

史上第一位華籍扶輪社社長 - 蔡廷幹海軍上將

Admiral Tsai Ting-Kan

The First Chinese Rotary Club President in History

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

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After the establishment of Shanghai Rotary Club (上海扶輪社) in 1919, followed by Tientsin Rotary Club (天津扶輪社) in 1923, a group of outstanding persons in Peking (*Beijing*) gathered together on Thursday, 27 July 1923, and to discuss the formation of the third Rotary club in Peking, the Republican China's capital. Initially, around 30 persons joined in a regular luncheon fellowship called [The Thursday Tiffin Club]. Until 30 June 1924, finally 22 persons dedicated to join the world service organization of Rotary, and submitted the membership application of Peking Rotary Club (北京扶輪社) to Rotary International. On 30 August 1924, Rotary International approved the membership with the Charter No. 1814 granted. Amongst these 22 charter members, there were 8 Chinese, 11 Americans, 2 Britons and 1 Australian. The charter president was a Chinese -- Admiral Tsai Ting-Kan (蔡廷幹海軍上將) (*Classification: Customs Administration*), Director General of Customs Revenue Council, Beiyang Government Administration. Though both of the Shanghai and Tientsin Rotary clubs were formed earlier but they did not have any Chinese served Club President before August 1924. Hence, Admiral Tsai Ting-Kan became "The first Chinese in history to serve as a Rotary Club President". There was his brief introduction published in *《The Rotarian》* Magazine, Issue January 1927, Page 15: "Rotarians in the Public Eye".

Education and Qualifications

Tsai Ting-Kan (1861-1935), Guangdong native, was born in 1861 in Heung Shan County, Kwangtung Province (*now: in the portion of Zhuhai City, Guangdong Province*), Qing Empire. He received his early education in his home district schools. Thereafter he attended the Chinese Educational Mission School, at Shanghai, organized by the late Dr. Yung Wing (容闈). After Tsai graduated from the preparatory school in 1872, at age of 12, he was selected as one of the 30 students to continue studies in the United States of America, firstly in English language school at Greater Hartford, Connecticut. From 1878 to 1881, he studied successively at New Britain High School, New Britain, and the Columbia College, New York. While in the United States, he with Tong Yuen-Cham (唐元湛) (*later the first Chinese Rotarian of Shanghai Rotary Club in 1919*) was sent to work in the machine shops in Lowell, Massachusetts. Because of the danger of working amongst the moving machinery, both of the lads were given special permission to cut off their pigtails.

After eight years of study, together with the other students, Tsai was recalled to home country. In 1881-1884, he joined the torpedo school at Dagukou (大沽口) Naval Yard, Tientsin (*Tianjin*) (天津), instructed in torpedo management and torpedo boats by foreign instructor Major Mannix. From 1882 onward Tsai also studied electrical engineering, mining, and surveying under American and French instructors. Later he studied navigation and seamanship under British officers at Weihaiwei (威海衛) and at Port Arthur (*Lüshunkou*) (旅順口).

Navy Commander and Statesman

After finishing his study, Tsai participated in the war with France as a petty officer in the Fujian Fleet, and then he was transferred to the Beiyang Fleet to be on active service. In the Imperial Qing Navy, he was appointed Lieutenant with 5th Class Naval honors and assigned to Beiyang Squadron in 1884;

August 1887 – March 1888 : as Commander of a torpedo boat built at Yarrow Shipbuilders Ltd., London, accompanied a fleet of four English- and German-built steel cruisers from the English Channel to China to join the Beiyang Fleet;

1888 : commissioned Junior Lieutenant in navy; 1889 : acting Senior Lieutenant;

1891 : given command of a torpedo boat, and assigned to patrol duty;

1892 : rank of Commander, awarded Peacock Feather on headgear, attached to torpedo boat squadron at Port Arthur.

He was first made captain of a torpedo boat, and later given command of a flotilla of torpedo boats, at Port Arthur; and during the First Sino-Japanese War (甲午戰爭) (1894-1895) he took part in the engagements off Port Arthur, Yalu, and Weihaiwei. At the beginning of 1895, he was captured in the Sino-Japanese War, and was later imprisoned

in Osaka, Japan. In 1901, after he was dismissed, Tsai was recommended by Viceroy of Chihli, Yuan Shih-Kai (直隸省總督袁世凱), and entered the services of Yuan, commanded torpedo boat squadron at Weihaiwei (*Weihai Garrison or Port Edward*).

In 1911, Tsai was appointed Chief of the Naval Administration Department in Navy Board, with the rank of Rear Admiral in Imperial Qing Navy.

After the Xinhai Revolution 1911 (辛亥革命) with the establishment of the Republican China, in December of the same year, he was made Expectant Metropolitan Officer of the Third Rank, with Brevet Second Rank.

Tsai was closely aligned with Yuan Shih-Kai for a long time in the changing political arena of the times. In February 1912, soon after Yuan Shih-Kai officially became the first Chinese Republic President, Tsai was appointed, by Presidential Mandate, High Councillor of Military Affairs; and, by a similar mandate, he was made a Vice-Admiral, Deputy Commander of the Navy. Concurrently, Tsai was appointed as Aide-de-Camp to President and Deputy Ceremonial Master of the Presidential Palace.

By Presidential Mandate, in 1913, Tsai was appointed Director of the Salt Gabelle. In September, he was appointed Assistant Director of the Revenue Council. In May 1914, he was made Assistant Grand Master of Ceremonies in the Presidential Office, concurrently as Chief English Secretary to President Yuan, handling all foreign matters.

But over time, Tsai became increasingly disgusted with Yuan's perfidious actions which led Yuan to be crowned Emperor again. After Yuan's death in June 1916, Tsai was retired by the new Beiyang Government. But in May 1918, he was appointed Chairman of the China Tariff Revision Commission, and was appointed again Assistant Grand Master of Ceremony in the Presidential Office by President Hsu Shih-Chang (徐世昌).

Because of his fluent English and abundant international knowledge, Tsai served as the Assistant Director of the Repatriation Bureau for Enemy Subjects, in 1919. In the same year, he was appointed Vice-President of the Chinese Red Cross Society. In 1920, he served as a member, and later treasurer, of the International Famine Relief Association, in Peking.

In 1921-1922 winter, Tsai attended the Washington Conference as Tariff Advisor to the China's Delegation. This Conference was practically carried out by the American and Chinese Rotarian statesmen -- a significant international and political disarmament conference of the early 20th Century. The Conference convener was the United States President Warren G. Harding who was a Rotarian of the Rotary Club of Washington D. C. On the other hand, there was Shanghai Rotarian Dr. V. K. Wellington Koo (顧維鈞博士) being one of the plenipotentiaries of China's delegation. Due to the participation of such a remarkable political conference by Rotarians, *《The Rotarian》* magazine invited a guest writer George W. Harris to give his observations which was then published on the March 1922 Issue.

In February 1922, Tsai was appointed Chairman of the China Tariff Revision Commission, and concurrently, Director General of Customs Revenue Council, Beiyang Government Administration. In 1925, Tsai's favorable reputation in both the Chinese and foreign communities made him acceptable to serve as one of the 3 commissioners to

investigate on the May Thirtieth Incident (五卅慘案) in which Shanghai police fired upon and killed Chinese protestors. One of the other commissioners was Dr. Chengting T. Wang (王正廷博士) who later became Rotary International 2nd Vice-President in 1945-1946.

In July 1926, Tsai was appointed Foreign Affairs Minister by Beiyang Government Premier Tu Hsi-Kuei (杜錫珪). However, he resigned soon in October. In May 1927, a financial crisis occurred in the Beiyang Government Administration. Tsai resigned the post of Director-General of Customs Revenue Council and then retreated to Dalian for seclusion, withdrawing from politics forever in his private life. Tsai left Dalian (大連) in 1931. Then he went back to Peiping (北平) (formerly *Peking*) and settled there.

The First Chinese to translate Classical Chinese Poems into English

Tsai was the first to translate classical Chinese poems into English independently and to publish them in the United States.

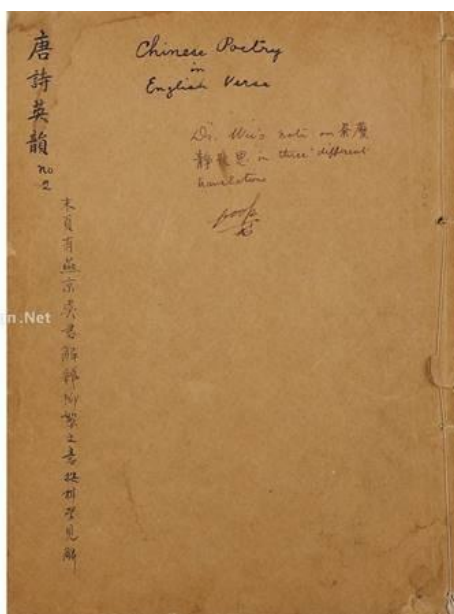
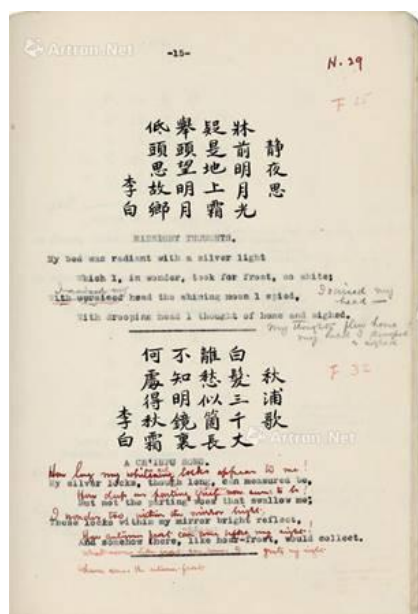
Tsai had attained distinguished achievements in both civil administration and military affairs, and was, at that time, a well-known admiral who possessed literary grace. In his later years, he was invited from time to time to teach Chinese literature in Tsinghua University (清華大學) and Yenching University (燕京大學) (*forerunner of Peking University 北京大學*) as a visiting professor, and he was engrossed in the English translation and annotation of classical Chinese literature in his spare time. His book in English *《A Synthetic Study of Lao Tzu's Tao-Te-Ching》* (英語譯注老子道德經), has remained a bestseller in the United States to this day. In addition to the unfinished English versions of *《Notes of the Yuewei Hermitage》* (閱微草堂筆記) and *《Selected Articles from a Dream of Red Mansion》* (紅樓夢選篇), his *《Chinese Poems in English Rhyme》* (唐詩英韻), published by the Chicago University Press, U.S.A., in September 1932, further established Tsai's reputation as the first native Chinese intellectual to translate classical Chinese poems into English independently.

The book *《Chinese Poems in English Rhyme》* has a Chinese title given by Tsai himself as *《唐詩英韻》*, literally meaning “Tang Poems in English Rhymes,” which caused confusion among later generations, who mistook this book for the English translation of Tang Poetry only. In fact, the word “Tangshi” (唐詩) in the Chinese title refers to Chinese poems in general, instead of those of the Tang Dynasty precisely. The character “Tang” (唐) stands in place as a pronoun for “China” in modern Chinese, just as “Chinatown” could be “Tang'ren Jie” (唐人街, Streets of Tang people) and “Chinese people” could be “Tang'ren” (唐人, people of Tang). All poems translated in this book were selected from the anthology *《千家詩》* (Poems by 1,000 Masters).

As a military commander and by virtue of his self-confidence and love of his own cultural background, Tsai presented to the English-speaking world more of the “true colors” of classical Chinese poetry. His work provided a different perspective for English readers who did not know any of Chinese but were eager to learn classical Chinese poetry. He brought English readers the native interpretation of Tang poetry as

a frame of reference, so that they could learn to appreciate fully its charm through contrast and comparison.

Tsai also ended the long absence of native Chinese in the process of introducing Tang poetry in English. He and his work proved that the absence was not because native Chinese intellectuals failed to remember the artistic charm of Tang poetry – which lasted for a dozen of centuries – or did not believe that it could go beyond cultural and national boundaries. They were confined by historical conditions. Once this limitation was surpassed, Chinese scholars demonstrated that they were competent enough and were possessed of a sufficiently high degree of consciousness of cross-cultural communication, to be able to introduce the essence of their national culture to the rest of the world.



《唐詩英韻》出版前校稿本，內有蔡氏大量校改、編序、篩選標記，甚至通篇重譯。

The pre-publication draft of 《Chinese Poems in English Rhyme》 shows plenty of Tsai's proof-reading, editorial, screening marks, and even re-translation of the entire poem.

Decorations of Honor

Republic of China (conferred by the Beiyang Administration)

- 1913 : Order of Merit, 4th Class
- May 1912 : Order of Golden Grain, 2nd Class
- October 1917 : Order of Precious Brilliant Golden Grain, 2nd Class
- May 1918 : Order of Precious Brilliant Golden Grain, Grand Cordon 2nd Class
- 1919 : Order of Golden Grain, Grand Cordon 1st Class
- Order of the Striped Tiger, 1st Class
- 1920 : Order of Precious Brilliant Golden Grain, Grand Cordon 1st Class
- October 1922 : Order of Merit, 3rd Class
- Order of Brilliant Star, 2nd Class

Republic of France

French Legion of Honor

Imperial Germany

Order of the Crown (Prussia)



Admiral Tsai Ting-kan
蔡廷幹字耀安
(Tsai-Ting-kan)

蔡廷幹 號耀堂年六十三歲直隸大興縣人原籍廣東香山幼在香山肄業及長赴上海入中華教育書院一八七二年由政府派赴美國留學學八年始苦攻讀旋于光緒七年與數留學生奉調回國入大沽水雷學校後隨美法二國技師習魚雷電氣礦務及察量等學旋赴威海衛等處隨英人習航海術光緒十四年以守備儘先補用光緒十五年升署都司光緒十七年以遊擊儘先補用光緒十八年補授都司並賞戴花翎中日之役曾于旅順鴨綠江威海衛等處督戰當袁世凱總統任北洋大臣時君曾隨辦事宣統元年以參將補用宣統三年充海軍部軍制司司長補授海軍正參領同年十二月以三品京堂候補並加二品銜民國元年奉令任命為高等軍事參議同年十一月奉令授為海軍中將民國二年奉令授以勳四位派充鹽務稽核總所總辦同年五月奉令給予二等嘉禾章同年九月奉令任命為稅務處會辦三年五月奉令任命為大總統府副禮官六年十月七日奉令給予二等寶光嘉禾章七年五月二十日派充修改稅則委員會主任同年十月十日晉給二等大綬寶光嘉禾章八年一月派充遠東敵僑事務局會辦二月呈請更改禮官處職員名稱奉大總統批准如所擬副禮官改為副大禮官四月廿九日奉令派為中國紅十字會副會長同年九月給予一等大綬嘉禾章十月十日給予一等文虎章九年一月給予一等大綬寶光嘉禾章同年十月充華洋義賑會特運股長十一年改司庫股長十一年九月奉令派為華盛頓會議顧問十一年二月派充修改稅則委員會主任同年十月十一日奉令晉授勳三位君著作頗多曾將中國老子道德經譯成西文名謂道德經彙集其他由中國詩詞之譯成英文者甚多且曾陳列于聖路易博覽會君善詞令其任美國留學生同學會會長數年該會會務日益發展在京對於社會服務頗示熱忱云

蔡廷幹在 63 歲時的手書自我介紹

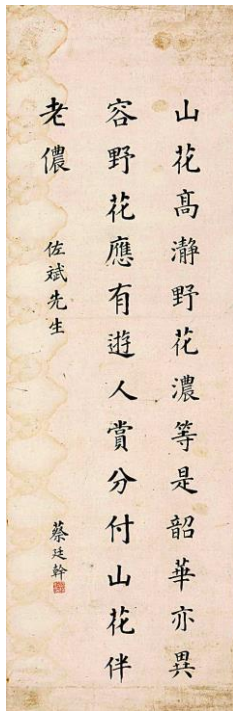
Tsai Ting-Kan wrote the self-introduction to *Biographies of Prominent Chinese* by A. R. Burt, J. B. Powell & Carl Crow, editors (Shanghai: Biographical Publishing Company Inc., c.1925)



1921-1922年華盛頓會議中國談判代表團：梁如浩（左），施肇基夫人（中），蔡廷幹（右）

1921-1922 Washington Conference Chinese Delegates:

M. T. Liang (left), Wife of Alfred Sao-ke Sze (middle), Tsai Ting-Kan (right)



蔡廷幹的書法/書信

Calligraphy and Manuscript by Tsai Ting-Kan

北京扶輪社向國際扶輪遞交成員社的申請
社長蔡廷幹 / 書記熊崇志 簽署 - 1924年7月11日

CAUTION:
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spaces must
be filled out.

ROTARY INTERNATIONAL

221 E. 20th ST., CHICAGO, U. S. A.



APPLICATION FROM CLUB FOR MEMBERSHIP

To the Secretary, Rotary International, Chicago, U. S. A.:

Rotary Club of PEKING of the ~~State of~~ CHINA,
having been duly organized on June 30 1924, with 22
charter members, each representing a different classification of whom a roster list is
hereto attached, now applies for membership in

ROTARY INTERNATIONAL

in accordance with the provisions of Article 4 of the Constitution of Rotary International
and the following understandings and agreements:

1. It is agreed that *no additional members* will be elected until this club has received its charter. It is agreed that thereafter this club will steadily though carefully add to its membership, but that during the first year of its existence *not to exceed three new members* shall be introduced into the club *during any calendar month*. It is agreed that during the same period this club will not establish any classification, not included in Rotary's "Standard Outline of Classifications," unless with written approval thereof by the District Governor.
2. Attached hereto is a copy of our constitution and by-laws, duly certified. It is understood and agreed that no change in, or amendment to, the club's constitution herewith submitted, nor any amendment to the club's by-laws which will conflict with the constitution of the club or with the constitution and by-laws of Rotary International, will be made without first submitting same to the Secretary of Rotary International for approval by its board of directors.
3. A remittance of \$100.00, covering the charter fee, is attached hereto in accordance with the provisions of Article I, Section 2, of the by-laws of Rotary International.
4. Upon notice of our admission to such membership we will execute and deliver to you a ratification of the constitution and by-laws of Rotary International and we will remit for our members payment of their subscriptions to "THE ROTARIAN," as provided therein.
5. The present officers and directors are:

Pres. <u>Admiral Tsai Ting-kan</u>	Directors.
V. P. <u>C. R. Bennett</u>	<u>Admiral Tsai Ting-Kan</u>
Sec'y. <u>S. S. Young</u>	<u>C. R. Bennett</u>
Treas. <u>Yen Te-Ching</u>	<u>E. G. Clarke</u>
S. at A. <u>H. C. Faxon</u>	<u>S. S. Young</u>
	<u>H. C. Faxon</u>
	<u>Julean Arnold</u>
	<u>S. G. King</u>
6. Regular ~~weekly~~ meetings are held:
Day— 1st and 3rd Thursdays
Hour— 12:45 p.m.
Place— Masonic Temple

Dated July 11 1924. Rotary Club of Peking

Attest:
S. S. Young
Secretary.
60 Ta Fang Chia Hutung
Address.

By Tsai Ting Kan
Its President.
Shui Wu Ch'u,
Hsi T'ang Tzu Hutung
Address.

蔡廷幹 — 史上第一位華籍扶輪社社長

繼 1919 年上海扶輪社、1923 年天津扶輪社成立之後，1923 年 7 月 27 日(週四) 一群不同國籍的社會賢達在北京聚首，討論在北京成立中華民國第三個扶輪社的可能性。起初，二十多人以 [週四茶園俱樂部 The Thursday Tiffin Club] 的名義舉行午餐例會。1924 年 6 月 30 日確認了創社人員名單後，決定用 [北京扶輪社 The Rotary Club of Peking] 的稱號，向國際扶輪遞交成員社的申請。1924 年 8 月 30 日國際扶輪核准，授證編號 #1814。22 名創社成員，有 8 名中國籍、11 名美國籍、2 名英國籍、1 名澳大利亞籍。創社社長是中華民國北洋政府的稅務處會辦蔡廷幹海軍上將 (職業分類: 關稅行政)。雖然上海和天津兩家扶輪社都是早些年成立的，但他們在 1924 年 8 月之前沒有任何華籍人士出任社長。於是，蔡廷幹成為了「歷史上第一位擔任扶輪社社長的中國人」。

1927 年 1 月的英文扶輪月刊《The Rotarian》第 15 頁簡要地介紹了蔡氏：「蔡廷幹海軍上將 - 中華民國外交總長和稅務處會辦。1870 年代初期在美國接受了部分教育；在 1894 年的清日甲午戰爭中英勇作戰；1925 年任 [五卅慘案] 中國方面調查委員會的高級專員；是北京扶輪社的第一任社長。」

學業歷程

蔡廷幹 (1861—1935)，字耀堂，廣東人，1861 年 4 月 5 日出生於大清國廣東省廣州府香山縣上恭都上柵村 (現今：廣東省珠海市香洲區金鼎鎮外沙村)。

1871 年 (同治十年) 清廷接受華僑教育家容闈的建議，同意選拔一百二十名幼童分四批派送美國留學，並由容闈主持事宜。為了保證選派幼童的英文水準，清廷在上海創辦一間預備學校——中華教育書院，由全國各地選派聰穎子弟入學預修，然後通過考核選拔優秀者送美國留學。

由於廣東省得風氣之先，加上有容闈、唐廷樞、徐潤等思想較為開明人士的引薦，入上海預備學校者大多數是粵籍兒童，尤以香山縣為眾。1872 年 (同治十一年)，蔡廷幹在中華教育書院畢業，被選派為第二批三十名幼童，中有香山縣同鄉的唐元湛在內 (唐元湛在 1919 年參加了上海扶輪社)。最初分派到美國康納狄格州哈特福德 (Greater Hartford) 的語文學校學習；不久又進入新不列顛中學 (New Britain High School) 和紐約哥倫比亞學院 (Columbia College, New York) 讀書。因蔡氏品性比較頑皮，同學稱之為「好鬥的中國人」。在高等學校將屆畢業之前，和唐元湛同被分配到麻省羅沃爾機械廠 (Lowell, Massachusetts) 學習。在長達八年的美國生活中，他和多數的留美幼童一樣，在西式教育的影響下，對大清國固有的封建禮教、社會倫理的觀念逐漸淡薄，成為幾名首先剪掉辮子的學生之一。

由於當年大清國駐美國副公使兼留美學生監督容闈對學生許多的「越軌行為」採取放任的態度，遭到清廷一班官僚的非議，不斷向清帝上奏彈劾。清廷終於在 1881 年 (光

緒七年)下令撤回全部留美學童。蔡廷幹奉召回國後，分配到大沽水雷學堂學習。在以後的四年中，他除了學習有關魚雷的理論知識和操作技術之外，同時在美、法的外籍教官指導下，學習電機、採礦、測量等課程。畢業後，任大沽口砲台魚雷艇管帶。1884年(光緒十年)，蔡氏在北洋艦隊實習期間，向擔任艦隊教習的英國海軍軍官學習了航海課程。

清末民初海軍將領、政府首腦

蔡廷幹畢業後，被派往福建水師當一名士官。1885年(光緒十一年)參加了中法之戰；1888年(光緒十四年)以「守備銜儘先補用」調往北洋水師服役。1889年(光緒十五年)以「都司銜補用守備」升署北洋海軍魚雷左一營都司、委帶左隊一號魚雷艇；1892年(光緒十八年)升署三年期滿改為實授，後調任「福龍」號魚雷艇管帶(武職正四品)並賞繪花翎頂戴。

1894年(光緒二十年)(甲午年)，日本背信棄義，不顧原來與清廷簽訂的協議，採取「不宣而戰」的卑劣手段挑起侵略朝鮮的戰事，以絕對優勢的軍力向清廷駐朝鮮的陸軍發動攻擊。9月，北洋水師大小艦艇十八艘護送招商局輪船，運送陸軍增援駐守平壤的清軍，發生了中國近代史上「甲午戰爭」中的重要戰役「黃海海戰」。之後，日本海軍取得了制海權。1895年初，日軍從海陸兩路夾攻威海衛北洋水師基地。據蔡氏兒子所撰行狀，訴說了戰情：「十九年甲午…先嚴駕左一魚雷艇，與日艦西京丸激戰三次。勇敢奮擊，以少困眾。…我軍退守劉公島，先嚴改帶福龍艇。明年乙未正月，為日軍包圍，全軍覆沒。先嚴義奮填胸，痛茲大難，遂投海殉節。漂泊半日不沉，為日艦撈救俘之以去。」蔡氏受傷被俘，押送至日本大阪囚禁。戰獲釋放，任水雷艇隊司令駐屯威海衛。

1901年(光緒二十七年)，袁世凱出任直隸總督、北洋大臣。通過袁氏的保奏，因「甲午戰事」被革職的海陸官員次第恢復原職，絕大部分收歸袁世凱幕下。蔡廷幹經同鄉唐紹儀(天津海關道)的推薦，為袁氏收入幕府，日見重用。

蔡廷幹成為袁世凱的幕僚之後，以其嫻熟的英語詞令和豐富的國際知識，漸為袁氏倚重。當辛亥革命爆發，袁世凱被授任總理大臣後，1910年(宣統二年)立即奏委蔡廷幹為「海軍部軍制司司長補授海軍正參領」(海軍參軍長)；同年12月又授予「三品京堂候補並加二品銜」，任袁氏的海軍副官，專責協助袁氏一切外事活動。

1911年(宣統三年)辛亥「武昌首義」成功，黎元洪被推舉為革命軍都督，各省熱烈響應。袁世凱一方面向清廷發誓效忠，另一方面立即派蔡廷幹、劉承恩秘密赴武漢會晤黎元洪(黎是蔡氏魚雷營舊屬)，進行談判。這件事很快被蔡廷幹的好友——《泰晤士報》(The Times)駐北京記者莫理循(George Ernest Morrison)一所獲悉。1911年11月16日莫理循向《泰晤士報》報社發送了《蔡廷幹上校來訪接談紀錄》全文三千餘字，報導了蔡廷幹講述他兩人去武漢與黎元洪談判的經過。文中有「最初蔡氏列舉事實，認為中國應該實行君主立憲制。但是在與革命黨人交談後，就改變主意而贊成共和政制。」

1912年（中華民國元年）2月，袁世凱正式就任中華民國大總統。8月，袁世凱擢升蔡廷幹為「高等軍事參議，中將海軍副司令兼大總統府副禮官」。1913年（民國二年）任北洋政府的鹽務署鹽務廳總稽查兼稅務所會辦，此後投身政界。1914年（民國三年）任大總統府副禮官；總統首席英文秘書，處理所有外事。禮遇之隆，使得蔡廷幹竭智盡忠為袁世凱效命。

隨著時間的推移，眾多事實的啟示，蔡廷幹對袁世凱的信賴逐漸起了變化。而袁世凱背信棄義，熱衷帝制，蔡廷幹極度悲憤。1915年（民國四年）12月袁世凱稱帝，蔡廷幹不滿，開始疏遠袁世凱，靠近黎元洪和段祺瑞。1916年（民國五年）當袁世凱死後，莫理循以顧問身份徵詢蔡氏能否與黎元洪合作時，蔡氏斷然拒絕。同時也退出政壇，在京城閑住；1917年（民國六年）任全國稅務學校校長。

段祺瑞執政以後，蔡廷幹又得到北洋政府的重用。段祺瑞在1918年（民國七年）5月20日委任他為「修改稅則委員會主任兼全國稅務學校校長」，年底又接受大總統徐世昌任命為「總統府副大禮官」。1919年（民國八年）1月，任敵國僑民遣送事務局會辦；4月29日，任中國紅十字會副會長；1920年（民國九年）任華洋賑濟會轉運股長；1922年（民國十一年）改任司庫股長。

1921年（民國十年）年底以「稅務處會辦」身份擔任中國代表團顧問出席「華盛頓會議」（Washington Naval Conference）。按照當時會議上達成的協議，安排三月份在上海召開「關稅修訂會議」，由蔡氏擔任主席。原定的議程安排是「經過充分討論後，簽訂協定，修改稅率（國際）於翌年一月施行」。會議期間，由於北洋政府遲遲不提出解決《二十一條》的方案，妨礙了國際稅務會議有關在中國境內的稅務工作。蔡廷幹憤而與王寵惠、顧維鈞、顏惠慶力辭代表工作，認為「政府坐失良機，漠視會議內英、美、日同流合污給中國施加的無理壓力」。他們的聲明，激起全民的憤怒，促使北洋政府態度較為明朗，以後會議形勢較為好轉。蔡氏等人繼續重任代表工作，獲得了較好的成就。

1923年（民國十二年）修訂關稅工作基本結束，蔡廷幹被任命為「整理國內外債務委員會」成員；6月30日任關稅特別會議準備處會辦；揚子江水道討論委員會副委員長。1924年（民國十三年）任關稅會議總長。在此期間，蔡廷幹在外事活動和公共事務上也有不少參與。8月，任北京扶輪社第一任社長；又任美國留學生同學會會長多年。在外事方面，1925年（民國十四年）上海發生的「五卅慘案」，蔡氏與顏惠慶、王正廷受段祺瑞委派到上海與日本交涉。10月26日，「國際特別關稅會議」在北京召開，蔡廷幹、王寵惠、顏惠慶、王正廷、施肇基、黃郛、莫德惠等十三人組成中國代表團。

1926年（民國十五年）6月，杜錫珪以海軍總長代理國務總理（同時代行大總統職），成立杜錫珪臨時攝政內閣，蔡廷幹擔任了外交總長。杜辭職後，蔡一度代理內閣總理一職，任內沒有作為。在國際關稅會議復會時，蔡廷幹爭得與會國際代表一致同意「中國關稅應由中國自主」後，便辭去部分政府工作，只留任「稅務處會辦」一職。1927年（民國十六年）5月，北洋政府發生財政恐慌，蔡氏遂辭職到大連隱居，從此退出政壇。

蔡廷幹在大連，與外界接觸依然頻繁。1931年（民國二十年）「九一八事變」後，蔡氏從大連回北平定居。1935年（民國二十四年）9月24日，蔡廷幹病逝於中華民國北平市。

功勳

中華民國（北洋政府頒授）

*1912：二等嘉禾勳章 *1913：勳四位 *1917：二等寶光嘉禾勳章

*1918：二等大綬寶光嘉禾勳章 *1919：一等大綬嘉禾勳章 / 一等紋虎勳章

*1920：一等大綬寶光嘉禾勳章 *1922：勳三位 / 二等景星勳章

法蘭西共和國 榮譽軍團勳章 德意志帝國 普魯士王冠勳章

「儒將」- 漢詩英譯先行者

蔡廷幹是晚清和中華民國北洋時期，政治、軍事和外交界顯赫一時的人物。少為人知的是，他在學術研究領域也有開拓性貢獻。由於蔡氏的中國古典文學根底深厚，美國的八年留學中又潛心鑽研英語，中英兩文的造詣極深，對中西文學、哲學均有研究。而一生中大部份時間都從事涉外工作，在口才、談吐、詞鋒各方面老練穩健。晚年潛心研究國學，除了不時應清華、燕京兩大學的邀請作客座教授，以「中國文學」為題材講課外，其餘時間便以其造詣深厚的英語，將一批中國古典文學名著譯注。其中已經成書的有《老解老》（英語譯注老子《道德經》）（1922）及《唐詩英韻》（1932）。兩本譯本都曾經在「美國聖路易世界博覽會」展出，獲得國際文學界的好評。蔡氏譯注《老解老》一書，採用西方的「詞語索引」（concordance）方法研究老子《道德經》，可稱「用科學方法整理國故」的先行者。

他也是對外譯介中國古典詩歌的先驅者之一，率先將中國古典詩歌推向世界。中國古代蒙學經典《千家詩》首個英語譯本即出自其手。1932年，美國芝加哥大學出版社出版了蔡廷幹的《唐詩英韻》《Chinese Poems in English Rhyme》，是華人中系統英譯漢詩的第一人；是中國學者向西方系統翻譯介紹中國傳統詩歌的濫觴之作。整個翻譯過程持續近三十年，譯作幾經修改，並經多位中外人士審閱修正。其中部分篇章曾在1905年發表於上海的英文雜誌《The East of Asia Magazine》。

《唐詩英韻》選取《千家詩》內唐宋詩作122首譯成英文，用了西方人熟悉的英語傳統詩歌形式，採用等行翻譯，並充分考慮了英詩的押韻習慣。譯文流暢自然，全書保持了原作的神韻。書名「唐詩」並不是指「唐朝的詩作」，是泛指「唐人的作品」，與「華埠」稱作「唐人街」含義雷同。其他未成書的有英譯《閱微草堂筆記》、《紅樓夢選篇》；在中文方面有《古君子》及《大東詩選》等。

由於蔡氏在文事武功均有卓越的成就，是以當年上流社會中冠以「儒將」之稱號。