

AFP Foundation for Philanthropy

CCC, Jan. 9, 2013

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.
Thank you for attending this conference on Chinese philanthropy. I want to point out that I am not a fundraiser, so I can't give you any professional tips. I am only going to talk about philanthropy from a Chinese perspective.

You would know that philanthropy means a love of our fellow human beings, and those of us who are philanthropic make an effort to promote happiness and wellbeing for others by giving of ourselves, of our time, effort and/or our money. Irrespective of where we come from, rich or poor, this is what all human beings are capable of.

I believe the world is made up of three types of people. Those who build are the givers, those who destroy are the takers, and those who do neither just exist. This afternoon, I'm going to talk about the builders.

There are many ways of giving. Even the very young can volunteer their time. Those of us in our senior years can also do the same according to our physical or financial abilities. I remember the first time I heard about Meals on Wheels was from my mother-in-law who helped through her church.

Voluntarism is philanthropy. Volunteers are from every walk of life, donating their time and their expertise. They get involved in projects of any size, and every person can make a difference. I am amazed how generous some people are, and

what they are willing to give, either in their own countries or abroad.

Many professionals go abroad to help the needy. We all have friends who are doctors, dentists and nurses who spend their holidays going to developing countries to provide free service for needy patients. They even bring supplies and equipment with them. There are many groups that do this so admirably.

I'll just give you one example. How many of you have heard of ORBIS Flying Eye Hospital? I would like to say a few words about them since I am on the ORBIS Canada board. ORBIS International has been in existence for 30 years, and has saved tens of millions from blindness in the developing world. The number of volunteer doctors, nurses and pilots are staggering. The

ORBIS team not only do surgery, they also teach the local communities and build capacity. They have a classroom on the plane. And yes, they do have a number of projects in China.

Now, let me address today's conference, which is one of the "diversity to inclusion" series, with the ethnic Chinese community being the first. There is a presumption that people from different cultures look at philanthropy differently. In Chinese, the words for philanthropy are "good deeds" or "kind deeds." These terms have been in existence from time immemorial.

For what I know, philanthropy in my family started from my grandfather's days. My great grandfather was poor, so he had to go to San Francisco during the gold rush days to make a

living. I grew up in Hong Kong and attended St. Paul's co-educational College since grade 3.

Looking at the foundation stone of the school one day, I realized that my grandfather was the only individual in Hong Kong who donated a large sum of money towards the building of St. Paul's Girls School at the beginning of the 20th century, which later became the co-ed College that I attended. He was a progressive man who believed in education for girls a hundred years ago.

We used to have morning assembly in Lee Hysan Hall, named after my grandfather whose photograph hung on the right side of the stage. How did I feel? I thought I had better work hard to be the best student I could be because I would be noticed. One day, one of my teachers said, "I am amazed at how hard you work with the family

background that you have!” Even though I was very young, I didn’t think that was an appropriate comment.

Another thing I remember very well from my childhood days was the South China Stadium. Our extended family members often went there where my brother and I used to ride our bikes. Why were we allowed to do that? I found out that it was because my grandfather convinced the colonial government to provide the land for Chinese youth in order for them to have a place for sports. Whether my family was involved with the building of the stadium or not, I don’t know.

Many years ago, a child would hear an adult say, “I don’t care to be the richest person in Hong Kong, I just want to make sure people are looked

after.” “One should not speculate because it drives prices up and people can’t afford to live. One must invest in businesses to provide good jobs for the employees so that their children will have a chance for a good education.” And, “One university is not enough for the young people in Hong Kong. The high school graduates need another university (1960s).” That child was I, and the speaker was my father. There were many other things he said that have left a deep impression in my mind. Throughout my childhood and youth, I was greatly influenced by his beliefs and his actions.

I learnt, at a very young age, that a kind word, or giving people a helping hand in improving their lives, makes life much more meaningful than the accumulation of wealth.

Philanthropy, to my father, was directed locally. Many things he did was for the people of Hong Kong and Mainland China. That was common in his generation because they recognized that the needs were there.

Many of you would know that Chinese have long memories, and relationships are important. Years after my father died, I remember my mother receiving gifts, and was paid respect to by those whom my father had helped soon after the 2nd world war when life was difficult in post-war Hong Kong. This is a Chinese custom because we don't forget an act of kindness or a good deed.

This Chinese tradition continued when people went abroad to settle. There is somewhere close to

100 million ethnic Chinese living overseas, on every continent, and in the old days, this included Hong Kong and Macao. Depending on the societies we came from, we are culturally different. However, there is a thread that binds us, and that is, we all help the Chinese people, wherever they may be. So the saying “charity begins at home” does have significant meaning.

To illustrate this, I’ll use the Fu Hui Education Foundation, which is a good Canadian example that has successfully helped, over a number of years, the orphaned Yi minority children in Liangshan, Sichuan province. Many of these children are orphans left behind by parents who died from aids and drug use, and they now have a chance to go to school. The most vulnerable are the girls who are put into school dormitories

to keep them out of danger of being preyed upon.

The tradition of money and human resources brought into China from the overseas Chinese communities has continued for hundreds of years, not only to assist those in need, but also in the building of bridges, roads, schools and hospitals. The contributions of the overseas Chinese communities are so significant that there are museums established in China to honour and record the lives of these individuals and their communities abroad. Such as - there would be a gallery on the Chinese in Canada, one on the U.S. Brazil, Malaysia etc.

In my family, my ancestors' contributions in China were limited to Guangdong province, in our

ancestral counties as well as in our villages – all close to Hong Kong. To say that the Chinese are clannish is an understatement. When we visit, we are welcomed everywhere – hospitals, primary and middle schools, and even factories that were established to be owned by the villagers to increase their income.

We all know the importance of education to the Chinese. For centuries and until the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (1949), wealthy families in the villages built schools in their family compound, not only to educate their own children, but also the bright sons of the poor villagers, who would then have the chance to take the imperial exams. Since there has never been an aristocracy or a class system in China, the Chinese have always recognized that

education is the only key to success. One successful scholar would bring glory to his entire county.

During my father's lifetime, he used to give financial support to needy, qualified students to go to university because it was expensive in Hong Kong. All they had to do was to write to him and show proof of their acceptance by the university. Today, there are foundations that provide scholarships to Chinese youths to the best universities in the world. The Chinese who settled overseas would often extend the support for higher education to any qualified, needy students. Since education is the path to a good future, this is the ultimate "good deed."

China is a very large country and people from different areas would speak different dialects, have distinct traditions as well as foods. In Imperial times (before 1911), when they travelled to different provinces in China, those from the same villages or counties would form associations to help each other. This tradition continued when the Chinese went overseas.

When the Chinese first came to settle in British North America (Canada) in large numbers during the gold rush days in the middle of the 19th century, the same type of associations were formed based on the county of origin or family name. Also, the Chinese Benevolent Associations as well as the Chee Kung Tong, (Chinese Freemasons,) were established to offer help to all new settlers. These associations are still in

existence today. This shows that philanthropy is an intrinsic part of Chinese culture.

In Canada, philanthropic support towards the ethnic Chinese community and mainstream society used to be separate. It wasn't until the 1980s that there was cross-cultural support. From my own experience, an organization like the Mon Sheong Foundation, founded in 1964, only had the support of ethnic Chinese and was very much Chinatown based until the early 1990s. That was when it started having support from the mainstream community, their corporations, businesses, as well as attendance to its annual Cathay Ball.

I have lived in Canada for almost 54 years, and have witnessed the evolution of philanthropy.

Since the late 1970s, our diverse population has become increasingly involved in contributing, not only to our own ethnic communities, but also to Canadian society. One just has to look at how the Chinese community has moved in to help organizations such as our hospitals, the Kidney Foundation, the Cancer Foundation, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, and the Diabetes Association, and many others. This is the work of this younger generation, a topic you'll be hearing more about this afternoon.

A good example of the evolution in philanthropy is the Centre for Information and Community Services of Ontario. It started in 1968 in Toronto, with a group of Chinese students volunteering information and interpretation services to Chinese residents. In 1974 it became the Chinese Interpreter and Information Services

(ciis), and in 1988 the name was changed to Chinese Information and Community Services (cics). And, since 1998, it has become the Centre for Information and Community Services of Ontario with the same acronym. It now serves immigrants of all ethnic backgrounds. So what started as a student effort to help those in the Chinese community now serves immigrants to Ontario from all over the world.

Today, philanthropy in terms of donating money has become very sophisticated. Foundations are established to direct these donations. Of course, laws for charitable donations are different in different countries. There are many charitable foundations established by the Chinese in Hong Kong, and a number of them will only direct donations to the

Chinese population within or outside China, both in the relief of the needy, to help the younger generation to attain higher education, as well as promote Chinese culture, art, and traditions. One foundation that I know of, which promotes Chinese culture exceptionally well internationally, is the Robert H.N. Ho Foundation. This was the Foundation that has made the exhibition of the Terracotta Warriors across Canada possible, among many other Chinese cultural exhibitions the Foundation supports around the world.

In Canada, we are very aware that we live in a high tax country, and charitable donations, in money or in kind, are carefully considered. This topic will be on your breakout session this afternoon. So, what started off as a “good deed” or a “kind deed” now also has tax implications.

Life is certainly not getting any easier, is it?

Whether you are religious or not, one sentence will always ring true - it is indeed more blessed to give than to receive.

Thank you for your attention. Have fun this afternoon.