

Rotary's Wheel of Misfortune

(Hong Kong) South China Morning Post Staff Reporter

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The international service movement Rotary has run into an incomprehensible wall of official opposition in Shanghai. Hopeful organisers of a local chapter of the non-political businessmen's association have been warned not to proceed with plans to formally establish a Rotary group in the city.

Motives for the orders from the Shanghai Municipal Government are vague. Theories range from fears of a link with Taipei---where Rotary has a strong presence---to confusion over a name that sounds much like the banned *Falun Gong*. Attempts to resolve the cloudy issue have failed.

"It's a great pity," says Randal Eastman, a Canadian in the electronics business who now heads the semi-dormant Rotary movement in Shanghai. "We have nothing to do with politics. We stand for good-fellowship and good works, the same as any Rotary Club anywhere on earth." That's not how city officials in Shanghai see it. During a recent visit to Shanghai by the Rotary Club of Seattle, the body that sponsored Shanghai's first Rotary Club on October 1, 1919, official orders were given that the two groups should not officially meet.

The visitors were also astonished to learn that they were not permitted to visit Percy Chu, the ailing 101-year-old banker who was the first Chinese president of the Shanghai Rotary in 1934-35.

Mr. Eastman is unofficial chairman of Expatriate Rotarians and Friends in Shanghai and Frank Yih is secretary. "We simply do not know what has gone wrong," both agree.

Rotary in Shanghai has a long history. In 1919, the Seattle Rotary sponsored the infant Shanghai chapter. In 1952, Rotary found itself in a hostile, anti-business environment in post-Liberation Shanghai, with most of its members departed. The club closed down.

Mr. Yih, who was born in Shanghai, was taken to Hong Kong as a child in 1950. He has been an enthusiastic Rotarian most of his adult life. He wonders if cross-strait tensions could be one reason for the present strained situation for Rotary in Shanghai.

Businessmen in Beijing established a branch several years ago, and although it has well-attended weekly meetings, that chapter is not recognised officially by the Rotary International headquarters in the United States. The Beijing chapter has been allowed to operate unofficially but openly.

In Shanghai, it's been a different story. Tentative meetings to see Rotary reborn on the Bund started last year. A handful of interested people, mostly expatriates who had been Rotarians abroad, went to monthly gatherings. The pace began to pick up, with meetings now held fortnightly.

The Beijing Rotary had got off the ground by having new members fly to Hong Kong to be inducted. This meant they could meet in Beijing as members of a Hong Kong organisation. The Shanghai group chose a different route.

Not only was there quiet opposition from local officials, but Rotary International headquarters in Evanston, Illinois, seemed none too happy about Rotary starting in Shanghai. Once again, Mr. Eastman and Mr. Yih are puzzled.

Part of the disdain expressed by Shanghai officials may have been because of one early meeting where the home club banners of visiting Rotarians were displayed. One of these was from the Taipei Club.

A city official saw Taipei Rotary banners and although they promptly came down, never to go up again, suspicions seem to have been raised.

Then came another bombshell. City officials demanded to know if Rotary was connected with *Falun Gong*? An official pointed out that the names of the two organisations were similar in Chinese. Rotary is *Fulun Hsia*, roughly translated as "Charity Wheel Association". The sect's name is the three characters meaning "Helping Wheel" with the "*Gong*" linking it to martial arts teachings.

Rotary group members were astonished to be linked to the banned sect.

Mr. Eastman stresses the service aspect of the Shanghai group. "We're a group of people who are keen to help the community, just as Rotary does everywhere else. We've raised a little money from members and would like to find a good cause to support." The issue came to a head when the Seattle delegation arrived in June. The Seattle Rotarians were eager to see if they could once again sponsor a revitalised Shanghai chapter and Mr. Eastman and Mr. Yih were anxious to talk to the visitors to get sponsorship if Rotary was permitted to re-establish itself on the mainland.

The Seattle visitors wanted to go to the Red Cross in Pudong to present a cash donation. It was when Shanghai Rotary, using the name *Fulun Hsia*, began trying to locate the Red Cross that alarm bells began ringing. It is believed an official made a mistake in the name, thinking that Americans and *Falun Gong* were involved in trying to locate the Red Cross.

Warnings came that the Shanghai Rotarians were not to go to the Red Cross presentation and the Seattle visitors were not to officially visit their Shanghai counterparts.

"It's all an enormous pity," says Mr. Eastman. "All we want to do is establish an organisation in Shanghai similar to Rotary clubs worldwide. They bring benefits to every community in which they are found." "There's been a sad mistake here and we hope it can be corrected."

國際扶輪社的厄運之輪

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國際服務組織「扶輪社」在上海，遭遇了令人費解的官方阻撓。一些熱心人士計劃在上海成立扶輪社，但卻被警告不得繼續推進此計劃。

上海市政府的這項禁令，背後的原因不明。有人猜測，可能是因為擔心扶輪社與臺北有聯繫（扶輪社在臺灣影響力很大）；也有人認為是因為「扶輪社」這個名字與被禁止的「法輪功」太像了。試圖澄清這一情況的努力，都失敗了。

「真是太可惜了，」在上海從事電子業的加拿大人伊仁德(Randal Eastman)說，他現在是上海扶輪聯誼會(Expatriate Rotarians and Friends in Shanghai)的負責人。「我們與政治無關。我們倡導友誼和慈善，與世界各地的其他扶輪社一樣。」但上海市政府官員顯然不這麼認為。最近，西雅圖扶輪社(Seattle Rotary Club 1919 年 10 月 1 日輔導成立了上海第一家扶輪社)的社員訪問了上海，但他們被告知不得與上海的扶輪社員正式會面。

他們也驚訝地發現，他們不能去探望病重的 101 歲高齡的銀行家朱博泉，他是 1934-1935 年度上海扶輪社的社長。

伊仁德是上海扶輪聯誼會的主席，葉守璋是秘書。「我們真的不知道，到底發生了什麼？」兩人一致表示。

扶輪社在上海有著悠久的歷史。1919 年，西雅圖扶輪社輔導成立了上海扶輪社。1952 年，隨著新中國成立，上海扶輪社面臨一個充滿敵意的、反商業的環境，大部分成員被迫離開。該扶輪社也因此解散。

葉守璋出生於上海，1950 年隨家人移居香港，他一生都熱衷於扶輪的活動。他懷疑，兩岸關係緊張可能是上海扶輪聯誼會目前困境的原因之一。

幾年前，北京的商界人士成立了一個香港扶輪社分社。北京分社以非正式但公開運作，雖然每週的例會都有不少人參加，但該分社並未獲得美國國際扶輪總部的正式認可。

在上海，情況則截然不同。去年，有些人開始在上海浦東地區探討恢復扶輪社的可能性。最初，只有少數對扶輪社有興趣的人參加每月一次的聚會，這些大多是曾在海外加入扶輪社的外國人。隨著活動逐漸活躍起來，聚會頻率也增加到每兩週一次。

北京的扶輪分社，是透過讓新成員前往香港參加入社儀式來啟動的。這樣，他們就可以作為香港扶輪社的成員在北京活動。上海的扶輪聯誼會，則選擇了不同的方式。

地方政府官員對此持保留態度，而位於伊利諾州埃文斯頓的國際扶輪總部似乎也不太贊成在上海設立扶輪社。對此，伊仁德和葉守璋感到困惑。

上海官員對扶輪社的抵觸態度，可能源於一次早期的聚會。當時一些來自其他城市的扶輪社員帶來了各自扶輪社的旗幟，其中有一面是來自臺北的。

一位政府官員看到了臺北扶輪社的旗幟，儘管旗幟很快就被收了起來，但似乎引發了懷疑。

隨後，又出現了一個令人震驚的消息。政府官員詢問扶輪社是否與法輪功有關？一位官員指出，兩個組織的中文名稱很相似。「扶輪社」，意思是「慈善之輪協會」。而「法輪功」的名稱，其中「功」字與武術相關。

對與這個被禁的組織聯繫起來，扶輪社成員感到震驚。

伊仁德強調，上海扶輪聯誼會的宗旨是服務。「我們是一群熱心於服務社區的人，就像世界各地的扶輪社一樣。我們已經從成員那裡籌集了一些資金，希望找到一個合適的慈善項目來支持。」6月，來自西雅圖的扶輪社代表團抵達上海時，此事達到了頂峰。西雅圖的扶輪社成員渴望能夠再次贊助上海分社的重建。而伊仁德和葉守璋也希望與代表團成員會面，爭取他們的支持，以便扶輪社能夠在內地重新建立分社。

來自西雅圖的客人原本計劃前往浦東的紅十字會，捐贈一筆善款。但當上海的扶輪社員以「扶輪社」的名義聯繫紅十字會時，事情開始變得複雜起來。據信，一名工作人員誤解了「扶輪社」這個名稱，認為美國人和「法輪功」成員企圖藉此接近紅十字會。

因此，當局發出警告，要求上海的扶輪社員不要前往紅十字會，也不要與西雅圖的客人進行正式的交流活動。

伊仁德表示：「這真是太可惜了！我們只是想在上海建立一個類似於全球扶輪社的組織，為當地社區服務。扶輪社在世界各地都為社區帶來諸多益處。」「這次真是個令人遺憾的誤會，我們希望能夠盡快澄清。」

