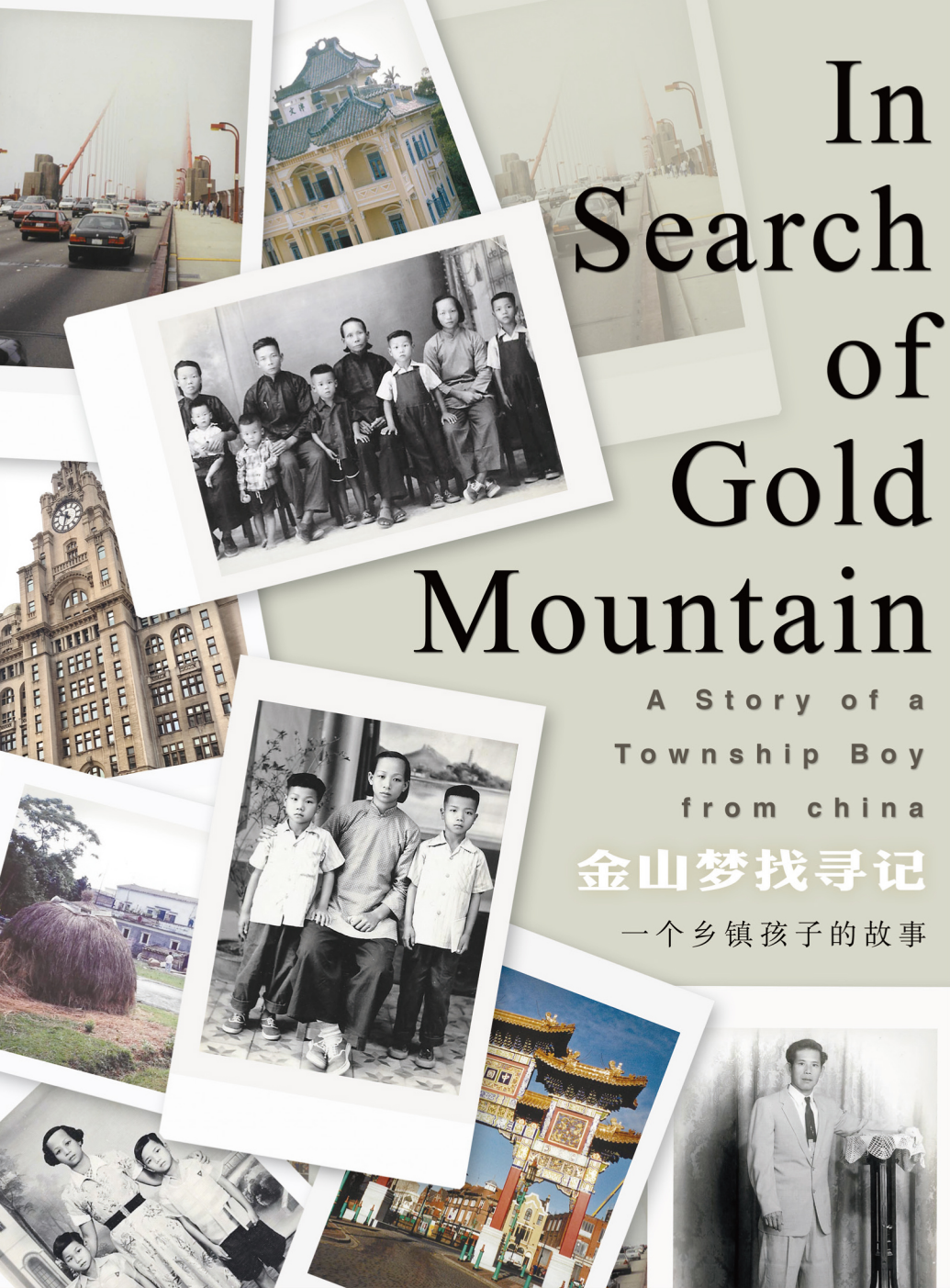


In Search of Gold Mountain

A Story of a
Township Boy
from china

金山梦找寻记

一个乡镇孩子的故事



BRIAN WONG 黄荣富



Green
Forest



In Search of Gold Mountain
金山梦找寻纪



A Story of a Township Boy from China
一个中国乡镇孩子的故事



Brian Wong 黄荣富

In Search of Gold Mountain

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Published by Red Publish

Red Publish (Green Forest)

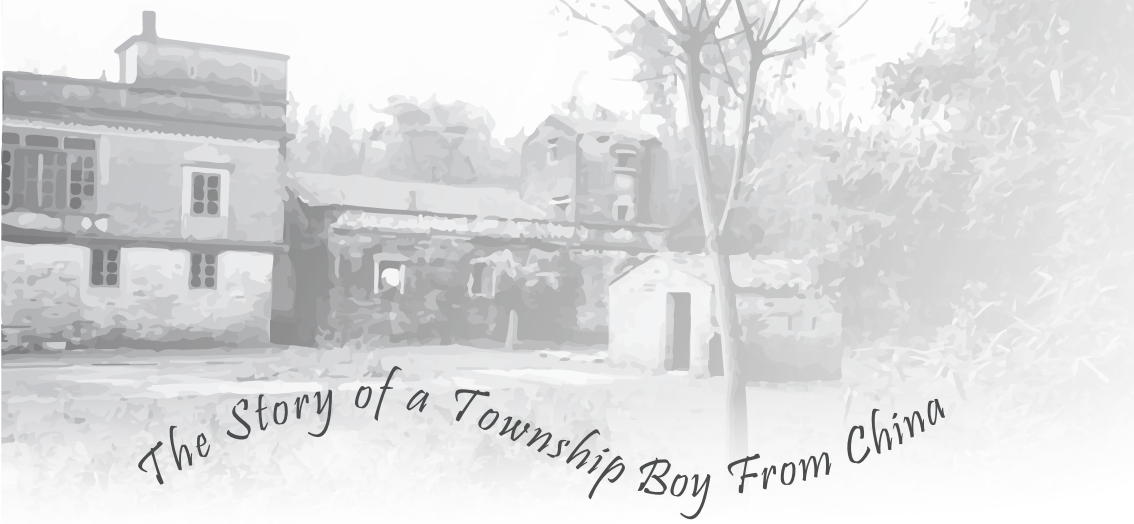
11/F, 133 Wanchai Road, Wan Chai, Hong Kong

editor@red-publish.com

<http://www.red-publish.com>

ISBN: 978-988-8868-75-9

First Edition: November 2024



The Story of a Township Boy From China

Biography

Brian Wong, JP, DL, MA (Econ), was born in the village of Xiang Gong Township, Kaiping City, Guangdong Province of the People's Republic of China in 1949. He left the village in 1954 and arrived in the port city of Hong Kong. He was educated at a Chinese Language School in Mong Kok, Kowloon, Hong Kong.

He left Hong Kong in 1963 for Liverpool, England and attended a local school. To pursue his dream of searching the 'Gold Mountain', he left school at the age of sixteen and went to work for Uncle Tony in his restaurant in Hull, East Yorkshire in 1965, where he learned some basic managerial and cooking skills. Searching of fortune had always been his dream, just like the path his grandfather and father had taken.

In 1969 he opened his own Fish & Chip Super Bar and soon opening a restaurant and coffee bar. He also joined his wife's family business and diversified the business into one of the

biggest cash and carry supermarkets in 1980 in the Chinatown in Liverpool. At that time, the city was already facing a severe economic recession, strikes and social unrest, and also a crisis of gentrification developments. In order to meet this challenge, he founded the Liverpool Chinatown Business Association in 1993 and served as the Bilingual Chinese Business Development Officer for the City Council since 1994.

He was qualified and appointed as Justice of the Peace since 1994 and was appointed as Deputy Lieutenant in the County of Merseyside since 2002. He served as Board Member of the Ethnic Minority Business Forum for the Department of Trade and Industry (2004-2007). He also served as Vice Chairman of the North West Ethnic Minority Business Forum (2006-2007). On the cultural front, he served as Member of the BBC's Advisory Council for North West (1998-2003). He also served as Trustee Board Member of the National Museums of Liverpool from 2004 to 2012.

Currently, Brian is the consultant of the Rongfu Business Finance Investment Consultancy. Over the years, he has acted as an adviser to local business community and voluntary organisations. He was appointed by the Jiangmen City (Municipal Government) as the 13th Jiangmen Overseas Chinese Consultative Representative. At the same time he was appointed as a consultant to the Jiangmen City Public Diplomacy Association 2020. Because of his knowledge of legal procedures and laws between the UK and China, he was appointed as the

Mediator for Kaiping City's Overseas Chinese Affairs Bureau in 2020.

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In Search of Gold Mountain

Preface

My Journey to the West was inspired by my father, uncles and grandfather's ventures to the Gold Mountain at a very young age. I had already made up my mind that I would follow their paths and embark on this adventurous journey when I grew up and searched for my own fortune.

I was born in the year 1949 when China had just recovered from the end of the WW2 and the Japanese occupation; few days after Chairman Mao Zedong proclaimed the founding of the People's Republic of China at Tiananmen Gate Tower on October 1st, 1949. The village was situated south of Guangzhou, the capital city of Guangdong Province. The village was called 'Long Jiang Li' in the township of 'Xiang Gang' where my grandfather built when he returned from the 'Gold Mountain', namely San Francisco in California. The village had twelve houses and it was a short distance away from the big village for all our extended families.

From this township village to the West; from a fish pond to the fragrant harbour of Hong Kong, and across the ocean to the port city of Liverpool (which I had no knowledge of at that time), the journey was full of challenges and hardships. I faced language barriers and discrimination during the journey, which I conquered and overcame through learning, adaptation, hard work, determination as well as perseverance.

My journey to the West started when I was 5 years old, leaving this joyful rural life for Hong Kong, then left this cultural 'East meets West' metropolitan port city for Liverpool in December 1963. I had decided in search of my 'Gold Mountain' and that the journey should be started as early as possible, just like my father, uncles and grandfather had done. Later on I left Liverpool for Hull, East Yorkshire, and so the journey unfolded again.

I hope my story would benefit my children, grandchildren, friends, Chinese community leaders across the globe, overseas Chinese Bureau, business elite, students who study sociology and economics and many who may wish to know about the overseas Chinese diaspora and Chinese philosophical approach to business and life. I appreciate my wife who persistently and strenuously supported me through out that time. I adhere to the belief in lifelong learning and spent a lot of time going to Day Release Studies to pursue knowledge, whilst managing the business at the same time. She managed our family businesses, raised our children, and had no complaints about my need to leave England.

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I am also grateful to my father who left China few months before I was born in February 1949, supported our family financially so that I could attend Chinese school in Hong Kong.



Introduction

Over 200 years ago the Wuyi people (Note 1) consisted of five counties: Jiangmen (Xin Hui), Kaiping (my county), Tai Shan, Enping and He Shan, many of them went overseas in search of fame and fortune. They went to San Francisco and later Barkerville, Canada in search of fortune which actually they worked as coolies in laundries or chefs or grocery keepers. Like my grandfather, he left his wife and the extended families behind and embarked on such treacherous journeys, facing racial discrimination, language barriers, harsh and dangerous working conditions. Some of them returned home in triumph. They became financially rich and spent huge sums of money to build the famous ‘Diaolou’ (under the World Heritage Conservation-a fusion of west and east architectural designed mansion called Diaolou) in Wuyi County, Guangdong Province, China.

In the 17th century, most of the Chinese went to the West because of the weakness of China, which was still under

imperial rule, and was plagued by wars, occupations by great powers, Japanese invasions, famines, floods, and warlordism. Domestically, it was faced with rebellions, Opium Wars and banditry, especially in rural areas. These were the turbulent times in Wuyi County, with many Wuyi people went to Southeast Asia and lost their lives in rubber plantations due to harsh working conditions.

My journey will highlight our Wuyi people's spirit and perseverance across the globe, where the 'see Yap Dialect' still exists and is widely spoken in San Francisco today. Our See Yap Chinese Association had been formed over 100 years ago. It was founded in 1906 in Cleveland Square, Liverpool.

I hope my story will capture their endeavours and ventures; how our Confucian philosophy taught us endurance, respect and honour which enable them to integrate well with any host nations across the world. The ethos of our extended family in business and networks led us to congregate in Chinatown in Liverpool at an early stage; likewise in San Francisco, New York, Toronto, Sydney and many other cities around the globe. In the meantime, I wish to outline my ambitious plans to reshape Liverpool's Chinatown and how modern gentrification and other factors are inevitably destroying and marginalising my beloved Liverpool's Chinatown.

I hope to illustrate the pros and cons of Chinese traditional management style in modern business environment in my story. I like to explain the difficulties of forming a voluntary

organisation such as Chinese Business Association in 1990 and how hard to implement its vision and objectives such as improving the infrastructure of Chinatown and building the biggest archway in Europe in 2000. I like to stress the importance of the interpretation and experience of my early theories: with knowledge (education, innovative skills), access to information, access to power, access to finance, and in turn enables the accessibility of more knowledge, and therefore ultimately reach the pinnacle of a successful life.

From lecturing Economics to studying my Masters in Economics at the University of Manchester enabled me to travel to Hong Kong, China and Southeast Asia to conduct theoretical, statistical and evidence-based research for my dissertation; and later on, to appreciate how business thrive in different political, social and economic systems. I want to convey and share my experiences and learning with the fifty million overseas Chinese and 1.4 billion Chinese in China, and all those who are interested in understanding China's well-being and its relationship with the rest of the world.



The story began:

*From Bamboo Forest to Pinewood
Mountain in San Francisco, California*



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Early Childhood in the Township

When I was a little boy, ever since I had the ability to recollect stories, happiness, sadness and fear, the story of my grandfather's adventure to the 'Gold Mountain' was deeply imprinted in my mind. I decided at that time that I would follow his journey and in search of my own 'Gold Mountain'. The gathering with grandfather, uncles and aunties usually took place in front of the village square; under the pagoda style pavilion after the harvest in September. The weather was still very humid and we would fan ourselves whilst sitting by the flicking oil lamp inside the pavilion. It was dead silent and pitch black at night. Crickets, toads, and many other insects were singing in unison like an orchestra. Fireflies were dancing gently on the mulberry trees surrounding the pond in our village, lighting up the night sky.

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My grandfather told us the sad story of his eldest son, (my first uncle) who travelled to San Francisco to work in a gold mine and unfortunately died suddenly in a new gold mine in British Columbia. He told us that many Wuyi people from our county went to San Francisco at first, but then after the First World War, gold mines were also discovered in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada and many of them went north and subsequently ended up in Barkerville (Note 2). Historically, the Wuyi people were a very united and close-knit community, supporting each other in a strange country and forming the Wuyi Association, one of the oldest community groups in San Francisco.

My grandfather returned to Xiang Gong Township in triumph, and courted our second grandmother (who was an opera singer) in Guangzhou, and built a new village called 'Long Jiang Li' for his extended family. His first and second wife both had three children (my father being the youngest); the age gap between the children was very wide, because I was told that our second grandmother was a young opera singer in Guangzhou, and she married my grandfather on his homeward bound journey.

The village 'Long Jiang Li' that my grandfather built was ten minutes walk from our original village 'Chaling Cun' of 'Xian Gong Township'. There were twelve houses and a large fish pond in front of the houses. There were two huge banyan trees at each end of the fish pond, surrounded by mulberry trees in the middle. On the right of the village exit, there was a well for fresh water, and a small narrow road and bushes on the left leading to other

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villages. At the back of the village was a small bamboo forest with a sloping path leading to the 'pit toilet'. Inside the toilet, there were two long wooden planks running across the pit; as children we had to use it and wipe our bottom with dried leaves. The excrement would be used as fertiliser for the villagers' crops. As a kid, I was always terrified of falling into this 10-foot-deep 'poo pit' without being rescued by anyone because it was so discreetly hidden behind many tall bamboo trees.

Village life

Rural life, games, ventures, fears, land reform (commune)

Life in the village was peaceful. My father had already left for San Francisco with his nephews from my second uncle before I was born. With two young boys, my mother was allocated a small field to grow rice, which was enough for us to eat. Mother also reared chicken and ducks and grew sweet potatoes and taro. She would also catch fish from the fish pond for special occasions. I enjoyed the monsoon season with my older cousins; we would paddle around the village with our front door (in times of flood, we would use the unhinged door to paddle around the village). When the water receded, large carp, dace, catfish and many other fish would be trapped in our pond and the canal outside the village. After the heavy rain, my mother and aunties would use big bamboo baskets to catch large carp weighing more than ten kilograms and many other fish. I was thrilled and excited.

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I enjoyed village life because there was so much fun and many seasonal games to play and seasonal fruits to pick. Sometimes I would tie a big firecracker to a long bamboo stick, lighted it and threw it directly into the canal outside the village where fish gathered. The fire-cracker exploded in the water and hit the fish, my cousins and I would grasp the opportunity to catch the fish when they surfaced. My cousins and I enjoyed autumn period after the harvest, when the field was dry and cracked. We would collect sweet potatoes and taros from the field. We dug a small hole, buried the sweet potatoes and taros in it, and then covered it with sand. Finally, we would build a small hut on the sand with dry mud clay, burn straws inside the hut until the sand and clay became red hot. Then we all shouted with excitement and pushed down the hut, and the red hot clays would naturally cook the sweet potatoes and taros, which tasted delicious. It was an unforgettable experience.

I learned how to play poker and Chinese poker (it was more complicated but with the same principle as poker) with match sticks when I was very young; if you won enough to fill a small box, you could exchange sweets from the 'Rag-and-Bone' man who visited our village regularly. So I was very good at mathematics, which proved to be useful in future.

My childhood was full of scary events and fears. When I was naughty, my mother always tried to scare me by telling me that the scratching sound in the alley of the village came from a tiger, and it would take me away at night. The other was to visit my

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grandma's village over six miles away in Taishan 'Chakeng Cun'. My mother had two big baskets hung on a very strong bamboo stick; the basket in the front carried my brother and the basket at the back carried me. She walked briskly across a fifteen-foot-long, two foot-wide stone bridge that spanned a thirty-foot-deep gorge. I would cover my eyes whenever she crossed this gorge especially where tall trees casted long dark shadows on both sides of the gorge.

I learned how to catch frogs in the field from my older cousin. He taught me to put my hand into the cave on a raised path. If the passage inside the cave was rough and uneven, it must be a frog's burrow; if the passage was smooth and sticky, it would certainly be a snake's burrow. There were many interesting things to do in the village, such as cutting silkworm silk to make fishing line, twisting metal wires to make fish hook, using frog skin to make little drums, using bamboo sticks to make kite frame, and collecting birds eggs and shrimps in the morning dew (the shrimps had drifted to the edge of the pond, so you just needed to collect them in the morning mist). Many of the games we played came from nature, and we had no modern means of communication such as telephones, social media, radios and televisions; we did not even see any private cars except public buses.

I was so proud to wear a red scarf (Hong Lingjin) and walk to my school three miles away. Every morning I could see many of my classmates from different villages walking along the road

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and we all walked to the school together with great joy. Some of our school assignments were as simple as collecting rice worms from rice fields; each of us would fill up a glass jar and counted as school marks at the end of the day. I liked this kind of assignment because it allowed me to go out for the day and meet some of my uncles and aunties who worked in the fields.

I was lucky enough to avoid being scolded by my teacher. One day I was caught smoking in the Xian Gang market place. My teacher asked me to bring my mother to see her. However, the next day, my mother woke me up early in the morning and walked thirty minutes to the bus stop at the market square, and so began my new life in Hong Kong.



(1) Village that my Grandfather built in Xian Gang Township Kaiping City

The village consisted of twelve houses for the extended family that my grandfather built when he returned to the village from San Francisco. My first grandma had two older boys and one girl, so I called them first Uncle and second Uncle and first

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Auntie. My second grandma had one older girl and two boys, so I called them second Auntie, third Uncle and my father. Traditionally, in larger family clan groups, males and females were ranked separately. The house on the far left belonged to third Uncle, then it was my first Uncle's house, and then the second Uncle's house. On the far right was my father's house. The flat, square concrete areas in the front were for placing corn or drying rice in the hot sun.

My Family in the Old Day



(2) My family pictures as in 1953

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Top right, my father left China (two months before I was born) in August 1949 for San Francisco, following in his father's footsteps in search of fame and fortune. Top left photo, my mother was in the middle and I was on her right and my older brother on her left. Bottom right photo, mother and her family. The one next to me was grandmother; the man sitting next to grandma was mother's older brother and his family in 1953.



From a small village to the west.
From a fish pond to Hong Kong.
Across the ocean to the port city of Liverpool...

The story of searching for Gold Mountain started with a little boy, Brian Wong, who was living in Kaiping City, a small village in China. Brian Wong knew that one day he would embark on this perilous journey—language difficulties, prejudice—but owing to his endurance and hardworking spirit, he overcame. Follow the steps of his ancestors to achieve his dream of a golden mountain.

It is a story about Brian Wong and all the overseas Chinese. See how they built Chinese culture in a foreign land with the Chinese spirit.

ISBN 978-988-8868-75-9



9 789888 868759 >

PRICE: HKD\$140