

# Roots and Linkages: A Journey Through the Pearl River Delta

By HIM MARK LAI

A stiff breeze was blowing when our ferry from Xinhui docked at Doumen (斗門) County. During the two days we stayed in this area tucked away in the southwest corner of the Pearl River delta, the weather remained windy with the temperature in the 40's.

## ISLAND

Doumen is separated from its neighbors, Zhongshan and Xinhui, by four of the West River's channels, and going to Jing'an (Jengnon 井岸), the county seat, from either Huicheng (Wu-shing 會城) or Shiqi (Shekki 石岐), in Xinhui (Sunwui 新會), and Zhongshan (Chungshan 中山) respectively, requires two ferry crossings. In effect much of Doumen is an island.

For many years, most of Doumen was part of the 8th area (八區) of Zhongshan County, but it was only within the last few years that a connecting dirt road to the main part of Zhongshan had been completed. Accessibility via the delta terrain of Xinhui was much easier and, for this reason, many travel from Guangzhou to Doumen via this route rather than Zhongshan. This was also the preferred traditional route of migration and most of Doumen was settled by people from Xinhui. Even today, the spoken dialects are very similar.

## ISOLATION

Because of its geographical location, Doumen was long an economic backwater. It was in order to facilitate faster development of the area that it was established as a separate county in 1965. The territory, including eight communes and two state farms, was carved mostly out of Zhongshan, with a small part taken from Xinhui. It is the most rural of all the districts we visited, and the only one that did not have a branch of China Travel Service, an indication that the number of visitors here was insufficient to warrant establishing such an agency.

## Part VI: Doumen



A back alley in Nanshan Village. Most of the inhabitants have the surname Chan. One of its most famous emigrants was Lung Chin, Stockton's potato king during the early 20th century.

Compared to other counties in the Pearl River delta regions, Doumen does not have a large population, it being 180,000, with another 60,000 workers, on two state farms, recruited from outside the country. Included among the state farm population are about 6,000 of China's 250,000 Vietnamese Chinese refugees. I was told that the government allotted about RMB \$1,800 for resettlement of each refugee, and new housing has been provided for them. However, some of the Vietnamese Chinese, hailing originally from urban areas, have had difficulties adjusting to the spartan simplicity of rustic life and have tried to steal across the border, attracted by the bright lights and apparent opulence of Macao and Hong Kong.

The central portion of Doumen is mountainous, dominated by Huangyang Shan (黃楊山), whose 3,000-foot elevation makes it the highest point in the delta area. In ages past these mountains of Doumen were islands standing in the shallow waters of the Pearl River estuary, but over the centuries soil deposits have filled in the sea bottom, so that the islands have coalesced to form a single mountainous land mass. This process of land formation is continuing as the silt-laden waters of the West River continue to deposit sediment near the river mouth, and the land area of Doumen is increasing yearly. However, this new soil is still salty and is only of limited use in agriculture. This is one of the reasons good arable land is scarce in Doumen and many villagers have emigrated overseas, with as many as 10,000

having gone to America. These emigrants, mostly from the western side of the district, included such surnames as Chan (陳), Chow (周), Fong (廣), Hom (何), Jue (趙), Leong (梁), Mock (莫), and Wong (黃).

A number of Doumenese immigrants made names for themselves in the U.S. e.g., Lung Chin (陳康大) was called the potato king in the Stockton area around the World War I period, and Joseph Sunn Jue (趙樹榮) started the Grandview Motion Picture Co., the first successful Chinese American cinema enterprise. And of course most people are familiar with the name of retired Senator Hiram Fong (鄭友良) of Hawaii, who once held the highest national elective office held by a Chinese American.

## CROP

Many people of Doumen descendent in the San Francisco Bay Area raise China asters and chrysanthemums for the market, but not here in their land of origin. When we raised the question, the obvious answer was that there would be few customers for such items of luxury. Instead, the main crop in Doumen, besides rice, is sugar cane. Since liberation sugar mills have been constructed, with associated paper mills.

In one of the paper mills which we visited we saw bagasse (the residue of sugar cane after the juice has been extracted) being processed into paper and raw process waste being dumped into the river, which we felt must have raised havoc with aquatic life. This was confirmed by the local people, who claimed that such contamination has caused the harvest of marine products to drop greatly in recent years. This environmental pollution is evidently a serious problem which China faces today and we were told it has often led to dispute between the factories and the nearby communes.

Jing'an is on the bank of one of the channels of the West River and about 30 miles east from Huicheng. It is on the eastern side of the county, away from the more densely populated emigrant areas. Formerly an insignificant village, many new buildings and wide streets have been constructed since Jing'an was elevated to its present political status. Thus we get a feeling of roominess here, which was lacking in some of the

other rural towns we had visited. But on the other hand, the town is too new to have acquired an individual personality, which we sensed easily in the historically older county seats of Kaiping, Taishan and Xinhui.

## PALM

A number of industries, mainly connected with the agricultural sector, are located in Jing'an. For example, many fan palm products, a specialty usually associated with neighboring Xinhui, are being manufactured for export. However, a spokesman frankly admitted to us that despite the variety of products, Xinhui still leads in skill and experience in this industry.

It was also here in Jing'an that we saw graphic examples of the higher status of women in China today. In a plant making spare parts for tractors, we were guided by the technical staff, one prominent member of which was a woman. A pre-Cultural Revolution graduate of the South China Institute of Engineering at Guangzhou, she was impressive with her poised confidence and technical competence. We also paid a visit to the Doumen Printing Plant, which handles all printing in the county and sometimes even contracts for work from outside. Here again the plant director was a woman. In fact, on our trip, it had been common to see women in such responsible positions.

## TRIP

After two nights in Jing'an, we left for Zhongshan. It was only about 30 miles northeastward to Shiqi as the crow flies, but since our car had to cross two rivers—and here near the river's mouth, crossings can be as wide as a mile or more—the entire trip took about three hours.

Our route passed through an area with many levees surrounding fields barely above river level. These are known as shatian (沙田), and are formed by soil deposited by the river. The terrain is strikingly similar to that in the Sacramento River delta area, only on a much larger scale. After the second river crossing we reached Zhongshan and immediately hit hilly country. Traveling on a rough dirt road we reached the paved main highway from Shiqi to Macao. Soon we were in Shiqi, the county seat of Zhongshan.

**17% to 22%\***  
ANNUAL YIELD

SOLIDLY SECURED BY SHORT TERM LOANS ON SO CALIF REAL ESTATE

**Gemini Financial Corporation**

Corporate Headquarters: 14651 Ventura Boulevard Sherman Oaks, CA 91403

**CALL COLLECT**


LOS ANGELES

**(213) 872-0844**

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY

**(213) 501-2813**

Licensed Calif. Real Estate Broker with pre-payment bonus



**ACROBATS OF CANTON**

GUANGDONG ACROBATIC TROUPE OF CHINA  
FIRST TIME IN NORTH AMERICA

2 Ticket Offices in Chinatown:

East Wind Book and Arts  
1435 Stockton St.  
781-3331

Daily Travel  
115 Waverly Place  
433-4965

Special added performance: Sunday, Dec. 14 at 6:30 p.m.

**GOLDEN GATE THEATRE**  
Golden Gate and Taylor at Market Street, San Francisco

**NOVEMBER 25—DECEMBER 14 ONLY!**

**CHARGE BY PHONE: (415) 775-8800**

## Investment Opportunity

Oil & Gas Leases: The U.S. Dept. of Interior holds public drawings every second month to award leases on public trust lands. You must be a U.S. Citizen at least 21 years old to participate. Your tax deductible fee of \$10.00 could return you \$25,000 or more when you sell your lease rights. (For further information: RONALD CARSON CORPORATION, Dept. B, 8112 Rainier, Ave. S., Seattle, WA 98118, 206-725-8760).

## COLORADO Investments!

Denver Metro Homes  
0 to 10% down very attractive owner financing  
Excellent equity growth potential  
Full management & maintenance Program  
Sierra Enterprises  
303-428-4844 days  
303-422-6744 evenings  
4250 W 72nd Ave.  
Westminster, CO 80030