

Hong Kong Rotarian Peter Kingson Kwok

Metal Trader and Founding Director of Bank of East Asia

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

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Peter Kingson Kwok (郭幼廷) (1883-1953), owner of metal trading firm Singon & Company (成安公司) and a founding director of the Bank of East Asia (東亞銀行), was an Active Member of the Rotary Club of Hong Kong (香港扶輪社) in the 1930-40s holding the Classification “Metal Industry – Metal Importing”.



While most people identify the Bank of East Asia (BEA) with the family of Li Koon-Chun (李冠春), Kan Tong-Po (簡東浦) and Fung Ping-Shan (馮平山) who ran the Bank for most of its century, there were several other Chinese merchants who were involved in the founding of the Bank in 1918 and served on its board for decades. One of them was the metal merchant Peter Kingson Kwok Yau-Ting (hereafter refer to as Peter Kwok, he was also referred to as “P. K. Kwok” in the Rotary Club and many old directories), who was an ordinary director from 1918 to 1920 and permanent director from 1921 until his death in 1953. His extended family achieved prominence in different fields outside of his businesses.

Peter Kwok, whose original name was Kwok Ping-Kwan (郭炳坤), was a descendant of the famous General Kwok Chi-Yee (郭子儀大將軍 698-781 A.D.) from the Tang Dynasty (唐代) and his ancestors moved from Fenyang (汾陽) in the Shanxi Province (山西省) to Panyu in Guangdong (廣東番禺). His grandfather Kwok Tak-Po (郭德坡) was a landowner in Panyu who was inspired by missionaries in Canton (*Guangzhou*) (廣州) and sent two of his five sons---Peter’s father Kwok Chi-Ting (郭子庭, *aka* Kwok Hin-Wing 郭顯榮; Peter’s Chinese name Yau-Ting 幼廷 literally means “Ting Jr.”) who was number three and Peter’s uncle Kwok Ching-Tong (郭靖堂 1861-1937, also known as Kwok Hin-Fun 郭顯勳) who was number five to study in the British Crown Colony Hong Kong at Queen’s College (皇仁書院).

Chi-Ting started the metal business in Hong Kong before returning to Panyu to become a magistrate while Ching-Tong attended the Foochow Naval Academy (福州船政學堂) (graduating the same year as Admiral Ching Pik-Kwong 程璧光 and Liu Kuan-Nan 劉冠南) and rose to become an admiral in the Imperial Ch'ing Navy (大清國水師) before returning to join his brother in business in Hong Kong after the Ch'ing Empire lost in the Sino-Japanese War in 1895.

Peter was sent to study in Hong Kong at King's College (英皇書院) during which he stayed in Happy Valley (跑馬地) at the home of his uncle. Peter succeeded his father at Singon & Co., a leading importer of iron, steel, metal and hardware in Hong Kong which was established in 1880 according to advertisement in 《Pacific Ports》 in 1920. Its clients were primarily shipbuilders and engineering works. (Finance & Commerce Yearbook, 1923) The firm operated out of No. 35 & 37 Hing Lung Street (興隆街) (second street west of Central Market 中環街市) since the early 20th century and remained there until at least the early 1960s. According to Peter's grandson Stanley, Peter Kwok also had a cast iron foundry in Wan Chai (灣仔) across the Wan Chai Market (灣仔街市) backing up to the beginning of the Kennedy Road (堅尼地道), earning him the nickname of "The Iron Roast Pig" (鐵燒豬). (Directory & Chronicle for China, 1906; Comacrib Directory, 1925)

In 1918, Peter Kwok was one of the four ordinary directors of the Bank of East Asia when it was founded (the other three being Nam Pak Hong (南北行) merchant Fung Ping-Shan, Eurasian opium farmer and legislator Chan Kai-Ming and Ng Chang-Luk 吳增祿) along with the 9 permanent directors (dyeing merchant Chan Ching-Shek, Chow Shouson 周壽臣, Kan Tong-Po, Kan Ying-Po, Li Koon-Chun and his brother Li Tse-Fong 李子方, Wong Yun-Tong 黃潤棠, Mok Ching-Kong 莫晴江 and Pong Wai-Ting 龐偉廷). In 1921, Kwok along with Fung, Vietnamese Chinese merchant Huynh Tai (黃柱臣 Wong Chu-Son), "Tobacco King" Kan Chiu-Nam (簡照南-南洋兄弟煙草) and Ng Chang-Luk each subscribed 2,500 shares at HK\$100 each and became permanent directors of the Bank. Peter also teamed up with four other founders and developed five houses on Kennedy Road in the Mid-Levels (all five have since been re-developed but the families continue to own the first of the small five garages). Peter remained on the board as permanent director until his death three decades later and during that time helped the bank weather the financial crisis of 1935 and the Japanese occupation.

In addition to Singon and BEA, Kwok was chairman of Oriental Land and director of China Emporium (中華百貨), one of the big 4 department stores which was chaired by his fellow BEA director Sir Shouson Chow. Outside of business, he was a director of the Chinese General Chamber of Commerce (香港中華總商會會董) and also director of Po Leung Kuk (保良局總理).

In March 1953, Peter Kwok died at his 3-storey residence at 7 Arbuthnot Road (亞畢諾道) and was buried in the Catholic Cemetery in Happy Valley (跑馬地天主教聖彌額爾墳場).



1929 -- Peter Kwok (5th from the right, 2nd row from the bottom) with fellow directors and staff of Bank of East Asia at the 10th Anniversary of the Bank. To his right was Li Tse-Fong and to his left (right to left) were Wong Yun-Tong, Fung Ping-Shan, Sir Shouson Chow, Li Koon-Chun, unknown, Kan Tong-Po.



Peter Kwok (standing, 4th from right) and his wife Rose (seated 4th from the right) with their family and guests in his residence at 7 Arbuthnot Road. (Courtesy of Stanley Kwok)

Peter Kwok's younger sister Alice Kwok Fung-Hin (郭鳳軒 1886-1967) received her Bachelor of Arts degree (B.A.) from the University of Hong Kong (香港大學), and Master of Arts degree (M.A.) in Social Work from the London School of Economics. She was involved in leading the Hong Kong YWCA (whose headquarters is located at MacDonnell Road (麥當勞道) adjacent to the land owned by her elder brother Peter) from 1931 to 1958. Alice was also a leading director of the Po Leung Kuk (保良局) in the 1930s and was appointed Unofficial Justice of the Peace for Hong Kong. When she died in December 1967, she bequeathed her entire estate to the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui (香港聖公會) (Chinese Anglican and Episcopal churches), which used the proceeds to establish the SKH Lok Man Alice Kwok Integrated Service Centre (聖公會樂民郭鳳軒綜合服務中心) in To Kwa Wan (土瓜灣) to provide services to seniors.

Peter Kwok and his wife Rose Chu Lai-Hin (1882-1950) had ten children. Their eldest son Frank Kwok Hing-Sum (郭慶深 1906-1972) was a famous lawyer who was admitted to practice as a solicitor in the United Kingdom in 1928 and in Hong Kong in 1929. He worked for Johnson Stokes & Masters (JSM) (孖士打律師行) for four decades before his retirement at the age of 60. As the first Chinese partner of JSM, he counted many leading Chinese businesses as his clients. During the War, he helped to build an airfield and hostel in Hunan (湖南) and helped to rescue two American pilots. Outside of work, he was a keen tennis and badminton player who was a tennis champion from the 1930s to the 1960s and was one of the founders of the Badminton Association of Hong Kong (香港羽毛球總會). He was also very involved with the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) (he served as president in 1952) and St. John's Cathedral (聖約翰座堂). He married Virginia Wang Ging-Tsing, a graduate of Ginling College (金陵女子文理學院) in Nanking (*Nanjing*) (南京) in 1939. Together they had four daughters (Rita, Frances, Theresa, Amy) and one son (Stanley).

According to his grandson Stanley, Peter Kingson Kwok's second son Peter Kwok Hing-Kai (郭慶楷) was a graduate of Cambridge University, England, and remained single. Fourth daughter Rose received her Master of Arts degree in Social Work from the London School of Economics and also stayed single. Sixth son John Kwok Hing-Chung (郭慶鐘) was a graduate of the University of Hong Kong and married Kay Woo Lai-Wah, the daughter of Woo Yee-Tung (胡爾棟) at the St. John's Cathedral in 1940. Seventh son David Kwok Hing-Fong (郭慶芳) also graduated from Hong Kong University and was assistant manager for Singon. David and his Hawaiian Chinese wife Cecilia were very involved with the St. John's Cathedral where Cecilia played the organ for many years. Eighth son Henry Kwok Hing-Piu (郭慶標) went to Temple University, U.S.A., and worked for China Emporium. He married May Lo Sau-Lan (盧秀蘭), a granddaughter of the famous casino tycoon Lo Lim-Ieoc (盧廉若) from the Portuguese Territory Macao in 1954. Ninth son Edward Kwok Hing-Yan (郭慶恩) studied at Bowling Green State University, U.S.A., and joined the Bank of East Asia after he returned to Hong Kong and served as the Bank's Saigon branch manager in Vietnam.