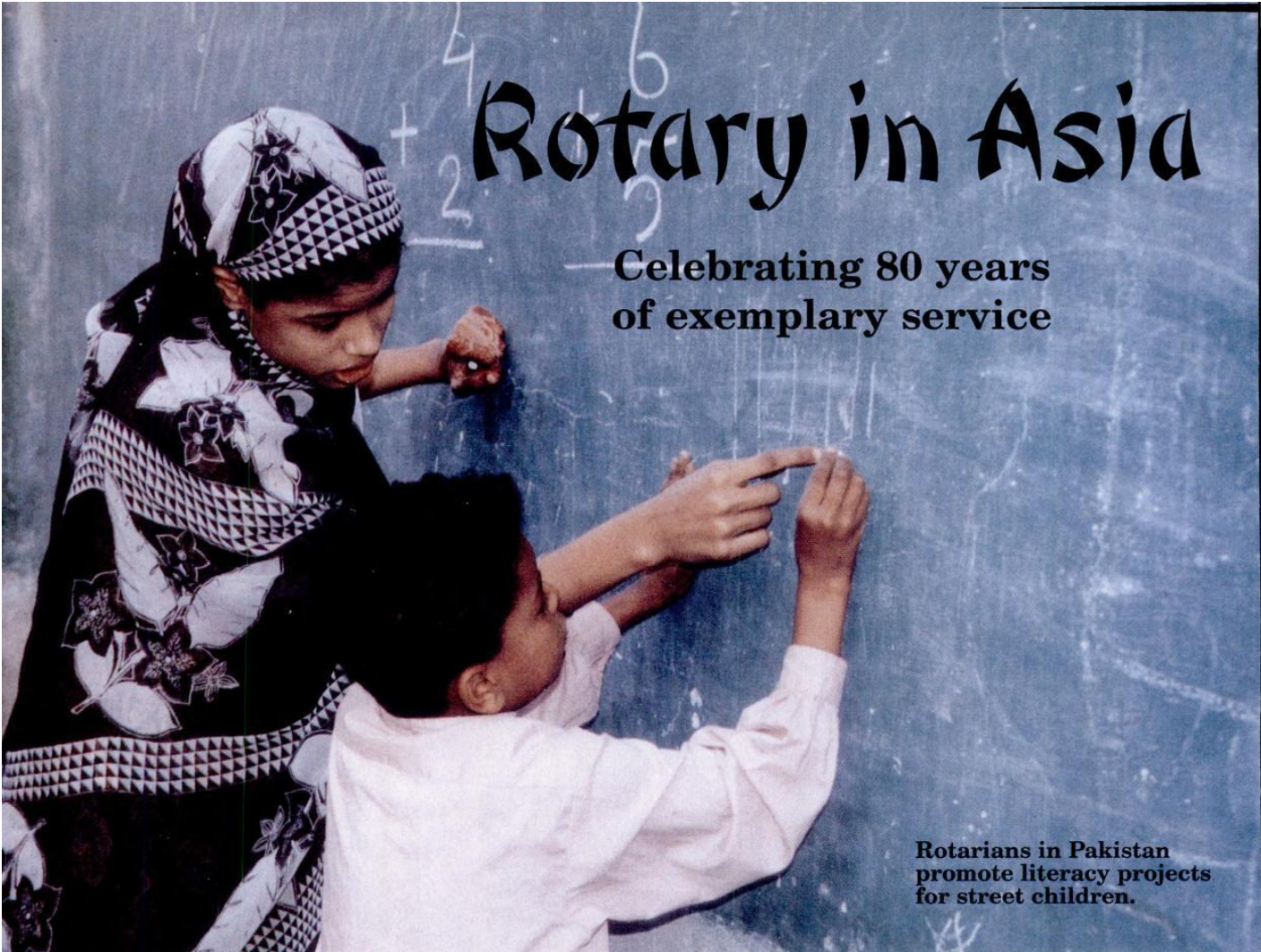


Rotary in Asia

Celebrating 80 years
of exemplary service



Rotarians in Pakistan
promote literacy projects
for street children.

by Wen Huang

In 1918, Leon Lambert, a leading businessman in the Philippines, heard from a friend about what was then called the "International Association of Rotary Clubs (IARC)." He was attracted to the concept of Rotary's spirit of fellowship and community service. A year later, Lambert wrote a letter to John Poole, then the president of IARC, and expressed his desire to start a club in the Philippines. In response to Leon's request, Rotarian Roger Pinneo from Seattle, Washington, U.S.A., was sent to Manila to assist with the organization of Rotary clubs in the Far East.

Thus, on 1 June 1919, the first Rotary club in Asia was chartered in Manila. Later that year, a second club was established in Shanghai, China. By the end of the 1920s, clubs sprang up in many Asian countries, including those known today as India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

At the very beginning, many people considered Rotary to be a "foreign import" and they expressed concern whether such an organization could acclimate itself to the Asian culture. In addressing the doubt about Rotary growth in Asia, Tsunejiro Miyaoka, a Japanese diplomat and international lawyer (who would later become a member of the R.I. Board of Directors), said, "Rotary's spirit fits in exactly with our

philosophy of life because it teaches service and cooperation. Rotary will bring about harmony and rightful understanding among peoples in Asia who differ widely in blood descent, historical background, language, religious faith and economic conditions."

History has proven the truth of Rotarian Miyaoka's words, as well as the resilience and universal appeal of Rotary's spirit of service and volunteerism. There are currently 7,000 Rotary clubs in Asia, with 285,000 members in 17 countries and regions, accounting for 25 percent of Rotary's 1.2 million membership worldwide. During the past decade alone, more than 82,000 Asian business and professional leaders have joined Rotary clubs.

With this fast growing membership, Asian Rotarians play an increasingly important role in the organization's humanitarian initiatives. During the past five years, Asian countries (with Japan, Korea and Taiwan as the leaders) have contributed more than U.S. \$1.3 billion to The Rotary Foundation of R.I., which accounts for 38 percent of the total funding of the Foundation's worldwide humanitarian projects.

"The generosity of Asian Rotarians has enabled Rotary International to mobilize its immense international grassroots networks in the region and fill in the

gap of social services in countries where their governments do not have the resources," explains R.I. President Carlo Ravizza.

During the past eight decades, Asian Rotarians have changed the face of their own communities through volunteer activities and by initiating projects that address hunger, homelessness, illiteracy, high unemployment and environmental problems—despite many challenges.

With the escalation of World War II, clubs throughout Asia were forced to disband. Some club members continued to meet—often at risk—in order to serve their communities. The Rotarians of Bangkok, Thailand, for example, helped to care for orphans, the blind and those left homeless by air raids. In India, the Rotary Club of Calcutta fed the famished throngs that flocked to the city, while other clubs aided destitute villagers in rural areas.

The end of World War II in 1945 paved the way for the re-establishment of Rotary clubs in formerly occupied areas. While the communist victory in China forced clubs there to disband, Rotary clubs in other liberated and newly sovereign nations of Asia gained members and spread beyond the port and capital cities where the Rotary movement began. In some Asian countries, however, Rotary continued to be perceived as an organization of foreigners. For example, the Rotary Club of Bangkok included many English-speaking expatriates, which fostered this notion. In 1958, the first Thai-speaking club was organized, which set the stage for Rotary expansion into other areas of the country. Later, Thai Rotarians would launch a magazine in their own language.

Postwar upheavals continued to challenge Rotarians, but the movement proved resilient. When the Korean War started in 1950, the Rotary Club of Seoul moved to Pusan, where its new leaders distributed a large amount of food and clothing contributed by overseas clubs. After the partition of Vietnam in 1954, Rotarians in Saigon built a school for the children of refugee families fleeing the north.

The 1950s witnessed an increasing trend toward nationalism, but Asian Rotarians looked beyond national patriotism to promote Rotary's ideals of advancing international understanding. To honor the late Umekichi Yoneyama, a well-known business executive who introduced Rotary to Japan, the Rotary Club of Tokyo established a fund in his name to provide scholarships for foreign students enrolled in Japanese universities.

Rotary's people-to-people programs, from Youth Exchange to Ambassadorial Scholarships, have proven

popular in Asia. Between 1988 and 1998, Rotary clubs in Asia sponsored 8,000 Ambassadorial Scholars to study abroad. These scholars have brought back cultural understanding, skills and knowledge that can be applied in their own communities.



any Asian urban clubs have "adopted" rural communities. For example, Sri Lankan Rotarians have launched village cottage industries, Pakistani Rotarians provide free health care to the poor, and Indian Rotarians work to bring better housing, sanitation, industry and improved agricultural methods to countless villages.

In Saigon, the Rotary club sponsored a project called the People's Clinic, which treated 500,000 people, mostly refugees from the north, from the 1950s until 1975. In refugee camps in Hong Kong and the Philippines, Rotary volunteers cared for displaced Vietnamese families.

In the 1980s, the World Health Organization reported that 10 countries in Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific accounted for 85 percent of the world's polio cases. Rotary International initiated the first immunization project in the Philippines, where six million children were vaccinated in 1979 against polio, and in India, where three million children were vaccinated against measles. From these initial projects, Rotary's largest public health program of the century—PolioPlus—emerged in 1985.



A Foundation Matching Grant provides mattresses and bedding for homeless children in Bangladesh.

Along with Rotary club members worldwide, Asian Rotarians have donated both money and time to help conduct National Immunization Days and "mop-up" vaccinations in polio-infested countries. In India, more than 100,000 Rotarians and their families joined the government in 1997 to help immunize more than 130 million children in one day—the largest public health campaign ever conducted anywhere in the world. Rotarians in Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan continue to fund the purchase of polio vaccine, vehicles to transport the vaccine and social mobilization materials such as posters, T-shirts and banners in countries including Nepal, Cambodia and Bangladesh. As a result of efforts by Rotarians worldwide, the number of polio cases in Asia has been slashed by 94 percent since 1980.

When the financial crisis and social upheavals swept Asia two years ago, Rotary clubs in the region addressed economic hardships locally with the help of The Rotary Foundation and clubs in Western countries. The following are some examples of Rotary in action:

- In Indonesia, the country's 72 local Rotary clubs mobilized to donate food and medical supplies to peo-

ple affected by the financial crisis. They offer free vocational training and provide support for public health and environmental projects that have experienced funding cuts.

- The Rotary Club of Changi, Singapore, raised money to purchase food that nourished more than 8,000 families affected by riots in Indonesia.

- In Thailand, where the economic downturn took a heavy toll on children's programs, Rotary clubs built daycare centers for children from low-income families and offered scholarships to help young people finish school.

- In Malaysia, Rotarians helped provide capital for a revolving loan program for poor people in Kuala Lumpur and donated school supplies and clothing to children in Damansara.

- In Bangladesh, clubs participate in low-cost housing projects in Dhaka and operate a revolving loan fund to support microenterprise

In Thailand, a Rotarian physician examines a Buddhist monk before surgery.

They are also taking an active role in volunteering their services to the Korean Rehabilitation Center's orphanages, infant home-care and environmental awareness projects.

- Clubs in Hong Kong have long supported projects that help combat poverty and illiteracy in mainland China. During the last three years, they have raised U.S. \$7 million to build schools and provide clean drinking water. Last year, clubs in Hong Kong and Japan raised more than \$300,000 to con-



The Philippines was the site of R.I.'s first polio immunization effort in 1979, which paved the way for the PolioPlus Program.

projects for poor rural women in Mymensingh.

- In Sri Lanka, many Rotary clubs initiated affordable housing programs and provided a mobile health clinic for the remote areas of Colombo.

- In Korea, Rotary clubs are working with the government to offer job training programs for unemployed and poor unwed mothers in Seoul.

struct a village in China's southern city of Jiujiang.

- In the Philippines, Rotarians offer equipment, training materials and working capital to train unemployed urban youth in Makati City and for housewives and out-of-work laborers in Manila.

- As Taiwan and Japan emerge as economic powerhouses in Asia, Rotarians there have not forgotten

the less fortunate in other countries. Rotarians in Taiwan have provided more than U.S. \$55,000 for rehabilitation centers for disabled children in Korea and helped provide shelter for aboriginal minorities in the Philippines. In 1997, Rotarians in Japan and Taiwan started regular vocational training programs for disabled young people in Thailand. Volunteers also serve as tutors and donate books, computers and other teaching tools.



While celebrating their past achievements, Rotarians in Asia also look to the future. By far the world's most populous region, Asia offers Rotary great prospects for further growth and additional opportunities for service. As the global polio eradication effort enters its final stretch, Rotarians will embark on the most difficult phase of immunizing children in the poorest regions of Asia, which still account for approximately half of the world's reported polio cases.

Asian Rotarians are ready to take on this and other challenges in the new millennium. In the past 80 years, Rotarians in Asia have exemplified an enduring spirit of volunteerism that has transcended the boundaries of geography, race and creed.

- *Wen Huang is the communication specialist for Asia in the R.I. Public Information Department.*

具有啟發的資料

Reader's Opinion – Letter to the Editor of 《The Rotarian》 Magazine

The China Story

Thanks for the well-researched article [Rotary in Asia, August 1999] on Rotary's 80 years of exemplary service in Asia.

As a former resident of Beijing, I read with special interest the writer's remarks on Rotary in China. His statement, "While the communist victory in China forced clubs there to disband" may lead readers to assume that the communist government forced the Rotary clubs to close. Although it is very probable that this would have eventually happened, it is a fact that Rotary closed itself down.

Following the communist victory and the declaration of the People's Republic on 1 October 1949, Rotary clubs continued to function. But the economy had collapsed and there were severe shortages of everything. It was primarily for these economic hardships that clubs lost many members and therefore disbanded themselves; R.I. then cancelled the charters of most clubs.

By 1950, only two Chinese Rotary clubs remained and the Rotary Club of Peking was practically the only international organization remaining in the country's capital.

As late as 12 June 1951, Peking Club President T. E. Shaw and Secretary A. C. Hausske visited the Rotary Club of Hong Kong. There they reported that the Chinese members of their Club had recently called a special meeting to consider disbanding the Club "because the authorities had taken over all major facilities and it had become impossible to find meeting venues." Records of the Hong Kong Club show that President Shaw stated that "there had been no outside request to close the club," which could have gone ahead so far as he knew. On 26 June 1951, R.I. declared the charter of the Rotary Club of Peking invalid.

The article also addresses the generous contributions Asian clubs and individual Rotarians have made in terms of donations and projects. In this respect, it may be of interest that a group of some 40 Rotarians, working mostly as businessmen and businesswomen and diplomats stationed in Beijing, have organized themselves---with the knowledge of the Chinese authorities---as an informal "Beijing Fellowship Group". The Group has been getting together every week since 1996. The members have successfully completed a number of community service projects.

Hermann G. Heid, *Rotarian*

Perth, W.A., Australia, March 2000

REMARKS by Herbert K. Lau:

- (1) Hermann G. Heid was a Vice-President of the Hong Kong Rotary Club (香港扶輪社), and a leading organizer of the Beijing Fellowship Group.
- (2) The key factor led to the terminations was the Korean War (1950-1953) which caused the Communist China and the United States in hostility. There was no feasibility for the Chinese clubs (except Taipei 臺北) to communicate with Rotary International. The last 3 clubs survived until January 1952 were: Tientsin (天津); Nanking (南京); Shanghai West (滬西).

This article was edited by Herbert K. Lau (劉敬恒) (Rotary China Historian) on 4 May 2014.