



## THE GLORIOUS 25 YEARS

A review by Mr Kay Ming Lai, Honorary Chairman of Portsmouth Chinese Association

### From Preparation to Start Up

The predecessor of the Portsmouth Chinese Association (PCA) was the patriotic Portsmouth Chinese Films Society, established in 1964 by a group of local Chinese youths led by Mr Ping Lai and Mr. David Y. Lai. They made frequent journeys to London, to visit the Overseas Chinese Section of the People's Republic of China (PRC) State Council, in their spare time, to fetch old 16mm films made in China. Those films shown in hired halls or theatres became very popular amongst the local Chinese community. The films filled a culture void and at the same time helped to maintain strong understanding and links between local Chinese people and their roots in China.

In the winter of 1979, Mr David Y. Lai and Mr Tim Lee asked for my views on the forming of a Chinese Association which was desired by many local Chinese people. I felt there was already a strong active Chinese community in Portsmouth. The establishment of a formal association would be a natural course of development. My views were shared by all three of us. Mr Lai and Mr Lee asked if I could get involved in the setting up of the association. Being a Chinese living in a foreign country I felt it was my duty to contribute to the Chinese community and as I had previous experience with community work it equipped me well for the task.

A preparation committee, consisting of a few more volunteers, was established. After several months hard work, 4 committee meetings, wide consultation & exchange of ideas, the final committee meeting was held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1980 in my restaurant (Central Chinese Restaurant), attended by 15 committee members. The agenda was to elect the first Chairman and deputy Chairmen of the association, appoint the person to draft the articles of association, finalise the mission statement, promote the membership and agree on the establishment of a Chinese Language School for local Chinese children as the association's first priority task. After a full discussion and with full agreement, Mr David Lai was duly elected as the first Chairman, Mr Tim Lee and myself as deputy Chairmen and was tasked for the drafting of the articles of association. It was agreed that the new organisation was to be named Portsmouth Chinese Association with all communications temporarily via The Eastern Store and the (Central Chinese Restaurant).

### The Association Was Born

At 2pm on the 30<sup>th</sup> June 1980, the executive member of the preparation committee and the first Chairman of the association Mr David Lai announced that the Portsmouth Chinese Association was formally established. I chaired the meeting and celebrated the moment, with all members and a watchful crowd of local Chinese, with vigorous applause. We all had mixed feelings from our individual backgrounds. Most of us had been living quite isolated lives in a foreign country. At long last there was an organisation to unite us all. In his opening speech, Mr Lai presented a detailed report on the works of the preparation committee. It took over 400 days joint effort of all the committee members and the support of the wider Chinese community to make that day possible. Mr Lai also presented to the members the mission statement of the association and promised to work within the articles of association and to maintain the long term stability of the organisation.

### The Formation of the Chinese Language School

Through some hard work and with the help from the Education Department of Portsmouth City Council, Wesley Church was chosen as the venue. On Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> October 1980, the Chinese Language School was officially opened, with 71 children enrolled on the first day. There were 2 junior classes, one a higher level than the other, held between 12 noon and 2pm every Sunday afternoon and taught in turn by executive committee members, parents and several Chinese university students.

Because the classes were held in a church hall, there were no teaching facilities. Every week, the Chairman and executive committee members would arrive early to set out the desks, chairs and blackboards. As the student numbers increased, it became a tedious task. We then requested assistance from the City Council in finding a more appropriate venue for teaching. Portsmouth City Council was very sympathetic to our request. Several months later, the Chinese Language School moved its classes to Mayfield School with rent paid from a government educational fund.

During the first part of the 1980's, the Hong Kong Government Office in London donated £900 per year and an allowance for text books. Unfortunately the funding stopped after 5 years. During the latter part of the 1980's, the Community Language Service Department of Hampshire County Council picked up all the running costs of the school, including class room hire, travelling expenses and ongoing training for teachers.

With continued funding from the government and judicious direction from the association, the school has matured into a well respected formal educational establishment. The school now has over 200 students, 13 different classes including Mandarin. There are even non-Chinese students. This confirms that the Chinese Language School has fulfilled its objectives of furthering the exchange of language and culture between the Chinese and English communities. All past Chairmen and their deputies have put an enormous amount of time and effort into the running of the school. Their sterling service has earned them high respect amongst their colleagues and parents of the children. I thank from the bottom of my heart all the past Chairmen, their deputies and all the teachers. I hope the school will continue to prosper under the direction of the Headmistress Ms Guo Zhen He & her deputy Mrs Mui Lee Li and the efforts of teachers & parents.

## **The Harder Times – The Purchase of a Permanent Base**

In February 1991, after repeated discussions by executive committee, the association decided to purchase the property we currently occupy as its permanent base. Invitations for donations were distributed amongst members and a total of £50,000 was collected. The purchase price of the property was £92,000 with £35,000 needed for the refurbishment. Four executive committee members, Mr David Lai, Mr On Poon, Mr (Wai Kwong Cheung) and myself allowed Midland Bank, the predecessor of HSBC Bank, to use our personal assets as security in exchange for a mortgage of £49,000 to cover the shortfall. Portsmouth Chinese Association was the legal owner of the property on the land register. The deed of the property was given to the solicitors for safekeeping. These are the facts of the real history that should be known and remembered by every member.

Mr David Lai and Mr On Poon not only mortgaged their personal assets but also donated £5,000 each toward the running costs of the association. Other members donating £5,000 each included Mr David Leung and the late Mr Luk Hup Lai. Their love for the association and their contributions were much appreciated by the members and earned them all a well deserved honorary presidency.

On 9<sup>th</sup> June 1992, the purchase of the property was completed. Heads and representatives from other Chinese associations / communities, prominent members from different regions, officials from the Embassy of the PRC, members of the association and representatives from non members of the local Chinese community were invited to the grand official opening ceremony.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> July 1992, the secretary of the association announced to all members, that the everyday operation of the association was moved to the new property. Our members had wished and worked hard for many years to have a permanent base and their dream finally became true.

At the beginning of 1994 I was elected the Chairman. I suggested to the executive committee a new round of collections to repay the mortgage. My suggestion won the backing of all the committee members. Chairman David Lai also suggested that the association should take out loans from executive committee members and ordinary members as well. This won the backing of many committee members. By 1997, through hard work by all the members, we managed to collect enough money to repay the mortgage, the loans from all members of the association. As a result of 6 years' hard work, the executive members including myself felt the lifting of a heavy load from our shoulders.

The complete ownership of the property was the single most important achievement the association had managed since its inauguration. Chairman David Lai encouraged every executive member to contribute in whichever way they could, being money or effort. I visited each local Chinese business and urged them to make generous donations. Every member put their weight behind the project. We finally did it!

## **Senior Citizen's Lunch Club**

Following the establishment of a permanent base for the association and the continuing expansion of the Chinese community, we applied to Social Services for a community development worker to be based at the association. This person would form a link between the association and Portsmouth City Council and help to overcome the language barriers faced by many of our members. Our proposal was accepted by Social Services and on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1994, a community development worker was appointed by Social Services.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1994, with funding from Social Services, the Senior Citizen's Lunch Club started operating on every Tuesday serving about 50 senior citizens each week. It gave us great pleasure to see our hard work had created the opportunity for those senior citizens to get together and enjoy themselves.

Due to the popularity of the club, the venue at the association became inadequate for the increasing number of senior citizens who wanted to join. In March 2001, the club moved to Friendship House and continued its operations to date.

## **Friendship House Sheltered Housing**

There had been considerable focus on elderly people's welfare. Elderly Chinese encounter additional problems due to language and culture barriers. PCA initiated discussions with Social Services and the Housing Department which resulted in SRB funding and Parchment Housing Association partnership. After 3 years' planning and organisation, by the end of 2000, a sheltered housing block for elderly Chinese was built.

The building, situated in the centre of a busy and convenient area of Southsea, was named Friendship House. The building was previously the telephone exchange and it was converted into residential accommodation with modern facilities. It is a 5 storey building with lifts connecting each floor. The ground and first floor form the Portsmouth Multicultural Resources Centre which includes offices for the centre manager, the PCA, Vietnamese Association, Multicultural Group, a large hall with a capacity of 200 people, a well equipped Chinese kitchen, a computer room, meeting rooms, a medical room and a library.

Between part of the 1<sup>st</sup> floor and the 5<sup>th</sup> floor, there are 34 flats, each comprise fully fitted 1 or 2 bedrooms, a sitting room, a kitchen and a bathroom. Each flat is fitted with emergency pull cord which connects directly to the scheme manager and a central emergency unit. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, there is the scheme manager's office, a communal lounge, communal shower room, communal toilet and a communal laundry room.

The formal opening ceremony for Friendship House took place at lunch time on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2001. It was a very high profile and rumbustious event with firecrackers, drums, cymbals and the ribbon was cut by the then Mayor Councillor Barry Maine, Executive Ambassador of Chinese Embassy Mr ZhenGang Ma and Chief Executive of the Parchment Housing Association Ms Jackie Burn.

On 19<sup>th</sup> March 2001, the community development worker moved from the association base to the PCA offices in Friendship House for easier access by members. Our General Secretary Mr Shee Hung Lee also works on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays from his office in Friendship House.

### **Sports and Leisure Activities**

Since its formation, PCA frequently organised sport and leisure activities. In 1981, a lion dance class was created and it took part in a carnival organised by Portsmouth Leisure Services. Along the route, "lions" were dancing, drums were beating, and cymbals were crashing. Together with martial art performers, they received warm welcome with rapturous applause by many spectators.

In the area of sport, PCA organised many friendly matches of youth football against neighbouring associations. PCA also organised snooker and table tennis matches. On 2nd November 2004, PCA hosted the Hopelake Cup Snooker Chinese Open at Majestic Snooker Club sponsored by Hopelake Food Group. PCA also organised tours to China, Europe, USA and Canada, and short day trips. These activities were strongly welcomed and supported by all members and their friends and families. The utmost memories trips were invited to visit Inner Mongolia (including Zha Lai Te Qi, Aershan City and Wulan Haote City) in July 2004 and Tanggu District of Tianjin City of China in May 2005. Both visits were warmly welcome by local authorities.

### **Celebrator Events**

PCA holds a party every year to celebrate the National Day of the PRC. The most memorable party was in 2001 when the 52th National Day coincided with the visit by the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy warships invited by the British Ministry of Defence. Whilst the warships were docked at Portsmouth naval base, 4 young officers ranking from sub-lieutenant to lieutenant commanders from the destroyer Shenzhen and the support ship FengCang were invited by PCA to the party. They attended the party accompanied by the Ambassador of PRC in Britain Mr ZhenGang Ma and Consul General Mr DaLi Sun. A Lieutenant Commander said in his speech that he was overjoyed by the fact that, whilst away from China, he was able to celebrate the National Day with overseas Chinese and that it had been an extremely memorabled day for him.

Youth discos and mothers & children's parties to celebrate Christmas have always been very popular. Various traditional Chinese New Year celebrations were also organised each year for the Chinese community. In 1981 the party was jointly organised by PCA and Portsmouth Chinese Scholars and Students Society. In 2000 it was held at the Portsmouth Guildhall in conjunction with Vietnamese Association. It was attended by more than 1,500 people including officials from the Embassy of the PRC in Britain, 5 Mayors and other officials from neighbouring areas. The party had a really bustling festive atmosphere.

In 2002, 2003 and 2005, PCA held 3 Charity Chinese New Year Parties at the request of the Lord Mayor of Portsmouth. £8,270, £8,688 and £6,488.50 were raised respectively. These monies have been donated to the Lord Mayor's Appeal which would provide medical equipments and emergency motorbikes for local hospitals.

In 2004, the Charity Chinese New Year Party was held in aid of the "Hope School Fund" of the Zha Lai Te Qi of Xinganmeng, Inner Mongolia of PRC. The fund-raising event was well attended and supported by various Chinese communities. Many valuable items of art and craft were donated for the event and the £11, 721 which were raised, comfortable exceeded the target set. The money was sent to the Embassy of the PRC in Britain to be passed to Zha Lai Te Qi People's Government for the building of the Hope School. By the spring of this year, the building was completed and the school was opened. This provides the pupils with a suitable environment to study and to enable them to make contributions to the development of their country once left school. This is believed to be the first Hope School in Inner Mongolia that was built with donations from overseas Chinese communities. We hope to see more Hope Schools being built in Inner Mongolia.

On 3rd March 1983, PCA's Women's Group hosted the Seventh UK Chinese Women's Celebration of the International Women's Day. The celebration was attended by over 500 people from 24 organisations around the country. The Chinese Women's Association of UK was formed during the celebration. On 8th March 2004, PCA's Women's Department was asked by the Chinese Women's Association of UK to host the Thirteenth UK Chinese Women Celebration of the International Women's Day. The celebration was attended by over 600 people from 38 organisations in UK and Europe. The guests of honour for both celebrations include the wives of the Ambassador of PRC to UK, Minister Counsellor, Counsellor, the Lord Mayor of Portsmouth and 4 other female Mayors from the neighbouring areas, leaders of Chinese communities in UK, representatives from various women's organisations in UK and Europe and representatives of Chinese media from all over UK. The overwhelming atmosphere was unprecedented. The cost incurred in organising both meetings were quite huge and they were met by generous donations from various organisations and individuals. The Executive Committee and sisters of the Women's Group would like to take this opportunity to express their gratitude to all individuals, organisations and businesses for their much appreciated help and support.

### **Sino-British Cultural Exchange**

On 11th August 2002, with funding from Portsmouth Leisure Services, the Chinese Art & Culture Festival was held at the Guildhall. At 12 noon, the opening ceremony was attended by the then Mayor Councillor Elaine Baker, the Chairamn of PCA Mr Kam Hung Ip and the Counsellor of Embassy of the PRC in Britain Mr Chengyou Zhang in the Guildhall Square amidst a lengthy and dense display of firecrackers. An audience of 1,500 people enjoyed a collection of lion dances, Chinese martial art and various other acts. The most unusual act was the Mongolian folk dances performed by the Dancing and Singing Team of Zha Lai Te Qi Wulanmuqi of Inner Mongolia.

In the afternoon, various workshops and talks were held inside the Guildhall together with a selection of food stalls that proved very popular with people from all communities.

In the evening a packed schedule of variety performances were staged jointly by the professional UK Far East Arts group, the

Chinese Association of Southampton and the Dancing and Singing Team of Zha Lai Te Qi Wulanmuqi of Inner Mongolia. The audience of 500 people were enthralled by the performances.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> June 2003, in conjunction with the Portsmouth City Museum, PCA organised an exhibition of "Dancing with the Dragons – the Oral History of the Chinese Community". Through the memories of the old Chinese immigrants' early years after arrival in the UK, we get to know their personal, work and family lives, how the Chinese communities were formed and how the Chinese tried to integrate into the main steam communities. This was the first time that the history of the Chinese people was exhibited at the City Museum that helped with a better understanding of the Chinese communities by other races. The exhibition lasted four months and was warmly received by other minorities and the local people. According to the museum statistics, over 20,000 people visited the exhibition.

Our Chairman Kam Hung Ip was asked to act as the go between Portsmouth City Council and Zha Lai Te Qi in Xinganmeng, Inner Mongolia, PRC. For eighteen months he liaised with city council officials and persuaded the city councillors to pass a bill for the Friendly Link with Zha Lai Te Qi. The formal signing ceremony was held on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2004 in the Lord Mayor's Palour. It was a simple yet solemn ceremony attended by the then Lord Mayor Councillor Tom Blaire; the Executive for Culture & Leisure Councillor Terry Hall and Deputy Mayor of Zha Lai Te Qi Mr HaDa Sun who jointly sealed the agreement with their signatures. Other guests included Executive Members of PCA; Mr. Ruiyu Li, the Minister of Chinese Embassy in UK; Mr WeiPing Liu from the Sino-British Cultural Exchange Bureau. Strong trade and active co-operation is expected between the two cities in the future in commerce, science, culture and tourism. PCA will continue to act as a link to promote and make contributions to the cultural exchange between China and Britain.

### **Conclusions**

Time flies. PCA has been existing for 25 years. So much has happened in these years and the obstacles PCA faced and the accomplishments its members have achieved were never short of surprises and excitement.

Consecutive Committees of PCA officials, led by our first Chairman Mr David Lai then Mr. Kay Ming Lai, Mr. Shing Cheung Wong and Mr. Kam Ip worked selflessly and tirelessly for twenty five years for the benefit of all the members. They presented themselves as servants to our community and contributed what they could. Their good deeds are in line with typical traditional Chinese values. The effect is felt by each member in different ways according to their own personal background and experience. It's no surprise that they are all well respected by the members.

Chairman Kam Hung Ip chaired the 12<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee Board in 2001 and led the Committee during its tenure. Assisted by our General Secretary Mr Shee Hung Lee, Chairman Ip abided by our mission statement, operated within the articles of the Association, carried on with his predecessor's sterling work, launched his own initiatives, moved up with time, collaborated with committee members of different ages and raised PCA's standards of work to a new level. Their success is acknowledged by all members especially those founders of the Association.

Twenty five years is only a quarter of a century. If you were a volunteer worker, you probably feel that community development is hard work. PCA stayed within its mission statement and sought stable growth rather than spectacular expansion, which may not have fulfilled some member's dreams.

Sadly some founders of the association have passed away but they have left us with a legacy of triumph. Following in their foot steps, PCA will strive to continue its effort in providing the services that are expected by its members.

Looking forward, PCA aims to nurture new leaders, uphold its mission and tradition, seek further accomplishment and bring credits to the Chinese in Britain. Though 70 years old, I still hope to have some opportunity to achieve more.

A review of PCA's twenty five year history brings to me mixed memories and feelings. Words can not express all I wanted to say. Limited by space, I'll have to stop here.

Translated by Ms Hilary Tan  
May 2005, Portsmouth England