

# Complete Integrity

An Interview with  
Washington SyCip, Founder, SGV & Co.

**EDITORS' NOTE** *Washington SyCip is also a Chinese-Filipino accountant and founder of the Asian Institute of Management. A product of the Philippine public school system, SyCip was in the U.S. completing a postgraduate degree during the outbreak of the Second World War. He enlisted in the war effort and was recruited into a "special codebreaking" class, and was later deployed to India as a codebreaker. After the war, SyCip started his own practice of accountancy. He eventually partnered with Alfredo Velayo and Ramon Gorres to form what is now known as SGV. SyCip has received numerous accolades in the fields of accountancy and consultancy.*



Washington SyCip

**COMPANY BRIEF** *Established in 1946 as W. SyCip & Co., the firm changed its name twice: first in 1947, to SyCip Velayo Jose & Co., and again in 1953, to SyCip Gorres Velayo & Co. (SGV & Co.). SGV & Co. is currently the Philippines' largest multidisciplinary professional services firm with eight offices across the country. The firm employs over 3,200 professionals from various disciplines. It provides integrated solutions that draw on diverse and deep competencies in assurance, tax, transaction and advisory services. It upholds the highest standards of quality. In fact, SGV & Co. remains the only ISO 9001-certified professional services firm in the Philippines – a distinction maintained since 1996. While Washington SyCip has retired from the firm in 1996, SGV & Co.'s track record has remained unmatched in the region. It has accumulated invaluable resources in its 67 years of operations – highly qualified and competent staff, state-of-the-art facilities, and an enviable international network. The firm envisions not only to give value-added services to their clients but, more importantly, to become a partner in their and the region's development. SGV & Co. ([www.sgv.ph](http://www.sgv.ph)) became a member practice of Ernst & Young Global Limited on June 6, 2002.*

**To what do you attribute the strength of the Philippines today and what opportunities does the country offer to foreign investors?**

The present strength of the Philippines is that we have a President of great integrity. He has a strong and capable cabinet consisting of technocrats, many with successful careers in the private sector. All of his actions as a leader of the nation have been very transparent so there is trust and

confidence in the country by foreign investors. While the great growth is in the business processing industry, which had 775,000 people by last count and is increasing by about 100,000 college graduates per year, the manufacturing sector has been moving up rapidly. Many new foreign investors have come to the Philippines and are finding the necessary skills in the Philippine workforce. Aside from that, tourism is growing rapidly and many new resorts and hotels have opened. New luxury hotels are under construction. The agriculture sector, with

new leadership, has also done much better than in the past.

**Is there an effective understanding and awareness of the opportunities that exist in the Philippines and the exciting developments taking place in the country?**

While the BRIC countries have drawn a lot of attention from investors in the past, the present focus has been on emerging markets of Southeast Asia where the Philippines recorded 7 percent-plus growth for the first half of 2013 – the fastest rate of the ASEAN countries.

**President Aquino has been clear about the need for good governance. How critical is this to the future of the Philippines and has the President's good governance agenda been effective?**

The present good governance agenda has been very encouraging for both foreign and domestic investors. All of the nation's major domestic groups have expanded operations not only in the Philippines but in neighboring ASEAN countries. Toyota, with joint venture partner the MetroBank Group, has just completed a large center to train and supply talented Filipinos for the needs of Toyota on a worldwide basis. This is the only such center that Toyota has established outside of Japan.

**Is enough being done to alleviate poverty in the Philippines?**

The 7 percent-plus growth of the country includes a new middle class. Much still has to be done to bring the benefits of the present growth to the bottom group of our society. There is still much poverty in the rural areas and in small fishing villages. Aside from government efforts to reduce poverty, many private groups are devoting financial and human resources to help the lower tier of our society.

**You have been a lifelong advocate for education, particularly for access to basic**

**education for children in far-flung and impoverished areas of the country. Where does the education system in the Philippines stand today and what more must be done?**

Together with CARD, the largest microfinance company in the Philippines with 1,400 offices throughout the country, we are now sending over 20,000 students who would otherwise be illiterate to public schools in the poorest areas of the country; we expect to move this figure up to 50,000. Other companies are also involved in these efforts to bring the benefits of the present growth rate to the poorest parts of our country.

**You have been a leading philanthropist throughout your life. Why has this been such a focus for you and would you highlight the many areas you support?**

I have always believed that development of human resources is the most important thing for a country or for a company. An organization's future is determined by what it is doing now in terms of human resources development. I am, of course, hoping that many of the law schools will be gradually changed to vocational and engineering schools. I am also very much involved in Synergeia, an organization that has quite successfully improved the public school system in various parts of the Philippines, including Moslem areas where the political leadership wants change. Through the very dedicated efforts of Dr. Milwida Guevara, Synergeia is involved not only in the Moslem area but in many poor provinces of the country.

**What are the key ingredients that make for a successful leader today?**

The key ingredients that make for a successful leader are not only complete integrity but the ability to inspire other dedicated and bright people to work with him.

**You have achieved great success in your career. Do you take the time to reflect and appreciate all that you have accomplished?**

I am proud that I played a significant role in establishing high standards for the auditing and consulting profession in the Philippines. This has enabled many companies to seek funding not only in the Philippines but also in the financial sectors of Asia and the developed financial markets abroad.

**What advice do you give to young people starting their careers?**

My only advice to young people is to keep their integrity, and through continuous education, to improve their efforts for the development of the nation with a special emphasis on poverty reduction. ●