

Unfading Splendor--The Golden Years of Jinguashi

By Lee Hsin-yi

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Compared with its noisy neighbor Jioufen, Jinguashi is visited by fewer tourists. After decades of prosperity, it now has a simple and tranquil life.

The good old days of Jinguashi dates back more than a century ago when gold mine attracted many people to work and live here. To date, we can still recollect its prime period by touring the Japanese-style houses, the Prince Guesthouse (where former Japanese Emperor Hirohito ever stayed when he was prince), and the gold mine pits. In fact, the expertise of old miners and their skillful hands are more valuable than gold.

(Photo 1: Jinguashi at night. The shining orange color of lights seems to brings back the golden days of its past.)

Jinguashi naturally was famous for gold mines. At that time, if one asked local residents about the percentage of gold in the gold mines here, they would point to the major mine pit "Big Gold Melon," saying that it boasted of the highest percentage (about 40-50 %). The Japanese started to mine on a massive scale whereas later managers excavated more mine pits. As a result, there had been 9 gold mines, with the last two operating below sea level. Some people said that, after the Big Gold Melon was opened, the *feng-shui*, or geomancy, here was destroyed, resulting in the downfall of Jinguashi.

(Photo 2: Chen Shih-cheng shows the old ingot he extracted from ores.)

"After gold was found here, people had flooded into this place," 77-year-old Chen Shih-cheng, an old miner, recalled. At peak period about 40,000 people lived here. There were two cinemas and two primary schools. But why both were two? The reason is that the Taiwanese were required to be separated from the Japanese. At that time, cinema was called club. The First Club was only for the Japanese while the Second Club was for local Taiwanese. After the Japanese left at the end of World War II, the First Club was renamed "Zhongshan Hall" by the Taiwan Metal Mineral Company but was still a cinema.

The space distribution in Jinguashi during that period was closely related with gold mining industry. There are Japanese, Taiwanese and mainland Chinese (mostly

from Wenchow of Fujian province) workers. The houses for the Japanese were built in order, the Taiwanese area was poorly arranged, and the Wenchow workers lived at dormitories in the outer circle.

According to Chen, those young laborers from Wenchow did the most difficult works. In the beginning their passports had been taken away and they could not leave freely. Later on, due to the outbreak of China's War of Resistance against Japan (1937-1945), they were unable to go back to the mainland. What was worse, many of them suffered dust-lung disease. Therefore, most of the 2,000 or so Wenchow young workers had stayed and died in Taiwan eventually.

(Photo 3: Chen Shih-cheng recalled the old mining days.)

(Photo 4: The site of a prisoners-of-war camp)

Five Stops of Jinguashi's historical tours

If you want to better understand the historical development of Jinguashi, you can refer to the following five tour arrangements. Some of the past glories are no longer visible, but you can still see some relics which vividly reflect the past gold times.

Stop 1: Residence of the last mining director, Mike Kikujirou

The buildings located on No.5 Road used to be the best residential area at that time. Today there are quite a few Japanese style houses in Jinguashi, but most of them have not been properly maintained. Besides, woods do not stand long. The best preserved building here is the residence of Mr. Mike Kikujirou, who was director of Jinguashi Mining Field in the 1930s. It is now dormitory of Taiwan Sugar Company and is not open to public.

Stop 2: Supply Station

It is situated right beside the Director Mike Kikujirou's residence. Today you can hardly recognize its building structure. The only thing that can be identified is a slideway which was used to allow goods to slip down. Japanese and Taiwanese workers could buy daily necessities at cheaper prices here. But short-term contract workers were not given such benefits.

(Photo 5: The location of Supply Station used to be town center.)

Stop 3: Central Warehouse

The Central Warehouse was located at Jinguashi's downtown area and there was a hospital inside. It was surrounded by Japanese style dormitories and Supply Station. Regrettably, only the foundation is left now.

(Photo 6: The old site of Central Warehouse is now the playing ground of Shi-yu Middle School.)

Stop 4: Old Residence of Huang Jen-hsiang

Mr. Huang Jen-hsiang was foreman of workers at that time and made great contributions to the development of Jinguashi. Located on the first of Chi-tang Old Street, this residence is not open to the public.

(Photo 7: From the outlook of this building, people will not be able to tell the importance of its previous host. The building is no longer prominent, just as the mining industry here.)

Stop 5: Chitang Old Street

To be frank, this old street seems to have been rebuilt. The road pavement is by no means original. We can only imagine what Mr. Chen Shih-cheng recalled: Along the street there stood tailor's shops, goldsmith's shops, cloth stores, pharmacists, Chinese medicine stores, billiards playgrounds, restaurants, groceries, hardware shops, etc. At that time, the narrow street was so crowded and prosperous. It is a pity that these shops are no longer here and the noise is no longer heard.

Fortunately, a grocery which has been here since the Japanese occupation period is still operating. The current owner is an eighty-year-old woman whose father opened this shop. She is called "The Big" by Chen Shih-cheng. On the second floor there are novels and comic books for rent. Chen ever came to rent novels.

(Photo 8: The grocery that has been here since the Japanese occupation period witnesses the golden time of Jinguashi.)