

A Biography of Ramon S. Ang



Leader of San Miguel Corporation

Chapter One

The Boy from Tondo: Growing Up in a Repair Shop in Manila's Poorest District



On 14 January 1954, a baby boy was born into a Chinese family in **Tondo**, one of the poorest districts of Manila, Philippines. His Chinese name was **Cai Qiwen**, while his Filipino name was **Ramon S. Ang**. In the years to come, he would rise to become the leader of **San Miguel Corporation**, the largest corporation in the Philippines.

Ramon Ang's ancestral roots trace back to **Tangdong Village, Jinjing Town, Jinjiang, Quanzhou, Fujian Province**.

Like many Chinese migrants who journeyed to Southeast Asia in search of opportunity, his father left Fujian for the Philippines at a young age. In Manila's Tondo district, he established a modest automobile repair shop on Fusi Apelo Santos Street.

Ramon spent his childhood in the working-class neighbourhoods of Tondo. Day after day, he watched his father repair engines of every kind, growing up amid the constant sounds of hammers, tools and machinery.

Poverty was the defining memory of his early years.

Tondo was known for its narrow streets, crowded slums and high crime rates. Ramon would later recall that most people who lived there were not striving to become wealthy; they were simply trying to survive. Yet he never allowed hardship to breed resentment. Instead, he viewed poverty as a form of training. From a young age, he understood that only through his own efforts could he change the course of his life.

As a teenager, Ramon began helping out in his father's workshop. He learned how to repair automobile engines and gained a practical understanding of mechanical systems. In addition to repair work, the family was also involved in refurbishing and trading used Japanese trucks

and automobile engines. These experiences sparked his fascination with machinery and laid the foundation for his later studies in mechanical engineering at **Far Eastern University**.

To ease the financial burden on his family, Ramon worked while studying. He attended the **Philippine Chinese High School**, one of the oldest Chinese educational institutions in Manila. His daily routine was demanding: attending classes during the day and helping at the repair shop in the evenings.

Balancing work and study became a way of life for the young Ramon. The experience taught him how to deal with people from all walks of life and instilled in him the values of perseverance, discipline and hard work that would later define his career.

Chapter Two:

Working Student Years: Far Eastern University and His First Job

After graduating from the Philippine Chinese High School, Ramon Ang enrolled in the Department of Mechanical Engineering at **Far Eastern University**. The university was one of the Philippines' most respected institutions of higher learning and had produced generations of leaders in business, government and public life. There, Ramon received formal training in mechanical engineering, laying the foundation for his future involvement in heavy industry and manufacturing.

Even during his university years, Ramon continued to support himself through part-time work.

Years later, while addressing graduates at his alma mater, he reflected on that period of his life:

"Being a working student helped me interact with people from all walks of life. One reason I have achieved success is my ability to judge people and situations. I can adapt. I make difficult decisions based on instinct."

The experience taught him lessons that no classroom alone could provide. It strengthened his resilience, sharpened his judgement and nurtured the practical mindset that would later become one of his defining strengths.

Upon graduation, Ramon secured a position at **Northern Cement Corporation**, a company owned by the influential **Eduardo Cojuangco Jr.** family. The appointment marked the first major turning point in his professional career.

At the time, the Cojuangco family was among the most powerful families in the Philippines. Eduardo Cojuangco Jr.'s ancestral roots traced back to Hongjian Village in Jiaomei, Tong'an, Quanzhou, Fujian Province. His cousin, **Corazon Aquino**, became the first female president of the Philippines, while her son, **Benigno Aquino III**, later served as president as well. Few families in Philippine history possessed comparable political influence.

Beyond politics, the Cojuangco family also controlled a vast business empire whose reach extended across multiple sectors of the national economy.

At Northern Cement, Ramon began at the grassroots level. Hardworking, capable and eager to learn, he quickly distinguished himself from his peers. His dedication soon attracted the attention of Eduardo Cojuangco Jr.

Ramon's strengths extended beyond technical expertise. More importantly, he earned a reputation as someone who could be trusted.

Within a few years, he was promoted to managerial positions and entrusted with greater responsibilities.

Yet the most important test of his career still lay ahead.

Chapter Three:

Loyalty and Trust: Standing Firm During Eduardo Cojuangco's Exile

In 1986, the Philippines was swept by the **People Power Revolution**, which brought an end to the rule of **Ferdinand Marcos**. As one of Marcos's closest allies, **Eduardo Cojuangco Jr.** was forced into exile overseas.

The political upheaval triggered a dramatic reshuffling of power. Businesses associated with the Cojuangco family suddenly found themselves without political protection. Uncertainty spread through the organisation. Some individuals distanced themselves from the family, others took advantage of the chaos for personal gain, while many simply left.

Ramon Ang made a different choice.

He stayed.

Remaining loyal to the Cojuangco family, Ramon continued managing Northern Cement and diligently carried out his responsibilities. He neither sought personal advantage from the turmoil nor abandoned the benefactor who had given him his opportunity. During Eduardo Cojuangco's years of exile in the United States, Ramon became one of his most trusted representatives and advisers in the Philippines.

This loyalty, demonstrated during a period of adversity, would ultimately transform Ramon's life.

Several years later, when Eduardo Cojuangco returned to the Philippines and regained control of **San Miguel Corporation**, he made a decision that would shape the future of one of the country's largest corporations.

He entrusted Ramon Ang with the responsibility of helping lead San Miguel into the future.

The term "chosen successor" was often used to describe the relationship between the two men. It reflected the immense confidence that Eduardo placed in Ramon.

Founded in 1890, San Miguel Corporation had already become one of the Philippines' most important business institutions. With a history spanning more than a century, it was the country's largest and earliest industrialised conglomerate, with operations covering food, beverages, packaging, energy, infrastructure, cement, petroleum refining, real estate and numerous other sectors.

What made Ramon's rise particularly remarkable was that he had no family ties to the Cojuangcos. At most, both families shared ancestral roots in the Quanzhou region of Fujian.

His emergence as Eduardo's chosen heir was widely regarded as an extraordinary story within Philippine business circles.

One commentator observed that while Eduardo may have believed in selecting leaders based on merit and character, the decision was ultimately rooted in Ramon's personal qualities and moral integrity. Hard work alone had brought him far, but it was trustworthiness and ethical conduct that earned him the opportunity of a lifetime.

Chapter Four:

The San Miguel Years: From Vice Chairman to Chief Operating Officer

In 1998, at the age of forty-four, Ramon Ang formally joined **San Miguel Corporation** as Vice Chairman. By then, he had already accumulated more than two decades of management experience. Under his leadership, the company began a strategic transformation from a traditional brewing enterprise into a diversified multinational conglomerate.

Ramon championed expansion into a wide range of industries, including petroleum refining, power generation, rail infrastructure and cement production. Each new venture reflected his willingness to pursue opportunities beyond the group's traditional business boundaries and his confidence in San Miguel's ability to compete in new sectors.

In 2007, he was appointed Chief Operating Officer, assuming direct responsibility for the group's day-to-day operations. One of his first priorities was the company's struggling beer business. He initiated a comprehensive restructuring programme, overhauling the distribution network, introducing new products and revitalising the brand portfolio.

The reforms produced tangible results.

Driven by the continued growth of its beer and food divisions, San Miguel launched its first toll road and power generation projects in 2009, marking a significant step in the company's diversification strategy.

In 2010, San Miguel acquired a controlling stake in **Petron Corporation**, the country's largest petroleum refining company by revenue. The acquisition established San Miguel as a major player in the energy sector and further broadened its industrial footprint.

Two years later, Ramon experienced another defining moment in his career.

In 2012, he acquired an 11 percent stake in San Miguel Corporation from **Eduardo Cojuangco Jr.**. The transaction transformed him from a professional manager into one of the company's principal owners.

The move carried significance far beyond the financial aspect. It reflected the extraordinary level of trust that Eduardo had developed in the man who had stood by him for decades.

Looking back on the experience, Ramon remarked that what Eduardo valued was not his wealth, but his character.

In a business world often shaped by money, influence and power, Ramon believed that credibility, integrity and moral conduct remained among the rarest and most valuable assets a person could possess.

Chapter Five:

A Diversified Empire: From Beer to Aviation, from Cement to Media

Under Ramon Ang's leadership, San Miguel Corporation shed its image as merely a brewing company and evolved into the largest and most diversified conglomerate in the Philippines.

Energy and Petroleum

Through **Petron Corporation**, San Miguel controls the largest oil refining company and fuel station network in the Philippines. Petron has grown beyond its domestic market and expanded its operations into neighbouring Southeast Asian countries, including Malaysia, establishing itself as one of the region's major energy players.

Infrastructure

San Miguel has become one of the Philippines' largest toll road operators. The group manages major expressways such as Skyway, South Luzon Expressway (SLEX) and Star Tollway, connecting Metro Manila with surrounding provinces and serving millions of motorists each year.

In 2013, San Miguel secured the concession for the Ninoy Aquino International Airport Expressway project with a winning bid of 11 billion pesos, further strengthening its position in the country's infrastructure sector.

Cement and Construction Materials

For many years, Ramon maintained a controlling interest in Eagle Cement Corporation, one of the Philippines' leading cement manufacturers. In 2022, he sold his stake to San Miguel Corporation in a transaction valued at approximately US\$1.7 billion.

Rather than cashing out, Ramon used much of the proceeds to increase his ownership in San Miguel. Over time, his shareholding grew to approximately 37 percent, making him one of the company's largest individual shareholders.

Media

In 2017, Ramon acquired a majority stake in the **Philippine Daily Inquirer** from the Prieto family. As one of the most influential newspapers in the country, the acquisition elevated him into the ranks of the Philippines' most powerful media owners.

Aviation

Between 2012 and 2014, Ramon served as Chairman of **Philippine Airlines**, becoming involved in one of the most closely watched corporate rivalries in Philippine business history. During this period, he found himself competing against another prominent Filipino-Chinese tycoon, **Lucio Tan**, in a struggle for influence within the country's flagship carrier.

Under Ramon's stewardship, San Miguel's annual revenues surged from roughly 100 billion pesos to more than 900 billion pesos.

Meanwhile, San Miguel Beer strengthened its dominance of the domestic market, commanding approximately 95 percent of the Philippine beer industry and cementing its status as the nation's undisputed beer brand.

What had once been a brewery founded in the nineteenth century had become a sprawling industrial empire spanning energy, infrastructure, cement, media, food, beverages and transportation—an achievement that reflected both Ramon's ambition and his willingness to venture far beyond the company's traditional boundaries.

Chapter Six:

The Infrastructure Visionary: Airports, Expressways and a Blueprint for the Future

Ramon Ang's transformation of San Miguel Corporation did not stop with food, beverages and energy. His ambitions extended far beyond the group's traditional businesses.

Among Philippine business leaders, Ramon emerged as one of the strongest advocates of large-scale infrastructure development. He believed that modern infrastructure was the key to unlocking the country's economic potential and improving the lives of millions of Filipinos.

The Bulacan International Airport Project

Perhaps the most ambitious undertaking of Ramon's career is the development of a new international airport in

Bulacan Province.

Under his vision, the airport will feature six parallel runways and eventually accommodate up to 200 million passengers annually, making it one of the largest airport complexes in Asia and potentially the world. Ramon has argued that the project will generate millions of jobs, attract tens of millions of foreign visitors each year and relieve congestion at Manila's existing airports.

For him, the project represents far more than a commercial investment—it is a long-term national development initiative designed to support the Philippines' future growth.

Metro Rail and Urban Connectivity

San Miguel has also become deeply involved in the country's transport infrastructure.

The group is participating in the construction of **MRT-7**, a major railway line linking Metro Manila with Bulacan Province. It is also involved in transport projects connecting Commonwealth Avenue, Batasan Hills, SM North EDSA and neighbouring urban centres.

In addition, San Miguel has invested heavily in expressways and ring roads designed to improve connectivity throughout Metro Manila.

The ultimate objective is to address the chronic traffic congestion along **EDSA**, the capital region's busiest thoroughfare and one of the most congested urban roads in the world.

Boracay and Regional Development

San Miguel's infrastructure ambitions also extend beyond the capital.

The group developed **Caticlan Airport**, the principal gateway to the world-famous island of Boracay. It has also pursued projects to improve transportation links to the island, including plans for bridge connectivity and supporting infrastructure.

Beyond transport, San Miguel has participated in efforts to address Boracay's environmental and public utility challenges, including solid waste management, wastewater treatment, water supply, electricity and telecommunications services.

Ramon views these projects as part of a broader national responsibility.

He once explained:

"We believe patriotism is important. Through our products, roads, airports and infrastructure projects, we continue doing our best to help more Filipinos. Building a better future for the next generation is our ultimate goal."

To turn that vision into reality, Ramon allocated an unprecedented capital expenditure programme for San Miguel's future development. Of the group's planned 1.4 trillion pesos in capital spending over five years, approximately 1.2 trillion pesos—around 86 percent of the total—was earmarked for infrastructure expansion.

The scale of the investment reflects his conviction that infrastructure is not merely a business opportunity. It is the foundation upon which the future of the Philippines will be built.

Chapter Seven:

The Formula for Success: Integrity, Decisiveness and Keeping One's Word

In 2018, Ramon Ang returned to **Far Eastern University**, his alma mater, to receive an Honorary Doctorate in Business Engineering. During his commencement address, he shared what he called his personal "formula for success"—a set of principles that had guided him throughout his life and career.

Be a Person Who Keeps His Word

For Ramon, trust is the foundation of all business relationships.

The reason **Eduardo Cojuangco Jr.** continued to place his confidence in him, even during years of political uncertainty and exile, was simple: Ramon was a man who honoured his commitments.

In his view, money, influence and status can come and go, but credibility is irreplaceable. Once trust is lost, it is almost impossible to regain.

Know How to Keep Confidential Matters Confidential

During the difficult years when the Cojuangco family was under intense public scrutiny, Ramon never disclosed sensitive information or betrayed the trust placed in him.

His ability to remain discreet and loyal earned him a reputation as someone who could be trusted in both good times and bad. In a business environment often marked by rivalry and intrigue, such qualities were rare and highly valued.

Work Harder Than Everyone Else

Ramon has never believed in shortcuts or lucky breaks.

From helping in his father's repair shop in Tondo, to working his way through university, to becoming a manager at Northern Cement and eventually the leader of San Miguel Corporation, every stage of his journey was built on discipline, effort and perseverance.

Success, he believes, is rarely the result of chance. More often, it is the outcome of years of consistent hard work.

Be Decisive and Willing to Take Risks

Throughout his career, Ramon repeatedly demonstrated a willingness to make bold decisions.

Whether restructuring San Miguel's distribution network, acquiring Petron, expanding into new industries or pursuing massive infrastructure projects, each move involved substantial risk. Yet he never allowed fear of failure to prevent action.

His philosophy was straightforward:

"There is no such thing as impossible."

For Ramon, opportunities favour those who are prepared to act when others hesitate.

Believe in a Larger Purpose

Making money, Ramon often says, should never be the ultimate objective.

For him, profit is a means rather than an end.

His larger mission is to help transform the Philippines through infrastructure, industrial development and long-term investment. Airports, expressways, rail systems and energy projects are not merely business ventures in his eyes—they are instruments for improving the country's future.

He believes that true success is measured not only by personal achievement, but by the positive impact one leaves for future generations.

These principles—integrity, loyalty, hard work, decisiveness and purpose—have guided Ramon Ang from a small repair shop in Tondo to the helm of one of Southeast Asia's most influential conglomerates.

They remain the foundation of both his business philosophy and his life story.

Chapter Eight:

The Car Collector: A Passion for Machines and Speed

Among the many titles associated with Ramon Ang, one stands out as particularly distinctive—that of a passionate automobile collector.

Over the years, he assembled a collection of more than 300 vehicles, including an **Aston Martin Valkyrie** valued at approximately US\$3 million. The collection ranks among the most impressive private automobile collections in the Philippines and reflects a lifelong fascination with engineering and performance machines.

His love affair with automobiles can be traced back to his childhood.

Growing up in his father's repair shop in Tondo, Ramon learned how engines worked long before he entered university. Surrounded by dismantled motors, spare parts and repair tools, he developed an appreciation for mechanics that never left him. While other children were playing games, he was learning how machines were built and how they could be repaired.

That early exposure shaped both his personal interests and his professional outlook.

Even after achieving success in business, Ramon remained closely connected to the automotive world. Together with **Mark Cojuangco**, son of **Eduardo Cojuangco Jr.**, he became involved in the luxury automobile business, expanding his interests beyond collection into vehicle distribution and sales.

The family's connection to the industry continued through the next generation. His son, **Jomar Ang**, managed **RSA Motors**, the family's automotive company responsible for the distribution of BMW automobiles and motorcycles in the Philippines.

For Ramon, cars were more than symbols of wealth.

They represented craftsmanship, engineering excellence and the spirit of innovation. Each vehicle reflected the same qualities he admired in business: precision, performance, reliability and the relentless pursuit of improvement.



Although he became known for leading one of Southeast Asia's largest conglomerates, the boy who once repaired engines in a small workshop in Tondo never truly disappeared. Beneath the corporate executive remained a mechanic at heart—someone who still appreciated the beauty of a finely tuned machine.

Chapter Nine:

Family: Lessons Learned from the Loss of a Son

Ramon Ang and his wife, **Tessie Ang**, raised a family of eight children.

Among them, his eldest son, **John Paul Ang**, emerged as one of the most important figures in the family's business succession plans. He served as President of Eagle Cement Corporation and, in June 2024, was appointed Vice Chairman, President and Chief Operating Officer of **San Miguel Corporation**, placing him among the leading candidates to carry forward the group's future development.

Yet despite his remarkable success in business, Ramon would eventually confront a tragedy that forced him to reassess what truly mattered in life.

On 11 April 2020, his twenty-six-year-old son, **Jomar Ang**, passed away after contracting COVID-19.

The loss was devastating.

In the years that followed, Ramon himself contracted COVID-19 three times. Having lost a beloved son while personally experiencing the effects of the pandemic, he found himself reflecting deeply on life, family and mortality.

Looking back on that difficult period, he later said:

"In 2020, I lost my son Jomar. It made me realise how precious life is and how important it is to spend time with family. The happiest moments are when everyone comes home and we share a meal together."

The experience changed his perspective.

He spoke fondly of one of his daughters who enjoyed baking and how the entire family delighted in sharing those moments together. He also described the joy brought by his grandchildren, whose presence filled the household with energy and laughter.

For Ramon, it was no longer about what the family was doing. What mattered most was simply being together.

The businessman who had spent decades overseeing billion-dollar investments, negotiating major acquisitions and managing one of Southeast Asia's largest corporations came to embrace a simple truth:

Wealth can be accumulated, but life cannot be replaced.

Businesses can expand, but the time spent with loved ones is a treasure beyond measure.

The loss of his son became one of the most painful chapters of his life, yet it also reminded him of something that success alone could never provide—the enduring value of family.

Chapter Ten:

Business Philosophy: Patriotism, Risk-Taking and Lifelong Learning

Ramon Ang's business philosophy reflects a unique blend of traditional Chinese values and modern entrepreneurial thinking. It combines the integrity of the classical Chinese merchant with the boldness and adaptability of a contemporary business leader.

Patriotism Above All

One principle that Ramon has repeatedly emphasised throughout his career is the importance of patriotism.

In his view, the ultimate mission of **San Miguel Corporation** is not merely to generate profits, but to serve the Filipino people. Whether the company is building expressways, airports, power plants or producing food, fuel and beverages, the larger objective remains the same: to help create a better future for the next generation.

For Ramon, business success carries with it a responsibility to contribute to national development.

Nothing Is Impossible

Perhaps no phrase is more closely associated with Ramon than:

"There is no such thing as impossible."

His own life serves as evidence of that belief.

From a boy growing up in the impoverished streets of Tondo to the leader of the Philippines' largest corporation, every stage of his journey challenged conventional expectations. Time and again, he ventured into industries where others doubted his chances of success.

He often encourages young people not to be intimidated by obstacles.

According to Ramon, no challenge is insurmountable if a person possesses determination, discipline and the right attitude. Success may not come easily, but possibilities expand when one refuses to accept limitations.

A Commitment to Lifelong Learning

Another cornerstone of Ramon's philosophy is the belief that learning should never stop.

More than four decades after graduating from **Far Eastern University**, he returned to the institution not as a student, but as the recipient of an honorary doctorate. Yet despite his achievements, he never regarded education as something that ended with a diploma.

Even at the height of his business career, he continued reading extensively and studying new industries, technologies and economic trends. He believed that curiosity and continuous learning were essential for remaining relevant in a rapidly changing world.

Addressing the graduating class of 2018 at his alma mater, he reflected on the role the university had played in shaping his life:

"My character was shaped by this school. I am proud of the contributions I have made to society. I have left my mark, and I challenge you to do the same."

The statement captures the essence of Ramon Ang's worldview.

Success is not measured solely by wealth or corporate achievements. It is measured by the impact one leaves behind, the people one helps and the legacy one creates for future generations.

Conclusion:

A Business Legend Built on Loyalty

In 2024, Ramon Ang ranked fourth on the Forbes Philippines Rich List with an estimated net worth of US\$3.8 billion. By 2025, his fortune had reached approximately US\$3.75 billion, equivalent to around RMB 26.9 billion, allowing him to maintain his position as the country's fourth-richest individual.

Yet numbers have never been the true measure of Ramon Ang's legacy.

His greatest achievement lies in creating one of the most remarkable succession stories in modern Asian business—a rare example of a non-family executive rising to become the trusted steward of a family-controlled empire.

Unlike many tycoons, Ramon was not born into privilege. He was a boy from a small repair shop in Tondo, one of Manila's poorest districts. There were no influential family connections, no shortcut through marriage into a wealthy clan, and no inherited corporate throne waiting for him.

What he possessed instead was something far more valuable: decades of loyalty, perseverance and unwavering integrity.

Through his actions, he demonstrated that in business, there exists an asset even more precious than money—trust.

When **Eduardo Cojuangco Jr.** passed away in 2020, the future of **San Miguel Corporation** could easily have become the subject of a bitter succession struggle. Instead, the Cojuangco family placed its confidence in Ramon. Members of the family gradually transferred substantial ownership interests to him, an arrangement that remains exceptionally rare in the history of Chinese family businesses.

Eduardo's decision was never based primarily on Ramon's financial resources.

It was based on his character.

For decades, Ramon had proven himself to be loyal in times of adversity, reliable in moments of uncertainty and steadfast in protecting the interests of the organisation. The trust he earned could not be purchased; it was built through a lifetime of consistent conduct.

From the crowded streets of Tondo to the boardroom of the Philippines' largest conglomerate, Ramon Ang's journey is a story of loyalty, resilience, courage and service.

His name will forever be associated with San Miguel Corporation, Petron, Eagle Cement and the Bulacan International Airport project. More importantly, it will remain intertwined with the story of modern Philippine economic development.

For future generations of Overseas Chinese entrepreneurs, Ramon Ang's life offers a powerful lesson:

Talent may open doors, hard work may create opportunities, but trust is what sustains success.

And in Ramon Ang's case, trust became the foundation of an extraordinary legacy.

Main References

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