

Birth of the first ever Rotary District in China  
The 81st District of Rotary International in 1935  
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Today is the 80 years since the first Rotary District established in China on 1 October 1935. The first Rotary Club formed in Asia was the Rotary Club of Manila, The Philippine Islands, in June 1919. Our first Rotary Club in the Republic of China (中華民國) was established also in 1919 couple of months later in Shanghai (上海), the seaport on the mouth of the Yangtze River (長江), which was the country's main window to the world. Rotary was an alien import, and there was considerable doubt whether it would acclimate itself to Chinese soil. Other clubs were started in Tientsin (*Tianjin*) (天津) in 1923 and at Peking (*Beijing*) (北京) in 1924, but until 1931 these three remained the only Rotary clubs in all China. Then Rotary began a development along most of the "treaty ports" that expanded the number of clubs fivefold in the next five years, an expansion largely attributed to the work of the Honorary Commissioners appointed since 1927.

As in January 1935, there were already 15 clubs formed:

(A) Republic of China (中華民國):

(1) Shanghai (上海) (1919); (2) Tientsin (天津) (1923); (3) Peking/Peiping (北京/北平) (1924); (4) Canton (廣州) (1932); (5) Hangchow (杭州) (1932); (6) Tsingtao (青島) (1932); (7) Tsinan (濟南) (1932); (8) Foochow (福州) (1933); (9) Amoy (廈門) (1933); (10) Hankow (漢口) (1933); (11) Nanking (南京) (1934)

(B) The British Crown Colony Hong Kong (英國殖民地香港):

Hong Kong (香港) (1931)

(C) The Philippine Islands (United States Protectorate):

(1) Manila (1919); (2) Cebu (1932); (3) Iloilo (1933)

Unlike all those clubs in the United States, the membership in these 15 clubs were of multi-nationalities. According to the rules by Rotary International in those years, a group of 15 clubs would be the minimum number qualified to form a District. As such, voices to form a new District were the consensus of most of the Rotarians in these 3 different countries/territory.

## Discussions on forming a New District

The month of February 1935 was the 30th anniversary of Rotary. The Fifth Pacific Rotary Regional Conference was also scheduled to be held at Manila, The Philippine Islands, on 18-20 February. It was attended and officiated by Rotary International President “Bob” Robert L. Hill on his way to visit Rotary clubs in the Far East and the Eastern Mediterranean region. President Emeritus Paul and Mrs. Harris, who were on their way to attend the Joint Australian Conference (76th and 65th Districts held in one) and to visit New Zealand clubs, were present at the Manila Conference to the great delight and benefit of all those in attendance.

Prior to the arrival to Manila, the Rotary world leaders stopped over Shanghai and Hong Kong and paid their official visits to the local Rotary clubs.

When departing Shanghai by the SS “President Coolidge” on the afternoon of February 13th, a great number of Rotarians and their families---4 from Hangchow (杭州), 4 from Nanking (南京), one from Peiping (北平), 14 from Shanghai (上海), 2 from Tientsin (天津), one from Tsinan (濟南), and one from Tsingtao (青島) were joining the voyage to the Pacific Conference in Manila. On board the steamer there were also about 14 members from the United States and Honolulu, Hawaii, besides founder Paul Harris and President Bob Hill and their wives, and about 16 members from the Japan clubs.

When they reached Hong Kong, the group picked up 5 Rotarians from the Amoy Club (廈門), 5 from Canton (廣州), one from Foochow (福州), and 8 from Hong Kong (香港), making a total of 46 members and their families on-going to the Conference. Out of the 11 clubs in China with the exception of the Hankow (漢口) Club, 10 clubs plus one Club from Hong Kong were represented at the Conference, which indeed was an excellent record.

Taking such a golden opportunity that could converse with Rotary International President face to face, while majority of the clubs from China and Hong Kong were well represented by Rotarians present, the proposal to hold a special meeting on board “President Coolidge” was initiated to discuss the feasibility in forming a new Rotary District, as well as some other club affairs and administrative procedures.

In the morning of the February 16th, at 10 o'clock, Rotarians of the China and Hong Kong clubs met President Hill informally in the writing room to discuss certain problems confronting the clubs. The agenda was prepared by Honorary Commissioner “Peter” Ernest F. Harris (*Shanghai*) from replies received to a previous questionnaire sent out by him, containing the following items: club dues, classification, translation of Rotary literature into Chinese and possible appointment of a District Governor, etc.

Every item was thoroughly discussed by the members with President Hill, who in closing the interview with a most sympathetic and inspiring talk hinted that no hard and fast rule was attached to the classification list and that some elasticity was permissible to meet particular cases. With regard to the appointment of a District Governor, he emphasized that

the only logical outcome of the Chinese position was the formation of a district, and surely the time has arrived for China, Hong Kong and the Philippines, to study seriously this question in the light of the progress wished for and expected of the clubs in this part of the world.

## The Board Decision

When President Hill returned from the 5th Pacific Rotary Conference held at Manila where he had been able to confer with representatives of the Rotary clubs in China, Hong Kong and in the Philippine Islands, he reported to the Board of Directors of Rotary International (at its June 1935 meeting) that there was a desire among the Rotary clubs and Rotarians in this region for the grouping of the clubs into a district of Rotary International.

President Hill advised the board that Honorary Commissioner Dr. Chengting T. Wang (王正廷博士) (*Shanghai*) was inquiring of the clubs in the region as to their definite wishes in the matter, that Wang himself concurred in the proposal and that Harris, whom he had been able to consult in Chicago just prior to the Board Meeting, concurred.

The Board, therefore, at its June 1935 Meeting, agreed that as of 1 October 1935 the Rotary clubs in China, Hong Kong and the Philippine Islands shall be constituted a district of Rotary International, providing such action meets with the approval of the clubs concerned.

A cablegram had been received from Wang stating that the 15 clubs in the region unanimously favor the establishment of a district.

On 30 July 1935 Chesley R. Perry, Secretary of Rotary International, sent out a circulation letter to the Presidents and Secretaries of the 15 Rotary clubs concerned:

“ ... .... I am able to advise you, that in conformity with action of the Board of Directors of Rotary International at its June 1935 meeting, the Rotary clubs in China, Hong Kong and the Philippine Islands will be constituted a district of Rotary International on 1 October 1935. A number will be assigned to the district at that time.

Subsequent to the June meeting of the Board, a letter was received from Honorary Commissioner Wang asking whether the Board would authorise a special conference of the Rotarians of the region in the nature of a district conference at the time of the meeting of the Club presidents and secretaries which was being scheduled for the 10th of August. The Board at its July meeting did authorise the holding of this conference.

Honorary Commissioner Wang now advised us that the conference will on that date nominate a Rotarian from one of the clubs in the region for appointment by the Board of Directors of Rotary International as the District Governor of the district about to be established. Before this letter reaches you we shall, no doubt, have been advised as to the nominee and steps can be taken so that the board can complete the appointment prior to the definite establishment of the district on 1 October 1935.

The Governor thus appointed will serve until 30 June 1936, for the year 1936-37 the clubs

in the district will either re-nominate him or nominate some other Rotarian as Governor and this Governor-Nominee for the year 1936-37 will be regularly elected along with all the other District Governors for the year at the Atlantic City Convention to be held in June 1936.

The establishment of this new district represents a step forward for the Rotary clubs in China, Hong Kong and the Philippine Islands as well as for the Rotary movement generally. It will lead to increasing activity and to a higher degree of unity among the clubs.

A district is merely a method of administration for a certain group of R. I. member clubs. The Rotarians in the district meet annually in a district conference at which matters pertaining to the progress and development of Rotary in their territory are discussed. But even though Rotary clubs when grouped into a district do not become a unit which legislates for itself, it will soon be apparent that the existence of a group spirit and cooperative effort by the clubs in the district will operate to make the general condition of Rotary in the district much stronger.

According to Article XIV, Section 2, of the by-laws of Rotary International, the per capita tax payable to R. I. by districted clubs, is \$4.50 U.S. currency. Heretofore, because the clubs in China, Hong Kong and the Philippine Islands have not had the advantages of the district form of administration, the Board of Directors of Rotary International has remitted a portion of this tax. Beginning with 1 January 1936, the semi-annual payment will be \$2.26, U.S. currency.

The Club Secretary will continue to advise the Secretariat as he has in the past of all changes in membership.

The Club Secretary will send the monthly attendance report to the District Governor.

The Club Secretary should send to the Governor, copies of the club bulletin or meeting notice, copies of club reports and such other information as may help the Governor to follow the life of the Club.

If the District Governor makes an official visit to the Club, it is not to be considered an occasion for unusual entertainment. His official visit is strictly a business visit, the purpose of which is to afford an opportunity for the officers and committee chairmen to discuss with their Governor all problems of club administration.

Questions of local policy on which the clubs may desire advice should be taken up with the District Governor. Questions of general Rotary policy may be taken up with him also. If they are taken up directly with the Secretariat, it will be helpful if the District Governor receives a copy of the letter sent to the Secretariat.

We are confident that when the district is established and the Governor appointed, he will receive the hearty cooperation of every Rotary Club in the district and that, subsequently, this Rotary year will be marked as one of unusual activity and progress among your clubs.

The President and the Board of Directors of R. I. congratulate the Rotary clubs in China, Hong Kong and the Philippine Islands on the approaching establishment of the district. It

means additional responsibility for each of the clubs, an enlarged capacity for service and a greater opportunity for promoting the objects of Rotary. It should bring the clubs closer to each other and cause them to feel more definitely an integral part of the world movement.”



*1935 -- Dollar Steamship Lines "President Coolidge"*

### The First District Governor

Originally, the R. I. Board of Directors has assigned the number “80” to the new district. But sometime later due to certain administrative arrangement, the final numbering decided was “The 81st District” for the group of 15 Rotary clubs located within the Republic of China, the British Crown Colony Hong Kong, and the Philippine Islands of the U.S. Protectorate.

During the Special Conference held in August 1935 in Shanghai, Dr. Chengting T. Wang was nominated for appointment as the first Governor of the Rotary International 81st District from 1 October 1935 until 30 June 1936. Wang was also nominated to carry on his governorship for one more term in 1936-1937. However, unfortunately, Wang was appointed in August 1936 the state mission to serve as China’s Ambassador to the United States. He has no option but to resign from Rotary. His vacancy was then filled up by Dr. Fong Foo-Sec (鄭富灼博士) (President 1931-1932 of Shanghai Rotary Club 上海扶輪社; Rotary International Director 1933-1934).



*王正廷 Chengting T. Wang*



Dr. Chengting Thomas Wang, commonly known as C. T. Wang, Dr. Chengting T. Wang (1882-1961), *HonLLD (Peking)*, *HonLLD (St. John's)*, B.A. (*Yale*), a Yale scholar in international laws, was a career diplomat, remarkable politician, and social activist in China. His contribution to the Republican China was also recognized in the field of athlete and sports that he was one of the bellwethers in the promotion of Olympics in China and the very first Chinese member of the International Olympic Committee.

Born in a Christian family on 7 September 1882 in Fenghua County, Chekiang Province of the Ch'ing Empire (大清國浙江省寧波府奉化縣金溪鄉), Wang was raised in the soil of Western thoughts and ideas. He went to the United States as a liberal arts student at the University of Michigan in 1907. He then transferred, after one year of enrollment at Michigan, to Yale University where he eventually received his Bachelor of Arts Degree in 1910. Wang returned to China in 1911 after one year of study in the Yale graduate program major in International Law.

Wang served several key positions in the government of the Republic of China including the Chief of Diplomatic Affairs, the Vice-Minister, and later the Minister of Commerce and Industry, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Ambassador to the United States for a period of two years from 1936 to 1938. Wang also was the secretary of the National Chinese Y.M.C.A. in Shanghai; President, National Red Cross Society of China from 1934 to 1943.

During his position as Chief of Diplomatic Affairs, Wang led the movement on the rescission of unequal treaties with Western powers through soft and pragmatic strategies, or “iron fist covered with rubber,” as he proposed.

### The First Conference of the 81st District

On 13-15 April 1936, the first ever in the Rotary China History, Rotary Conference of the 81st District, Rotary International, was held at International Club, Bubbling Well Road, Shanghai International Settlement. The Conference was convened by District Governor Dr. Chengting T. Wang, while Percy Chu (朱博泉) (*Shanghai*) was the Conference Chairman.

The Conference was attended by delegates of 12 Rotary Clubs and 2 provisional clubs from the Republic of China, 1 Club from the British Crown Colony Hong Kong, and 1 Club from The Philippine Islands of the U.S.A. Protectorate. The total registrations was 185 Rotarians and 74 RotaryAnns.

This official conference photo was taken outside the Civic Centre of the City Government of Greater Shanghai.

