

Shenzhen – China's Melting Pot

Photo / Text by Shen Siling



Shenzhen is a city with all kinds of smiling faces

"Where are you from?"

"When did you come to Shenzhen?"

When two people meet each other for the first time in Shenzhen, they usually say hello in this special way, instead of saying "How do you do?" and "How are you?" Then from their different dialects the two people will try to tell where their hometowns were, and usually they will come to the same answer—the immigrants.

Shenzhen, or Bao'an County before 1980, is a one-time fishing village with only more than 300 thousand residents.

Shenzhen's immigrant novel and modern cityscape began when China opened its doors to the world. Shenzhen is China's first special economic zone established in 1980. As China's south coastal city in Guangdong Province, situated next to Hong Kong, Shenzhen became something of an innovative frontier.

Similar to New York, Shenzhen is also

considered to be a melting pot. Many people from all walks of life rushed to the place. And most of them were construction workers and investors from 1980s to 1990s.

Shenzhen's favorable terms and conditions continue to attract rapid foreign investments after 1990s. The city becomes home to the headquarters of numerous tech companies. Millions of new immigrants came from everywhere in China with an average age of less than 30.

Some people come here on a whim, and many more come with deliberate plans. However, deep down, they all come here in hopes of setting up better

lives.

48-year-old Yu Haibo is a photojournalist who came to Shenzhen from Henan province in 1989.

"People come to Shenzhen to fulfill their dreams. When I came here, I found that the city was just what I was looking for. I feel free to showcase my abilities. I can do whatever I think. At that time, I found Shenzhen was a fantastic city. The air is fresh and the people are young and energetic. Relationships are also simple because we are all here for the same goal—to fight for our dreams."

Young talents like 26-year old Zhao Liang continue to flock to Shenzhen. Zhao has a postgraduate degree from Wuhan University and is trying to find a job in the city.

"Working in Shenzhen is my beautiful dream. I will try to



Every year during China's traditional lunar new year, or the Spring Festival, migrants in Shenzhen are happy to return to their hometowns for vacation, although it's crowded at the railway station. [File Picture]

make it come true!"

The dreams brought by millions of immigrants also plant deep cultural roots in

Shenzhen, which sit in tandem with the city's creative and modern ethos. The city has since created an innovative spirit of encouraging innovation and pursuing excellence. "Innovation" and "Pursuing" become the particular "name-card of the city".

Shenzhen is a city of hope, a city of opportunities, and a city drawing thousands of talented people from across the world. The dreams and wisdom of the immigrants from every corner of China also bring splendor and prosperity to Shenzhen. In return, the city gives everyone an equal stage.

"I feel the city is quite tolerant. It gives you a better chance and platform to fulfill your dreams. You can get chances if you have ability, if you have dreams, and if you keep on striving."

There is no barrier between the permanent and immigrant populations, so foreigners can enjoy the same treatment as local residents and regard the city as their home.

"I feel in Shenzhen there is no difference

between the natives and immigrants. There is no discrimination against immigrants. People are able to seek livelihoods from one starting point." Hong Kong investor Cai Dongliang said.

If you ever travel to Shanghai, you may have suffered from the supercilious looks from Shanghai people, when you don't speak Shanghai dialect. But foreign tourists feel at ease like at home in Shenzhen. People often talk in various dialects. But they don't mind that they sound a little different.

"20 years ago Shenzhen's main language was Cantonese. People speak and sing in Cantonese. It was viewed as a modern trend at that time. Now, the mainstream language is Mandarin." Cai Dongliang introduced.

As an immigrant city, Shenzhen's official language has changed from Cantonese to Mandarin. This offers a great opportunity for people from all over the country to display a variety of customs and cultures. People live in Shenzhen feel free to talk in all kinds of

languages and maintain various customs.

Morning tea seems to be a distinctive custom of Guangdong province. However in Shenzhen, every morning from 7 to 11 o'clock, people from all over the country go to restaurants to enjoy the Guangdong initial lifestyle. Immigrants accept Guangdong culture and at the same time they bring abundant cultures from all over China. It is an interesting thing that during the Chinese Spring Festival, different families in the same building in Shenzhen observe different traditions throughout the holiday.

Shenzhen is such a unique city in China. Shenzhen's culture manifests the flavor of "mix" - a mix of all kinds of culture from all over the country. This unique culture showcases the spirit of equality, embracing various customs and fighting for one's dreams. This demonstrates the "Shenzhen spirit."

"No matter where you are from, you are a Shenzhen person, unlike people in Beijing and other cities. Although you may live there for 10 or 20 years, you are still a foreigner."

The Tale of A Fishermen Village

Text by Chen Zhe

The Fishermen Village, as the name suggests, is a seaside village in the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen. Thirty years ago, villagers made a simple living by fishing.

In 1980, Shenzhen became China's first special economic zone to adopt the central policy of reform and opening-up. The Fishermen Village as a result has undergone huge changes. In the early 1980s, it was the first Chinese village to have an annual average per household income exceeding 10,000 yuan, far higher than the national average.

52-year-old Tang Wenbiao will never forget the moment when late Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping visited his hometown, the Fishermen Village, on January 25, 1984.

"Xiaoping saw that families in our village had TV sets and electric fans. He said villagers could enjoy comfortable lives. Our village chief Wu Bosen asked Xiaoping whether the reform and opening up policy would ever change. He confirmed that the

policy would continue."

Thanks to the policy, the tiny fishing village in Shenzhen's Luohu District is now a modern community with high-rise apartments and a cultural square. In the past, the village, like many others in China, was remote and impoverished. In 1978, the annual average per capita income of Fishermen Village was only about 134 yuan or about 20 U.S. dollars. Villagers often snuck into Hong Kong via the river connecting the two areas. Tang Wenbiao recalls.

"When I was little, no outsiders could enter our village. There were no roads, just mud. The village was hit by floods almost every year. This did not change until late 1970s. The clothes we wore were patched and threadbare. People from Hong Kong would laugh at us, saying the patches on our trousers looked like pancakes on our bottoms. I was desperate at that time. I wanted to leave the village by joining the army or stowing away to Hong Kong. Many of my classmates

did leave."

In 1980, Shenzhen was designated as China's first special economic zone, becoming a testing ground for the country's reform and opening-up drive initiated by late Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping. Shenzhen was chosen because of its proximity to Hong Kong, which could offer market economy expertise and capital.

People in Fishermen Village first made a fortune through fishing when they started an aquaculture industry by breeding fish. They then organized teams to transport bricks and other construction materials, since Shenzhen was developing as one of China's major manufacturing bases.

In 1982, every family in the village built a villa, causing a sensation. It rose to fame as the richest village in the country with an annual average per household income of 33,000 yuan. In sharp contrast, the average per capita income in China at that time was about 220 yuan. Deng Xiaoping visited

the village two years later and was highly impressed by its achievements. His words of continuing the reform and opening up policy put villagers' minds at ease.

Huang Xingyan is deputy manager of Yufeng Co., the collective company of the village. He attributes their success to both the government's policy and the mindset of the villagers.

"We're diligent and hard-working, open-minded and always ready to take on new ideas."

However, development of the Fishermen Village came with twists and turns. From 1987 to 2000, Shenzhen developed at an incredible speed, and millions of people rushed in to find work. The value of the village land increased dramatically. As landowners, the villagers were anxious to construct buildings to rent to migrant workers. With unplanned construction, the area became an urban village surrounded by skyscrapers and public transportation. It was composed of overcrowded, multi-story buildings and narrow alleys that were difficult for vehicles to navigate. Inside, it was dark and damp all year round, and lights had to stay on even during the daytime.

Each household could make more than 20,000 yuan a month from rentals, but they were worried about the future of their home village. Tang Wenbiao tells us the story through some old photos.

"Since the buildings in the village were not well-planned, they were called 'kissing building' or 'handshake building'. Firemen were unable to get into the alleys. We had to fetch water in buckets if there was a fire. My house was the first one to be pulled down."

In 2002, the village company demolished all the old buildings and planned to rebuild them as a modern community with pleasant natural surroundings, a kindergarten, sports facilities and a cultural activity square in just two years. Huang Xingyan laughs

when he recalls the day the new apartments were completed.

"We handed out property ownership certificates to villagers that day. Each family was allocated nine floors, altogether about 36 apartments. I remember the scene of them carrying piles of red certificates. The environment also changed greatly. In the past,

villagers. Senior villagers are free to entertain themselves. At present, the village is a landlord for 3,800 renters. Property rentals became the most important source of income for the villagers. Thirty villages in Luohu District are now learning from the experience of Fishermen Village as they attempt to plan and manage their land.

Now that they don't have to worry about their daily life chores, villagers are looking to expand their horizons. Huang Xingyan explains.

"Villagers are better off and are now hungry for cultural activities. Their perspective on society is changing. We think that cultural progress is more important than economic development."

Wu Songqiu, the first university undergraduate from the village, shares the sentiment. He returned to the town in 1992 with a degree in computer science from the prestigious Guangzhou-based Sun Yat-sen University.

"I have a strong affection for my hometown. My grandfather was part of the first generation of villagers here. At that time, few villagers were educated and they turned their backs on me when I graduated from the university. I thought it would be difficult to develop the village because the people were illiterate. I wanted to devote myself to the development of the village using what I learned."

Wu Songqiu is now the manager of a real-estate company tasked with

creating a better living environment for local residents.

"I want to rearrange the surroundings and lay-out of the village. I hope I can expand our business in the future and invest in diversified industries, because simply depending on housing rentals is risky and unsustainable."

Wu Songqiu is glad that many young



1982年,建设中的深南中路、红岭路

► Shenzhen's trunk roads, Shennan Road and Hongling Road, were under construction in 1982. [File Picture]



► Shenzhen has transformed from a fishing village to an international metropolis over the past 30 years. [File Picture]

there was no room for villagers to do open air exercises, and they seldom came out. Now, they love to congregate in the square."

Huang Xingyan says a real estate company now manages the apartment rentals. Professional management attracts renters and provides high-quality services to them. The rental rate has also increased. The company offers job opportunities and training for

people in the village have received higher education. Hong Kong citizens living here also send their kids to the kindergarten in the village, since its educational resources are as good as those of schools in Hong Kong.

As we're bidding farewell to the Fishermen Village at noon, restaurants in the community are getting busy.

Some villagers are doing exercises outdoors whilst others are reading books in

the shade. But all are getting ready for an even more prosperous future. ■

One Family's Journey

Text / Photo by Yang Yang

2008 marks the 30th anniversary of China's adoption of the reform and opening-up policy. How has the initiative changed ordinary Chinese people's lives? The answer can be found in one particular city — the city of Shenzhen in south China.

Zhang Jihe moved to Shenzhen in his mid 40s to start a new career.

In February 1979 people's lives in Shekou, a district located southwest of Shenzhen, changed forever. China's first industrial zone was launched there.

It was considered as a fresh start for China's first special economic zone — Shenzhen. Many people across China rushed to the city in the hope of better lives, and Zhang Jihe hoped he could become one of them.

"I was open-minded and ready to join the country's economic expansion. I had planned to come to Shenzhen in 1983, but failed at the time because my family needed me badly."

In 1983, Zhang Jihe was a 37-year-old engineer, married with two daughters. He had a comfortable life in Wuhan, a big bustling city in central China. He heard the story of Shenzhen's development and wanted to give it a shot. But giving up an easy life and go to a strange place didn't excite his wife Xi Hehua.

"Our family was finally reunited in Wuhan after he quit his job in another city. But suddenly he said he wanted to work in Shenzhen. I really could not understand it and didn't allow him to go. In addition, our daughter was ill. A career is important but family is also important."

One of the reasons Zhang Jihe wanted to work in Shenzhen lay in the city's incentive

policy. It guaranteed that the harder you worked, the higher you would be paid. At that time in other parts of China, people would get the same salary no matter how hard they worked.

Ten years later in 1993, 47-year-old

In its first year as China's first special economic zone, Shenzhen had only two engineers. But now in its Nanshan high-tech zone alone, there are over 50,000 high-end technicians.

After moving to Shenzhen for work



Zhang Jihe and his family of three generations pose for a photo in Shenzhen on November 1st, 2008. From right to left are his daughter Zhang Hui, granddaughter Ranran and his wife.

Zhang Jihe had another chance to work in Shenzhen. The city was badly in need of senior technical and managerial talents. And this time, Xi Hehua didn't oppose the idea.

"At that time our children had grown up. He insisted on going to Shenzhen to work. I agreed. He is a man with ambitious career plans."

It was the perfect time for engineers to go to Shenzhen because in the 1990s, high-tech sectors were replacing the city's traditional manufacturing industry.

in 1993, Zhang Jihe always felt he made the right decision.

"My mind has changed a lot since I came to the city. It's a special economic zone. Time is money, efficiency is life. Before, many state-owned enterprises were not efficient at all."

Zhang Jihe led a technical team to design projects. He also wrote technical books and gave lessons to young people in his spare time. Through his hard work, his income improved dramatically.

"The salary I received when I first came to Shenzhen was already twice or triple the amount I earned in Wuhan. And my income has grown three or four times from when I first arrived."

The more money Zhang earns the better life his family can enjoy. His wife Xi Hehua offers an anecdote.

"The most expensive gift he bought me, which is also the one I like the best, was a gold necklace. Our relatives and friends admired us very much. Every time we went back to Wuhan, they would say we got rich in Shenzhen."

"The necklace cost me about 2,000 yuan. If I still stayed in Wuhan, I could never imagine buying such an expensive gift for her. I also spent 20,000 yuan to buy a house back in Wuhan. I travelled from Shenzhen to Wuhan by air. It was considered a luxury for most Chinese in the 1990s."

As early as in 1984, Shenzhen residents' annual per capita income was twice as much as that of the national average. For

10 consecutive years between 1993 and 2003, the disposable income of urban residents in Shenzhen ranked first in China.

Reality has spoken for itself. Zhang Jihe and Xi Hehua now live a comfortable life. When we asked Xi Hehua whether she regretted not letting her husband come to Shenzhen in 1983, the answer was clear.

"At that time I just wanted a life in which the whole family could stay together. He sometimes complains that our life could have been even better, and I blame myself for not supporting him to come here in 1983."

Zhang Jihe and Xi Hehua were reunited in Shenzhen in 1998, five years after Zhang Jihe came to work in the city. At that time, Xi Hehua was already retired. The dynamic Shenzhen caught her by surprise.

"I can still remember the moment I first arrived in 1994. There were few houses in Shekou and a lot of grassland. Skyscrapers are now everywhere. It takes a long time to build a house in other parts on the Chinese mainland, but in Shenzhen, it is much faster

thanks to its high efficiency."

Apart from the high rises, urban services and the environment in Shenzhen have also improved a lot.

"It often takes a longer time to do things back home. But the pace here is unbelievably fast. Shenzhen also has a nicer weather, better environment and fantastic city planning."

After 27 years of development, Shenzhen, a former fishing village, developed into a modern city with a sound infrastructure and beautiful environment. The population of Shenzhen has also increased from 20,000 in 1983 to its current 14 million.

Zhang Jihe and Xi Hehua feel lucky to have experienced all the changes alongside Shenzhen, and consider it their second hometown.

But like many other senior citizens in China, they want to return to their first hometown, Wuhan after Zhang Jihe retires.

A hometown is where you feel at home. By this definition, both Shenzhen and Wuhan are Zhang Jihe and Xi Hehua's hometowns.

Migrant Worker Weng Chunxian

Text by Chen Zhe

During the period of thirty years after China's reform and opening up, millions of people moved to Shenzhen, the first special economic zone in the country. Weng Chunxian was among the first generation of migrant workers to move to the city. She thought she would stay in Shenzhen for three months when she first arrived, but has made the city her home for the last thirty years.

In November 2008, a photo exhibition was held in Shenzhen to mark the 30th anniversary of China's reform and opening up. Weng Chunxian was attracted to a picture of a factory girls' dorm in the early 1980s. The dorm belonged to her during that time and she remembers that eight girls lived in the room with four bunk beds. Their aspirations for life were explicitly expressed in their eyes.

"There was nothing but beds in our dorm, not even desks or chairs. Here, you see. We made a small table from foam boards. On one's birthday or festivals, we would sit at it to enjoy ourselves."

These pictures brought back memories of Weng Chunxian's life twenty six years ago.

On April 30th, 1982, Weng Chunxian arrived in Shekou Industrial Zone in south China's Shenzhen from her hometown Shantou. With her were 120 other girls. As a recent graduate from a senior high school, Weng Chunxian didn't qualify to enter a college. But an employment advertisement from Hong Kong-based Kader Toy Factory caught her eye.

"It said that senior high school graduates were qualified to apply to be workers. I wanted to give it a shot and didn't think I would be hired, because most people got jobs through back door practices at that time."

Surprisingly, she was hired. But her family opposed her decision.

"My elder brother was a college student then. He thought my future boss was a capitalist who would exploit the workers

and limit my freedom. My grandma was in Hong Kong and she said workers there were exhausted every day because of their heavy workload. They were deeply opposed to the idea."

Shenzhen was designated as the first special economic zone in China, in August 1980. It was still a fishing village in early 1980s with fields and mountains.

Weng Chunxian insisted on going to Shenzhen to work. She promised her family she would return home in three months if life became unbearable.

At that time, the Shenzhen government was providing preferential policies on tax and land purchasing as well as financial support to overseas investments.

Kader Toy Factory was the first Hong Kong factory to operate in the Chinese mainland since China adopted the reform and opening up policy in 1978. Its products were popular in Britain and Australia.

Weng Chunxian and about three

thousand young women in the factory were the first batch of migrant workers in the city. They were known as 'Kader Mei' literally meaning 'Kader Sisters'.

The factory was located in a remote area with only a few fishermen living nearby. Some workers left due to the harsh environment but Weng Chunxian stayed.

"The workshop was quite big and very bright. At home, we had only one light bulb in a 70-square-meter house. But the workshop was full of light bulbs, making the night as bright as the day. It was a whole new world for me. As a girl who had never had a chance to play with beautiful toys, working there was a pleasure."

Since Weng Chunxian was the only worker who could understand the manager's Cantonese-flavored Mandarin, or standard Chinese, she was picked as a team leader. She also took the responsibility of assigning tasks to others. Working overtime was routine for them.

"We were young and didn't feel tired. There were no supermarkets or entertainment facilities around. It seemed that all we could do was to work."

The job earned Weng Chunxian a decent monthly income of 80 yuan, or about 12 USD, and over 200 Hong Kong dollars of overtime pay. It was a large sum of money as most Chinese people at that time only earned around 30 yuan per month. Weng Chunxian joked that her income was even higher than that of the Chinese president. But she missed her family, especially when she was ill.

"We could ask for leave if we were sick. But nobody was available to take care of us. Colleagues couldn't leave work, and there were no hospitals, just a small clinic. If

we went to see the doctor, we would always be given tablets. We were so depressed that we cried a lot. Many people quit."

Weng Chunxian was lucky. She met and fell in love with Wu Sufeng during the second year she lived in Shenzhen. In 1987, they were married and transferred their

were called 'welfare housing for employees.'

"It was 66 square meters and cost over 10,000 yuan. The down-payment was 3,000 and we paid installments of 100 yuan every month. My salary was 300 then."

In 1990, Weng Chunxian left the Kader Toy Factory and joined China Southern Glass, where employees were encouraged to undertake further education.

"We didn't work extra hours there. More importantly, if we wanted to receive further education, the company would pay for us. Although the salary wasn't as high as in Kader, I was happy to work."

In 1993, Kader Toy Factory laid off its 2000 employees and two years later, it moved to Dongguan in Guangdong province. The building was rebuilt and renovated as part of the Shekou Innovation Park in which many real estate and art design companies are now located.

Hi-tech and multinational companies began to spring up in Shenzhen and play a more important role in its economic development.

In China Southern Glass, Weng Chunxian reached the pinnacle of her career. She finished a degree in accounting at Ji'nan University in Guangzhou and became a regional sales manager.

"Though I had a stable job, I couldn't stop learning because the whole society was progressing."

Progressing from an ordinary migrant worker to a sales manager, her

experience influenced several people around her. Peng Li is one of her colleagues.

"She is very devoted and experienced. She is also very willing to help others. Her persistence and readiness to take on new technology impresses me a lot."

Weng Chunxian's husband Wu Sufeng is now a public servant in Shenzhen. They



1990年，福田区工业区求职的女工

Many young people from all over China came to Futian district in Shenzhen to find a job in 1990. [File Picture]



28年后的今天他们又聚在一起，还是在蛇口

The first generation of migrant workers get together after 28 years. [File Picture]

Hukou or registered permanent residence from Shantou to Shenzhen.

In 1987, the couple bought their own house. This was the first time real estate property could be purchased by individuals in Shenzhen. Before that, houses were either allocated or rented by people's employers. Wu Sufeng says that houses on the market

have bought a larger house and a car. Their son entered a university in the city. Recalling their experience in Shenzhen, her husband says:

"In the early 1980s, Shekou Industrial Zone put forward a famous slogan 'Time is money, efficiency is life'. One can get happiness only by seizing every day. Don't be cry babies. You will be rewarded later if you

work hard."

In 2007, the 'Kader Sisters' gathered to celebrate their 25 years in Shenzhen. Half of them continue to live in the city, and some have become entrepreneurs and officials. Weng Chunxian says life treated her well.

"Thanks to the reform and opening up, I came to know that the harder I work, the more I gain. As a migrant worker, I must be

responsible and try my best in everything."

Weng Chunxian now drives to work every day. She is at a very comfortable stage in her life. From the three months she promised her family to the thirty years of working and living in Shenzhen, she has achieved a lot. Her optimism and diligence are an act to follow for anyone who wants to succeed in the city of immigrants. ■

A Hong Kong Businessman's Life

Text by Liu Min

Shenzhen is an epitome of China's economic reform and opening-up. According to statistics, 60% of its overseas investment comes from Hong Kong. Cai Dongliang is one of them.

When 18-year-old Hong Kong resident Cai Dongliang first set foot in Shenzhen in 1987, he never expected to see the scene of a modern city with convenient transportation, high living standards and developed infrastructure.

Over the past 20 years, the businessman has travelled frequently between Hong Kong and Shenzhen and now feels deeply connected with Shenzhen.

His first trip through Shenzhen was on a trip to his hometown in Guangdong for the Spring Festival, the traditional Chinese new year holiday. He recalls the snowy day when he waited in a long line to buy a ticket.

"Before the Spring Festival, if we wanted to go back to our hometown on Dec. 26th we had to start queuing on the 25th. There was only one border control station at

the time, the Luo Hu port."

In the 1980s, as China's first special economic zone, Shenzhen was engaged in infrastructure construction. Cai Dongliang still remembers what he saw through the train window that day.

In 1984, China and Britain signed the Sino-British Declaration on the question of Hong Kong, which stated that the island would return to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. Hong Kong's exchange with the Chinese mainland was further strengthened. In the

summer of 1988, Cai Dongliang, as an intern at a Hong Kong-based company, Cai Dongliang came to Shenzhen together with his boss to explore business opportunities. His boss' conclusion was no investment in Shenzhen.

"Nobody knew what would happen during those transitional years before 1997. So they didn't dare to invest in the Chinese mainland. My boss later regretted very much about his decision of not investing in

Shenzhen. Otherwise, he would have been more successful."

But Shenzhen's development didn't stop due to some people's lack of confidence. In 1992, Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping visited Shenzhen and reassured the central government's determination to further



Stocks and shares have become part of the lives of Shenzhen people. [File Picture]

"The city was completely different from Hong Kong at that time. But it was not as shabby as I had imagined. I saw the tallest building, the Shenzhen International Trade Building. I was quite surprised. Since then, every time I took a train to Shenzhen, I would see a different Shenzhen."

promote reform and opening-up policy. In the same year Cai Dongliang was promoted as a department manager of a manufacturing company based in Hong Kong. The company assigned him to work in Shenzhen.

"After 1992, many factories moved to the Chinese mainland. We thought the whole investment environment in the mainland was pretty good. The Shenzhen municipal government provided lots of favorable policies to attract overseas investment."

According to the deputy director of Shenzhen Bureau of Trade and Industry Chi Weiguo, the government at that time was trying to introduce foreign investment and business cooperation.

"There was nothing for us to learn from previous experiences. But we sincerely hoped the overseas enterprises would come to Shenzhen. Shenzhen was among the first cities in China to establish the Service Centre for overseas enterprises as early as in the mid 1980s. We also helped these enterprises to find business opportunities in the city."

More business opportunities pushed Cai Dongliang to start his own company in Shenzhen in 1993. His company produced polymers for industrial constructions.

"At that time, the Shenzhen government offered very good deals for us overseas investors. My contract allowed me to use the land for 40 years with an annual pay of 150 thousand yuan."

But bureaucracy did exist. It would take the local government several months to respond to questions raised by overseas investors. But Cai Dongliang believed that it was just a matter of time before the government's service would catch up.

"70% to 80% of the overseas enterprises in the Pearl River Delta were from Hong Kong and Taiwan in the early 1990s. The policies were quite favorable for us; although the government service was not as efficient as it is now. They now have a centre which holds most of the government agencies. It's much more convenient"

Overseas companies took full advantage of cheap raw materials and labor cost in Shenzhen. Most of their products were export-oriented.

To further tap the huge Chinese mainland market, Cai Dongliang later established several branch companies in other Chinese cities. But he chose Shenzhen as his company's headquarters.

"The whole country underwent huge changes. We went to provinces of Guangdong, Fujian and Zhejiang to explore the opportunities. We were very excited. Previously, Shenzhen was a showcase of China's opening-up drive. Whenever people in Hong Kong talked about the Chinese mainland, they would refer to Shenzhen. Now it's different, other places has also opened up right in front of us."

Shenzhen had to adapt to the new situation. It changed from a manufacturing base to a financial, high-tech and logistics center. This has presented new challenges for businessmen from Hong Kong. For example, the development of logistic service means exports from Shenzhen no longer have to pass through Hong Kong.

"In the past, Shenzhen's development depended very much on Hong Kong. But now Shenzhen is independent and has its own industries and plenty of ports. The two are more like twin cities. It's an inter-dependent relationship, not a one-way relationship as it used to be."

Cai Dongliang has worked in Shenzhen for over 10 years. Driving a Benz, he travels back and forth between the two cities.

"It seems that everyone in Shenzhen is an immigrant from another part of China or around the world. I often say that if you want to find a city with no aboriginals, Shenzhen would be the only city in China. It offers a level playing field for everyone. So if you have a dream to realize, come to Shenzhen."

When Cai Dongliang opened his first company in Shenzhen, the city was just at its starting phase and now it has become an international modern city. 30 years later, Many Hong Kong businessmen like Cai Dongliang have taken Shenzhen as their home. ■

Love Literature in the Times of Commercialism

Text by Li Cong, Photo by Xu Liuli

Education has always been a top priority in any city's economic and social expansion. In that sense, Shenzhen, China's first special economic zone is no different. But Shenzhen's education does have a highlight—its emphasis on contemporary campus literature. Many people have put their unremitting efforts behind this transformation. Let's follow the story of Yan Lingjun, a high school teacher who has adopted unconventional Chinese teaching methods in his school.

Yan Lingjun teaches Chinese literature

in Yu Cai high school in Shenzhen. Although it's only a selected course, his class attracts many students.

"I like literature very much, and I was recommended to attend this class. It's very helpful. With his interpretation on literary works, we can find many answers to daily questions."

"I think the biggest gain in this class is that we can adopt a positive view on life and society through reading classic works."

Different from other teachers who focus on grammar or structure analysis, Yan

Lingjun is much more of a guide to help students understand and think about the ideas behind an article, and further promote their interest in literature. This is also one of the initiatives that prompted him to teach Chinese in Shenzhen 20 years ago.

"I came to Shenzhen in 1990 mainly for two reasons. One was to earn more money; the other to do something meaningful in an open environment."

The first goal was very easy to realize. It was not difficult to earn a satisfactory salary as long as you have talents and put in enough

effort in a city where "efficiency is money". But the open environment is what concerns Yan Lingjun.

"Under such a rapidly growing economy, children in Shenzhen at the time were mainly thinking about how to earn big money. The significance of literature teaching was somehow neglected."

At the time, parents may have easily satisfied their children's material needs; however with the busy life style and focus on earning money, they couldn't spare enough effort on the spiritual growth of their young.

population had increased dramatically from the 300 thousand in 1979 to now over 12 million. To meet the demands of such a rapidly increasing population, the number of schools in the city grew from less than 600 to the current figure of more than 14 thousand. The vast expansion of Yu Cai high school distracted the authorities' attention from literature.

But Yan Lingjun didn't give up. As a Chinese teacher and a lover of literature he felt obliged to introduce these literary works to the next generation.

faced complex social problems in a society of transformation.

The novel attracted readers nationwide with its realistic depiction, and encouraged more students to write their own story. Numerous high-quality literary works from students sprang up in Shenzhen, and the city was named 'the cradle of campus literature' in China.

Wang Wei still remembers how popular the book was among her peers.

"These campus literary works were closely related to our lives and we loved to read them. Our school also took the opportunity to encourage us to read and write more."

At that time, many high schools in Shenzhen founded their own literature and writing clubs, including Yu Cai high school who established the famous 'Spring Rhythm' club.

But while educators were delighted about a rising interest in literature, the internet penetrated into people's life at the beginning of the 21st century. Shenzhen is situated beside Hong Kong and young students have access to massive resources from their neighboring city, including the latest computer games. Many students became obsessed with games and put aside their books.

It was at this time that Yan Lingjun began to think once again about reviving his idea of a literature club. He wanted to combine literature and computers together, and build an online literature portal.

"We should use computers and the internet as a tool, and take full advantage of it. We wanted to attract students who loved both the internet and literature. The online literature portal has several advantages. One of them is to make possible the direct communication between teachers and students, and provide a platform for the students to exchange their writing experiences and works."

Yan Lingjun's first priority was to persuade the school authorities to accept his idea.

"I wrote five reports to the schoolmaster over two years. I asked for two things. One was to finish my 'Adolescents' Reading' project and use it in my literature classes, and the other was to put online our literature club, 'Spring Rhythm'."

The school authorities threw their full support behind Yan Lingjun and in 1999, the literature portal officially opened online. Yan Lingjun also started a course named after his own teaching materials, 'Adolescents' Reading.'

Yan Lingjun (3rd from left), a Chinese literature teacher in Yu Cai high school in Shenzhen and his students.



"My parents were very busy then, even had little time for cooking. So I always went to some outside dinners with them and we had little time for better communication."

Wang Wei is a high school student in Shenzhen. Like many other young students, she found that literature could open a window for her and satisfy her spiritual needs.

Facing such a situation, Yan Lingjun began to think about establishing a literature club. But he found out that the materials for Chinese language and literature teaching were not good enough.

"Shortly after I started to teach here, I found that the teaching materials were not very suitable for students, especially for children in Shenzhen. The doctrine-like books erased their interest in enjoying beautiful articles, and failed to provide guidance for adolescents."

However, the idea of a literature club was put off. As an immigrant city, Shenzhen's

"I've read so many good works and I always think that it's my responsibility to introduce them to my students. Through these works, they can know more about the various human cultures, understand the meaning of life, and most importantly learn to cherish their own lives and love the world."

Bearing this idea in mind, Yan Lingjun decided to focus on his teaching materials. He compiled his own teaching book called 'Adolescents' Reading'.

"Children should experience happiness and joy in their adolescence. My teaching book aims to provide a fresh approach when they are overloaded with heavy homework."

And the importance of literature education for young people soon hit the spotlight.

In 1998, a student named Yu Xiu of Yu Cai high school published a novel describing the experiences of local high school students. The novel revealed how students in Shenzhen

Liu Genping is the principal of Yu Cai high school.

"For subjects like literature, we can't only rely on regular classes. We should explore more channels in accordance with the changing tides. Without the literature portal, without his literature class, we wouldn't have so many excellent student writers."

The literary class was also welcomed by students. Every Wednesday afternoon, Yan Lingjun's classroom is crowded with literature lovers; Wang Wei is one of them.

"I came to the class initially for my interest in literature, and gradually find out that this class provides me with a lot of thinking about literary works and life. And the reading material is classified according to different subjects like friendship or different

views on life. It's easier for us to understand the theme through comparing different articles with the same subject."

Now the Wednesday afternoon literary class has become the hottest choice for many students, even for those who don't study at Yu Cai high school.

About 70 percent of the middle schools in Shenzhen are using Yan Lingjun's 'Adolescents' Reading' as a core teaching material in their compulsory or selected courses. Moreover, literary education has been emphasized not only in middle schools, but also in many primary schools in Shenzhen.

The "Spring Rhythm" literature portal has now become a popular platform for young people from all around the country to exchange their views on literary works and

share their own articles.

It's been nearly 20 years since Yan Lingjun first came to Shenzhen. He is very gratified that he could finally realize his goal of doing something meaningful.

"The process of a city's development is just like a person running. When you run too fast, your head may bend backward, and your mind may not keep up with your feet. Good literary work just like a guide, piloting our direction and telling us where we should go."

Now in his 40s, Yan Lingjun has a happy family life and a son who is also a lover of literature. Besides his daily classes, reading remains his most favorite thing. He continues to absorb vast knowledge from good literary works, and attract more and

30 Years of Pop Music Memories

Text by He Fei

Photo by Xu Liuli

Shenzhen, as the first special economic zone in China, has always been at the forefront of China's opening-up. And its special geographic location, a neighbor to Hong Kong, helped to secure its key position in China's pop music industry. Over the past 30 years, the city was like a cradle for Chinese pop music. Singers from around the country came to Shenzhen to pursue their dreams.

Shenzhen is a busy city. People come from every corner of the country with their dreams.

"I came to Shenzhen in the early 1980s. Like other young people, when I just arrived, I was curious about the city and flooded with expectations."

Qiu Yan, originally from Dongguan,

Guangdong Province, is a music producer and lyricist. Like hundreds of other musicians and

Shenzhen is the frontline of China's opening-up drive, I could feel my strength grow when

I got here. I never felt tired. And I have witnessed and felt the great changes in the city."

One of these changes would be in Qiu Yan's favorite trade, music.

"The early 1980s was a copycat era. The entire music market here in Shenzhen was flooded with Hong Kong pop songs. No original works were available. Then gradually, adapted cover songs became popular, like 'Ye Se Lan Shan'."

In the 1980's China had just initiated its opening-up policy. Shenzhen, a small fishing village on the sea side of southern China was designated as China's first special economic



Qiu Yan, a music producer and lyricist in Shenzhen, is working at his studio.

singers here in Shenzhen, Qiu Yan follows his dream.

"We spent our best times here. The feeling was special and complex. Since

zone. The new policy was like a spring breeze that brought the city fresh air and earth-shaking changes.

Some consider the song "Ye Se Lan Shan," or translated as "When the Dark Night Shades" as the first real pop song in China.

dream in Shenzhen. Zhang Ping is the music producer of the song "Ye Se Lan Shan". Reputedly he was the first musical producer to use electronic sounds in a song, marking the beginning of China's pop music era.

In Zhang Ping's studio, the cassette

and guitar. We had the band in the studio and recorded all the real sounds. The sound of the brass was also a new fashion back then. I adopted the way of using brass instruments from jazz music."

In the early 1980's, almost all the singers looked the same. Their performances were dull and serious, and they would often stand motionless in formal clothes. Zhang Ping says Zhou Feng and his song "Ye Se Lan Shan" gave the audience a visual impact.

"He showed us a brand new way of stage performance. His vivid act and fashionable score made him different from other singers at the time. He was an overnight success. Actually I never expected that song would be a hit, but people had just walked out of a shackled world. Back then, it was rare to hear and see such a performance."

From then on, pop music took hold in the country, and Shenzhen became a forefront of Chinese pop music. Qiu Yan, the avid



♦ Reputedly Zhang Ping, the music producer of the song "Ye Se Lan Shan" was the first musical producer to use electronic sounds in a song, marking the beginning of China's pop music era.

▼ Li Jixian, an official in the local cultural affairs department.

It caused a big stir all over the country, especially in Shenzhen, where its singer Zhou Feng came from. At that time, many people found an echo in the melody and the lyrics.

"How fresh the night is when breeze comes,

The Shades of Shenzhen is bright and flowery.

My car is running fast through all the streets and lanes; through the sea of lights."

"When I arrived in Shenzhen, almost every night-club and bar was playing this song. Although I was young then, only a middle school student, I can still remember the melody today."

"As far as I know, it was a cover of a Japanese song. The singer Zhou Feng was then a handsome and energetic young man. And his performance on the stage was not what traditional singers did because he gave the audience a brand new experience. He became very popular."

"My youth, my world becoming so splendid at this time.

My hope, my dream, these happy times will never be forgotten."

The lyrics described the passion of Zhang Ping, also pushing for his musical



tape of "Ye Se Lan Shan" is well looked after. The quiet man becomes talkative when he hears the song.

"The sound of the brass instrument is real, not made by the computer. So is the drum

music lover from Dongguan, started to write his own songs.

"My works were in their infancy period in the 1990s. Many of my works were romantic love songs. I lived in Shenzhen and

saw the changes every day. My songs became branded by the city."

The special economic zone has attracted people from around the country. Almost 90 percent of local residents are not from the city, like Qiu Yan. However, living in Shenzhen for over ten years, Qiu Yan includes his love of the city in his songs.

"As time passed by, Shenzhen changed and so did I. I included my sense of belonging to the city in later works, such as this one 'Hua Deng Chu Shang'."

"Even now I still think about one question. To the people who have lived in the city for 10 years, 20 years or even 30 years, how much do they feel they belong to the city? It seems that nobody was born here."

The name of the song is a great way to describe the city Shenzhen, "Hua Deng Chu Shang" or "When the Colorful Lights On". In the 1990s, the city was off like a rocket, developing at a very high speed.

Landmark buildings soared above the horizon, and cars and buses weaved back and forth through crowded new streets. The stock market expanded and the small village was modernized. But behind the splendid appearance, loneliness and a lack of belonging have long been issues for the residents.

These sentiments could be seen in the city's colorful nightclub culture. The clubs

were famous for their promotion of original music, and many famous singers started their careers there.

Li Jixian was then an official in the local cultural affairs department.

"Since Shenzhen is on the front line of China's opening-up policy, minds were more open than in other mainland cities. The city embraced all kinds of culture, home and abroad, traditional and avant-garde. At the peak, there were over 1,000 night bars and KTVs, and thousands of singers and bands in Shenzhen. They had performances every night. Hong Kong pop music was a major impact in the city's music. Some clubs even invited Hong Kong producers to help them. And Hong Kong singers came to perform in the city, like Anita Moi."

As a song writer, Qiu Yan has his own understanding of the era.

"When talking about music, the city was in its element in the 1990s. Shenzhen had an advantage over neighboring Hong Kong. Since it is an immigrant city, people were open to new things. Its rapid economic growth created a solid foundation for pop music with numerous people traveling abroad and bringing back fresh music elements. At that time, many song writers like me were writing endlessly. But actually, there were not many platforms for us to release them

on. There were a few record companies in Shenzhen but I had to go to Guangzhou to release my new songs. Now it has changed a lot. There are several record companies and a special radio program for original pop music. Singers from other areas of the country now come to Shenzhen to release their songs. This is a major change."

Shenzhen's night bars and clubs have actually decayed from their peak time, but there are still young people arriving with musical dreams.

Zhang Ping, the music producer of China's first pop song, is still writing songs for ceremonies, musicals and stage performances. He plans to reproduce the song "When the Dark Night Shades" with a symphony score.

Qiu Yan runs a cultural and music company and has his own studio. He promotes young singers, and says pop music will be a lifelong pursuit.

The past 30 years in Shenzhen has seen music mature from simple Hong Kong covers to the original songs branded with the character of Shenzhen. Like when a baby learns to walk, the music of Shenzhen has taken many steps, growing with the city and mirroring its growth. ■

The Oil Painting Base of Dafen Village

Text by He Fei
Photo by Xu Liuliu

The story of Shenzhen cannot be completed without talking about the village of Dafen. Located in east part of the city, the village has become a cultural symbol due to its production of oil paintings.

Dafen village differentiates itself with other villages in China through its slews of orderly arranged workshops. Inside the workshops, artists and workers are busy painting while owners are negotiating with buyers from all over the world.

It is estimated that 70 percent of the world's most copied oil paintings are brushed up and spat out of this village.

Liang Jian is the Art Director of Dafen Oil Painting Village Management Office.

"We have more than 800 galleries

and nearly 10,000 artists and workers in the village. In 2007 Dafen earned 380 million yuan selling oil paintings and peripheral products such as frames, palette and so on. Around 60 percent of the paintings were sold for export, mostly to Europe and North America."

However, about two decades ago, Dafen was just a poor fishing village inhabited by about 300 people. The average annual income of each villager was less than 200 yuan, or about 30 US dollars. In 1989, an art dealer from Hong Kong came to Dafen with his painting tools and several students, trying to start a new trade in the village. His name is Huang Jiang.

"Dafen was a very poor village when

I first arrived. No one wanted to invest here. At that time, I got some painting orders from Hong Kong and was looking for a workplace to finish them. I found Dafen was quite close to Hong Kong and its rent was very low. So I rented a room from a villager and taught some students to do the work."

In the 1990s, almost all the oil paintings produced in Dafen were replicas of world classics. People who couldn't afford originals paid a few hundred yuan for reproductions. Before Huang Jiang's arrival, painters could rarely make a living.

Wu Ruiqiu is one of Huang Jiang's students who came to Dafen in 1989. He recalls the first time he started making money by selling paintings.

"I have been studying art since I was very young, but it was just my hobby. I didn't know I could make money by painting. My family was very poor, so when Huang Jiang asked me to come to Dafen, I left my home without hesitation. After I got here, I told my mom that every piece of my painting of chickens could buy me two real chickens. My mom was very surprised and asked me to draw quickly."

In the next few years, more and more art dealers and painters opened painting factories in Dafen. Back then, every painting was completed by only one painter. This way of copying was inefficient and caused many problems. Wu Ruiqiu invented a new method.

"It was in 1997. Wal-Mart Store asked me to finish 100,000 oil paintings in ten days. I hired 200 painters and rented a two-story building. Just as different people have different handwriting, different painters have different painting styles. After a few days, I

painting, painter A only drew trees, painter B only drew rivers and painter C was only in charge of mixing colors."

This new way assured that all the paintings had the same colors and shapes, and accelerated the production. Many art dealers in Dafen started to adopt the procedure in their own factories. In 2004, after noticing that Dafen had the potential to become a cultural production base, the local government set up a management office of Dafen Oil Painting Village. But copying masterpieces is no longer a preferred activity as the market demands more original works. The office has to adjust its

yuan to build a dorm for them. Talented artists can rent apartments at a comparatively low price."

More and more galleries in Dafen are producing original works. Han Huimin, an artist, came to teach in Shenzhen University after his retirement from the Chinese Artists' Association. He says some of his students are copy workers in Dafen.



Wu Ruiqiu, general manager of Artlover Gallery is narrating his painting knot to CRI reporters in Shenzhen on November 15, 2008.



Two painters are working on oil paintings in Shenzhen's Artlover Gallery on November 15, 2008.

"I see many young copy workers who love art very much. They really want to learn how to make original works. I hope Dafen could give them more training opportunities and help them improve their skills. I believe originals in Dafen will have a bright future and many talented artists will be born from here."

Wang Jingpei is a copy worker in one of the galleries of Dafen Village.

"Pipelining is not good for copy workers. Once there are no orders, the workers lose their jobs. If I am able to create originals, I can make a living. My dream is to become a real artist and

found every painting looked different from the others. I realized that the old method of production was not going to work and Wal-Mart would not accept these paintings. Suddenly I got inspiration from the assembly lines in clothing and car factories. I asked every painter to take charge of only one part of a painting. For example, in a landscape

strategy. Art Director of the office Liang Jian explains:

"Now any painter who wants to work in Dafen has to pass an examination. What Dafen needs are artists who know how to create, not just copy. To attract more talented artists to Dafen and keep the existing talent in the village, we invested about 80 million

open my own gallery."

Now, galleries in Dafen are selling millions of paintings of different genres, including Fauvism, abstraction, impressionism, Chinese wash paintings and more. Sheridan, an Australian customer who doesn't want to give her family name, has just moved to Hong Kong and is looking for

paintings for her new apartment.

"I think there are a lot of paintings, very great varieties of painting. Most of them are very beautiful. I would like to buy two, if I can see two I like. I like cool colors like green. For next summer in Hong Kong, I will feel cool with the painting."

According to statistics released by the Management Office, the annual income of Dafen has almost tripled in the past four years. However, the same as other industries in Shenzhen, art business in Dafen is also damaged by the global market downturn at the end of 2008.

Li Hui owns a local painting shop in Dafen.

"In the past, large numbers of foreign customers have come to our village and buy many paintings as Christmas gifts. But by November of 2008, we have only received one such order."

Li Hui's shop is in a five-story trading center in the village, where around 30 percent of shop owners have closed their businesses due to a shortage of customers. Overall exports in the village have decreased by more than 70 percent. The local government has worked out some preferential policies to stimulate the painting trade.

But as one of the first artists of Dafen village, Wu Ruiqiu points out, the local industry should also take some initiatives of

its own.

"Expanding domestic market is our priority. We have adjusted our production structure. Replicas used to be our major business, and now we have doubled the quantity of original paintings, which we hope will attract more customers and bring more interest."

From a small fishing village to a major painting production base, Dafen's transformation has not been easy. But whatever difficulties are ahead, the local people have proved they will deal with them resolutely and creatively. ■



People in Shenzhen mostly take public transportation. An office worker reads a newspaper in the subway on the way to work.



A photo of modern Yantian Port in Shenzhen, the second largest port in China and the fourth largest in the world.



Residents of Luohu District entertain themselves by performing Yue Ju, a local drama of southern China.



A family poses in front of a 6-meter tall statue of Deng Xiaoping, the late Chinese leader, without whom Shenzhen would still be a small fishing village.

A Dynamic Shen Zhen

Photo by Xu Liuli



Volunteers in Shenzhen give free haircuts to passers-by on a street corner.



Shenzhen residents like spending their weekends in Lotus Hill Park with their families.



Travelers and residents head to Old Dongmen Street to have fun and shop.

I would love to continue hearing CRI on China Radio International.

I have always been curious and interested in other countries and cultures and CRI is my magical entrance to this wonderful country, China. It informs and educates me and others like myself on everything from China's perspective on world events to things such as China's people, culture, heritage, language, music, sports, advancements, and so many, many more fascinating subjects.

CRI certainly fills an important role in bringing China and its people into our lives and unites us all as one people while respecting our differences.

Geraldine Haniff
Canada

I have e-mailed you just to show many thanks for the hard work. I've been one of your CRI listeners since February 11, 1977. I would like to thank your government for making easy listening for me and others by broadcasting your programs on several FM frequencies in

our country, Liberia. I would like also thank your government for meaningful developments such as building roads, plastic and flour factories.

Joshua Kingkpa
Liberia

It has been a busy year of many challenges, a year that US elected a black man to white house and a year that Kenyan experienced election violence but all in all we are approaching its end smoothly.

I will never forget to thank CRI team for its effort of updating us on whatever is happening around the globe and without forgetting China itself a country whose economy is growing very fast.

The reception quality has been excellent for the entire year which enables us to tune and enjoy your programs on a daily basis.

Philip M Machuki
Kenya



A New Year Card by Shakeel Ahmad,
President of Cheeno Listener's Club

theMessenger

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