

Henry Ching, OBE, JP

The First Hong Kong Rotarian Journalist

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

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Henry Ching, Editor, South China Morning Post

Henry Ching, OBE, JP (2 November 1891 - 31 March 1968), career journalist, Editor of 《South China Morning Post》 (SCMP) (南華早報), joined the Rotary Club of Hong Kong (香港扶輪社) in the early 1930s but as an Additional Active Member (增額現職社員 old fashion membership of the last century). It was because his “boss” Benjamin Wylie, Managing Director and General Manager of SCMP, has already joined the Club as Active Member holding the Classification “Printing & Publishing – Newspaper Publishing”.

Henry Ching was born in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, on 2 November 1891 to a Chinese father Charles Ching, a Hongkonger from Sha Tau Kok (沙頭角), and British mother from Barnstaple, Devon, England. He was the fourth of ten children.

As a schoolboy Henry won a scholarship to the Rockhampton Grammar School, but had to leave school at 15 in order to contribute to the family income. He went home to his father’s sugar cane farm near Mackay, and found work as an errand boy, learning shorthand in his spare time. He then became a reporter for the newspaper 《Mackay Standard》.

In 1911 his mother and five of his younger siblings were murdered by a disgruntled farmhand who was brought to trial and hanged in Brisbane.

In 1915 Henry’s father, in ill health, expressed a wish to return to his native village for his last days. Henry, the sole surviving son, accompanied him back to the British Crown Colony Hong Kong. Henry found a job with the 《South China Morning Post》 as a junior reporter, the first “non-European” reporter, in 1916. In his younger days he was a keen cricketer and played regularly for the Chinese Recreation Club (香港中華游樂會).

Some influential figures in Hong Kong society show little enthusiasm for Henry because of his Eurasian ethnicity. On one occasion, the resourceful young journalist was barred from entering the Hong Kong Club (香港會). So he sneaked in through the back door and pretended to be one of the staff to report on a business meeting being held there.

Eight years later, when the SCMP editor, Thomas Petrie, left in 1924 Henry replaced him. Henry remained on the seat of “Editor” for the next 33 years.

In 1927 Henry married Ms. Ruby Irene Kong, from Sydney, and they had five children.

In 1937, Rotarian Henry was appointed a Justice of the Peace for Hong Kong by Governor Sir Andrew Caldecott (香港總督郝德傑爵士)---a former Rotarian who was the Charter President 1929-1930 of the Rotary Club of Kuala Lumpur, Federated Malay States.

After outbreak of the Pacific War (1941-1945), the Imperial Japan captured Hong Kong for three years and eight months. During the Japanese occupation of the Colony, Henry had no regular employment. The SCMP temporarily ceased publication, and he declined to work for the Japanese-run English language newspaper 《The Hong Kong News》. He had odd jobs from time to time, including helping his fellow Rotarian Sir Robert Hormus Kotewall (羅旭龢爵士) with his memoirs. But for the most part Henry relied heavily on the charity of better off friends and on the sale of his possessions. Henry was arrested by the Kempeitai (日本憲兵隊) in 1943 and briefly incarcerated in the gendarmerie located in the Le Calvaire Convent in Happy Valley (跑馬地加爾瓦略山會院).

Disembarking in Hong Kong at War's end in 1945, leading units of the relieving British fleet were surprised to find a newspaper in circulation, announcing the arrival. It was a single sheet special edition of the SCMP. Restored to his desk, after a grilling at the hands of Japanese occupation forces, was its Australian Chinese editor Henry Ching. Henry's report of the liberation of Hong Kong remains one of the journalism's classic reports.

His son, also Henry Ching (程慶禮), CBE, JP, became an Administrative Officer in the colonial Hong Kong Government, serving as Deputy Financial Secretary for many years to Sir Phillip Haddon-Cave (夏鼎基爵士), KBE, CMG, JP, and eventually retiring as Secretary for Health and Welfare (衛生福利司).

Rotarian Henry Ching, OBE, JP, passed away on 31 March 1968. It was reported in 1986 that Henry Ching was the greatest editor in the newspaper's history. “His influence over four decades gave the newspaper the reputation it holds to this day,” the 《Australasian Post》 reported.





1949 – Henry Ching (the 4th person sitting from the left) joined the group photo of the 《South China Morning Post》 staff on the rooftop of SCMP offices.



The first 《South China Morning Post》 building located at Wynham Street (雲咸街), Central District.