

# SCHOLARSHIPS AND EDUCATION PROJECTS IN THE CHINESE FILIPINO COMMUNITY: AN OVERVIEW

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## **ABSTRACT**

The paper provides a brief discussion on the Chinese in the Philippines and the current state of education system in the community. While Chinese Filipino schools cater mainly to ethnic Chinese in the Philippines, these are also open to all Philippine residents. Almost all graduates of these schools eventually pursue higher education in Philippine colleges and universities. Upon graduation, they become professionals and serve not only the Chinese Filipino community but the larger Philippine society. The guiding principle of the community for the past two decades has been to produce graduates with a solid grounding in Chinese language and culture, who are multicultural and multilingual and equipped to meet the challenges of the new century. To help in furthering this objective, different scholarships and education projects are available in the Chinese Filipino community. The paper ends with a discussion on the major education projects that benefit the mainstream society, and hopefully identify the best practices that can be replicated outside of the Chinese Filipino community.

**Keywords:** *Chinese Filipino scholarships, education projects, Chinese language education*

Compared with other countries in Southeast Asia, the Chinese community in the Philippines is relatively small, whether in absolute number or in terms of percentage of the total population.

While the Chinese in Singapore is the dominant ethnic group at 75% of the total population; the Chinese in Malaysia, at roughly a third; the Chinese in Thailand at about 15%; and the Chinese in Indonesia, at about 3%, the ethnic Chinese in the Philippines comprises only an estimated 1.5% of the total Philippine population, with a big part of it concentrated in the Chinatown or Binondo area.

But in terms of being able to perpetuate and cherish Chinese culture and Chinese language education, the Chinese in the Philippines are luckier than their Southeast Asian counterparts. Thailand and Indonesia, for instance, have in the past prohibited or restricted Chinese language teaching.

Even when the Chinese schools in the Philippines were Filipinized in 1975 by then President Marcos, the schools were allowed to retain at least an hour a day of Chinese language instruction, although the teaching of Chinese history and geography and the teaching of math and the sciences in Chinese were scrapped.

At present, there are about 130 Chinese Filipino schools in the country, approximately 50 of which are in Metro Manila. The rest are scattered across the country.

### **State of Chinese Language Education in the Country**

Despite the Philippine government's policy of tolerance of Chinese language education in the country and despite the influx of new migrants from mainland China in the last decades, enrollment in Chinese Filipino schools<sup>1</sup> has steadily dwindled.

Statistics from the Association of Chinese Filipino Schools show that in the last ten years, from 2000 to 2010, total enrollment in the Chinese Filipino schools has decreased from about 90,000 to about 70,000, a decline of 20,000 or roughly 25%.

There are no formal and definitive surveys showing the reasons for such decline. But three main reasons are cited for this phenomenon.

*The shrinking size of the Chinese Filipino family.* The average Chinese Filipino family has become smaller, such that not even the influx of new migrants from China is able to arrest the decline of enrollment in the Chinese Filipino schools.

*Lack of interest among young Chinese Filipinos in the study of Chinese language.* Despite the rise of China as a major economic and political power in recent years. English is apparently considered the more important language by younger Chinese Filipinos so that many of them prefer to send their kids to schools perceived to offer better English language instruction.

While there are now dozens of Confucius Institutes in countries like Thailand and Indonesia, there are only a handful of Confucius Institutes in the Philippines, with very limited enrollment.

*Financial difficulties.* Finally, another reason for this steady decline is the financial difficulty many middle class Chinese Filipino parents are confronted with in meeting the cost of studying in these schools.

Some may find this hard to believe, but this is the reality. Some years ago, when World News, the leading Chinese daily in the country, announced that it will give education subsidies to financially challenged families, a long line started forming in front of

the newspaper's office even before sunrise, even if the amount to be given was just a few thousand pesos per family.

Of these three reasons, financial difficulty is considered to be the main reason and is the issue being addressed through fundraising in the Chinese Filipino community.

### **Subsidies for Students**

At the forefront of this effort is the Federation of Filipino-Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry Inc. (FFCCCII), the biggest organization of Chinese Filipino businessmen in the country, which has, in the last few years, aimed to raise about ₱10 million a year to subsidize the education of Chinese Filipino students, provided they continue their studies in Chinese Filipino schools.

Each recipient is given a yearly subsidy or grant of ₱10, 000, the benchmark or standard amount given by other organizations in the community that give grants and scholarships to financially-challenged students.

Family or clan associations and the hometown associations, which are basic components of the Chinese community in the Philippines, give approximately the same amount of subsidy, mainly to their members.

The scholarships managed by alumni associations, which are innumerable and mostly set up to honor parents and departed loved ones, and the scholarships and grants offered by the different businesses and religious groups also follow more or less the same formula.

## The FFCCCII's Operations

While the FFCCCII's efforts to help arrest the decline of enrollment in Chinese Filipino schools is a very recent one, the Federation has been known as the Philippine government's major partner in alleviating the shortage of classrooms in more than half a century, through its flagship project aptly called *Operation Barrio Schools*.

*Operation Barrio Schools* addresses the most basic need of the Philippine educational system, namely the provision of decent classrooms.

Started in 1960, the Federation, through *Operation Barrio Schools*, has supported the education program of eight Philippine presidents, since the time of President Carlos P. Garcia. It has built about 10,000 classrooms all over the country. It is one of the biggest private sector-led school building construction programs in the country. Two-classroom school buildings are built in public schools in all regions through donations from Federation members and from benevolent organizations, families and individuals within and outside the Chinese Filipino community.

Following the success of *Operation Barrio Schools*, the Federation was tapped by government as its partner in school building construction.

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo entrusted part of the President's Social Fund for the construction of school buildings under the PGMA School Building Project. A total of ₱78.3 million was turned over to FFCCCII for the construction of 207 two-classroom school buildings.

Senate President Franklin Drilon also assigned his Congressional Initiative Fund to FFCCCII to construct school buildings in rural areas all over the country. About ₱255 million were used to construct about 750 school buildings or 1,500 classrooms. Following Senator Drilon's lead, Senator Francis Pangilinan allocated part of his Congressional Initiative Fund, ₱40 million for Luzon and another ₱40 million for Visayas and Mindanao, to FFCCCII to build classrooms in rural areas. Senator Richard Gordon also allotted part of his funds to the project.

The Federation also partnered with the Department of Labor and Employment, Department of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Education in the program called *Classroom Galing sa Mamamayang Pilipino Abroad* or CGMA. The program solicits donations from Filipinos overseas for school building construction.

Organizations and individuals in the Chinese Filipino community who wish to support Philippine education also contribute to *Operation Barrio Schools*, as it is perceived to be the most efficient in building classrooms.

### **AKFI's Education Projects**

While focusing on poverty alleviation projects that benefit farmers and fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, and other marginalized sectors of society, the Angelo King Foundation, (AKFI), is also doing its share in supporting education in the country.

AKFI's education projects are two-pronged: support for infrastructure and provision of scholarships.

The Foundation supports institutions of higher learning such as Dela Salle University in Manila and Dasmaringas, Cavite; De La Salle

College of St. Benilde Angelo King International Center; San Beda College in Taytay, Rizal; Silliman University in Dumaguete; and St. John Institute in Bacolod City. It also supports Chinese Filipino schools, some of the beneficiaries of which are Xavier School, Immaculate Conception Academy, St. Stephen's High School, and Chiang Kai Shek College.

The Foundation is also a major donor to *Operation Barrio Schools*, having donated schools that were mostly built in Gawad Kalinga and Habitat Philippines communities throughout the country.

As a major donor institution, the Angelo King Foundation also supports scholarships and professorial chairs in the Chinese Filipino community and the mainstream society. Among the major beneficiaries are Chiang Kai Shek College Alumni Association, the Lioc Kui Tong or King Family Association, Assumption College in Makati, Silliman University's "K" Scholarship Program, College of St. Benilde's Deaf Program, Child Hope Asia, Synergeia Foundation<sup>2</sup> and the University of the Philippines' Scholarship Program in Mathematics.

Just recently, in 2011, responding to the call for help in arresting the declining enrollment in Chinese Filipino schools, the Angelo King Foundation partnered with the Association of Chinese Filipino Schools to provide scholarships to students of the 20 poorest Chinese Filipino schools in Metro Manila. This is in line with the Foundation's thrust of supporting the poorest of the poor.

### **MBFI's and PSBank's Programs**

Aside from the prestigious annual search for outstanding teachers, soldiers, police officers, artists and designers, projects which aim to

instill the value of excellence among Filipinos, the Metrobank Foundation Inc. (MBFI) supports several scholarship programs, foremost among which are the Share a Gift of Education (SAGE) and the College Scholarship Program.

SAGE is an educational assistance program for students of Chinese Filipino schools. It is being implemented in partnership with FFCCCII. The SAGE program awards a subsidy of ₱10, 000 per year per student, paid directly to the school where the student is enrolled. To date, a total of 2000 scholars have benefited from the program.

PSBank, a subsidiary of Metrobank, also started a similar scholarship program for Chinese Filipino schools in 2009, but in partnership with the Association of Chinese Filipino Schools instead of the FFCCCII.

Metrobank Foundation's College Scholarship Program, on the other hand, was established in 1995 to give academically qualified but financially challenged students access to quality higher education. The scholarship program represents the Foundation's social investments in the country's future. In partnership with over 40 of the country's best educational institutions, more than a thousand scholarship grants under the Program have been awarded so far.

Recipients of Metrobank Foundation's college scholarship must maintain a certain level of academic performance, a cut-off score of at least 85%, to continue enjoying the grants. The scholars also undergo seminars and training programs on values formation, leadership, and other skills to help them cope with the rigors of college life and equip them to become well-rounded citizens.



MBFI's College Scholarship Program is so successful and so professionally managed that some companies – Boysen Paint for instance – entrust their own college scholarship programs for management of the Foundation.

### **Charity First Foundation's from the Streets to the Campus**

“From the Streets to the Campus” is the scholarship program started by Charity First Foundation in 2002. Supporting students from state colleges and universities, the Program aims to help the poor and deserving students achieve higher education.

Aside from financial assistance, Charity First also provides values formation and skills training, where the scholars are taught love of country and the values of hard work and discipline, among others. Interestingly, graduates are encouraged to prioritize helping the family and supporting younger siblings to get a college education.

Its partners include the University of the Philippines (UP), Philippine Normal University (PNU), Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP), Technological University of the Philippines (TUP), Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila (PLM) and the City College of Manila (CCM).

To date, through the program, 511 scholars have finished various courses such as education, accountancy, engineering, nursing, social work, banking and finance, and others. The program hosts 300 scholars for the current school year.

What Charity First does is to look for sponsors for each of the scholars. The sponsors, mostly members of the Chinese Filipino community, support the scholars in terms of allowances and

expenses throughout the four years of college, without the scholars knowing who their sponsors are.

It is only during the graduation ceremony organized by Charity First to honor the graduates that the scholars find out for the first time the identity of their sponsors.

True to its slogan, the “From the Streets to the Campus” scholarship program of Charity First Foundation is able to uplift the quality of life of many poor but deserving youths and their families. Charity First also takes pride in contributing to the molding of many young Filipinos into highly motivated, productive, and responsible citizens of the country.

### **Chinese-Filipino Business Club’s *Pag-abot sa Pangarap***

This program is similar to, or is patterned after the Charity First Program. It also supports deserving scholars from state colleges and universities. In addition, it supports scholars from Chiang Kai Shek College and Philippine Cultural College, the two Chinese Filipino schools offering tertiary education.

Started in 2009 by Chinese-Filipino Business Club, a major business group in the community, the program has about a hundred scholars this school year. To date, the program has produced about 50 graduates.

As with Charity First Foundation, the Chinese Filipino Business Club provides values formation and skills and livelihood training to its scholars. The scholars are also required to maintain a certain level of academic performance and are encouraged to participate in some community activities.

Aside from its scholarship program for college students, the Chinese- Filipino Business Club's other projects include building classrooms and regularly conducting SME training and seminars, among others.

### **Aihu Foundation's *Van Aralan*: Education on Wheels**

Aihu<sup>3</sup> Foundation is a non-stock non-profit organization established in 2003 by a group of Chinese Filipinos who wanted to practice the Chinese dictum "Give a man fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime."

Aihu's flagship project is the Van Aralan, a 40-footer container van converted into a mobile computer classroom. Equipped with air-conditioning and 21 personal computers and a printer, this mobile classroom is dispatched to depressed communities to offer free computer education to out-of-school youth.

Started in 2004, there are now three vans roaming around municipalities in Metro Manila and nearby provinces of Bulacan, Cavite, Laguna, Tarlac, and Bataan. It has recently expanded its reach to include Albay, Aurora, Camarines Sur, Pampanga, Quezon, Pangasinan, Zambales and Sorsogon.

As of the end of 2011, graduates of Van Aralan total about 30,000, composed of out-of-school youth, government employees, and other individuals from older age groups.

Through the years, graduates of the Van Aralan have shown to equal the competence of graduates from private IT schools. Graduates of the program have an average of 90% passing rate in the TESDA assessment examination, the same examination taken by graduates of IT schools offering two-year diploma courses. Armed

with the certificate of competency they earn from TESDA, graduates of Aihu's Van Aralan have a better chance of getting employment.

Some of the major sponsors of the project are the Chinese-Filipino Business Club, Acer Computer, Toyota, Davies Paint, Mang Inasal, and many others.

Aside from three to four weeks of intensive computer education, the Aihu Foundation also conducts values formation classes to its recipients. They are taught the values of hard work and industry to attain self-sufficiency and financial independence.

In addition to the three Van Aralan computer schools, Aihu recently added a Van Aralan mobile cooking class, this time to teach people livelihood training in cooking and catering.

### **Kaisa Para sa Kaunlaran's *Kaisa sa 0-6***

It is generally agreed that the early childhood stage, or the first 6 years, is a child's formative stage. This is the period when the brain develops fastest, essential structures of language and thought are constructed, the foundations of basic attachment, security and confidence are formed, and the growth of physical abilities initiated.

Herein lies the significance of *Kaisa sa 0-6*, a project initiated by Kaisa Para sa Kaunlaran (Kaisa).

Kaisa is an organization of young Chinese Filipinos or Tsinoys working for the integration of Chinese Filipinos into mainstream Philippine society, so that they could be active participants in the tasks of nation-building and poverty alleviation.

Organized in 1987, Kaisa is engaged mainly in cultural and social projects. Among its major projects is the Kaisa-Angelo King Heritage Center in Intramuros, which, as the name implies, is in

collaboration with the Angelo King Foundation. The Center houses the *Bahay Tsinoy*, a museum showcasing the influences of ethnic Chinese in all aspects of Philippine life.

Kaisa launched *Kaisa Sa 0-6* in 2009. It is a national volunteering program for early childhood care and development or ECCD. This is in response to Republic Act 8980, or the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Act, the act institutionalizing a national system for ECCD that delivers health, nutrition, early education, and psychosocial services to young children, including children with special needs or of different cultural backgrounds.

*Kaisa Sa 0-6* aims to promote, recruit, field, facilitate, and recognize volunteers and their efforts for local ECCD. It also identifies the local ECCD coordinating committees of LGUs as local partners and co-volunteer managers. It supports and educates parents and organizes communities to improve the quality of life together. It opens a larger ground for everyone to work together for young children.

To date, Kaisa's partners are the local governments of the province of Ifugao, involving 11 municipalities, and the city of Tayabas in Quezon.

Together with its local partners, Kaisa holds workshops in volunteer training, team building, investment planning, action planning, and instructional materials development.

Although still modest in scope, *Kaisa Sa 0-6* offers another common ground for Tsinoy and other Filipinos to work together to care for young children. It is a program that can serve as model and be replicated by other organizations who want to work on early childhood care and development, especially in marginalized communities.

## Conclusion

The importance of education to the development of a country cannot be over-emphasized. It is our fervent hope that the organizations in the Chinese Filipino community will continue and expand their scholarships and education projects in support of Philippine education.

**About the Speaker:** Joaquin A. Sy is a writer-translator. He has written and translated 16 books, in English, Chinese, and Filipino. He has also translated teaching materials for Hanban and the Confucius Institute Headquarters in Beijing. He received a Citation for Translation from the Manila Critics Circle and the National Book Development Board at the National Book Awards in November 2012. Sy is at present a director or member of the boards of Philippine Savings Bank, Manila Doctors Hospital, and the Metrobank Group's two real estate companies in China. He is a consultant of the Metrobank Foundation and other subsidiaries of the Metrobank group. He is trustee of the Angelo King Foundation and director of the Unyon ng mga Manunulat sa Pilipinas or UMPIL. He was past president of Kaisa Para sa Kaunlaran, and former secretary-general of the Federation of Filipino-Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

## Editor's note

*This lecture was delivered on January 31, 2013 at the Ateneo de Manila University Science Education Complex Escaler Hall.*

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<sup>1</sup> Technically Filipino schools, albeit retaining classes in Chinese language.

<sup>2</sup> A coalition aiming to improve the quality of basic education in the country.

<sup>3</sup> Literally translated, Aihu, means "love and care."