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Manila, Beijing forge sister-city links



Manila Mayor Lito Atienza (R) and visiting Beijing Mayor Wang Qishan sign the Manila-Beijing sister city agreement on 14 November 2005.

The Philippine capital of Manila and the Chinese capital of Beijing became sister-cities on 14 November 2005.

Under the agreement signed by Manila Mayor Lito Atienza and visiting Beijing Mayor Wang Qishan, the two cities agreed to

have more exchanges and cooperation in the fields of economy, culture, education, city construction, sports, health and sanitation.

At the signing ceremony, Mayor Wang said that Beijing and Manila share many common features. He also said that both are making achievements in their respective economic and social development, and expressed confidence that the two cities will further strengthen their relations through more exchanges and bilateral visits of personnel.

Mayor Atienza said that when he visited Beijing two years ago, he was deeply impressed by the city's construction and economic and social development. Since then, he has regarded Beijing as a model for Manila's development.

Philippines, China sign Cultural Program



NCCA Chairman Ambeth R. Ocampo shakes hands with Chinese Culture Minister Sun Jiazheng after signing the 2005-2007 RP-China Cultural Program in Foshan. Standing behind are (L-R) Embassy Third Secretary Marie-Charlotte Tang, Philippine National Library Director Prudenciana C. Cruz, and Chinese Ministry of Culture Bureau of External Cultural Relations Deputy Director-General Zhang Aiping.

The Philippines and China signed the 2005-2007 Executive Program of the Philippines-China Cultural Agreement on 12 November 2005 on the sidelines of the Cultural Asia Ministerial Meeting in Foshan City, Guangdong Province.

Signed by National Commission for Culture and the Arts Chairman Ambeth R. Ocampo and Chinese Minister of Culture Sun Jiazheng, the agreement covers five general areas and 17 items of exchange in the fields of culture, the arts, history, education, research, books and publications, and film.

The Program is the 13th implementing protocol of the 1979 RP-China Cultural Agreement. On the government front, the RP-China cultural program ranks as one of the Philippines' broadest and most extensive with any other country.

Philippines joins 2nd China-ASEAN Expo

Philippine Ambassador Willy C. Gaa joined the Philippine delegation to the *Second China-ASEAN Expo* (CAEXPO) on 18-20 October 2005 in Nanning.

The Philippine delegation, headed by Trade and Industry Undersecretary Zorayda Amelia C. Alonzo, also included Special Envoy for China and Chairman of the Philippines-China Business Council Jose E. B. Antonio, Philippine Consul General to Guangzhou Erlinda Q. Gavino, other national and local government officials, and members of the Philippine business sector.

In Nanning, Ambassador Gaa also participated in the *Roundtable Discussion on Philippine Investment Policies and Environment* on 20 October 2005, during which he invited Chinese businessmen to invest in the Philippines, in particular, in the Philippines' mining sector.

The CAEXPO is an initiative of Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao to promote economic relations between China and ASEAN. According to the Expo Secretariat, the 2nd Expo generated a trading volume of US\$1.15 billion, an increase of 6 percent over the trade volume generated by the previous year's Expo.



DTI Undersecretary Zorayda Alonzo (center), Ambassador and Mrs. Gaa (2nd and 3rd from right) at the CAEXPO. Also in the photo are Trade Attaché and Mrs. Enrico Mariano (1st and 2nd from left) and Trade Attaché Archimedes Gomez (right).

Philippines-China trade hits US\$17.6B in 2005

Trade between the Philippines and China reached US\$17.6 billion in 2005, up 32 percent from 2004.

According to figures from the Customs General Administration of China, Philippine exports to China amounted to US\$12.87 billion, while imports from China reached US\$4.69 billion, representing growth rates of 42 and 9.8 percentages, respectively. The Philippines posted a trade surplus of US\$8.18 billion.

Top Philippine exports include semi-conductor devices, machinery and mechanical appliances and their parts, copper, mineral oils, and bananas.

RP-China trade reached 13.3 billion in 2004. For the past five years, bilateral trade has been growing at an average rate of 42.61 percent. During the visit of Chinese President Hu Jintao to the Philippines, a trade volume of US\$30 billion was targeted by 2010.

DIPLOMATIC NOTES

Philippines joins Cultural Asia Ministerial Forum

The Philippines joined other Asian countries in participating in the *Cultural Asia Ministerial Forum* held in Foshan, Guangdong on 10-12 November 2005.

Representing the Philippines were National Commission for Culture and the Arts Chairman Ambeth R. Ocampo, National Library Director Prudenciana C. Cruz and Philippine Embassy Third Secretary Marie-Charlotte G. Tang.

The meeting adopted the *Foshan Statement* which calls for Asian countries to strengthen dialogue, cultural exchange and cooperation in the face of globalization.

Simultaneous with the Ministerial Forum was the holding of the 7th *Asian Arts Festival*, in which the Philippines was represented by the modern ballet-jazz group *Airdance*.



The Philippine delegation to the Cultural Asia Ministerial Forum held on 10-12 November 2005 in Foshan. L-R, Philippine Embassy Third Secretary Marie-Charlotte Tang, NCCA Chairman Ambeth R. Ocampo, and National Library Director Prudenciana C. Cruz.

RP joins SME high-level seminar

The Philippines, led by Trade and Industry Undersecretary Zorayda Amelia C. Alonzo, participated in the *First High-level Meeting on Promoting SMEs Development and Investment in East Asia* organized by China's National Development and Reform Commission on 27-28 October 2005 at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse.

Cainta Mayor visits Beijing



Cainta Mayor Ramon "Mon" Ilagan (3rd from right), Ambassador Gaa and Agriculture Attache William Co (4th and 5th from right) at the Embassy. Mayor Ilagan led a delegation of Cainta officials to study the possibility of forging links with Haidian District in Beijing.

Ambassador Gaa promotes RP in Zhejiang and Shijiazhuang



Philippine Ambassador to China Willy C. Gaa promoted the Philippines as an investment destination to Chinese businessmen at the 2005 Commodities Exposition in Wenzhou, Zhejiang on 11-14 October 2005 and at the Shijiazhuang International Investment and Trade Conference on 1 November 2005. He is shown here (3rd from right) at the opening ceremony of the Wenzhou Expo.

RP joins 3rd East Asia Forum

The Philippines, represented by Embassy Minister Jaime Victor B. Ledda and Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) Senior Research Fellow Dr. Maria Melanie Milo, participated in the *Third East Asia Forum* held on 31 October 2005 at the Asia Hotel. Dr. Milo also participated in the *Joint Study Convention on East Asia Cooperation* held on 30 October.

Former Chinese Envoy to RP bids farewell to Ambassador Gaa



Former Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines Huang Guifang (center, standing) and his wife Madame Zhang (seated, 2nd from right) hosted an early farewell dinner for Ambassador and Madame Gaa on 1 December 2005. Ambassador Gaa is set to depart Beijing in January 2006. Also in photo are officials of the Asia-Africa Development Exchange Foundation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

RP universities visit Embassy

Professors and students of the University of Asia and Pacific (UAP) and the Asian Institute of Management (AIM) visited the Embassy on 4 November and 13 December, respectively, as part of their study tours to China.

At the Embassy, the UAP students were briefed by Embassy officers on Philippines-China relations. The students, who are taking up Political Economy, also visited the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), where they received a lecture on ASEAN-China relations from Professor Han Feng, Deputy Director of the CASS Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies. They were also given a tour of the Beijing University by Chinese students taking up Philippine studies.

The AIM students, who are taking a course on entrepreneurship, were given briefings on how to do business in China by Professor Xu Ningning, Deputy Secretary-General of the ASEAN-China Business Council, and two Chinese alumna of the AIM.



Embassy Minister Jaime Victor B. Ledda and Mrs. Ledda (2nd and 1st from left) pose with CASS IAPS Deputy Director Han Feng (center), Prof. John Avila of the UAP and other teachers and students of the UAP at the CASS.

Madame Gaa performs in New Year Gala



Despite an injured leg, Madame Erlinda C. Gaa, spouse of Ambassador Gaa, joined the spouses of other ASEAN ambassadors in China in performing a medley of songs from ASEAN countries at the *2006 Happy New Year Gala Gathering of Distinguished Ladies* on 14 December 2005 at the Huafeng Hotel.

The Gala is organized by the Women's Working Group of the Association of Former Diplomats of China, of which Madame Qin Xiaomei, wife of Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhao-xing, is the Vice President.

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Address: No. 23 XiuShui Bei Jie,
Jianguomenwai, Beijing
People's Republic of China 100600
Trunklines: (10) 6532 1872, 6532 2451, 6532 2518
Fax No: (10) 6532 3761
E-mail: beijingpe@cinet.com.cn
www.philembassy-china.org

COMMUNITY BRIEFS

Filcom celebrates Christmas, raises funds via “Silid Aralan Galing sa Pinoy sa Beijing” (SAGIP-Beijing)



The Filipino community in Beijing will share the spirit of Christmas

with less privileged schoolchildren back home by heeding the Philippine government’s call for overseas Filipinos to donate funds for the construction of classrooms in the Philippines.

The small community, which currently numbers around 700, decided in November to raise US\$8,000 for the construction of two classrooms in a public school in Cainta, Rizal. The fund-raising project is called *Silid Aralan Galing sa Pinoy sa Beijing* (SAGIP-Beijing).

To make the project fun and participatory, the community raised funds through the holding of a Halloween disco party, a month-long sports festival, and during the annual Filipino community Christmas party on 11 December.

Following tradition, the Christmas Party was held at the Philippine Embassy Social Hall with Beijing-based bands and disc jockeys performing voluntarily for their compatriots. But unlike last year, where everybody was encouraged to contribute food dishes for a potluck meal, enterprising Fili-

pinos rented stalls from the SAGIP Committee and sold Philippine delicacies at very affordable prices.

The SAGIP Committee was also able to raise funds through the sale of raffle tickets, the prizes of which were donated by Philippine companies based in Beijing and members of the Filipino community. The first prize was a Beijing-Manila-Beijing air ticket donated by Philippine Airlines. Western Union Money Transfer also donated a substantial amount to the project.

In his Christmas message, Philippine Ambassador to China Willy C. Gaa congratulated the Filipino community for launching the fund-raising activities in the spirit of nationalism, *bayanihan*, and camaraderie.

He observed that Filcom events have ceased to be merely social activities, but have evolved into avenues for Filipinos to share their blessings with disadvantaged countrymen. He recalled that at the Christmas party in 2004, the Filipino community donated P195,000 to the government’s relief efforts for typhoon victims in Luzon.

At the end of the Party, the SAGIP project was able to raise almost US\$6,000, falling short of the project’s goal by US\$2,000. The SAGIP Committee aims to organize two more fund-raising projects in early 2006 to reach the targeted amount of US\$8,000.



Filipino bands performing at the Christmas party on 11 December.



The jubilant Red Team. Winners of the month-long SAGIP Beijing basketball tournament.

Embassy observes Rizal Day



Officers and staff of the Philippine Embassy and their family members marked the 109th death anniversary of national hero Dr. Jose P. Rizal with a flag-raising ceremony at the Embassy grounds on 30 December.



The flag ceremony was followed by a reading of selected stanzas of Rizal’s “Mi Ultimo Adios” in Filipino by children of the Embassy staff and a simple Filipino breakfast.

FPFVR meets Filcom



Former President Fidel V. Ramos poses with Ambassador Gaa and Filipino media practitioners in Beijing (L-R) Chito Sta. Romana, Jimmy Flor Cruz, and Eric Baculinao. The former President was in Beijing to attend the “2nd Annual Conference of the Education Forum for Asia” on 13-16 October 2005.

Overseas Absentee Voting starts

The Philippine Embassy would like to inform Filipinos that the Overseas Absentee Voting (OAV) registration for the next Philippine elections started on 10 October 2006 and will continue until 31 August 2006.

The schedule for registration has been changed from Sunday to Friday to Monday to Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Qualified applicants are reminded to bring their passports.

Embassy helps shipwrecked seamen

The Philippine Embassy assisted in repatriating ten Filipino seamen who were rescued by Chinese Vessel *M/V Tian Rong Hai* when the vessel that they were serving on sank 25 miles off the Port of Currimao in Ilocos Norte in the Philippines on 18 November 2005.

According to the seamen, their vessel, the *Maltese M/V Bright Sun*, sank after it collided with another vessel. The crew members abandoned ship amid strong waves and floated nine hours on a raft-boat in shark-infested waters until the Chinese vessel succeeded in rescuing them. Also rescued were ten South Korean seamen.

Philippine Embassy Vice Consul Jim Tito San Agustin fetched the Filipino survivors upon their disembarkation in Dalian, China on 23 November 2005, and worked closely with the *M/V Bright Sun’s* and *M/V Tian Rong Hai’s* respective manning agencies in expediting the repatriation of the Filipinos.



Vice Consul Jim Tito San Agustin (right, standing) with the rescued seamen in Dalian.

HIGHLIGHTS OF PHILIPPINES-CHINA RELATIONS

106 Chinese youth visit the Philippines



Mr Yang Yue, Vice President of the All-China Youth Federation (2nd from right), Mr. Bam Aquino (center) at the ground-breaking ceremony of the Filipino-Sino Youth Friendship Village in Pacita, Metro Manila. Witnessing the event are members of the Chinese youth delegation.

A delegation of 106 Chinese youth headed by Mr. Yang Yue, Vice President of the All-China Youth Federation (ACYF), visited the Philippines on 6-12 November 2005 at the invitation of the National Youth Commission (NYC).

The visit, made to reciprocate that

of a 114-member Filipino youth delegation to China in July 2005, was an activity to mark the 30th anniversary of diplomatic ties between the Philippines and China. It also implements the *Co-operation Agreement on Youth Affairs* between the NYC and the ACYF.

In Manila, the Chinese youth delegation attended the ground-breaking ceremony for the *Filipino-Sino Youth Friendship Village* in Pacita, Metro Manila. The village will be built with a US\$50,000 grant from the ACYF.

Ms. Evangeline Lourdes "Luli" Arroyo hosted a dinner for the youth delegation on 7 November.

The Chinese youth delegation was then divided into six groups, which separately visited Cebu, Bohol, Panay, Pangasinan, Cavite/Laguna, and Davao.

Former President Fidel Ramos joined the farewell reception for the Chinese youth delegation on 11 November 2005.

PAL resumes Beijing flights

Philippine Airlines (PAL), the Philippines' national air carrier, resumed direct flights to Beijing on 11 November 2005 after a hiatus of 16 years.

In his speech at the inaugural dinner hosted by PAL Chairman Lucio Tan at the Beijing Hotel, Philippine Ambassador to China Willy C. Gaa called the resumption "a milestone that punctuates an eventful year when the Philippines and China are celebrating the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations."

On board the inaugural flight were Madame Lovely Romulo, wife of Foreign Secretary Romulo; Philippine Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs Franklin M. Ebdalin, Mrs. Ebdalin and other Philippine personalities.

With the direct flights to Beijing, PAL has directly linked the Philippines with nonstop flights to a total of five Chinese cities, the most that the Philippines has with any other country.

Chinese tourists up 151%

Chinese tourist arrivals to the Philippines reached 84,000 for the period January-October 2005, representing an increase of 151 percent over the same period in 2004. This surpasses the official target of 70,000 Chinese visitors for 2005.

Accounting for four percent of total tourist arrivals to the Philippines, China is the sixth largest source of tourists to the Philippines, ranking behind the US, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Ambassador Gaa turns over ACB Chairmanship

Philippine Ambassador to China Willy C. Gaa turned over the chairmanship of the ASEAN Committee, Beijing (ACB), to Singapore Ambassador Chin Siat-yoon on 13 December 2005 at the Embassy of Myanmar.

During Ambassador Gaa's term, the ACB called on Beijing Mayor Wang Qishan, exchanged views on ASEAN-China cooperation with Foreign Affairs Director-General Cui Tiankai, and had a luncheon meeting with ASEAN-China Business Council Deputy Secretary-General Xu Ningning. The Ambassador also hosted a videoke party for the ASEAN ambassadors and their spouses and revived the publication of the ACB newsletter.

The ACB is an ASEAN third country committee composed of the ten heads of mission of the ASEAN Embassies in Beijing. Its chairmanship is rotated among the Ambassadors in alphabetical order every four months.



Philippine Ambassador Willy C. Gaa, ACB Chairman for the period September-December 2005, presents Beijing Mayor Wang Qishan with the ACB plaque following the call of the ACB on the mayor on 25 October 2005.

Philippines holds first-ever film festival in China



The Philippines held its first-ever film festival in China on 23-28 November 2005 at the Oriental Plaza Star City Cinema.

Co-organized by the Philippine National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), the Chinese State Administration for Film, Radio and Television (SAFRT), the Philippine Embassy and the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs, the festival is one of the activities marking the 30th anniversary of Philippines-China diplomatic relations. Philippine Airlines was a major sponsor of the festival.

Shown were the following award-winning films: *Jose Rizal*, *Magnifico*, *Minsan Pa*, *Crying Ladies*, *Milan* and *Tanging Yaman*.

A delegation from the Philippines composed of NCCA Chairman Ambeth R. Ocampo, National Artist for Film Eddie Romero, film makers Jeffrey Jeturian and Elvert de la Cruz Bañares, and actress Angel Aquino visited Beijing for the occasion.

It may be recalled that Mr. Romero was a co-director of the film jointly produced by the Philippines and China entitled *Hari sa Hari, Lahi sa Lahi* on the story of the Sultan of Sulu who visited China in the 15th century. Mr. Jeturian directed *Minsan Pa* while Ms. Aquino acted in *Crying Ladies*.



Ambassador Gaa (2nd from left) beside SAFRT Vice Minister Zhao Shi (3rd from left). She is flanked by NCCA Chairman Ambeth Ocampo, National Artist Eddie Romero, NCCA Consultant and independent filmmaker Elvert Bañares, and director Jeffrey Jeturian.

Post to launch book in 2006

The Embassy will be launching a book entitled "*Philippines-China Agreements (1975-2005): Bridges towards the Golden Age of Partnership*" in the first quarter of 2006.

The book will be one of the final projects of the Embassy to mark the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the Philippines and the People's Republic of China.