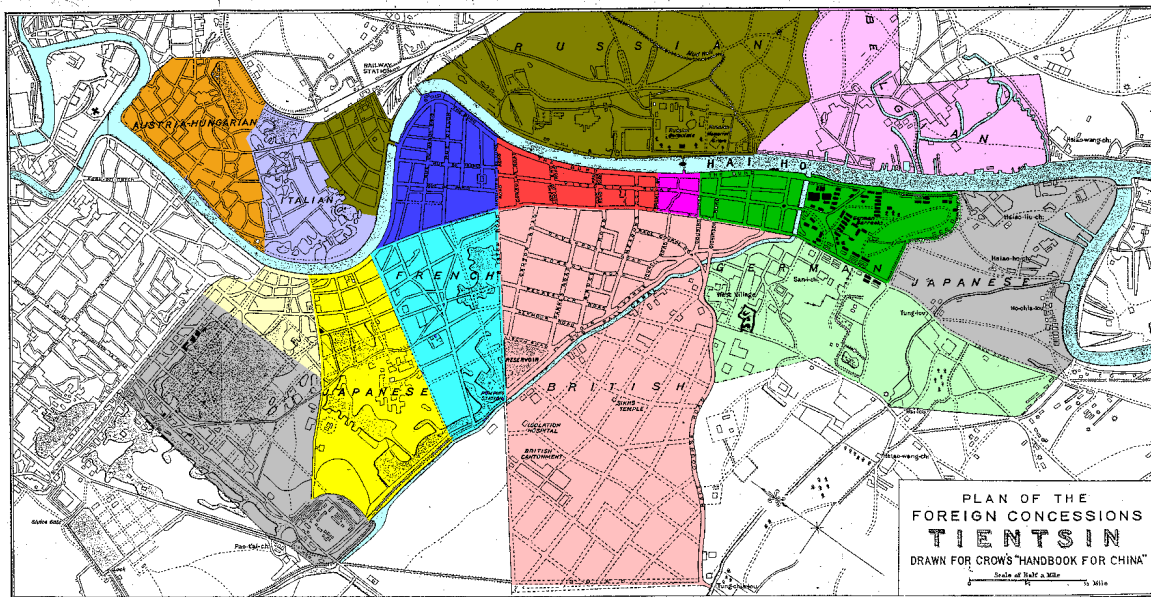


# The First Decade of Rotary in the Tientsin Foreign Concessions

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

1 September 2014



## The Treaty Port Tientsin

The concessions in Tientsin (*Tianjin*) (天津) were concession territories ceded by the Ch'ing Empire (Manchu Dynasty) (大清國) to a number of European countries, the United States and Imperial Japan within the city of Tientsin. There were nine concessions in altogether (*see map above*). These concessions also contributed to the rapid development of Tientsin from the early to mid-20th century. The first concessions in Tientsin were granted in 1860. By 1943, in the Republic of China (中華民國) all the foreign concessions, save the Japanese concession, had ceased to exist de facto.

There is reason to believe that the vast alluvial plain of North China, of which the modern Tianjin is the enter port, was once part of the Yellow River (黃河). The plain was largely created by the wandering Yellow River, eternally laden with immense quantities of silt. Twice the changes of its course brought the River through Tientsin. Its present name dates from the time the Great Ming Emperor Yung Lo (大明國永樂皇帝-明成祖朱棣), who moved the capital from Nanking (*Nanjing*) (南京) to Peking (*Beijing*) (北京) in 1421 and made Tientsin a garrison town for the safeguarding of the capital. The full name was Tien Chin Wei (天津衛), meaning “a Ford leading to the City of the Son of Heaven” (天子津渡). In his work on the 《Tientsin: An Illustrated Outline History》, Mr. Otto Durham Rasmussen pointed out that the poetic inference of the

name arose from the fact that embassies from many tributary states were obliged to ford their way across this confluence of waterways on their journey to visit the Emperor. Even under the previous Dynasty (the Yuen (元朝), established by the Mongol conquerors), Tientsin had assumed a certain importance, because of its situation on the Grand Canal (京杭大運河), the northern section of which had then been completed. Marco Polo referred to the place as the “Citta Celeste” (Celestial City).

The first European Embassy, sent by the Dutch, which passed through Tientsin in 1655, proclaimed this the “most famous Sea Town of all China”, near the sea and at a point where three rivers met, built with strong walls, full of watch-towers and bulwarks, “*and the place much set forth with temples; very populous and so full of trade, that hardly the like commerce is to be found in any other city in all China, for whatever vessels are bound for Peking from any other part of China, must touch here.*”

Hither came the first British Embassy to the Court of the Ch’ing Empire, headed by Lord Macartney (馬戛爾尼勳爵) (George Macartney, 1st Earl Macartney) in 1793, and the second Embassy 23 years later, under Lord Amherst (阿美士德勳爵) (William Pitt Amherst, 1st Earl Amherst), in 1816 as Ambassador Extraordinary. Both wrote of Tientsin as a city of substance, with well-dressed people of descent appearance who crowded the banks of the river and “*uttered no abuse, nor testified any signs of dissatisfaction---but all their countenances were expressive of good humoured surprise and curiosity.*”

Both these ambassadors traversed the Tientsin River (known today as Haihe 海河) in Chinese junks, their ships remaining outside the bar off Taku (大沽), which was some 30 miles from Tientsin.

The contemporary history of the port and city dated from the 《Treaty of Tientsin》 (天津條約) in 1858. Following troubles in the South of China and the continued indifference of the young Emperor Hienfung (咸豐皇帝), to the demands of foreigners for trading rights, the Powers turned their attention to the North. To wake the Emperor from “his dream of supremacy”, four Powers knocked at the outer gates of the Capital, two of them “*with the gentle tap of friendship, the other two with the heavy blows of belligerents.*” The Taku forts were taken and foreign gunboats went up the river to Tientsin. As an instance of the indifference of the common people to the quarrels between their own and other governments, and doubtless of the alacrity with which the Chinese seized any chance to earn what was to them an honest enough penny, when one of the foreign gunboats ran aground in the silt, 400 peasants were hired to keep her afloat, and “*they tugged as lustily as if they had not been helping the enemies of their sovereign.*” Owing to the lavish hospitality of the Chinese “*and the reckless enterprise with which the more juvenile portion of the British naval officers attacked every species of unwholesome dish that was placed in their way,*” Lord Elgin (James Bruce, 8th Earl of Elgin) (伊利近勳爵/額爾金勳爵) found it expedient to hasten the signature of the Treaties, which unfortunately overlooked Tientsin.

Thereafter the Powers were permitted to establish Legations in Peking, and their nationals to travel and do business. But as a result of the uncountable omission of Tientsin from the list of New Treaty Ports further trouble arose, the Imperial Qing evaded ratification and the rebarred door had to be forced open again two years later by an expedition which occupied Peking, the Chinese rulers had failed to keep the foreigners out altogether but they were determined not to have them in the heart of their cities. In this they were undoubtedly well-advised on practical grounds, for the possibilities of misunderstanding and collision were many and might have involved constant friction. Consequently places outside the city were set apart for them. The British and French were conceded low-lying swamps adjacent to the river, and a similar Concession was given to the Americans, which ultimately amalgamated with the British Area in around 1865. It was a very narrow strip of land, in later years extended with the consent of the Chinese authorities. The famous soldier Major-General Charles George Gordon (戈登少將), then a captain in the Royal Engineers, mapped out of the original British Area. Describing the site set apart for the Concessions Mr. Alexander Michie, first of a long line of British editors in Tientsin, wrote that Captain Gordon and his French colleague

“placed the boundary stones in the dreary grounds which contained within their areas junk docks, small vegetable gardens, mud heaps, hovels of fishermen, sailors and others, whose wretched groups of squalid huts were divided from each other by narrow tidal ditches which were bordered by meagre and settlements were foul and noxious swamps, and around them on the dryer ground were the numerous graves of many generations of the people.”

Tientsin was still the mart of North at that time. The guilds in the city were splendid and powerful, “and scarce any city in the Empire contained more numerous and better endowed charitable institutions, such as orphanages, schools of the poor, refuges, food distributaries, etc.”

The contact thus established between two of the foremost trading peoples of the world led in the course of time to a tremendous growth in the wealth, importance, and size of Tientsin. Most of the pioneer foreign traders were British. They found and fostered markets abroad for Chinese products while finding in Tientsin and its vast hinterland a market for the manufacturers of the West. Many a romantic tale could be told of the early development of this trade did space allow. It is sufficient to state that in spite of manifold difficulties and periods of crisis the growth of the commerce and importance of Tientsin had been practically continuous, and it was then the second port of China, taking precedence of all save Shanghai (上海). Twice the little foreign trading colonies were threatened with extinction: during the Tientsin Riots (Tientsin Massacre) (天津教案) of 1870 and again in 1900, when the Boxers (義和團) besieged the foreign areas. But, very soon, Chinese and foreigners were bound with strong ties, the sentiment of the native population had undergone considerable change, and for a generation---despite the periodical agitation of petty politicians---harmony had reigned.

The face of Tientsin, too, had vastly changed in the first 2 decades since the establishment of the Republican China in 1912. The swamps on which the foreign areas began have been raised far above their former level by scientific methods, silt being pumped up from the river and distributed over the low-lying land in sections. Macadam, asphalt, and concrete roads---as good as any to be found in the most modern cities of the West---had long since replaced the mud-

roads of former times. The example of the foreign areas in this respect was then being emulated by the Chinese authorities in the native city. Owing to the civil wars and the insecurity of life and property in the city, the trend of development had moved towards the foreign areas where all the larger department stores, hotels, banks, business institutions, theatres and cinemas, both Chinese and foreign, were centered. Chinese were flocking into these areas, too, for ordinary residential purposes. Most of the concessions were then built up to capacity.

The foreign areas represented in brick and stone that transition of the oldest civilization on earth to more modern concepts of life. People returning to Tientsin after a prolonged absence marveled at its rapid growth and the relative magnificence of many of its great banking and business premises. It was estimated that the total population, Chinese and foreign, then exceeded 1.5 million.

It is of interest to note that for several years then the British Area had been administered by a Municipal Council (天津英國租界董事會), of leading business men and ratepayers, consisting of 5 Chinese and 5 Britons, with a British chairman. The experiment had proved a most valuable one, and had confounded the sceptics and even surprised the optimists who dared to hope it would be successful. The most amicable relations existed between the two nationalities represented on the Council, and though the inception of the experiment occasioned a setback in the progress of the Area, this had been completely overcome.

### Trade and Commerce

It is good to note that despite the disorders in China, of which the North-West, which Tientsin served as its only port, had had more than its fair share, trade had grown with tremendous strides. The trade was remarkable in those years in view of the fact that since Outer Mongolia (i.e. the independent nation Mongolia today) broke off relations with China and virtually entered the economic regime of the Soviet Union (USSR), the vast amounts of camel's wool and sheep's wool, which used to come down to Tientsin for export to the United States and other foreign markets, had been diverted to the USSR. Tientsin was one of the greatest centers in Asia for the export of raw products. The main items of the trade were fibers, groundnuts, hides and skins, furs, straw braid, camel's and sheep's wool, raw cotton, bristles, egg and vegetable products. On the manufacturing side a large export trade was done in Tientsin carpets.

Its import trade included piece goods, metal and machinery, tobacco and cigarettes, kerosene and gasoline, printing paper, sugar, rice, wheat and flour, railway sleepers and materials, timber, motor cars, and aniline dyes.

### Industries

While Tientsin grew in importance on trade, and owed its modern foundations to this, industry had steadily become an increasingly important factor. While it lacked any of the great basic, heavy industries of the highly-developed countries of the West, there had been a proliferous growth of smaller industries and handicrafts. Indeed, it was a perpetual source of supervise even to the residents how many things formerly imported could then be made there. There was no doubt that Tientsin was destined to become one of the greatest industrial centers of the Far East, while the almost virgin North-West was destined for a development similar to

the North-East (Manchuria) in the past generation, and would thus immensely stimulate trade as well as industry.

Tientsin carpets were known all over the world, and this industry, which had grown tremendously since the First World War (1914-1918), was one of the most important in Tientsin. In spite of the depression, a million square feet was shipped to the United States alone in 1933. The industry had branched out in a new and most notable direction in the past year, owing to the heavy tariff imposed on imported woollen goods. Woollen spinning mills had developed with great rapidity. It was confidently predicted that Tientsin would become the Bradford of China in the manufacture of woollen goods.

There were numerous cotton mills, which had had a difficult time owing to excessive taxation, labour troubles, and lack of practical government aid, but had a bright future before them when their weaknesses were removed. Flour mills and tobacco factories, machine-shops and boiler-making enterprises, engraving and printing businesses, furniture, marble, match, press packing, salt and other industries, were centered there. Many small Chinese industries had developed in the early Republican years. Footwear of all kinds, and practically all athletic and games equipment and accessories were then made in local factories. In addition to these, many of the older industries such as silver ware, cloisonné, etc., were flourishing.

### Communications

Tientsin was both the leading port north of Shanghai and one of the chief centers of railway and internal river navigation in the country. The two great trunk railways north of Yangtze River (長江), the Tientsin-Pukow (津浦鐵路) and the Peking-Mukden (京奉鐵路) lines, both passed through the city, while the other main trunk line the Peking-Hankow Railway (京漢鐵路), was easily accessible. There was also considerable junk and boat traffic on the Grand Canal and the many other small canals, and the rivers in this vicinity. Some years ago, a network of roadways had grown up all over the Province, radiating from Tientsin, and though unmetalled and in poor condition, nevertheless, they sustained a growing traffic of motor-buses and other forms of transport.

In regard to shipping, for many years the port of Tientsin had had to battle against a formidable enemy in the shape of the Yung Ting River (*Yongding River*) (永定河), which with several other rivers flows into the Tientsin navigable river known as the Haiho (*Haihe*) (海河). The Yung Ting River during the spring and summer freshets brings down vast quantities of silt, and periodically blocks the river and obstructed navigation. During these periods only lighters and small crafts could come up to the Tientsin Bund, and while the ocean-going steamers lied off Taku Bar (大沽壩), the coastal services used Tangku (*Tanggu*) (塘沽) (some 27 miles from Tientsin, down river) as the port, the cargo being brought up by lighters or the railway. The Haiho was in a very badly silted condition at the time of the Boxers troubles in 1900. During the temporary foreign control exercised at that time the Haiho Conservancy Commission was instituted, and this body had fought a ceaseless battle against the silt menace. The Bar channel had been improved, many cuttings had been made in the river to strengthen its course and

facilitated tidal movement, and dredging had been ceaselessly undertaken, together with ice-breaking operations which had enabled ships to use the port even in the deepest winter.

### The Foreign Concessions in the 1920's-1930's

Tientsin lies at the confluence of several large rivers and the Grand Canal, and is near the sea edge of the great Northern plain. In winter the plain is hardly calculated to inspire poetic fancy. The bare brown earth does not possess that lush dark hue to be found in parts of northeast China. It is a dirty, light brown, and looks so poor that one wonders whether anything could be grown upon it. But when the kaoliang and other crops are high in the late summer one marvels at the immense of green and productivity of the soil. The climate is very dry except for brief period of humidity in summer. Temperatures run to extremes, and when the north-easterly winds blow it is very cold. In the spring, too, the winds are laden with a great deal of dust. But the rainfall is relatively small, and blue skies and sunshine are almost monotonous in their consistency and frequency.

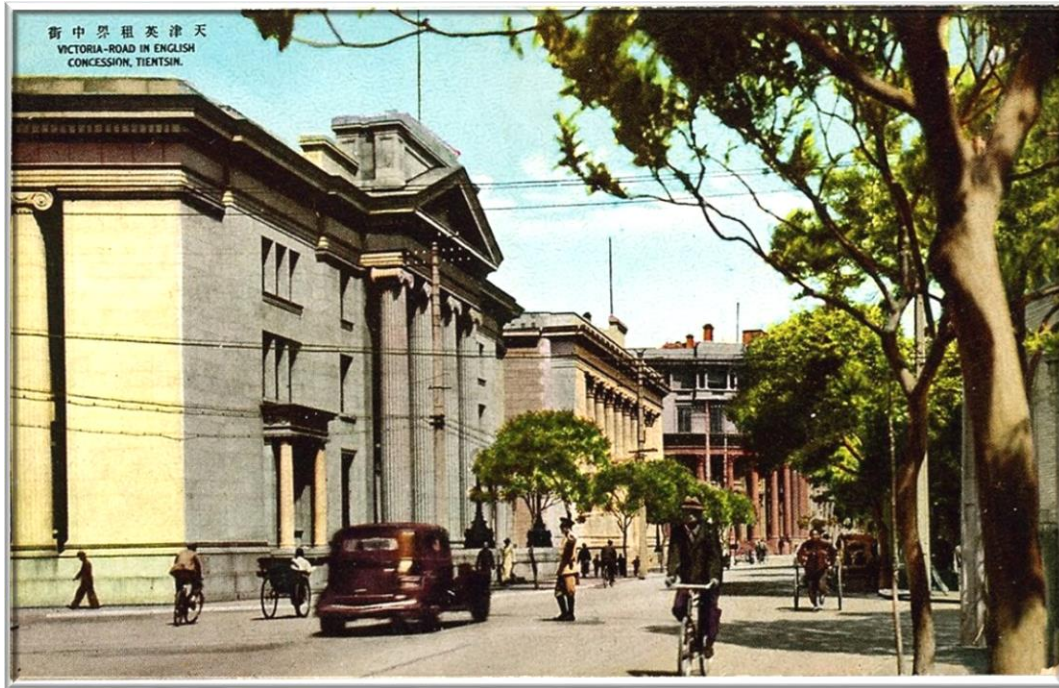
The original old walled city grew in the course of the 19th Century well beyond its limits, but with the coming of the 1911 Revolution and the disturbances and stimulus to modernity it brought, development had centered in the foreign areas adjacent to the Chinese city and further down river. The French, Japanese and Italian Concessions during the beginning of the Republican years had only a few streets, had been built up completely on the 1930's. The much larger British Area, which adjoined the French Concession, was then the chief center of new building and so greatly had the rate of development been accelerated. The former German and Austrian Concessions, which had reverted to China after the Washington Conference in 1922, had long since been built up, while the ex-Russian Concession had grown appreciably in the post-War years.

In these foreign areas model municipalities, with the usual municipal facilities of electric power, public works departments, parks and athletic fields, modern concrete streets, lighting and traffic systems, had grown up. They had begun to exert great influence on the Chinese city, though Tientsin native city could not yet compare with the vast streets in modern reforms instituted in such progressive cities as Canton (*Guangzhou*) (廣州).

The foreign areas looked for all world like Western modern cities with great modern temples of finance, massive business premises, and well-built residences. Even in the native city itself the transition from mud hovels and one-storey grey brick, walled houses, to more modern forms of construction was becoming more marked year by year, and expressed in brick and stone the great transition of ancient China.

The British Concession was situated on the right bank of the Haiho below the native city, occupying some 200 acres (0.81 km<sup>2</sup>). It was held on a lease in perpetuity granted by the Imperial Qing government to the British Crown, which sublet plots to private owners in the same way as was done at Hankow (*Hankou*) (漢口). The local management was entrusted to a Municipal Council, and the seat of Government was the stately Gordon Hall, situated on the financial street called Victoria Road (*see photo on Page 8*).

The British Concession was formally returned to the Republic of China with the 《Sino-British Treaty for the Relinquishment of Extra-Territorial Rights in China》, ratified on 20 May 1943, although China's government could not take possession until the end of the World War II.



*Victoria Road in the Tientsin British Concession*



*War Memorial & Gordon Hall --- The administrative center of the Tientsin British Concession*



*Meeting venue of the Tientsin Rotary Club, Astor House Hotel (left), and the British Club at Victoria Road.*





*The Bank of China, Tientsin Main Office (中國銀行天津分行)*



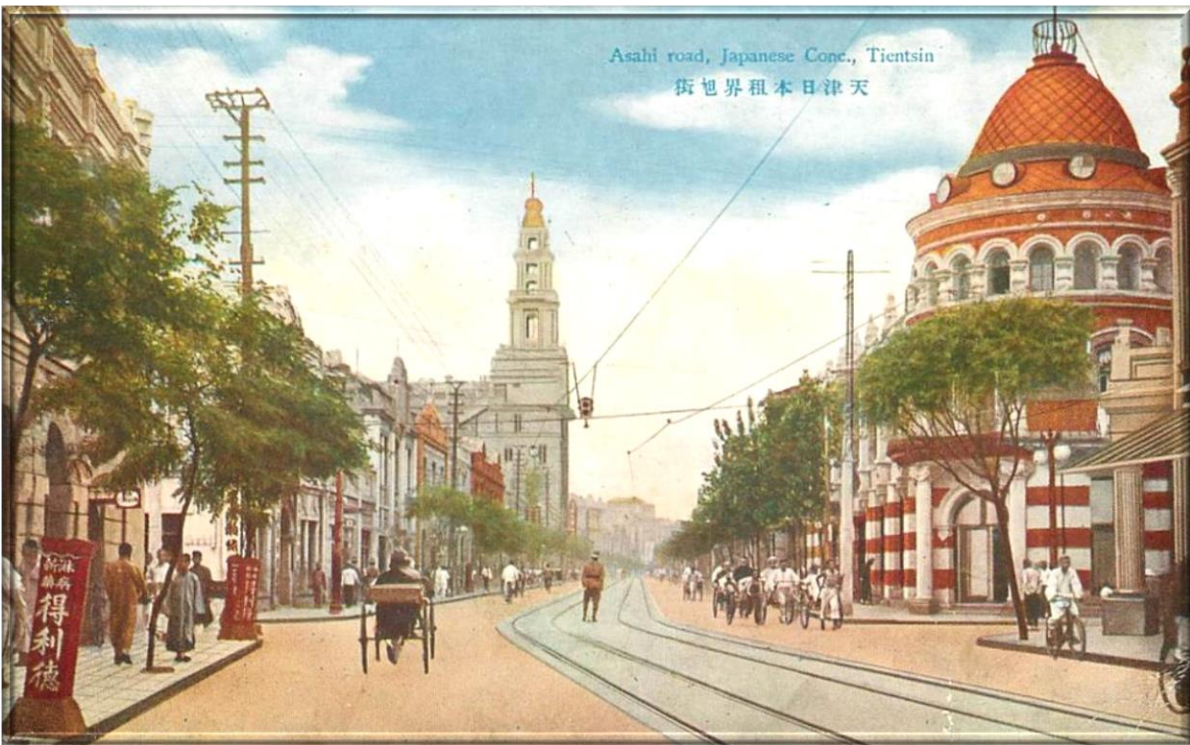
*Banknotes signed by Tientsin Rotarian Z. S. Bien (卞壽孫) (bottom right corner) in his professional capacity as Tientsin Office Manager, Bank of China*



*Tientsin German Concession*



*Tientsin Italian Concession*



*Tientsin Japanese Concession*

## Rotary in Tientsin --- The First Decade

The Tientsin Rotary Club (天津扶輪社) was a member club of Rotary International, Charter No. 1444, and in point of seniority came next to the Shanghai Rotary Club (上海扶輪社). Informally founded late in 1922, it was officially elected a member of Rotary International on 10 May 1923, as the second Rotary Club in the Republic of China (中華民國). Its origin was quite spontaneous. Two leading Americans, a doctor and a lawyer, first talked the matter over and later eight Americans, one Briton, and one Chinese met and agreed to organize a Rotary Club. As the years passed the Club became more and more cosmopolitan. Its headquarters were at the Astor House Hotel (利順德大飯店), at Victoria Road in the British Concession, where the Club met every Thursday at 12:30 p.m. (*see photo on Page 8*)

Tientsin Rotary Club was formed with 24 charter members, and the first office bearers were:

- President: Theodore Judson Worthman, Manager, The American Express Co., Inc.
- Vice-President: John James Woollen, Proprietor, Woollen, Vosey & Co., Ltd.
- Secretary: Albert Charles Row, Advertising Manager, British American Tobacco Co. (China)
- Treasurer: Emmett Hedgeman Grooms, Manager, China Import & Export Co., Ltd.
- Directors: The foregoing and
- Henry George Wandesforde Woodhead (伍德海), Editor & Director, 《*Peking and Tientsin Times*》(京津時報)
- John William Colbert, Surgeon
- Augustus Theodore Harr, Manager, Standard Oil Company of New York
- Kwan Sung-Sing (關頌聲), Architects & Engineers

Unlike most clubs in the cities of the West world, its membership was transient. The foreign consular and military representatives, many of whom joined the Club, were stationed there for a limited period. Even the ordinary banking and commercial community was subject to great changes, owing to the fact that the larger institutions had branches throughout the Far East, transfers of personnel thus being frequent. Nevertheless there was a considerable stable membership among the professional and business classes whose enterprises were centered there. The leading Chinese had taken an increasing interest in the movement, and this was reflected in the much larger Chinese representation in the Club. English was the lingua franca of the East, and this being a very international Club, its proceedings were conducted in that tongue. While no definite principle was laid down, account was generally taken, in the election of directors and successive presidents, of the various national representations in the Club membership. Thus the Chair had so far been occupied by four Americans, four Britons, two Chinese, and one German. The Directors were office-bearers other than committee chairmen, in the year 1933, comprised three Americans, three Britons (including one from New Zealand), two Chinese, and two Germans.

While the Club possessed all the usual Rotary committees, its activities had concentrated hitherto on two main lines: Boys' Work and Community Service. These had, however, involved many varied forms of service. In its early days the Club took a very special interest in work for the blind in Tientsin, largely because of the need for some serious attention to this very great

problem in China and because one of the most able and enthusiastic Rotarians in the Club, Dr. Pond Mooar Jee, an American-Chinese, was a specialist in this work. The modest beginnings in this form of activity led ultimately to the establishment of a special School for Blind Boys in the native city, where they were taught weaving and basketwork as a means to earn their own livelihood. Club members assisted in finding a market for their wares.

Later the Club became a partner with the International League for the Prevention of Blindness, which opened numerous clinics for the treatment of eye diseases, broadcast propaganda all over North China and distributed medicine and vaccination sets through the cooperation of scores of missionaries in widely-scattered areas. Small-pox was very prevalent and one of the chief causes of eye disease. Work was also carried on at the various mills and factories, there being at the time no government agency to fulfill these functions.

Boys' Work had been taken in many different forms. The Club had actively co-operated with the Scout Movement there, and awarded a special replica of the Rotary Wheel as an annual trophy for the best all-round Scout. In addition to this it had helped the forward Scout activities in other ways. The Club had sponsored a number of boys' camps either at the seaside or in the beautiful western hills northwest of Peking (*Beijing*) (北京), during the summer time.

Boys' Week activities included an annual Boys' Hobby Exhibition--- one of the most successful functions of its sort in Tientsin --- and an international tiffin (the local name for luncheon), to which the boys and their fathers were invited, Scouts and Cubs attending with their Scoutmasters in uniform. The photo below shows the first "Fathers and Sons Tiffin" held in December 1923 with more than 100 participants.



In the way of Community Service the activities had covered a very wide range of subjects, mostly of an urgent and topical nature. Road building, menace of rabies, the silting of the Tientsin River and problems ensuing therefrom, provision of athletic fields and similar facilities, welfare of factory apprentices, and many other questions had received attention. Round-the-world tourists had been met by Rotarians and escorted round the city in their cars pending the resumption of the tourists' journey to Peking.

In various forms of welfare work conducted by the Salvation Army officers, the Club had co-operated and in turn received the help of these officers in the functioning of certain activities

organized by the Club, such as special Christmas dinner for the hundreds of Chinese workmen who labour along the Bund, discharging and loading cargo on ships or lighters.

Local education and essay contests at the schools had also figured in the Club's activities. It is interesting specially to note that it was the Tientsin Rotary Club which undertook pioneer work on the elaborating a most careful translation of the Six Objects and Code of Ethics of Rotary. (*Today in this 21st Century, the 《Object of Rotary》 is already streamlined into four main focuses, together with a modern version of the 《Rotarian Code of Conduct》.*) A competition was organized open to all Chinese including university and middle school students. These were examined by a competent Committee, and the best sent to a noted Chinese scholar and Rotarian, formerly a prominent figure in the Peking governments, and first President of the Peking Rotary Club (北京扶輪社), Admiral Tsai Ting-Kan (蔡廷幹海軍中將), for final drafting and decision. Admiral Tsai was a famous English-Chinese translator of the era. The Rotary International leaders, at the 1933 Annual Convention in Boston, U.S.A., were astonished that nothing had been done to establish purely Chinese Rotary clubs in the interior cities. As a result of this, efforts were to be made to develop the movement in this direction, but it was first of all necessary to translate all Rotary literature, and that was a task of no small magnitude.

In view of the highly international character of its membership and of the community among which it was situated, the Tientsin Rotary Club had naturally given peculiar emphasis to the Sixth Object of Rotary. That was "*The advancement of understanding good will, and international peace through a world fellowship of business and professional men united in the ideal of service.*" If it had done nothing else whatever, its activities in this direction alone would have been well worthwhile. In spite of many international controversies and even local difficulties, the utmost harmony had reigned within the Club among all nationalities, close friendships had been fostered among leading men of different nationalities, and cordial relations maintained with the local Chinese authorities. In this Club, Chinese and Japanese, Europeans and Americans, French and Germans, Britons and other nationals met on terms of warm friendship, and as a little League of Nations in itself the Club was an object lesson of the fact that there was more to unite than to divide. The nations represented in the Club comprised: China, United States, Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Switzerland, Belgium, Denmark, Greece, Latvia, Sweden, and Austria. There were also members from Canada and New Zealand, but they were included under Great Britain.

The classifications of the members of the Board as constituted in the year of 1934 would give some idea of the personnel of the Club ---

- President: V. W. Stapleton-Cotton, Commissioner of Posts, "Postal Service"
- Vice-President: C. N. Jayner, Engineer in the British Concession, "Municipal Administration"
- Secretary: L. A. L. Moore, Proprietor, The Court Hotel, "Hotels"
- Treasurer: D. P. Gill, Manager of American Oriental Bank, "Exchange Banking"
- Directors:
- Wilfred Victor Pennell (潘納祿), Editor of *《Peking and Tientsin Times》* (京津時報), "Newspaper Publishing"
- Z. S. Bien (卞壽孫), Manager of Bank of China (中國銀行), "Commercial Banking"
- Paul Young, Commercial chemist and merchant, "Paint Manufacturing"
- Otto Sixt, Merchant, "Railroad Equipment Distributing"

- G. O. Richardson, National Aniline and Chemical Company, “Dyes Distributing”
- Emmett Hedgeman Grooms, Timber merchant, “Lumber Retailing”

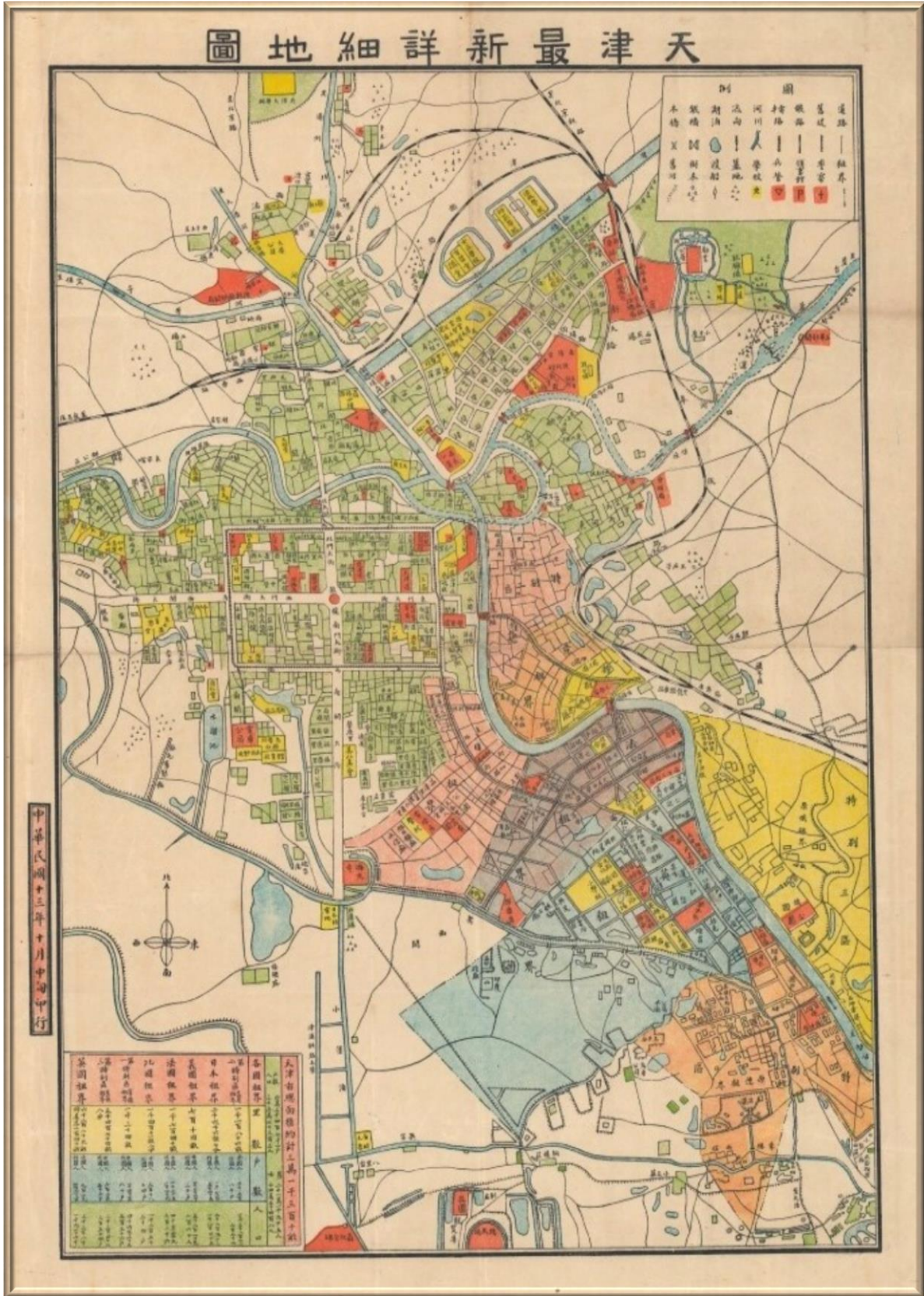


*Tientsin Rotary Club 10th Anniversary (1933) -- All consular officials, a representative of the Governor of the Province, the Mayor of Tientsin, and other Chinese officials were among the 154 present to help Tientsin Rotarians celebrating their 10th Anniversary. A feature was the presentation to the Club of 13 national flags, symbolic of the nations represented in the Club. Each of the flags was carried by a lady of the respective nationality, and was presented at the appropriate national anthem was played.*



*Tientsin Rotary Club 12th Anniversary (1935) Celebration  
14 nationalities were represented among the 61 names in the Club Roster*

# 天津最新詳細地圖



City Plan of Tientsin 1924