

MY FIRST VISIT TO HOME TOWN

(4.4.1999-9.9.1999)

(Written by Chan Siew Khai, 11.5.2000)

We are often told of a negative picture by many who visited mainland China, especially about the substandard hygiene facilities; strange human relationship; unsuitably cooked food. The thought of having to experience what painted above deters one from attempting to make his first visit to home town.

In 1999, the Hui Ann Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (惠安侨务办公室) together with the Hui Ann Returned Overseas Chinese Association (惠安归国华侨联合会) jointly organized the First world Hui Ann Clanman Conference cum the 10th Asia Hui Ann Associations Conference. We, a group of youngsters, including Teo Seng Yeong (张成雄) Chan Guan Poh (曾元宝), Chia Hock Song (谢福崧) and myself were encouraged by many elders to take part and represent the Association. With their encouragement, we finally decided to take the challenge.

On 4th September 1999 at about 1.45pm, we boarded MI928 and traveled four hours to land at Xiamen (厦门) International Airport. To our surprise, we landed in front of a huge and modern building, with passage leading straight into the building. Within the building, comfortable lobby and automatic escalator sending passengers from aerobridge to the checkpoint similar to what we see back in Singapore Changi International Airport. Perhaps the only difference, is that it is not as busy as that of Singapore Changi International Airport. We were greeted by Mr Zheng Xi Hong (郑锡鸿) and his driver Xiao Li (小李) who took us to our hotel at Hui Ann Luo Town (螺城) Da Peng Hotel (大鹏酒店); a hotel which was newly erected and equipped with modern facilities. We traveled for about one hour along a well constructed highway where we enjoyed the beautiful night scene



of the Quanzhou City (泉州市) and Ji Mei University (集美大学). Luo Town (螺城), a city which will bring us back twenty years when Singapore China town looked like this. Road well laid with tar and shop houses constructed at both sides of the road attracted many patrons.

We had most of our breakfast, lunch and dinner within the hotel and restaurant nearby during the period of our stay. The food was delicious and hygienic, especially those that were prepared using oyster as ingredient, whether deep fried, with eggs, or bee hoon soup. Another special dish that appeared in almost every meal was known as "fish roll" (鱼卷) from Chung Wu (崇武). It was especially nice when cooked with soup. Despite all kinds of good food we could not stop enjoying, nothing is complete without good liquor to go along with it. The special brew produce locally known, Hui Quan Beer (惠泉啤酒) is just the right drink we need. With this perfect combination, all of us simply suspended our diet plans and enjoyed ourselves without any further hesitation.

Our visit this round could not be as successful if not for the assistance rendered by many working at the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office and the Returned Overseas Chinese Association. The assistance rendered



range from arranging accommodation, transport arrangement, and tour guide arrangement-especially to the home village. Special thanks goes to Mr Chen Qing Fa (陈清发主任), Mr Lin Ban Beng (林万明副县长), Mr Wang Yu Qi (王育琪主任), Mr Zhuang Jia Min (庄稼民主席), Mr Lian Rong Yu (连荣玉主任), and Mr Zheng Xi Hong (郑锡鸿常委副会长). During our stay, we also received valuable assistance from our clanmen setting the right communication path. They are Mr Ong Han Cheong (王汉章先生), Mr Kea Meng Cheng (郭明星先生), Mr Chng Chee Kwee (庄志桂先生), and Mr Ho Eng Bok (何荣木先生).

Chung Wu Town (崇武镇), Xia Xi Village (霞西村) is the home village where myself and Guan Poh's (元宝) ancestors came from. This village consists of all Zeng Clanmen (曾氏). With the assistance of Mr Chen Qing Fa (陈清发主任), Mr Zeng Qiang Bin (曾强斌先生) and Mr Zeng Rong Bao (曾荣宝先生) were assigned to guide us through the visit. During the conversation, I soon discovered that Mr Zeng Qiang Bin (曾强斌先生) is actually my cousin, what a small world it is! In no time, we reached our home village. We found that there was no smell of shit, nor ugly sight of construction. Houses are constructed with proper arrangement, and the road leading to the village is



well laid. We were all amazed by the tranquillity of the environment. It was good to have an opportunity to meet my uncle, cousin, their wives and children. Apart from the village visit, we also had the opportunity to visit the ancient city of Chung Wu (崇武古城), witnessing the spectacular stone craft of Hui Ann and the magnificent view of the ancient city.



Participation in the conference allows us to feel and see the efforts put in by our clanmen to ensure success of the Conference. They had put in their heart and soul to prepare many nice programmes and activities to welcome us in order to make this conference a memorable one. Apart from the memorable gifts presented to all participants, we were greeted by a series of fabulous performance at the beginning of the conference eg. The Girl's Nan Yi Singing Group, a dancing Troupe that came to Singapore before, and the Hui Ann Girl's Fashion Exhibition. All of us indeed indulged in the good food, nice entertainment and accommodation.

9th September morning at about 11.00am, six days after

we set foot on the home town, it was time for us to say good bye. Undeniably our impression of home town was changed completely. We strongly believe that with this good experience we had, we should be in a better position to convince and organise more root searching groups in the future.

