Biography of Zhen Jinrong



From Taishan to New York

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Chapter 1
A Young Man from Wencun (1955–1988)



Around 1955, Zhen Jinrong was born in Taihe Village, Wencun Town, Taishan, Guangdong Province. Taishan is a renowned ancestral homeland of overseas Chinese, traditionally described as having “two Taishans, one at home and one overseas,” reflecting the large number of residents who have emigrated in search of livelihoods. For the people of Taishan, travelling abroad to establish a career was nothing unusual, but it was never an easy undertaking.

Zhen's early career followed a clear and practical path. He entered South China University of Technology, where he studied Architecture. After graduation, he undertook numerous construction projects throughout the Pearl River Delta,

accumulating extensive professional experience. This experience laid an essential foundation for his later success in New York's construction industry. When the thirty-three-year-old man from Taishan decided to move to America, he carried with him not merely determination, but a complete set of professional skills refined on construction sites across the Pearl River Delta.

In 1988, at the age of thirty-three, Zhen Jinrong made a decision that would change his life: he would go to the United States.

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Chapter 2
Making His First Fortune in New York (1989–2001)

After arriving in New York, Zhen Jinrong focused on two industries: construction and real estate. Compared with restaurants and retail businesses, which attracted many first-generation immigrants, the American construction industry presented greater competition and higher barriers to entry.

He studied English diligently, obtained a contractor's licence in New York, and founded Hongda Construction Engineering Company in 1989.

“If I don't take on a project, that's one thing. But if I accept it, I must do it to the highest standard.” This became Zhen's guiding business principle. Through an unexpected opportunity, he secured a renovation contract for the Formosa Plastics Group's headquarters building in New Jersey. He completed the project at a fair and reasonable price, maintained the construction schedule, and delivered workmanship that met the required standards during every stage of inspection and acceptance. The contract brought him his first substantial earnings as a new immigrant entrepreneur and established his reputation almost overnight. Thereafter, construction projects of various sizes began coming his way, and his business entered a period of rapid growth.

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Chapter 3
An Integrated Property Developer (2001–2017)

Around the turn of the millennium, the American real estate industry experienced rapid growth. Drawing upon the capital accumulated through his construction company and recognising favourable market conditions, Zhen established a real estate development company in 2001. By undertaking both construction and property sales, he became a professional integrated developer capable of managing the entire property development process.

After years of sustained effort, Zhen became a well-known Chinese-American entrepreneur in the real estate and construction market of the eastern United States. Hotels and residential buildings developed under his direction became part of New York's bustling urban landscape.

In 2017, Zhen received the Outstanding 50 Asian Americans in Business Award, presented by the Asian American Business Development Center (AABDC). The award is regarded as one of the most influential honours within the Asian-American business community and represented formal recognition of his standing in the mainstream commercial real estate industry.

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Chapter 4
A Journey in Community Leadership: From Hometown Associations to the Ningyang World Conference

As a prominent overseas Chinese community leader, Zhen Jinrong has been active in numerous associations. He has served as President of the American Taishan Friendship Association, Vice President of the American Taishan General Chamber of Commerce, Chief Adviser to the New York Guangfu Association, and Chief Adviser to the Federation of Guangdong Overseas Chinese Associations in the United States.

Within the New York Taishan Friendship Association, he served three consecutive terms as President, leading the organisation “from nothing to something, from small to large, and from weakness to strength.” Under his leadership, the association purchased its own premises and developed into an important community organisation with more than 1,000 members. In 2006, he also became Vice Chairman of the New York Zhen Shunhe Association, participating in the establishment of this organisation for members of the Zhen clan.

In November 2023, Zhen served as Executive Chairman of the successful Tenth World Taishan Ningyang Association Friendship Conference. Held in Taishan under the theme

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"Realising Dreams in the Greater Bay Area, Reuniting in Taishan," the conference brought together nearly 1,000 overseas Taishan natives from seventy-eight delegations representing nineteen countries and regions.

At the opening ceremony, Zhen stated: "The conference provides a platform for Taishan associations and fellow natives from different countries and regions around the world to strengthen friendships, communicate, and cooperate. We hope everyone will take this opportunity to learn about the development and changes taking place in our hometown of Taishan." Representing the organisers, he called upon Taishan Ningyang associations worldwide to take active steps to "bring together the strength of more than two million Taishan people at home and abroad, work with one heart and one purpose to build a prosperous, harmonious, and beautiful new Taishan, introduce Taishan to the world, help the world understand Taishan, and support Taishan in reaching the global stage."

The New York Taishan Friendship Association donated RMB100,000 to the Taishan Overseas Friendship Association to support cultural and sporting activities for children of overseas Chinese families, educational exchanges, and the development of overseas Chinese community publications and hometown newsletters.

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Chapter 5
Roots in Taishan

Despite spending more than thirty years building his career in the United States, Zhen Jinrong has never forgotten his hometown or his ancestors.

Before 2020, he returned to Taihe Village every year for the Qingming Festival, regardless of the difficulties of the long journey. He cleared weeds and maintained ancestral graves, burned incense, and paid his respects to previous generations, travelling thousands of miles to honour his ancestors and preserve family traditions. “I am Chinese, a descendant of the dragon. Honouring our ancestors is our duty.” For Zhen, his roots remain in Taishan and in China, and he believes he must never forget the land where he was born and raised.

In early 2020, Zhen mobilised and organised Taishan community associations in New York to donate pandemic prevention supplies to his hometown. These included infrared thermometers, medical gloves, surgical masks, and other protective equipment.

The Qingming Festival in 2023 marked Zhen's first return to his hometown to honour his ancestors in three years. On his first evening back in Taishan, he deliberately visited the historic and cultural district of Taicheng, walking through its streets and

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observing the changes that had taken place. He expressed pride in his hometown's development. He had also participated in projects involving the restoration of historic qilou arcade buildings in Taicheng's cultural district and took pride in their preservation and revitalisation.

He noted that many overseas Chinese who were unable to return home continued observing Qingming traditions in their adopted countries or sent money to relatives in their hometowns, asking them to maintain ancestral graves and perform remembrance rituals on their behalf. During the nearly three years when he himself could not return, Zhen likewise asked relatives in Taishan to make the necessary arrangements. “Every time he watched videos of the ancestral ceremonies sent by fellow villagers, his longing for home grew stronger.”

He has emphasised the importance of returning to one's ancestral hometown to rediscover family roots, invest, and establish businesses. He hopes to encourage second- and third-generation overseas Chinese descendants to visit Taishan, reconnect with their ancestry, and strengthen their sense of belonging.

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Chapter 6
Concluding Reflections: Buildings and Bridges

Zhen Jinrong's life can be summarised through two words: buildings and bridges.

Through construction, he has contributed to New York's urban landscape. From founding Hongda Construction Engineering Company in 1989 to establishing a real estate development company in 2001, he has spent more than thirty years establishing himself in the construction and property markets of the eastern United States. Through his integrated development capabilities, he has left his professional mark upon the buildings of bustling New York.

Through bridge-building, he has connected Taishan with New York. As President of the American Taishan Friendship Association, he helped transform an organisation into a substantial community association with more than 1,000 members. As Executive Chairman of the Tenth World Taishan Ningyang Association Friendship Conference, he worked to unite the shared interests and aspirations of more than two million Taishan natives and descendants worldwide. As a son of Taishan who returned home each Qingming Festival to honour his ancestors, he preserved his cultural roots through the simplest and most enduring traditions.

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From Wencun in Taishan to Manhattan in New York, and from construction sites in the Pearl River Delta to the commercial real estate landscape of the eastern United States, Zhen Jinrong has spent more than thirty years constructing visible buildings on one side of the Pacific while creating invisible bridges of friendship, heritage, and cooperation between the two shores.

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