

The Honourable Benjamin Wong-Tape, OBE, JP Charter Secretary of Hong Kong Rotary Club in 1930

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Benjamin Wong-Tape 黃炳耀

Birth of The Rotary Club of Hong Kong

The British Crown Colony Hong Kong located at the south China coast was the first prospect of Rotary International to extend Rotary landing on the continent of Asia. The story has to be dated back to June 1918. However, failure reports were received after several attempts not until the visit of Jim to Hong Kong in 1930 – the last goal of his Far East Rotary Extension Mission in two and a half years. The birth of the Rotary Club of Hong Kong (香港扶輪社) was given by the voluntary mission of Past President “Jim” James Wheeler Davidson of Calgary Rotary Club, Alberta, Canada, and who was the 3rd Vice-President of Rotary International in 1926-1927, with the assistance of his wife Lillian and daughter Marjory. Jim was an explorer, writer, United States diplomat, merchant and philanthropist. Affectionately, Jim was honoured as “The Marco Polo of Rotary” who established most of the first Rotary clubs in countries of the Orient.

In overcoming the previous experiences of failure by others, Jim’s first approach to each new country would be contact of the government officials from whom he had letters of introduction. He approached the difficult problem in Hong Kong without any fears of failure. He was fortunate in the fact that the new Governor, Sir William Peel, had come to Hong Kong from Kuala Lumpur, The Federated Malay States, and that he had attended the official inauguration meeting of Kuala Lumpur Rotary Club in 1929 there. As he was seated next to Jim at that dinner meeting, Jim was able to tell Sir William much about Rotary.

With eight introduction letters issued by Governor Sir William Peel (香港總督貝璐爵士), Jim was able to invite a group of potential members to the organizing meetings through the

efforts of leading citizens, Dr. Robert Hormus Kotewall (羅旭龢博士), William Edward Leonard Shenton, William Woodward Hornell, Dr. Arthur W. Woo (胡惠德醫生), etc.

Sir William Woodward Hornell (康寧爵士), Kt, CIE, MA, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hong Kong (香港大學校長) (1924-1937), was elected Charter President of the Hong Kong Rotary Club. There were 2 joint club secretaries elected: (1) Leonard Charles Fenton Bellamy, MC, AMIEE, MInstT; and (2) Benjamin Wong-Tape (黃炳耀太平紳士), JP, who was responsible for the communication with the Chinese communities, with the Chinese news press in particular. Holding the Classification “Insurance – Life Insurance”, Wong-Tape was the General Manager and Regional Secretary of Sun Life Insurance Company of Canada (加拿大永明人壽保險公司).

The inaugural dinner meeting of the Hong Kong Rotary Club was held on Tuesday, 8 December 1930, at the Lane Crawford restaurant (The Café Wiseman) in the basement of the newly built Exchange House, the center of industry and finance in Hong Kong. The charter members included 79 of the leading citizens: 31 Chinese, 46 Americans and Europeans, 1 Indian and 1 Japanese. The Club was admitted to Rotary International on 20 February 1931.

Within the Great Chinese Region, Hong Kong Rotary Club remains today the oldest with more than 80 years of regular weekly meetings. The Club is the home of most number of Rotary International officers, including vice-president, director, administrative advisors, and district governors, and was also the home of 13 knights bachelor invested by the sovereign of the British Empire.

New Zealander Wong-Tape

Benjamin Wong-Tape (黃炳耀), also named Wong Ben-Yew, was born on 26 December 1875 in Dunedin, New Zealand, the eldest child of Forsigh Wong-Tape and his second wife Hie Toy. Wong-Tape, a merchant from Sunning County, Kwantung Province, Ch'ing Empire (大清國廣東省新寧縣) (now Taishan City of Guangdong Province, China 中國廣東省台山市), had led an early group of Cantonese gold-seekers to Otago. Forsigh and Hie Toy were married by Donald Stuart, the minister of Knox Church, on 20 March 1875, immediately following Hie Toy's arrival in Dunedin. They were to have at least seven children. Forsigh Wong-Tape had left a family in the Ch'ing Empire, including a son named Wong King-Yip, who came to New Zealand in about 1889.

Forsigh Wong-Tape established the Hip Fong Tie Store (協豐泰) in Dunedin and an export office in Hong Kong. He divided his time between the two countries, actively maintaining links with his homeland, and Benjamin spent much of his early life moving between Hong Kong and New Zealand. He received a good English education. About 1887 Benjamin went with his father to Hong Kong, enrolling in a government school Victoria College (維多利亞書院) (later changed name in 1894 as Queen's College 皇仁書院 until today), where he won the Belilios Scholarship and passed the Oxford local examination.

In 1891 Benjamin returned to Dunedin after his father died, and attended Otago Boys' High School in 1892. In 1894 he left again for Hong Kong. While here he married Emma Kwai-Chun (伍貴鑽), who remained behind when Benjamin returned to Dunedin in 1898.

Benjamin joined his brother Wong King-Yip in running Hip Fong Tie Store in Dunedin, New Zealand. The firm imported tea, opium, silk, fireworks, fancy goods and Chinese food and drinks,

and provided loans to local Chinese. Much of the business was conducted by Wong King-Yip, as Benjamin was frequently absent on visits to Chinese communities in Otago and Southland. Nevertheless, he became well known in Dunedin both as a businessman and an interpreter. Benjamin took pride in being ethnic Chinese, insuring his pigtail for £1,000 in an effort to prevent its being cut off by larrikins.

Benjamin was a professed Christian. Although baptized a Presbyterian, he was most active among Baptists and Methodists: a veiled attack on his parents by the Presbyterian minister Alexander Don in his 1898 book 《Under Six Flags》 was, no doubt, partly the cause of this.

In 1905 Benjamin left Dunedin for Hong Kong for the last time, for a mixture of business and family reasons. He took with him glowing testimonials from leading Dunedin citizens. In Hong Kong, Benjamin first joined China Mutual Life Insurance Company (永年人壽保險公司) which was later acquired in 1923 by Sun Life Insurance Company of Canada (加拿大永明人壽保險公司). He became the General Manager and Regional Secretary. Although he retired in 1934, he was asked by Sun Life in 1945, after the Pacific War, to re-open the Hong Kong Office.

Though the principle profession of Benjamin was life insurer, he had served since 1947 as Chairman of Directors, On Lok Yuen (安樂園) Biscuits and Confectionery Manufacturers, and restaurant chain, which was also one of the leading ice cream producers. By then, On Lok Yuen already had at least 5 branches in Hong Kong Island and Kowloon, and also had restaurant and manufacturing operations in Canton (Guangzhou) (廣州). In 1949, the firm recorded HK\$783,933 in profits. The same year, the Chinese Communists took over Canton and On Lok Yuen's operations in the city were subsequently merged with other private firms to form a state-owned enterprise.

安樂園威化餅大減價
威化餅鬆化美味馨香與別不同

在三十餘年前我國不知威化餅之製造所購者均舶來由安樂園依法首創製造比美舶來在過去三十年來不斷努力改進製成最近本公司總經理張吉盛更費多時光遍遊歐美分別考察及參觀世界最大餅干製造廠多家返港後悉心研究改進製造各種餅乾貢獻各界人士及為酬謝顧客盛意特將 安樂園威化餅原價每磅叁元五角減至貳元八角批發八折安樂園威化各種夾心餅進行迄今三十餘年如蒙賜顧毋任歡迎

安樂園朱古力
補血 養顏

點特之末舶勝遠·味美·鮮新·平價·有俱
 售發店支各及司公本列陳市上造製量大

血 血 血 血
 ! ! ! !

血為人身之寶
 寶有血則生無
 血則死故吾人
 身伴之強弱端
 賴血之盛衰也
 安樂園朱古力
 富含滋養功能
 補血養顏提神
 健胃多食之尤
 勝燉品之補身
 請嘗試之

商務印書館代印

Advertisement of On Lok Yuen biscuits and chocolate



Advertisement of On Lok Yuen ice cream

Benjamin faithfully attended church, and was Secretary of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), and participated in his spare time a host of public-spirited organizations such as a director of Po Leung Kuk (保良局總理). An early member of the Hong Kong Police Reserve Unit (特別後備警察隊) since 1914, he attained the rank of inspector.

Other than a charter member of the Hong Kong Rotary Club, Benjamin could be claimed as one of the co-founders of the University of Hong Kong (香港大學). When the then Hong Kong Governor Sir Frederick John Dealtry Lugard (香港總督盧吉爵士) announced the establishment of a university in Hong Kong in 1908, Sir Ho Kai (何啟爵士) was elected as the Chairman and Ts'o Seen-Wan (曹善允) as the Honorary Secretary of the Chinese Sub-committee to raise the Endowment Fund. Benjamin was one of the members.

In 1925 Benjamin was appointed an Unofficial Justice of the Peace for Hong Kong (香港非官守太平紳士) by Hong Kong Governor Sir Reginald Edward Stubbs (香港總督司徒拔爵士).

In 1936, by order of Hong Kong Governor Sir Andrew Caldecott (香港總督郝德傑爵士) (Charter President 1929-1930, Rotary Club of Kuala Lumpur, Federated Malay States), Benjamin was appointed one of the first Unofficial Members of the Urban Council (市政局非官守議員) until outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941. Sitting in the same Council were also 4 Rotarian colleagues: (1) William Ngartse Thomas Tam (譚雅士), JP, (Hong Kong Rotary Club President 1936-1937); (2) Roberto A. Basto; (3) Tang Shiu-Kin (鄧肇堅), MBE, OStJ, JP; (4) Li Tse-Fong (李子方). After the War and again in 1946 until 1950, Benjamin's appointment was

renewed by Hong Kong Governor Sir Alexander William George Herder Grantham (香港總督葛量洪爵士). The Urban Council was first established as the Sanitary Board (潔淨局) in 1883. On 1 March 1935, the Sanitary Board was reconstituted to carry out the work which remained much the same until Pacific War broke out. The board was renamed the Urban Council in 1936 when the Government passed the Urban Council Ordinance, which gave legal motive to the already expanding range of services provided by the Council -- cleaning, burying the dead, running bath houses and public lavatories, hawker control, the use of bathing beaches throughout Hong Kong, etc.

After the Victory of the Pacific War, on 1 May 1946 during the hand-over ceremony from the military administration of Vice-Admiral Sir Cecil Halliday Jepson Harcourt (海軍中將夏慤爵士), KCB, CBE, of the Royal Navy, Benjamin served as the duty interpreter for the resuming Hong Kong Governor Sir Mark Aitchison Young (香港總督楊慕琦爵士) to translate his speech from English to Chinese. Harcourt received on 16 September 1945 the surrender of Imperial Japan (under Major-General Hisakazu Tanaka 岡田梅吉 and Vice-Admiral Ruitaka Fujitain 藤田類太郎) in the Government House. Then he was the *de facto* Governor of Hong Kong as Commander-in-Chief and Head of the Military Administration until June 1946.

Later in 1948, Benjamin was appointed Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (OBE), by King George VI of the United Kingdom and the Dominions of the British Commonwealth.

The Honourable Benjamin Wong-Tape, OBE, JP, died on 16 June 1967, aged 91, was survived by two sons. His wife Emma had died earlier on 30 June 1953. They are interred (together with their son Eric 黃兆良) next to Sir Robert Ho-Tung (何東爵士) in the Hong Kong Cemetery in Section 11B Row 12 Grave No. 3, Happy Valley, Hong Kong Island. The Hocken Collections in Dunedin holds papers and documents of Wong-Tape.

Benjamin spoke constantly of Dunedin and New Zealand. Had he stayed, Benjamin would probably had attained a position comparable to that of his compatriot, Choie Sew-Hoy (徐肇開), also known as Charles Sew-Hoy, who was a notable New Zealand merchant, Chinese leader and gold-dredger.



The joint grave of Mr. Benjamin and Mrs. Emma Wong-Tape in Hong Kong Cemetery, Happy Valley.