

The Termination of Shanghai Rotary Club in October 1951

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Rotary in the new Communist China

What was the life and situation of Shanghai Rotary Club (上海扶輪社) since the state power was changed to the Communist Party of China (中國共產黨) after the establishment of The People's Republic of China (中華人民共和國) on 1 October 1949?

In a letter dated 21 March 1950, from “Telly” Ejnar S. Thellefsen (*Danish*), Secretary of the Rotary Club of Shanghai, to George R. Means, Assistant Secretary General of Rotary International, Telly gave these descriptions:

“Rotary carries on as best we can. We here in Shanghai have not been interfered with at all and we have no reason to believe that we will be unable to carry on, but at the same time have no assurance that we can. Rotary is not judged alike in all parts of the country it would seem and in some places its aims, objects, purposes and traditions are not fully or correctly understood and certainly there are those who feel that Rotary is lashed to the chariots of Western imperialism and seriously question its position in the new order of things. Organizations of the kind to which Rotary belong will no doubt be subject to some sort of regulations when a Civil Government is established in this part of China, but pending the promulgation of such regulations and setting up of the machinery to apply these regulations, it is impossible to say what conditions we will have to observe, if we are allowed to carry on. The authorities are fully aware of our existence and some of our senior Rotarians have had the opportunity to emphasize the non-political nature of our Club and to explain fully the purpose and activity of Rotary to officials here who have promised to convey these explanations to the Government.

We are going on with our regular weekly meetings and such activities as circumstances permit. Our membership is much reduced owing to the departure from Shanghai of many of our members both Chinese and Foreign and the inability of others to return owing to the blockade. We manage to have a speaker nearly every week and on the whole our meetings are as a rule most satisfactory.

We had hoped to hold a District Conference here in Shanghai in March or April, but this idea has more or less been given up as the attendance of delegates from other Clubs will be very much restricted. (You have probably heard from District Governor “Gem” Marden of his very kind suggestion to hold a joint Conference of the three China districts in Hong Kong (Kowloon). This invitation we had to decline as we did not think it would be either possible from an attendance point of view or desirable in present circumstances to have a conference outside our district).



Shanghai images as in 1950 (Photo by Vladislav Mikosha, USSR)



Shanghai images as in 1950 (Photo by Vladislav Mikosha, USSR)

The majority of the Clubs in the district are not functioning for one reason or another and it is doubted whether any of the former officers or members of the non-active Clubs will be willing or able even to come to Shanghai. From Nanking we might have in addition to the District Governor one or two out of the remaining 20-22 members. That would probably be all from the outside and there would thus be only Shanghai and Shanghai West. Delegations from only two Clubs could hardly be called satisfactory for a District Conference. Nanking Club is meeting regularly we understand in each other's homes as there appear to be some difficulty about meeting in public places. From Hankow we have not heard for some time, but two months ago they met when circumstances permitted but they would appear to be down to about 10 members. In Peking and Tientsin things seems still to be approximately as in Shanghai. The Clubs meet regularly but there is no certainty about being able to continue to do so. I hope to visit Peking shortly and I am looking forward to being able to attend Rotary meetings there.

As regards the District Governor we expect it will be preferable for Yu-Hwa Chen to continue in office until he is relieved by his duly elected successor. There would be no purpose in nominating a new District Governor as it would be out of the question for him to go to the Convention and as things are a district of 3 or possibly 4 Clubs can hardly be called a real "district". We have Past Governor T. F. Wei to discuss matters with here in Shanghai and he is a great help to us all these days.

The picture is not very bright as you see, but we are working for and hoping to keep the door open for Rotary in China. We feel it is of great importance to do so and we on our part shall go out of our way to see that the Rotary candle is kept burning. These days there is so much talk of curtains of one kind or another – for China it is termed a bamboo curtain. The propagating and acceptance of this idea in international relations is most unfortunate and we feel very strongly that Rotary should avoid too readily to adopt that attitude. Here in Shanghai the door is not shut on us or on foreigners in general and we can honestly say that we have no feeling of a curtain having been dropped through action on this side -- the blockade and other activities from outside the country gives one more the impression of the lowering of a curtain. As long as Rotary and Rotarians are outside political scheming there should be room for us in the New Democracy to which China subscribes and we shall endeavour to maintain ourselves on the basis of our entirely non-political objects. Whilst it may be true as President Hodgson says in the penultimate paragraph of his letter of February 14 to President von der Crone that Rotary cannot live where the named conditions do not exist, we think that at the same time it is the duty of Rotary to keep going as long as possible even if a certain amount of adjustment to meet possible regulations is required as long as the ideals of Rotary are not compromised.

Apart from the disturbances caused by air-raids and the inconveniences they have resulted in as regards restrictions on electricity, life in Shanghai is still comfortable for most of us and not too troublesome. Of course with the increasing effects on business which the blockade is having many business houses and individuals have a difficult time and large numbers of foreigners desire to leave. The President Gordon is supposed to come in and take away about 1,500, I believe, but there seems to be some hitch in which case there may be many who will be in serious difficulties if they cannot get away soon.

Mrs. Thellefsen and I are in good health and altogether very comfortable, but we live very quiet and having an apartment centrally situated we suffer no real hardships as food is ample in



Shanghai images as in 1950 (Photo by Vladislav Mikosha, USSR)

Shanghai and is not dear measurer in foreign currency. Many of our Chinese friends in Rotary who are manufacturers are hard hit through lack of raw materials, labour difficulties and some rather heavy taxation which they have had to meet recently. Members of the professions are also much affected by the changes in the social structure. Everyone kicks about taxes in most countries, but when the kicking is particularly fierce here it must to some extent be looked at on the background that we in Shanghai have never been used to pay taxes or very small."

As told by Telly, Shanghai Rotary Club carried on its activities as usual. On 29 June 1950, the Club completed its Rotary year with on-going project under the leadership of President "Dicky" R. von der Crone (*Swiss*). Dicky concluded the year with a fruitful report, and then handed-over the presidential badge to his successor Dr. F. S. Tsang, M.D. (張福星醫學博士) (*Chinese*) who inspired the Club for another 12 months of Rotary services during his installation:

"It is needless for me to point out that we are passing through a period of great change, so much so that our mode of living and thinking needs to be adjusted. As a club we may have to alter the conduct of our activities to a certain degree with the hope that such a change will not seriously affect our fundamental objects. Under such circumstance we should emphasize the first object of our Rotary ideals, namely the development of acquaintance as an opportunity for service." Tsang further encouraged:

"In the ensuing year we may be confronted with difficulties but we must not be afraid. Armed with the high ideals and emboldened by fine fellowship and a united consecrated will to serve, we shall not be afraid. And by your unstinted support we shall succeed."

The 3 Rotary Districts in China were dissolved in 1951

Though there had been vision and mission on 1 July 1937 to develop 2,000 Rotary clubs in The Republic of China (中華民國), the 3 Rotary districts spread on most of the provinces were ultimately dissolved in July 1951 after the new administration of The People's Republic of China (中華人民共和國). Let us first review on what were the Rotary International Board of Directors' decisions laid down in January 1951:

"With regard to Rotary in China, the Executive Committee, acting in behalf of the Board of Directors, recently took this action: It

- (1) accepted the resignation of Keats Chu, Governor of District 59;
- (2) agreed that the territories and Clubs of District 58 and 59 be considered as one District (58-59) under the supervision of the present Governor of District 58;
- (3) called upon Rotary's Secretary to terminate the membership of Clubs in China where there is sufficient evidence that they are not functioning; and
- (4) agreed that effective July 1, 1951, District 57 and District 58-59 shall be dissolved and that any remaining Clubs in those territories be considered as non-districted Clubs under the supervision of an Administrative Advisor."

In responding to the above decision, a letter dated 12 February 1951, from Telly, Secretary of the Shanghai Rotary Club, suggested that the directors of the Club fully agreed with the

decision of the Rotary International with respect to placing the Rotary clubs in China on a non-districted basis. In that letter it was stated that the Rotary Clubs of Shanghai and Shanghai West were “functioning as usual.” The letter also contained this statement: “We are at present busy registering our club with the authorities and when the formalities are completed, we hope to have our clubs’ activities on a recognized basis.”

The Resignation of Keats Chu

By reading the above Board decisions in January 1951, one may observe that Keats S. Chu (*Tientsin*) (*Woolen piece goods manufacturing*) (朱繼聖-天津扶輪社), District Governor of all Rotary clubs in Northern China, who tendered his resignation in the early months of his second term as district governor, drew the serious realization of Rotary International that China Mainland was no longer socially and politically favourable and feasible for Rotary Movement. There were strong evidence and clear signal that led to the decisions of 2 to 4.

Rotary International did not disclose any supporting reasons toward the January 1951 decisions. However, the China Communist Party’s archives have given concrete evidence that Chu had given up his ideal of Rotary service as what he had told the congregation at the 20th Annual Convention of Rotary International held at Dallas, Texas, U.S.A., on 31 May 1929, when he was a member of Peking Rotary Club (北京扶輪社). After the outbreak of the Korean War, Chu changed his thought and his camp.

The Korean War (朝鮮戰爭) was a war of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) (North Korea), with the support of the Communist China and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), against the Republic of Korea (South Korea), with the support of the United Nations, principally from the United States. The war began on 25 June 1950 when North Korea invaded South Korea following a series of clashes along the border. The People’s Republic of China and the United States were then in hostilities.

Chu changed his thoughts could be found as what he had written a long article in the 《People’s Daily》 《人民日報》 on 27 September 1951 (*quoted after English translation*):

“On the eve of the launch of ‘The War to Resist America and Aid Korea’ Movement, I still had the idea of fear on the United States. But the surging patriotic climax drowned out all my concerns. I enthusiastically participated in the patriotic demonstrations of the Tianjin industrial and commercial circles and other circles. How glorious I feel when we get the approval of Chairman Mao! How excited! I also participated in the Chinese People’s Condolence Mission to the DPRK. I have seen and witnessed the bloody crimes committed by the U.S. imperialists such as burning, killing, kinking, and plundering in North Korea. This has made me even more hateful, and contemptuous of the American imperialism. On the one hand, I saw the brutality and corruption of the U.S. robbers; on the other hand, I saw the heroic and indomitable will of the Korean People’s Army and the North Korean people, and the spirit of heroic struggle and bloodshed and sacrifice of the Chinese People’s Volunteer Army. The confidence that this war of resistance to the American and the righteous victory has been greatly strengthened.”

Responding to the call by China’s Communist Party Chairman Mao Zedong (毛澤東), Chu was invited by the Party, as a senior leading industrialist and entrepreneur in Tianjin and even in Beijing, to donate the first unit of MiG-15 air fighter in supporting the Chinese People’s Volunteer Air Force (中國人民志願空軍).

Rotary International's Internal Viewpoints on the Communists

Until early 1951 Rotary International Secretariat had fairly frequent contact with and information concerning Shanghai Rotary Club. From occasional letters from the Club Secretary and information in the bulletins of the Shanghai Rotary Club and in the bulletins of the Hong Kong Rotary Club, Rotary International had information that the Club was continuing to function.

On 12 February, 1951, Shanghai Rotary Club Secretary "Telly" Thellefsen wrote that the Club was functioning as usual and that: "We are at present busy registering our club with the authorities and when the formalities are completed, we hope to have our clubs' activities on a recognized basis." On 24 April, Rotary International Director "Gem" George E. Marden (*Hong Kong*) forwarded to the Secretariat copies of letters he had received from Telly relating to the registration of the Shanghai Rotary Club with Shanghai People's Government.

Rotary International was quite aware of the communists would join Rotary clubs as Rotarians. On 2 May 1951, Philip Lovejoy, Secretary of Rotary International gave his opinions to President Elect Frank S. Spain in a memorandum titled "Rotary in China":

"Some time ago I asked the Board what they wanted to do about Rotary in China, and the Board in effect said nothing. Now here is a letter from Marden stating that the clubs are applying to the authorities, (Communist) for permission to exist.

You may have seen the letter that included the statement that the Vatican decree was issued because so many clubs are dominated by Communists. That statement was supposed to have been made to the club by a Catholic Priest. I have asked the club to have the priest furnish proof of his statement.

The fact remains that we have some clubs in China that are dominated by Communists — whether or not there are Commies in the clubs.

There is a definite question as to whether we want clubs in China that are under the constant surveillance of the Communists. Do we want them to have our directories officially? Do we want them to have the chance to infiltrate the entire organization because we have a few clubs that will have to abide by what the Commies tell them?

If the situation works in Red China do we want to go so far as to say that since it works there it might as well work elsewhere, and ask the Commies for permission to establish clubs in other Red territories?

Or, do we want to let the situation alone and let come what may? It seems to me that perhaps we may want to review this carefully, and have Marden's opinion as to what should be done. Maybe this is the opening wedge for the Commies to get control of more and more on Rotary. On the other hand maybe we shouldn't wait, but take action.

You will recall the convention action in Havana about truth sanctity of the pledge work, truth, honor, and justice — and that Rotary cannot prevail where these are absent.

I think your Board at least will need to give most careful consideration to the entire topic. It means what is ahead for us in this troubled world."

To follow up the administration, on 6 July 1951, Philip Lovejoy sent the official Rotary International reminding notice to Shanghai Rotary Club, addressing to both President F. S. Tsang and Secretary Ejnar S. Thellsfsen, respectively:

“As you know, the Board of Directors of R.I. has found it necessary to dissolve District 57 and District 58-59, effective 1 July 1951, and to consider all the Rotary clubs comprising those districts as non-districted clubs as of that date.

To assist the Board in contacting and supervising those clubs, President Frank Spain has designated Rotarian Arthur W. Woo, of Hoag Kong, as administrative adviser.

Dr. Woo will undoubtedly be establishing contact with you as administrative adviser and we hope that you will keep him advised throughout the year as to the activities and functioning of your club.”

Dr. Arthur W. Woo (胡惠德醫生), O.B.E., J.P., Obstetrician and Gynecologist, President 1940-1941 of the Hong Kong Rotary Club (香港扶輪社), was the Rotarian who rejuvenated the broken Club after the British Crown Colony gained the victory from the Pacific War (1941-1945).

Shanghai Rotary Club's Decision on the Termination

However, the first information received that the Rotary Club of Shanghai had ceased to function was contained in a letter from Director “Gem” Marden to President Frank Spain referring to the fact that the Rotary Club of Shanghai had decided to close “for the time being.” That letter was dated 10 July 1951.

On 1 October 1951, a letter dated 24 September, originating from Copenhagen, Denmark, was received from “Telly” Thellefsen, enclosing copies of letters sent from Shanghai on the 12 June 1951, the originals of which did not reach the Secretariat. In his letter of 12 June to the Secretary of Rotary International, Telly wrote: “I beg to inform you that the Rotary Club of Shanghai decided to suspend its activities on 31 May 1951 in accordance with the attached resolution. We would ask you to take note of this and to be good enough to consider the membership of this Club in Rotary International as being in suspension.”

The attached notice re the 1951-1952 President and Secretary was returned without being filled in. Copy of the resolution referred to was attached.

In another letter dated 12 June referring to the above letter and its attachment, Telly wrote:

“With reference to today's letter to R.I. regarding the suspension of the activities of the Rotary Club of Shanghai, I would like to state that the reasons given in our resolution represent the actual and true reasons on the basis of which the decisions was made. We have at present only some 30 members in Shanghai and as several expect to leave soon and others find it so very difficult to attend meetings for one reason or another. It is to be foreseen that we will soon not have enough members to maintain a Rotary Club as required by regulations.

I would like to state to you and through you to the R.I. Board that I think it would be doing Rotary a great disservice if in giving publicity to the fact that we have suspended our activities any other reason is given or intimated than the one stated in our resolution. I have more particularly in mind that newspapers should make a propaganda story out of the ease about

suppression or what not -- a story which would not be in accordance with the facts of the case. The world will one day have to learn to live in peace even if it is divided in two camps, and that day Rotary may have a very important role to play in finding a path by which the two can meet.”

Rotary Club of Shanghai, China

Resolution passed unanimously by the members at the Ordinary Meeting of the Club held on Thursday 31st May, 1951:

I. WHEREAS the membership in the Rotary Club of Shanghai has been much reduced during recent months, and

WHEREAS members find it increasingly difficult to attend meetings regularly owing to pressure of business and other duties, and

WHEREAS, it is found more and more difficult to arrange suitable programs and it now appears that our present meeting facilities in the Shanghai Club will shortly no longer be available.

IT IS RESOLVED by the members assembled at a regular meeting of the Rotary Club of Shanghai held this day, Thursday 31st May, 1951, that the Club will suspend its activities.

II. IT IS FURTHER RESOLVED that the present Board of Directors shall have full powers to act on behalf of the members of the Rotary Club of Shanghai,

(a) to inform the authorities concerned of the suspension of the activities of the Club;

(b) to establish an inventory of the properties of the Rotary Club of Shanghai, and to store or dispose of such property at their discretion;

(c) to close the accounts of the Club and establish a Balance Sheet as of this date 31st May, 1951;

(d) to accept from the Honorary Treasurer's office the balance of funds belonging to the Rotary Club, and to make such allocations and disbursements as are required in connection with the suspension of the Club's activities;

(e) to regulate the status of members (grant transfers to Senior Active Membership, grant Leave of Absence, etc.) and take such other action as is proper under Rotary regulations; and

(f) to act in any other manner which they may find necessary in connection with the suspension of the Club's activities; and finally


(g) to appoint a Committee of three (3) Rotarians to act as custodians of the property of the Club and to take over the balance of Club funds, and to administer and dispose of these assets as that Committee may see fit.

The Rotary Anti-trachoma Clinic (上海扶輪社砂眼防治所), sponsored and operated by Shanghai Rotary Club since 1947, located at No.442, An Yuan Road, Putuo District (普陀區安遠路 442 號) carried on functioning (with 1 doctor, 2 nurses and 1 assistant) until 12 September

1951 when it was handed over by the Club to the Shanghai Municipal People's Government, and became a clinic of the Shanghai Municipal No.1 Workers' Hospital (上海市市立第一勞工醫院). Attached below are images of part of the handover documents:

33

ROTARY INTERNATIONAL

"Service above self"  "He profits most who serves best"

PRESIDENT:
F. S. TSANG
MEDICINE—OPHTHALMOLOGY
DR. F. S. TSANG, M.D. N.M.S.E.
221 FOOCHOW ROAD, ROOM 408

VICE-PRESIDENT:
W. E. MINES
ASSOCIATIONS—Y.N.C.A.
FOREIGN Y.M.C.A.
150 NANKING ROAD (W.)

大公無私

ROTARY CLUB OF SHANGHAI, CHINA

CABLE ADD.: "ROCLUB" TEL. 16450
社 輪 扶 海 上

利人即利己

GREAT N

CHARTER TURNER I CHN

王春霖	朱喜娟	戚定賢	劉姮宇	姓 名
掛號員	護士	護士	醫師	職 務
六六元	七〇元	九〇元	一六二元	底新額計
			折實單位加四百五十九元 乘底新額為實支數	標 方 式

接收人

移交人

張福星

扶輪社代表

上海扶輪社主辦砂眼防治所員工新給表

11

16

(函公)府政民人區陀普市海上

受文者	提要	批示
衛生局		
有關文件	發文	附件
普府衛 一九五 年 第 一 號	普府衛 一九五 年 第 一 號	普府衛 一九五 年 第 一 號
辦	擬	政府之印

一、本區中遠路442號扶輪社設立砂眼防治所一所，有兼職醫師一人，護士二人（均工作半天），事務員一人（全天工作）每日下午門診，就診者大半是工人和其他勞動人民，全部免費，有時多至二百人，該所設立迄今已有三年，向未是接受外資津貼，設備簡陋，曾向本府登記申請診所許可証。

二、該所因津貼斷絕，自七月份起將無法維持，曾向軍

地址：江寧路一〇四號
電話：二九一四

官會接受外資津貼醫齒療機構登記費登記。

三、經本府了解該所房屋由中國化學工業社製造廠免費借用空地建築、水電亦由該廠供給、目前每月開支約三四百萬元。

四、本府意見、可得該所接管、由本府衛生科管理續辦並加以必要的整理與充實其工作人員等暫時維持現狀、每月所需上項經費開支由你局撥發五、即請你局決定。

區長

張應舉

校對方之明

監印朱榮秀

The termination request submitted by the Shanghai Rotary Club was duly accepted and approved by Rotary International on 16 October 1951. Rotary International declared the charter issued to the Club to be null and void; and instructed the Secretary to cancel the charter upon its surrender to Rotary International.

