

Rotary International Director Dr. Fong Foo-Sec

From Kitchen Boy to Doctorate

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

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Dr. Fong Foo-Sec (龐富灼博士), HonLL.D. (Pomona), M.A. (Columbia), B.A. (UC Berkeley) (1869-1938), ethnic Cantonese, 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 1931-1932; China's representative to the first Council on Legislation in 1934; Rotary International District 81 Governor in 1936-1937; Districts 96-97-98 Governor in 1937-1938; and finally, carried on the service as Governor of Districts 97-98 from 1 July 1938 until 3 October 1938 when he passed away in office after two months of illness.

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》. That was the first time in history for the Magazine to interview a Chinese Rotarian. 《Dick Whittington and His Cat》 is an English folk tale that tells of a poor boy in the 14th century who became a wealthy merchant and eventually the Lord Mayor of London because of the rapping abilities of his cat. Probably Arthur Melville thought that the struggling life of Fong was somewhat alike this poor boy Dick in this English tale. The Fong story was practically the career ladder of a kitchen boy who obtained 3 degrees from the American universities before he returned motherland to be conferred by the Ch'ing Emperor the title of "Chin Shih" (文科進士) which was equivalent to a Western degree of Doctor of Letters.

On 7 June 1922 during the 13th Rotary International Convention held at Los Angeles, California, U.S.A., Fong was invited to speak about his experience with Shanghai Rotary Club:

“Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Fellow Rotarians: I have the honor to bring the greetings of the Rotary Club of Shanghai to this convention. I am a newcomer to Rotary and so I feel that I ought to go to school to learn the principles of Rotary rather than to stand here and address this big convention.

The Rotary Club of Shanghai was started about three years ago. At present we have 79 members. The Club started among the foreign speaking people. The language used at our meetings is English, but from the beginning we had a few Chinese members and among them, I am glad to say that we have such a distinguished member as Dr. C. T. Wang. He represented China at the Peace Conference at Paris and was appointed lately to take charge of the Bureau for taking over the affairs for returning Shantung to China, by Japan according to the Peace Conference at Washington. He has a difficult task on his hands up there, but Dr. Wang is up there doing his work in the spirit of Rotary and we believe he is equal to the task. (Applause)

In the way of social service we are trying to do something. At Christmas time we send a Christmas box to the children in the Institution for the Chinese Blind. We take up collections at times for charity and we have put away some money for supporting scholarships for some worthy children.

We have people who can sing and Rotarians travelling to Shanghai have assured us that in our song leader, George Fitch. We have a jewel, but I think George can learn a lesson or two from the Rotarian from Milwaukee who is leading our singing.

While my knowledge of Rotary is so limited, yet I deem it a great privilege to be able to attend this convention. I have been profoundly impressed with the great idea that has brought us here, and I have been profoundly touched with the manifestation of friendship and cooperation. Shanghai is on the beaten track, in the direct line of travel to the Orient. So, when you go around the world or come to the Far East, look us up in Shanghai.” (Applause)

The full text of 《*A Chinese Dick Whittington*》 is reprinted on Pages 3-4. While reading the story, here are some glossary terms in Chinese for references:

- (1) Sunning district which lies southeast of Canton = 廣州府新寧縣 - 即今日廣東省台山市
- (2) The eighth year of the reign of Emperor Tung Chih = 清同治八年
- (3) Chinese pastor Chin Toy = 陳才牧師
- (4) Liang Chen-Tung -- the Chinese minister at Washington = 大清國駐美國公使--梁震東
- (5) College of Foreign Languages at Canton = 廣州方言學堂
- (6) The degree of Chin Shih = 大清國光緒皇帝御賜遊學文科進士
- (7) Ministry of Communications = 郵傳部
- (8) Dr. W. W. Yen = 顏惠慶博士
- (9) The Commercial Press of China = 商務印書館
- (10) Dr. Wellington Koo = 顧維鈞博士
- (11) Dr. Wu Ting-Fang = 伍廷芳博士
- (12) National Committee of the Y.M.C.A. = 基督教青年會全國協會
- (13) Institution for Chinese Blind = 中國盲童學校
- (14) Advertising Club of China = 中國廣告會
- (15) China Christian Education Association = 中華基督教教育會
- (16) American Junior Red Cross Society = 美國紅十字會青少年部
- (17) Cantonese Union Church in Shanghai = 旅滬廣東中華基督教會

INTERESTING ROTARIANS

A Chinese Dick Whittington

By ARTHUR MELVILLE

SOME time in the year 1882 the "S. S. China" steamed through the Golden Gate and fussy tugs jostled her alongside the pier. There was an unusually large number of Chinese laborers aboard for the American government was contemplating the restriction of immigration and the coolies were anxious to enter the country before the restriction went into effect. Among these immigrants was Fong F. Sec, then a lad of thirteen, whose eager eyes and alert brain were receiving first impressions of Western civilization. In his boyhood days Fong had known but little of opportunity and much of labor and poverty. He could look forward to much more labor, yet with the promise of better rewards than his native land might offer.

Forty years later this same Chinaman again journeyed to the Pacific coast but this time he came as a delegate from the Shanghai Rotary Club to the International Convention at Los Angeles, selected for the office because of his learning, his contribution to Chinese education and his constant effort for the promotion of international goodwill.

Occidental races take pride in the opportunities their civilization affords, and the men who can visualize the opportunities and seize them for the benefit of themselves and their communities are highly respected. Yet there is the constant reminder that the mere presence of opportunity does not imply a monopoly of the men to develop it. From out of the Orient come individuals whose ambition, honesty, industry, thrift, and real patriotism need but a fair chance to make a useful and successful life. As in the days of old, teachers still come out of the East, and they still bring us lessons which have survived the acid test of centuries.

Those qualities which changed Fong F. Sec, Chinese man of all work, into Dr. Fong F. Sec, an editor and leader of international reputation are not novel in human experience; many others might lay claim to them with justice. But the spirit which directed his efforts although spasmodically experienced by nearly all men, was of a clear and steady nature which distinguished his efforts from those of his fellows.

A FEW details of his arduous early life and his subsequent attainments will serve to illustrate the spirit of service which permeated his actions and enabled him to fight against odds.

Dr. Fong comes from the Sunning district which lies southeast of Canton. He was born in 1869, the eighth year of the reign of Emperor Tung Chih. His father was a farmer, and the farm life of a large family in China implies a bitter struggle for mere existence carried on with crude agricultural implements. The teeming millions of China contain a large percentage of families so situated that any

natural disturbance affecting agriculture may easily remove the slight difference between precarious existence and certain ruin. The educational opportunities of the peasant class are therefore necessarily limited, so the young lad did not enter the village primary school until he was eight years of age and then remained only four years before he became obsessed



FONG F. SEC

Shanghai, China

鄭富灼

with the idea of seeking a better living in America.

Accompanied by some neighbors who had been to America before, Fong Sec embarked for Hong Kong where he spent some months before sailing for the United States. Arriving in America, he was greatly impressed by the industrial activities of this new country and anxious to avail himself of its opportunities. Through the recommendation of an uncle in Sacramento he secured his first job, that of a man of all work in the kitchen of an American family. His weekly wage was \$1, and this, eked out by occasional dimes from his employer's son, gave him a start in his savings. Being anxious to learn English he went to night school. Here unfortunately he learned a few things not included in the scholastic curriculum. His new friends included some unworthy companions who taught him to gamble, a practice which not only interfered with his studies but swept away his small savings. The friendly counsel of a Chinese pastor, Mr. Chin Toy, intervened in time to both save him from bad company and to furnish him with his first insight into Christian doctrines.

The great fire in Chinatown numbered

Fong Sec among its victims. All of his personal belongings were lost in the flames. Perhaps it also swept away some of his old interests, for he determined to become a Christian despite the ridicule of his relatives. An American lady became interested in the ambitious youth and gave him lessons in English and elementary science. With her help he mastered "Pilgrim's Progress," "Travels in Africa," and other books which had a lasting influence on his conduct.

FONG SEC had observed at different times the persistence of the Salvation Army workers and their calm bearing in the presence of a jeering crowd. Greatly impressed by their conduct he was led into a deeper religious experience and finally became an enthusiastic worker in the Army ranks. His six months training in San Francisco was followed by many trips up and down the Pacific coast on missions for the Salvation Army.

Fong next took up the study of shorthand and typewriting and was eventually appointed stenographer to the chief Salvation Army officer on the west coast. Through his new work he came into touch with people of the upper classes and rapidly improved his knowledge of English. He was seventeen when he joined the Salvation Army and he remained in continuous service for eight years.

Finding that his success as a fisher of men was necessarily somewhat limited, Fong desired to fit himself for useful work in China. To this end he sought higher education and through the help of a friend, the president of Pomona College was interested in the ambitious Chinese. Special arrangements were made for him to work his way through college. Fong had but \$300 with which to start on his course, and this amount represented the savings of years. He was compelled to practice rigid economy in order to continue his studies. Cleaning house, waiting on table, typewriting, fruit-picking, cooking for camping parties, and other odd jobs filled the hours not devoted to school work. Although Fong was occasionally obliged to cook his own food and perform other acts of self-denial, he steadily refused to borrow money for his education. Friends noticed his struggles and gave him some help. In his struggle to enrich the mind, however, Fong had neglected his health, and to avoid a threatened attack of consumption he was compelled to abandon his studies and seek outdoor employment for a year. Altogether he spent five years at Pomona, during his high school work and Freshman year of college. He then entered the University of California where another three years of study and self-sacrifice earned him his degree of Bachelor of Letters. In 1905 he was first placed in a position where it was no longer necessary for him to do manual labor in order to make his way. He secured a scholarship at Teacher's College, Columbia University, and his expenses in New

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York City were paid by an American lady who had observed his fight for knowledge.

After a year of specialization in English and education he received the degrees of Master of Arts and Master of Education, and that commencement day was to him the glorious reward of twenty-four years of uphill work under very trying circumstances. Liang Chen-Tung was at this time the Chinese minister at Washington and to him Fong explained the motive which had prompted his search for knowledge. Through the recommendation of Minister Liang, Fong received an appointment as teacher of English in the College of Foreign Languages at Canton.

Once back in China, Fong was amazed by the changes which had taken place since he left his native land. He was glad to take an active part in the development of modern China, and his first year's work at Canton won him the esteem of his colleagues and his students alike. In 1907 he entered a competitive examination for returned students, winning the degree of *Chin Shih*, equivalent to that of Doctor of Literature in American schools. As a result of his success he was appointed to office in the Ministry of Communications. However, official life, he soon found, was not what he desired.

Dr. W. W. Yen, now Minister of Foreign Affairs, was then in charge of the English Editorial Department of the Commercial Press of China. Since Dr. Yen preferred official life, a successor was being sought for that post, and in 1908, Dr. Fong was offered the position of editor-in-chief. He accepted the offer, and it is in this capacity that he has made, and is still making, his greatest contribution to the life of modern China.

Besides his editorial work, Dr. Fong has written several textbooks for Chinese students of English. In these texts he stresses the importance of learning a few grammatical rules and applying them thoroughly before trying to memorize any large number of other rules. His editorial work has done much to raise the standard of the English books published by the Commercial Press, and to encourage the study of English among the Chinese.

Dr. Fong does not confine his interests to purely intellectual matters. He believes in a three-fold culture; physical, mental, and moral. He takes a keen interest in athletics, and keeps himself physically fit by systematic work in his garden.

Those Christian principles which guided his early struggles have never been forgotten, for they are now practically expressed by his social work. At different times Dr. Fong has held the following offices: Chairman of the Educational Committee of the Pan-Pacific Association; chairman (for many years) of the National Committee of the Y. M. C. A. in China; Honorary Secretary to the Institution for the Chinese Blind; president (1920) of the Advertising Club of China; also a member of the following committees: Executive Committee of the China Christian Educational Association, the China Continuation Committee, the Forestry Fund Committee, the American Junior Red Cross Society in China, last

but not least he is an elder of the Cantonese Union Church in Shanghai. He still takes active part in many of these organizations.

TODAY Dr. Fong has a two-story American style house in one of the best residential sections of Shanghai. His wife (a former doctor) and a group of well-behaved and intelligent youngsters always welcome his return from his labors in many fields. But the success which has crowned his work on behalf of Chinese students has not changed him for he still speaks little and does much, and he still retains the thrift and industry which characterized his early years. Chinese and foreigners alike are proud of his friendship and many honors have come to him, but he never loses sight of his goal nor ceases his efforts on behalf of the new China.

As the result of his half-century of continuous effort he is in a position to give good advice to students. His words are just as applicable however, to any young man, whatever his intended career may be, and perhaps to some of the more mature as well. Dr. Fong says:

"Since English is becoming more and more the universal language of the world, there is no doubt that a knowledge of English would be a great help to secure a good position. But I earnestly hope that the number of Chinese students of English who study this language is steadily increasing because of the facilities English affords in equipping one's self with a powerful mentality based on an intensive perusal of Anglo-Saxon literature on scientific and cultural subjects. China has need of men who have mastered English and who are so abreast of the times as to make their opinions command respect. Just imagine what a national asset it would be if we had a few tens more of Dr. Wellington Koo and Dr. Wu Ting-Fangs. To learn English with the express intention of serving China is as high a motive as any I can suggest for the inspiration of a modern student.

"Having passed the half-century mark it might not be inappropriate for me to give a few words of friendly counsel to the student of English. These hints are indeed commonplace, but their observance has done me a world of good, while their nonobservance has done great harm in many cases that have come under my notice.

"1. Live within your income at all cost."

"2. However small may be your income, put something aside before the rainy day comes.

"3. Use your leisure moments for self-improvement.

"4. Pay attention to the problem of selecting your friends.

"5. Learn to give something for the support of charitable undertakings.

"6. Keep your body strong by having a few simple rules of health and observing them faithfully."

All of which might be translated into Rotarian phraseology as follows: Equip yourself to serve, keep in condition to serve, and always put service above self. These are the fundamental ideas which have made Dr. Fong's life a success, and their value is the same in both the Occident and the Orient.



In June 1922 at the 13th Rotary International Convention at Los Angeles, California, U.S.A., Dr. Fong Foo-Sec (鄭富灼博士) (right), two-month fresh Rotarian of Shanghai Rotary Club, China, Editor-in-chief of the English Department of The Commercial Press (商務印書館) and well-known throughout China for his work in promoting the study of English among Chinese, met Herbert P. Coates (left), of Montevideo, Uruguay, organizer of Rotary Clubs in South America, and Dr. W. A. Osborne (middle), President of Melbourne Rotary Club, Australia, and a professor of the University of Melbourne.



October 1907 -- Fong Foo-Sec in his official Chin Shih attire, Ch'ing Empire.



From Coolie Boy to LL.D.

《New York Times》 September 24, 1922

Fong Sec was born in Sunning district of Southern China in 1869, the son of a poor rice farmer. Life was a bitter struggle. He was eight years old when he entered the village primary school. But because of the poverty of his family he was thrown on his own resources after about four years. Then he heard about America and with some Chinese neighbors who had been to America proceeded to Hong Kong. After several months of waiting, he sailed for San Francisco. That was in 1882. The Chinese exclusion laws had been passed but not put into effect, so Chinese were coming over as fast as ships could carry them.

Fong Sec, frail 13 year old coolie boy, arrived at his journey's end without knowing a word of English. It was anything but smooth sailing for him. Through an uncle he got his first job working in the kitchen of an American family in Sacramento at a dollar a week. He wanted to learn English so he went to the Mission night school and picked up his first bits of the language. About this time he met some new friends who taught him to gamble and he soon lost his small savings. But fortunately he also came in contact with Chin Toy, a Chinese pastor, from whom he received his first insight into Christianity, and in spite of the ridicule of his relatives determined to become a Christian.

A Mrs. Carrington became interested in Fong Sec and gave him lessons in English and elementary science. With her help he read "Pilgrim's Progress," "Travels in Africa" and other books which had a lasting influence on his life.

Fong Sec was greatly impressed by the work of the Salvation Army and became an enthusiastic worker in the army ranks, where he served eight years, making many trips up and down the Pacific Coast. He took up the study of shorthand and typewriting and later was appointed stenographer to the chief Salvation Army officer on the West Coast. Through this position he came in touch with people of the better class, thus improving his English.

Fong Sec wanted to fit himself for work in his native country and to this end sought higher education. Through Samuel Hahn, of Pasadena, the President of Pomona College was interested in him and arrangements made for Fong Sec to work his way through college. Cleaning house, waiting tables, typewriting, fruit-picking, cooking and other jobs enabled him to pay expenses. But in his struggle for education he neglected his health and to avoid the danger of consumption had to abandon his studies and find outdoor employment. A year later he came back and worked his way through his fourth year of preparatory school, then through his freshman year in college. The following term Fong Sec went to the University of California at Berkeley where he also worked his way, and after three years took his degree of Bachelor of Letters. A scholarship in Teacher's college enabled him to come to Columbia University, where he won his degree of Master of Arts the following year, having specialized in English and education. That commencement was the reward of twenty-four years of uphill work.

On the recommendation of Sir Liang Chen-tung, then the Chinese Minister in Washington, Fong Sec received an appointment as teacher of English in the College of Foreign Languages in Canton. He was amazed upon his return to China at the changes that had taken place. In 1907, the year after his return, he entered a competitive examination for returned students, winning the degree of Chin Shih, equivalent to that of Doctor of Literature in America. As a result he was appointed to office in the Ministry of Communications. But official life was not what he wanted and he accepted an offer to become editor of the English department of the Commercial Press at Shanghai. It is in this capacity that he has made and is still making his greatest contribution to the life of modern China. Besides his editorial work, Dr. Fong is author of several textbooks for Chinese students of English.

Today he has a two-storey American style house in one of the best residential districts of Shanghai. His wife is a former doctor, and he is the father of five children.

