

Hong Myung-ki, 'Korean American King of Donations' **Drove development of overseas Korean business network,** **erected statue of Ahn Chang-ho, led scholarship programs for** **next generation** **California state legislature establishes 'Hong Myung-ki Day'**



Former Chairman Hong Myung-ki, the "Korean American King of Donations," is the OKA's Overseas Korean of the Month for April.

The Overseas Koreans Agency has named Hong Myung-ki (1934-2021), former chairman of the M&L Hong Foundation (formerly known as the Bright Future Foundation), the Overseas Korean of the Month for April 2025.

A successful Korean American entrepreneur who is often referred to as the "Godfather of the world's overseas Korean merchants," Hong supported the preservation of the history of the independence movement for Koreans living in the United States, including the construction of a statue of Dosan Ahn Chang-ho and the restoration of the Korean National Association building, as well as supporting education and scholarship programs for the next generation of Korean Americans.

Born in Seoul in 1934 and graduating from Jungang High School, Hong immigrated to the United States in 1954, and despite the

difficulties of earning his own tuition and living expenses, he did not give up on his education and graduated from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) with a degree in chemistry, after which he was employed by a paint company.

For the next 22 years, he worked as a researcher at the Whittaker Company, rising through the ranks to become a senior researcher and laboratory director. However, he felt limited by racial discrimination as he struggled to get promoted due to his ethnicity, and in 1986, at the age of 51, he founded Dura Coat Products, a specialty paint company for industrial and architectural applications.

Although he faced many difficulties in the early years of his business, through relentless research and development, he grew Dura Coat into the No. 1 company in U.S. market share with annual sales of US\$300 million within 30 years and became a representative giant of the American dream.

His story of starting a business at such a late age and realizing the American dream has deeply touched and inspired many people. Moreover, his experience of facing racial discrimination was an important factor that led him to develop a deep love and commitment to the Korean American community beyond mere business success.

After visiting LA during the riots of 1992 and witnessing the lack of a leader who could speak up for the Korean American community, he decided to use his business success to give back to the Korean American community.

Giving back to Korean community through over \$15 million in assets

In 2001, he established a foundation with \$10 million to support the improvement of the rights of Korean Americans.

He was particularly impressed by the spirit of independence activist Dosan Ahn Chang-ho, who emphasized national revolution through education, and donated \$150,000 to build a statue of him to foster the national spirit and raise the pride of the next generation.

His donation was followed by donations from the Korean community and support from the Korean government, which totaled about \$600,000, and in 2001, the Dosan Ahn Chang-Ho Memorial was erected across from the statue of Dr. Martin Luther King in front

of Riverside City Hall. The statue has become a monument of educational value that is visited by groups of Korean American students.

In 2002, Hong also pushed for the naming of the interchange (IC) between the 10 and 110 freeways that run east and west through Los Angeles as the Dosan Ahn Chang Ho IC. With the support of the California state government and the state legislature, four interchanges in the area were designated as Dosan Ahn Chang Ho ICs, which helped raise the profile of the Korean American community.

He also served as the president of the Dosan Ahn Chang-ho Memorial Association in America for many years, helping to spread Ahn's spirit. His efforts have been recognized as not only a donation but also a significant contribution to raising the national pride of the Korean American community in the U.S.

In 2003, when the Korean National Association building, the headquarters of the Korean independence movement in the U.S., was facing demolition due to deterioration, he served as the chair of the restoration project and played a leading role in raising funds to help the building become a historical museum and educational venue. This is a prime example of his deep commitment to preserving the historical roots of the Korean community in the U.S. and passing on its meaning to future generations.

In addition, Hong emphasized the importance of educating the next generation of Korean Americans and chaired the board of the Korean Institute of Southern California, which was in danger of closing, raising \$3 million, including a \$200,000 donation from himself, and contributing significantly to the school's revitalization. His efforts to save the Southern California Korean Institute, the only Korean educational institution and formal Korean primary school in the Americas, demonstrate his deep interest and investment in future generations.

After selling the paint company he founded, he donated \$2.56 million to fund the Korean American Museum, as well as \$2 million and \$1 million to UCLA and La Sierra College in East Los Angeles, respectively. He also pledged \$370,000 to the Young Oak Kim Center for Korean American Studies, named after U.S. Army Col. Kim Young-oak, a World War II and Korean War hero.

His philanthropic endeavors continued in his homeland. In 2015, he served as the first chairman of the Global Hansang Dream, an organization established by overseas Korean businesspeople to foster the next generation of talent, and donated \$100,000 to support scholarships and overseas employment for young Koreans, as well as \$1 million to Sahmyook University for postgraduate training in chemistry. His donations go beyond mere monetary support and demonstrate his deep interest in fostering the next generation of talent. He has also spearheaded scholarship programs



A statue of Dr. Dosan Ahn Chang-ho in Riverside, California, U.S., built with the support of the Korean government and donations from the Korean community, including former Chairman Hong Myung-ki

for children from marginalized groups, including North Korean defectors and multicultural families.

Founding member of World Korean Business Convention

As a founding member of the World Korean Business Convention (formerly the World Korean Merchants Convention), Hong served as the president of the 12th convention in 2013 and as the chairman of the Hansang Leading CEO Forum, making a significant contribution to the development of the Global Korean Business Network.

He continued his contributions to his country and the Korean community until his passing in August 2021 at the age of 87, including a donation of 500 million won for the land on which to build the Overseas Korean Education and Culture Center in early 2021. Being honored as the Overseas Korean of the Month after his passing confirms the profound impact his life has left on Korean society and the overseas Korean community. His dedication and sharing spirit will continue to resonate in our society for many years to come.

In recognition of his contributions, the South Korean government awarded him the Camellia Medal of the National Order of Merit in 2002 and the Mugunghwa Medal of the National Order of Merit in 2011, and in 2022, the California State Legislature unanimously passed a resolution to establish June 20, his birthday, as "Hong Myung-ki Day."

"Mr. Hong's donations and sponsorships went beyond mere financial support and played an important role in strengthening the roots of the Korean American community in the United States and transmitting the spirit of the independence movement and its historical values to the next generation," OKA Commissioner Lee Sang-duk said. "In honor of his contributions as a role model for the global Korean business community, we selected him as the Overseas Korean of the Month in April, the month of the 23rd World Korean Business Convention." 장