



ROOTS AND LINKAGES: A JOURNEY THROUGH THE PEARL RIVER DELTA

Part IV: Taishan

By H. M. LAI

From Sambu (Samfau 三埠) our car sped southeastward past numerous villages of the Yee (余) clan. In less than half an hour we crossed a well-known landmark bridge over the Tongji River (通濟河), and entered Taicheng (Toising 台城), the county seat of Taishan (Toishan 台山).

We stayed at the new Overseas Chinese Hotel, finished subsequent to our last trip in 1976. Situated on the north shore of a beautiful man-made lake, it was modeled after Beijing's Summer Palace, even down to the marble boat, except that in this case it is concrete. Along the east shore is Ningcheng Park (寧城公園) with shop, teahouse and a small zoo. This is a delightful area for strolling, especially on warm summer evenings. However, in the cool late fall weather, visitors were rather few.

There was a color television set for guests in the hotel at Sanbu and Kaiping. This was also the case at Taicheng. A large TV room on the top floor of the hotel was available for the use of guests and off-duty staff members. Each evening some 20 to 30 persons would sit themselves in rows in front of the screen to catch the latest news or to enjoy motion pictures, Cantonese opera, and music performances, broadcast from Guangzhou.

SOPHISTICATION

Across the street is the Workers' Cultural Palace. Here those locals not fortunate enough to have their own TV sets, and this includes most of them, can view video programs for 5 fen (3½ cents) each. The evening's offering was announced on a blackboard at the small box office in front. With the general availability of such programs, one certainly cannot underestimate the level of sophistication of people in the countryside.

Taicheng has a population of about 30,000. Before liberation remittances from abroad provided the economic basis for numerous businesses here, such as money exchangers; stores selling imported consumer goods, and *gumsanjong* (金山莊) firms handling goods to and from America, remittances from abroad and travel arrangements for emigrants going abroad, etc. There were also "entertain-



Streetside repair and sewing service in Taicheng.

ment" establishments designed to facilitate the expenditure of hard-earned money remitted from laundries and restaurants overseas. It is said that 80% of the businesses had some overseas Chinese capital, and all this ostentatious prosperity earned for Taicheng the nickname of "Little Guangzhou."

SOBER

Today the money exchangers, gambling establishments and houses of prostitution, as well as their hangers on—the criminal elements and the *jinshanshao* (金山少), lit.: "young men of Gold Mountain," i.e. those who led extravagant lives with money sent by their hard-working emigrant fathers in America—have disappeared. The town has a sober and business-like atmosphere, but the visitor can still see everywhere influences from abroad. Most obvious is the architecture, much of which was inspired by influences from the West. In a busy part of town we saw the unmistakable gothic spire of a former Christian mission. On the opposite side of the same street, another building, now housing the bureau of public security (i.e. police station), used to be the YMCA.

In spite of its fame, Taicheng is small in extent. On the west side of town near the Tongzhi River is the busy bus station, once the station for the Sunning Railroad (新寧鐵路). Buildings of the defunct railroad company still stand behind the station, but a statue of Chin Gee Hee (陳宜禧), promoter of the railroad, has fallen victim to the Cultural Revolution.

BUSTLING

From here it was a short walk to the market place. Since the adop-

tion of a relaxed agricultural policy, this has become a bustling area, especially before midday. In addition to stalls selling pork and poultry, peddlers lined the roadside and marketed produce, fruits, cakes, herbs and condiments, or offered repair services for clothing, watches, bicycles, etc. A few vended herb teas (涼茶), jellied bean curd (豆腐花) and the like. One woman was making "oven bottom cakes" (爐底糰) or as we know it in America, waffles. Another enterprising individual exhibited a live mouse tied to a string and tried to attract buyers for his mousetraps. By the river bank a barber was giving haircuts in the open air. One day we even encountered a grizzled old man molding bright red dough manikins for children.

From the market it is but a half-hour stroll eastward to the campus of the famous Taishan Middle School No. 1 (台山縣第一中學), located at the foot of a hill on the opposite end of town. This was and still is the top middle school in Taishan. Money donated by Chinese in Canada and the US during the 1920s and 1930s enabled the construction of many of the buildings. However, during the Cultural Revolution zealots desecrated the many campus inscriptions commemorating these benefactors. These monuments were restored only recently, after the fall of the "Gang of Four."

CHANGES

With the "four modernizations" program many changes are coming to Taicheng. Shortly before our arrival, a Northern Californian had signed an agreement to furnish capital and materials to build a hotel on Stone Flower Mountain (Shihua Shan 石花山, east of Taicheng) and to bring regular monthly tour groups. In another contract, a group of Hong Kong investors will construct condominiums, for sale to returned overseas Chinese at about RMB \$10,000 per unit. The entrepreneurs' targets are older overseas Chinese who may wish to retire in China. Certainly for some, monthly social security checks of a few hundred dollars, which would allow for only very frugal levels of living in the US, could allow a life of relative luxury in China, where the average monthly salary runs around RMB \$40-60.

Taicheng used to be part of Xinhui (Sunwui 新會). It was established as Xinning (Sunning 新寧) county by the Ming government in 1498. The name was changed to

Enomoto Foe Wins A 4-0 Endorsement, Despite Opposition

SACRAMENTO — Howard Way, a white Republican from rural Tulare County, has won endorsement as head of the state correctional programs despite protests by Asian Americans and black groups.

The five-member Senate Rules Committee voted 4-0 last week to recommend to the full Senate that Way be confirmed as secretary of the new Youth and Adult Correctional Agency.

Some black state employees fear Way might dismantle the minority hiring programs of Jerry Enomoto, who was removed as head of the state's 12-prison system by Gov. Brown (E/W 5/7/80). Brown incurred the wrath of Asian American groups by his abrupt replacement of Enomoto with Ruth Ruschen, a former state parole board member and the first black or woman to head the prison system. Enomoto blamed Way for the "condescending" manner in which he (Enomoto) was replaced.

Two Seniors Get Elliott Warren Wu Memorial Awards

SAN FRANCISCO — Two Washington High School seniors were recently awarded \$200 college scholarships from the Dr. Elliott Warren Wu Memorial Fund. William Ferrero and Craig Tsuyumine were selected for their outstanding contributions to Washington High School as athletes and scholars.

Both maintained higher than 3.0 grade point averages during their high school careers and participated in numerous extracurricular sports. Ferrero will be attending San Diego State University in the fall, and Tsuyumine will be enrolling at City College of San Francisco.

They were the first recipients of scholarships to be awarded annually through the fund, established in memory of the son of Dr. and Mrs. Thomas Wu of San Francisco. Elliott Wu was a 1963 graduate of Washington High School who passed away last year of leukemia.

LA Mental Health Training Center Receives Grant

LOS ANGELES — The Asian American Community Mental Health Training Center (AMTRAC) has been granted re-funding for \$199,579 by the Social Work Training Branch of the National Institute of Mental Health, according to Royal F. Morales, project director. Basic goals of the center include person power development, the provision of scholarships and stipends for Pac/Asians entering the career of social work, community organizing and mental health services. The center also provides field training placement for college students. In addition, the center develops ethnic related curriculum content for social work education. Morales said the 8-year-old center has helped 120 students toward their BA or MSW degrees and join the service field.

The center is located at 1300 W. Olympic Blvd, Suite 303, L.A. CA. 90015.

Taishan in 1914 in order to avoid confusion with identical place names in other parts of China.

The country was one of the last Ming pockets of resistance in Guangdong against the Manchus, when, from 1655 to 1659, Ming general Wang Xing (王興) was entrenched in a stronghold at Wen Village (汶村) in southern Taishan. It was also the site of a bloody civil war during the 19th century, which had a direct bearing on emigration from the area. After the Manchu conquest in the 17th century the new rulers ordered a forced evacuation of a 50 li (approximately 17 miles) strip of land all along the southeast China coast in order to create a no man's land, preventing communication between the populace and Ming loyalists still active in Taiwan and other offshore islands. After the ban was lifted in 1669 the authorities recruited large numbers of Hakka settlers from mountainous eastern Guangdong. By the mid-19th century they had grown to comprise about one-third of the Taishan population.

CLASHES

Because of differences in customs and speech the earlier Punti (本地) settlers—i.e. the Cantonese-speaking—and the later-coming Hakkas tended to live in separate communities. Often clashes occurred between the two groups due to misunderstandings and conflicting interests. During the tense situation of the Taiping Rebellion of the 1850s, when a number of Triad-led insurrections occurred in the Pearl River delta, fighting also erupted between the Punti and the Hakkas. Much of the fighting, which lasted over a decade, centered on Taishan. The Hakkas were decimated by the numerically superior Punti. The land was devastated and the resulting economic dislocations became one of the factors impelling emigration abroad. Also as a result of this tragic fratricidal strife, Chiqi (Chikkai 赤溪) county was carved out of Taishan in 1867 to harbor the remaining Hakkas. The two counties were not recombined until 1953.

(Previous articles in this series have been in E/W: 3/19/80, 3/26/80, 4/9/80, 4/16/80, 4/23/80.)

The concluding part of this article will appear in the next issue of East/West.—Ed.

China Accuses Viet Police of Thwarting Asylum

BEIJING — China has accused Vietnamese police of removing 16 Vietnamese nationals seeking asylum in the Chinese embassy in Hanoi.

The New China News Agency reported that the group of Vietnamese, including six children and five women, appealed to the Chinese embassy Friday for assistance in emigrating abroad. The embassy staff then asked the Vietnamese authorities to consider the requests for emigration.



Sign in Taicheng: "It is Glorious to Have Only One Child."