Abstract: UCLA alumnus John Long is a successful businessman, Asian American community leader and philanthropist. One of his latest projects, the Global Chinese Philanthropy Initiative, works closely with the UCLA Asia Pacific Center. The two organizations are co-organizing a forum at Tsinghua University in late June.

Donor builds trans-Pacific community of Chinese donors

UCLA International Institute, June 19, 2018 — Until recently, no comprehensive comparative analysis had been conducted of contemporary Chinese American and Chinese philanthropy. That changed in fall 2017, when the Global Chinese Philanthropy Initiative (GCPI) published “Chinese and Chinese American Philanthropy,” an analytical report on the activities of Chinese philanthropists in the United States and China, respectively.

Among its major findings, the report documented dramatic growth in charitable giving by Chinese on both sides of the Pacific. “The project found that the amount of philanthropy by Chinese is not only significant in scale relative to other ethnic groups, but also rapidly accelerating in both the U.S. and Greater China,” says businessman and philanthropist John S. Long, who founded GCPI and serves on its executive committee.

“The GCPI research also highlighted common areas of interest and support by both Chinese and Chinese Americans, led by education, health and the environment,” elaborates Long. “Finally, common ‘soft’ qualities — as revealed by the individual narratives in the report — centered on family, community and faith.”

The GCPI report was launched in fall 2017 at two major, high-profile launch events in Los Angeles and Hong Kong, respectively. Its findings have already generated significant conversations and exchanges among Chinese American and Chinese philanthropists. Based on the success of those events, GCPI is spearheading an upcoming “Tsinghua Forum” in Beijing. The one-day forum, to be cohosted by the UCLA Asia Pacific Center and the Tsinghua Center for Chinese Entrepreneur Studies, will be held at Tsinghua University on June 28.

Creating an ecosphere for global Chinese philanthropy

An actively engaged donor to both UCLA and UC Irvine, Long created the Global Chinese Philanthropy Initiative in 2015, together with several partners and benefactors. Its goal was to foster a community of Chinese and Chinese American philanthropists who could share lessons learned, maximize the impact of their giving and encourage the next generation of young philanthropists.

A highly successful real estate developer and investor, Long completed his B.A. in economics at UCLA in 1969 and went on to earn an M.B.A. at the Harvard School of Business. In 1978, he founded Highridge Partners, a private real estate investment firm that invests in all types of real estate and at all steps of
the market development process. The privately held company has generated a portfolio in excess of $10 billion and is known for consistently generating high returns as a result of its disciplined investment approach.

Reflecting on the “Chinese and Chinese American Philanthropy” report, Long says, “There were several reasons why we felt a bilateral approach to examining, understanding and measuring the impact of Chinese philanthropy was needed.

“First,” he explains, “there was nowhere we could find data which presented in a comprehensive way the amount of Chinese giving in the U.S. and in Greater China, and the trend of such giving over the last 10 years.

“More than that,” he adds, “the thoughts and motivation of Chinese and Chinese American philanthropists were not examined in a systematic way. Finally, scant research could be found on how cultural differences between Chinese philanthropists from Greater China and the U.S. might translate to a different approach towards philanthropy between these two groups.”

After commissioning the research for 2017 report — overseen by the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs and the nonprofit organization Asian Americans for Advancing Justice — GCPI turned to the UCLA Asia Pacific Center for help in developing a website and building an academic network that could support its future work. The website, which hosts the report online, is expected to increasingly function as an information clearinghouse for an expanding community of global Chinese philanthropists.

“The three members of the executive committee of GCPI – Archie Kleingartner, Stewart Kwoh, and I – all have had deep connections with UCLA,” notes Long. Kleingartner is the founding dean and professor emeritus of the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs. Kwoh is president and executive director of Asian Americans Advancing Justice. A double alumnus of UCLA (B.A. and J.D.), Kwoh also teaches in both the UCLA Asian American Studies Department and the School of Law.

“The Asia Pacific Center at UCLA, led by Professor Min Zhou, has tremendous China and Chinese diaspora resources, so it was natural that there would be a good fit for us to work together to expand the study and outreach of this important field of global Chinese philanthropy,” he says.

Tsinghua Forum moves GCPI into a second phase

In its second phase, GCPI is moving to add crucial new elements to the ecosystem it has created, including rigorous academic research and more efficient communication among its participants.

The upcoming Tsinghua Forum will feature not only distinguished business leaders, philanthropists and second-generation philanthropists from both sides of the Pacific, but for the first time, a deans’ panel on research and philanthropy in higher education and two academic panels on Chinese and diasporic Chinese philanthropy. Both UCLA Chancellor Gene Block and UCLA Vice Provost for International Studies
and Global Engagement Cindy Fan will participate in the Forum, together with senior officials of UCLA, UC Irvine and Tsinghua University.

“Phase I in many ways was an exploratory research project that integrated data, narrative and analysis across Chinese philanthropists in Greater China and the U.S.,” comments Long. “This had never been done through a bilateral and interdisciplinary approach, and the results of this exploratory research led to three broad areas where this philanthropic ecosystem can take root.

“First,” he says, “the today’s generation of self-made Chinese philanthropists approach their giving in pragmatic and programmatic ways; so one goal of the next phase is to expand and create more efficient ways by which donors and recipients can more effectively connect with each other. Technology can be a powerful tool in making this happen,” he observes.

“Second, it became evident fairly early on that there is a growing next generation of philanthropists who approach their giving in a more holistic manner, integrating and collaborating in entrepreneurial ways to leverage the impact of their own giving,” he notes. “I’m excited to hear the next-generation panel at the Tsinghua Forum discuss this and how they plan to expand this aspect of the ecosystem,” he adds.

“Finally,” says Long, “the role of bilateral academic research to study and elevate the trends and motivations behind Chinese philanthropy is ripe for further advancement.”

Long hopes that the Tsinghua Forum will serve to expand the philanthropic ecosystem in both scope and scale. “I think the greatest take away from Phase I is that this is just the tip of the iceberg,” he says.

“There is a great deal of interest from different stakeholders in continuing to develop the many aspects and contributions of Chinese as philanthropists,” he elaborates. “In particular, it’s gratifying to see academics and industry working hand in hand in growing and shaping future research and dialogue.

A deep commitment to philanthropy

GCPI is one of many innovative projects supported by Long in his almost three decades of philanthropic work. “So many people have helped me get to where I am today, and still continue to support and encourage me,” he says, “so when we had the resources to begin giving back, it was natural to think of ways to help others.”

In 1992, Long and his wife Marilyn established the Long Family Foundation, where she serves as president and executive director. The Foundation focuses its work on religious, educational, cultural and research endeavors in the United States and China. Among the many activities it supports are Asian American and U.S.-China initiatives, scholarships, arts programs, public sculpture projects and Christian ministries.
“From the beginning,” explains Long, “we approached our philanthropy through a values based model, supporting both ideas and programs consistent with our desire to work alongside those we support, often providing seed and start-up funding for those programs that otherwise would not get off the ground.”

Perhaps one of the most impressive aspects of the foundation is that it involves the Long children in the transmission of the family’s deeply held values. “Getting to work inter-generationally with our family through the Long Family Foundation has been something that Marilyn and I have found rewarding,” shares Long. “We are proud of the passion and direction that our daughters contribute to our philanthropy.”

In addition to his own foundation, Long has created two research centers that seek to promote innovation by combining academic research with professional know-how: the Ziman Center for Real Estate at the UCLA Anderson School of Management (established in 2000) and the Long U.S.-China Institute for Business, Law and Society at UC Irvine (2010).

The UCLA Ziman Center, where Long continues to serve as founding chairman, seeks to harness the power of academic research and industry initiatives to help redefine the role of real estate in the 21st century. The Long Institute at UCI builds on this idea by promoting informed Sino-American relations through research and using existing partnerships among UC campuses and Chinese universities to foster mutual understanding of social, business and legal challenges and opportunities in the two countries.

GCPI, Long’s newest philanthropic venture, is now poised to expand its network and impact. In the coming months, the initiative will be working with the UCLA Asia Pacific Center and the Tsinghua Center for Chinese Entrepreneur Studies to strengthen their partnership and expand into a global philanthropy research collaborative.