

Visit to the Lodge of Lupan No. 9387 (English Constitution), Zetland Hall, Hong Kong

I spent the week of April 6th through the 11th in Hong Kong during which time I had the opportunity to visit a lodge there. As a new Master Mason, having been raised just three weeks prior to the trip, I was apprehensive about going to visit a Lodge without more experience into the different facets of masonry, especially from an international standpoint. Nevertheless, I thought that it was a good opportunity and I started to do some research. My first searches on the internet led me to the website of Zetland Hall, which is the Masonic meeting hall for Freemasons in the Hong Kong. After reading through the pages on the site, I learned that there were lodge meetings there almost daily, taking place in the two meeting rooms on the second floor designated as the Red and Blue rooms.

My next step was to look into the 2008 Listing of Recognized Lodges and confirm that they were in concordance with Grand Lodge and its affiliates. I went to the Livingston Library and R:W:. Tom Savini helped me photocopy the relevant pages from the most recent edition. With the help of our Brother Secretary, I was able to obtain a Masonic passport which was a helpful addition to my dues card. With these documents in hand as well as having done some brushing up on my Q and A, I felt prepared to visit Zetland Hall. At that point I wasn't sure what my availability would be in regards to my work responsibilities so I could not plan on which Lodge to visit, and with the exception of one or two, most of the lodges did not have a website or contact information.

Before the trip, I also managed to do some reading about the building and its history. The current property is actually the third incarnation of the Hall, which is named after Thomas, Second Earl of Zetland, who was the Grand Master of the UGLE at the time when the first hall was built in 1846. In 1865, the first Hall was moved to a larger and more impressive building which was destroyed in 1944 by American bombing, while Hong Kong was under occupation by Japan. The Hall we rebuilt in its current form in 1950. A comprehensive history of the building as well as some brief history of Masonry in Hong Kong is available on the website: www.zetlandhall.com.

On Tuesday April 8th, I took the subway from where I was staying in Tsim Sha Tsui to Admiralty where Zetland Hall is located at 1 Kennedy Road. It was surprisingly close and even though many of the taxi drivers have trouble understanding English, or at least pretend to, they knew exactly where I was asking to go. I arrived at about 6:30 and the scheduled meetings began at 7. The front of the building was a plain grey façade with a stone plaque next to the main entrance showing the names of the Brothers who dedicated the building. Above the door was a square and compass, however, it did not have the "G" in the center. Later, I would learn that this was one of the differences between American Freemasonry and Masonry as it was practiced in Hong Kong, as well as some other parts of Europe. At the front entrance was a sign that read members only and there was an attendant who gestured for me to sign the visitor's log. There were two lodges meeting that night and I had no preconceived ideas about which Lodge to look for an introduce myself to. I was then approached by a gentleman who turned out to be the Junior Warden of The Lodge of Lupan No. 9387. After I told him that I was a "traveling brother from New York", we exchanged further introductions and he and another brother of the lodge led me to an unoccupied room where my credentials were examined.

For the opening question, I was asked to give the sign of Master Mason, which was only met with a confused look. This was due to the fact that this Lodge was under the English Constitution, of which, at the time, I didn't understand. I discovered also, that the due guards and signs were quite different, but the words were the same. After passing a few more questions, I was welcomed as a guest and invited to attend Lodge as well as the dinner which followed immediately afterwards. I was informed that I had come on a day that a candidate was to be raised to the 3rd degree, which I could not have planned better.

I was introduced to another Brother that was visiting from a lodge in England, and we were brought upstairs to the changing room, in which there were rows of lockers that housed all varieties of Aprons, swords and other Masonic regalia for members of the multiple lodges that met there. I noticed right away that the aprons worn by the Master Masons of this lodge were not the same as our plain white ones. They had a light blue border with two light blue rosettes on each corner. This was accompanied by a light blue collar and jewel. I learned that within English constitution, a plain white lambskin apron is worn only by an entered apprentice. As the lodge about to be opened on the 2nd degree and the entered apprentices were asked to retire, the Worshipful Master inquired about how I was clothed, as I appeared to be wearing the apron of an Entered Apprentice, but the Director of Ceremonies informed him that I was from a jurisdiction where a plain white apron was what was worn by Master Masons, and I was allowed to stay.

Upon first entering the Lodge room, I noticed that the layout was different than any room that I had yet seen. Firstly, and most obvious, the alter was located directly in front of the Worshipful Master. In the center of the room, where the alter is normally located in our lodges, there was a tracing board, which was at first covered, then revealed at the appropriate degree on which the lodge was currently open. The Lodge was initially opened on the 1st degree, then raised to the 2nd and 3rd, during each change, the correct tracing board was moved from the bottom of the stack and placed on top. Another difference was that the Secretary and Treasurer's desks were in the North, across the room and facing the Junior Warden.

After opening the Lodge on the 3rd degree and taking care of some usual lodge business, the Lodge proceeded with conferring the degree. Differences that I noticed here were the absence of the attire that we utilize during our ritual, as well as in lieu of the hoodwink, the lights in the room are all turned off, with the exception of a blacklight that was lit in the ceiling. This caused the white shirts and gloves of the brethren to be visible, but not their faces. It helped to create a very solemn atmosphere as the candidate was tested in open lodge.

Much of the wording in the ritual was different, but the overall format was the same. There was still an obligation, a charge and a lecture, however, instead of the drama of the murder of the Grand Master Hiram Abiff, there was a ritual involving a tarp with the outline of a coffin, on which the candidate was caused to first step over in several motions, and then instructed to lie down on. At the head of the coffin, there were placed a human skull and crossed bones. From what I gathered from the lecture associated with this portion of the ritual, this was to teach an understanding and recognition of mortality to the candidate. Once the candidate was raised, further instruction was given, in which I observed more of the differences in some other parts of our ritual such as, the Five Points of Fellowship and the Grand Hailing Sign of Distress, which were unlike those used by our lodges. After the degree had concluded, the candidate was seated as a new Master Mason. Some final announcements were made and the guests were introduced, at which point, I gave thanks to the Worshipful Master on behalf of Shakespeare Lodge and thanked him for him and the other brethren for their hospitality.

After the lodge was closed, I was brought to the smaller of two dining halls that were in Zetland Hall for the dinner. The food was excellent and I met some fascinating people. The brothers of Lupan Lodge were a diverse mix of British expats, and native Chinese from what I picked up from conversations that I had. I really admired the caliber of their ritual work and level of expertise on Masonic subjects, considering that for many of the Brothers that took part in the degree, English was a second or even third language. All in all, it was a wonderful experience and it gave me a good perspective on how Masonry transcends barriers of race, religion, nationality and culture. One of the brothers had said to me something quite insightful as we were comparing our two lodges which was, “its not about the differences, it’s the similarities that tie us together”.

When I returned home, I did some research on the origin of the name of the lodge, and I found that it was named after Lu Pan (or sometimes called Lu Ban), the Chinese god of Masons and Carpenters. There seems to be some basis in fact as he was a real person named Gongshu Ban from the State or region on Lu, therefore, he was known as Lu Pan. The historical Lu Pan was a carpenter, stonemason, philosopher, inventor and statesman. He is thought to have lived sometime around 770 BC to 476 BC. A lot of the ornate temples and castles with dragon motifs are attributed to him, as well as credit for some inventions such as the first manned glider, kite, arched bridge, siege ladder, wooden horse carriage and some other weapons used in naval warfare. Lu Pan is thought to have brought the plane, plum line and various other craftsmen’s tools to China. He is widely regarded as the first great architect of China, therefore deified. In modern times, the Lu Pan prize is given annually to the highest achievement of excellence in construction in China.

Bro. Daniel Jeon
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AND

RIGHT WORSHIPFUL BROTHER ARTHUR ANDERSON DAND
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IN THE PRESENCE OF MANY BRETHREN
ON THE SECOND DAY OF APRIL A.D. 1949, A.L. 5949.