

## EDUCATION



# CLAN-DO ATTITUDE

An immigrant from one of China's oldest cities offers fresh hope to Kwun Tong college students through scholarships to a London university, writes Linda Yeung

In the midst of public housing estates in Kwun Tong, Ning Po College and Ning Po No 2 College are sister schools formed decades ago by a group of clansmen – from Ningbo.

They're migrants from the busy port city south of Shanghai; some members rank among the who's who in Hong Kong. The best-known of them was the late shipping tycoon Y.K. Pao and the late movie mogul and philanthropist Run Run Shaw.

While Shaw and Pao invested phenomenally in education in China, some of their fellow clansmen, also self-made entrepreneurs, sought to improve the prospects of underprivileged families here through education. At the two Ning Po colleges, about half of the students are from families on welfare or government subsidies.

A founder of the schools, 90-year-old entrepreneur Li Dak-sum, is also founding member of the Ningbo Residents Association (Hong Kong). He has remained as chairman of the boards of both schools.

Given the small percentage of graduates entering university, either locally or abroad, another Ningbo-born resident is leading a fresh drive to enhance the student mix by offering top students scholarships to study at Queen Mary University of London.

He is retired lawyer Robert Wang, 70, a law graduate of the university and also permanent honorary chairman of the Ningbo Residents Association.

At the age of five, he moved from Ningbo to Hong Kong with his mother to join his father who had fled the mainland earlier due to political instability. The young Wang attended La Salle College before pursuing law at the British university.

It was he who, in February, broached the idea of offering scholarships to the school population to enable those with the ability to study at his alma mater. Within a month, fellow Ningbo-born residents including Li, had made donations amounting to HK\$10 million.

Wang has high hopes that the offers will help attract high-calibre students who could become role models as well as raise the schools' profile.

Full of nostalgia for his student days in Britain, Wang met up with Queen Mary president Professor Simon Gaskell during his recent visit to the territory and is due to discuss with the university further arrangements for the

scholarship scheme. "The university reacted positively to our idea," he says.

In the 1980s, Wang was instrumental in soliciting scholarships for Tsinghua University students who wanted to pursue graduate studies at Jesus College, Oxford.

"That gave us a taste of what can be achieved," he says. No ceiling has yet been set on the number of recipients of the latest offer. Getting the right students, he believes, is the first step to raising both the profile and academic standing of the schools.

"Our long-term goal will be to become a band one school [schools with a high percentage of high-achieving students]. I don't think any clansmen association will support education the way we do so adamantly, single-mindedly," says Wang.

"If this [scholarship] programme is successful we will raise the amount until the whole world gets to know that our

schools will give their son or daughter a chance to go to a top university."

A once ambitious investor and lawyer, Wang is critical of the declining educational standard in local schools, notably students' English and Chinese proficiency.



## We Ningbo people hang on to our ideals until the last drop of blood

ROBERT WANG, RETIRED LAWYER

He blames it on the new medium of instruction policy introduced in 1997 that requires public schools to teach in Chinese. Under a fine-tuning measure introduced in 2010, secondary schools began to enjoy more flexibility, being allowed to increase lesson time in English, and were free to teach in Chinese or English as long as a certain percentage of their form one intake was capable of learning through English, defined as being in the "top 40 per cent" group.

"We got very frustrated because parents don't like to send their kids to a school in which the medium of

instruction is Chinese. How do we raise our own profile, apply to the education department to change the medium of instruction?" says Wang.

To help promote a reading culture, he has donated book prizes to the two schools for years. More efforts are being made by the schools to create a stronger English environment. At Ning Po No 2 College, set up in 1987, 16 years after its sister school, English banners and vocabulary cards are put up on campus and on the wall outside classrooms respectively; a native English-speaking teacher regularly takes students on outings in addition to class lessons. In their free time, students can go online and access various material on computers at the IT corridor – a section of a wide corridor converted into an IT zone with donations from board directors.

Secondary One to Three students are given compulsory training in personal grooming that also covers communication and personal presentation skills. Plans are under way to cultivate students' understanding about ethics and integrity, including punctuality.

Despite the new initiatives, principal Wong King-hung concedes it is difficult to recruit top students compared with schools with a long-standing reputation. "I always tell parents they should find a school that suits their child, not just a famous name," he says. Moreover, he has the backing of Wang, who pledges: "At any cost, we want to change the schools' current status from band two to band one. One day when we have enough band one students, we will succeed. We will have given Ningbo people a great deal of satisfaction with our achievement in education."

There is no doubting Wang's resolve to achieve that goal. "We Ningbo people don't believe in 'we can't' as an answer. We are very tenacious. We hang on to our ideals until the last drop of blood."

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Students at Ning Po No 2 College (top); Robert Wang, Dr D.S. Li and Queen Mary president professor Simon Gaskell (left).