

## Florida Splendid China Media Coverage

Developer devotes energy to Four Corners  
The Journal of Osceola County Business, January 1997  
Profile:  
By Nancy Pfister Journal Staff Writer

Splendid China opened in 1993 amid protests about Tibet, but it also opened with a great deal of irony, too. Osceola's first theme park opened here because of an uneasy partnership between communists in mainland China and a democracy-loving family from Taiwan.

"Mom wanted to design and build a cultural center in Osceola County," said George Chen, 40, developer of Formosa Gardens.

In 1988, Chen's parents Frank and Josephine Chen moved from California to develop 500 acres along US Highway 192 in northwest Osceola County.

But Josephine Chen wanted more than just homes and commercial buildings. Josephine Chen (who is not related to the former Osceola County school board member) started two private schools in Taiwan, served as principal for several years and continues to serve as chairman of the school board.

"She believes that education is a wonderful equalizer," he said.

For Osceola County, she envisioned a park where people could learn about Chinese history like a giant, like a Gulliver looking down on replicas of historic places during his travels.

Chen's parents visited similar parks in the Netherlands, Taiwan, and mainland China in 1990 to get ideas.

When Chen's parents toured the Splendid China park in mainland China, the communist Chinese approached them.

"The Chinese government expressed an interest in joint-venturing with my parents to develop this theme park in Florida," he said.

It took another year to hammer out the details, with construction beginning in 1991. Chen was named president.

"We started a multimillion dollar project to serve as a cultural center, that also doubled as a theme park," Chen said. "You could tour China and see everything close up. It's not the typical theme park with rides. It was built as a cultural experience, featuring authentic miniature replicas of magnificent buildings tied to major historic events of the world's largest population.

"It's a source of epiphanies for aspiring architects, world travelers, and culturally-oriented folks," Chen said.

The park also inspired protests.

Tibetans and sympathizers protested the park, which includes a replica of the Tibetan temple where communist Chinese slaughtered residents and forced the Dalai Lama to flee his homeland during the 1950s.

Chen is among the sympathizers. He met with protesters.

"What happened to Tibet in the 1950s was horrendous," Chen said. "I believe they have a legitimate gripe and reason to protest."

However, protesting at Splendid China is "barking up the wrong tree," he said. The theme park doesn't represent the policies of mainland China, he said. Trying to hurt Splendid China's business, Chen said, isn't fair.

"Sometimes the Splendid China operators have their hands tied. I think that privately they sympathize," he said.

But they can't comment. It would be like an American ambassador in China criticizing American policy, he said.

Chen wishes the park well, even though his family is no longer associated with the park. The uneasy partnership ended just before the park opened in September 1993.

"The way we did business was vastly different than the joint venture partners we had in mainland China," Chen said. "The outcome: we couldn't work with them."

China Travel Services ended up purchasing the operational rights and the 60-acre property when the park was about 99 percent complete, he said.

"It was an amicable parting," he said.

The family decided to devote their energies to developing their land in an area known as Four Corners because Osceola, Polk, Lakeland and Orange Counties meet at a point there.

Chen came to Kissimmee at the request of his parents.

His parents had been contemplating retirement in California, but decide to do one more project instead, Chen said.

With their retirement nest egg, they purchased the 500 acres and started the development. "At that time, I was the only sibling in the family who was not attached or married. They felt it was such a large project they wanted their child to come and work," Chen said.

Chen owned a computer business in California, designing computer software and mother boards that were manufactured in Taiwan for 10 years. Chen said he always liked Florida weather whenever the family vacationed here, so he packed up his computer company and moved.

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Chen was born in Taiwan but went to high school in North Carolina and Santa Barbara, Calif. He received a biology degree from the University of California at San Diego. he's single and has a brother and two sisters.

When he has spare time, he teaches scuba diving. he also continues to learn new languages. In addition to Chinese and English, Chen speaks Spanish and plans to relearn the German he forgot from high school. "I'm always busy," Chen said, "I never have enough time in the day to do what I plan."

The family business keeps him busy.

After he arrived from California, the Chens began the very tedious process of getting permission from the state to develop land by proving they could build with a minimum impact on the environment.

The development now has 100 of the 450 houses planned and Chen estimates that it will take five to 10 years to complete the project, which will include hotels and other commercial developments.

Chen is currently building Comfort Suites, with a target opening date set for April. It is the first of several hotels he plans to build.

Chen said his family strives to build a quality development.

"There's a prominent absence of factory outlet T-shirt shops," he said. "We wanted to do a very quality development, even though T-shirt shops were able to pay phenomenal prices."

The Chen family also stayed away from building time-shares, even though the development plan allows 300 units, he said.

"I don't believe in the philosophy and it's hard for me to do something I don't believe in," he said.

Instead, the family attracted businesses like Outback Steakhouse, Florida Hospital Center Care, and Goodings Supermarket. "We focus on attention to details. We're not tourist-oriented but focus on the local residential community as well as the tourists," Chen said.

For its Oak Island Harbor Shopping Center, the Chens received the grand prize of the Aurora Award for architectural design. It's a prestigious award given by a committee of Florida developers, architects, and public utilities, he said. "We're extremely happy with that award. It's a confirmation of our sense of quality," he said.

Keeping quality while developing in a rapidly growing area is a challenge, Chen said. "I think that this corridor will continuously grow exponentially. There's no doubt about that. The challenge for the developers and residents and public officials alike: how do you have quality growth?" he said.

Residents in Four Corners have unique problems, having more in common with each other than the counties they live in. One common problem is sending their children to school.

"These people's children are bused all over the place, 15 to 20 miles away," Chen said. Chen recently hosted a tour of school officials from four counties to view possible site for a proposed collaborative school to serve students in the area. No single county has enough children to open a school by itself, but together, with the aid of the state, the counties could open a school for all of the Four Corners residents.

Chen and others hope the school could be modeled after the Celebration School, and innovative school that's a collaborative effort by Disney, the Osceola County School district and Stetson University.

"If the school can be modeled after the Celebration School and turn it into a quality-oriented magnet school, K through 12, it would be wonderful," he said. It's the kind of quality the Chens appreciate.

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### Orlando Business Journal

Industry Wrapups

From the January 31, 1997 edition

Tourism & Hospitality

#### Splendid China targets families

When Splendid China opened its doors three years ago, the attraction's owner, China Travel Service of Hong Kong, ran it like its similar and successful attraction in China.

But things were different in Orlando.

"What they didn't think about was that Orlando is the most competitive attraction market in the world," says Scott A. Shaw, assistant vice president for CTS Investments.

"They realized the philosophy of 'If you build it, they will come' didn't work."

The Magical Snow Tiger Adventure show that will be at Splendid China starting Feb. 1 is one of the first efforts to bring more people to the Kissimmee attraction.

"We know we need to increase attendance by increasing our offerings," Shaw says. "You don't want to limit yourselves. This is a major step."

This won't be the last step, however.

The company plans to keep increasing its attractions at the park. The next step will be to bring a panda to the park.

The Chinese government has approved the panda leaving the country. Now CTS is waiting for approval from the U.S. government to bring it here.

When that comes, Splendid China will build an exhibit for the Panda and possibly for the big cats featured in the Magical Snow Tiger Adventure.

There will be even more shows and events added in the future, Shaw says.

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### PEKING'S UNUSUAL PROPAGANDA

03/14/96

by Gilbert Gendron

"Only in America!" Some might have exclaimed precisely that on December 18, 1993, when the opening ceremony at the amusement park "Florida Splendid China" (FSC) took place, right in central Florida.

Four years after the Tiananmen Square massacre, it was a heavenly image of China that FSC was offering visitors: miniaturized reproductions of the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, the Stone Forest of Yunnan and more than 50 other famous places being displayed there on some 76 acres of impeccable lawn. Everyone knows that tourist infrastructures of this kind proliferate in the subtropical Eden called Florida. The fact is that by establishing FSC at Kissimmee, in the suburbs of Orlando, its owners have become the neighbors of the great ancestor of all such parks, "Walt Disney World", which is located 2 miles to the west.

Some \$100 million had been spent to lay out the FSC park. Who exactly had done it? The master of the property, a legal entity called Florida Splendid China Inc., was initially a joint-venture. One the one hand, American Eastern International Corp., a Los Angeles-based company controlled by George Chen. A businessman of Taiwanese origin, he had also built, next to FSC, a housing development aptly named "Formosa Gardens".

On the other hand, CTS Investment Inc., USA, a subsidiary of the conglomerate China Travel Service (Holdings) Hong Kong Limited. As soon as December 23, 1993, G. Chen let his partners have his interest for \$26 million. It is said that before bowing out, he had suggested in vain to honor in the theme park those killed at Tiananmen. That such an idea should have been rejected is not surprising, considering that the China Travel Service (CTS) empire is in fact a possession of the Chinese communist state. Set up in November 1949 by the freshly established Mao regime, CTS now covers mainland China with its vast network of tourist centers (between 250 and 280 according to sources). Its head office is to be found in Peking, at 2 Bei-San-Huan drive.

The founding of Hong Kong's CTS company (CTS-HK) is supposed to date back to 1928. Nowadays, three quarters of its stock are owned, however, by the Peking regime.

The remaining shares are quoted on Hong Kong's stock exchange and are used as a screen by company directors who refer to them when they claim that CTS-HK is not a state corporation.

Nevertheless, an inquiry at the Hong Kong-based investment research company Wardley James Capel will suffice to produce a prospectus and financial records in which CTS-HK makes it clear that it belongs to the government of the People's Republic of China (The Orlando Sentinel", 15.1.94). Though CTS-HK shrouds itself in political vagueness, in August 1995 it nevertheless unveiled an impressive organization chart in which many of its subsidiaries were named. So there is a China Travel Service (France) SARL, a C...T...S... (Canada) Inc., a C...T...S... (USA), Inc., etc. -- in all, 14 subsidiaries presently established all around the world. In addition, CTS-HK is operating in Peking, Shanghai, Harbin and Guangzhou, and has various assets in Communist China, including steelworks!

Among CTS-HK's intricate network of corporate names, there is one which warrants a few comments: Shenzhen Splendid China Development Co., Ltd. Shenzhen is of course the county town of a "Special Economic Zone" created at Hong Kong's door by the Peking authorities. And it is just near Shenzhen Bay that CTS-HK has opened, during the horrible year 1989, a prototype "Splendid China" after which its Florida park was modelled. In Shenzhen, tourists also wonder at seeing a tiny Great Wall and a small-scale Qinling Mausoleum. To come back to the Florida park inauguration, it was of course conducted with great pomp. About 2,400 notables and distinguished guests -- including four Chinese Communist Party dignitaries-- feasted, listened to appropriate speeches and marvelled at fireworks. A spokesman declared then that "this is not a political park, this is a cultural park" (The Atlanta Constitution, 19.XII.93), but a publication launched for the opening dispels any doubt in this regard. It contains the names of the 33 members of an "honorary committee" formed in order to glorify FSC. On the Chinese side, Li Dao-yu, the PRC's Ambassador to the USA, Hong Kong magnate Li Ka Shing and Foreign Affairs minister Qian Qi-shen. On the American side, businessmen, Representatives, mayors, Alexander Haig and, heading the list, Richard Nixon. Another member of note was Barber Conable, the former chairman of the World Bank who now sits on the China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development. The globalist elite hobnobs with Communist China's nomenclatura in that organization set up by Peking and mainly financed by Canada.

As if the "honorary" list had not been prestigious enough, friendly messages from political figures were included in the publication: among others, Communist China's President Jiang Zemin, Prime Minister Li Peng (the "Butcher of Tiananmen") and former President Nixon who let it be known how much he had enjoyed a visit to the (Splendid China) park in Shenzhen on the preceding April 1st.

Contradicting the staged festivities, protesters had gathered at the front gate of the propaganda park. (NO COMMUNISM IN KISSIMMEE!) read a placard held by one of them. Only in America this was again, but in the finest sense of these words. Among the demonstrators, observers could spot Tibetans in their typical clothes. "We feel the inclusion of the Potala Palace hides the atrocities the Chinese have committed in Tibet," said Thubten Samphel, adding that "it is a false attempt to beautiful something that is totally ugly."

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It should be explained here that the people in charge of FSC had indeed got a nerve, for not only did they reproduce purely Chinese places but also nothing less than the Dalai Lama's palace. Tibetans are not alone to protest, given the fact that the Genghis Khan Mausoleum, the Id Gah Mosque, Appak Ghoja's Tomb are displayed on the site. In the first instance, the nationals of Southern Mongolia (so-called "Inner Mongolia") are indignant and, in the two others, so are the Uygurs of Eastern Turkestan (which Peking labels "Xinjiang Autonomous Region").

In Florida as in Shenzhen, the Potala and the Genghis Khan Mausoleum are supposed to make visitors believe that everything is going beautifully in the "New China" established by Mao. To quote an advertisement for the Shenzhen park, tourists may get to know the "rich and colorful customs of nationalities". Other documents -- official ones -- show that Peking is acutely aware that initiatives in the sphere of tourism may have some propaganda value. On top of that, the regime tries hard to combine the economically useful to the politically desirable (according to its own criteria, of course). All the same, Tibetans, Mongolians and Turkestanis in great numbers do not want to be anyone's national minorities or folk puppets.

With respect to the profitability of the propaganda park in Florida, it is not sure at all that China Travel Service breaks even. No doubt this has something to do with the "Citizens Against Communist Chinese Propaganda" (CACCP), a group whose campaign is led by Floridians Jack Churchward and Bill Mitchell. Since FSC's day one, CACCP has organized 15 demonstrations in front of the park. They frequently contact the media and get remarkable results. They strive to convince school authorities not to have schoolchildren visit FSC's phony China. The controversial park is far from competing with neighboring Disney World.

Even though there are no crowds at "Florida Splendid China", it nonetheless remains a fact that the Peking dictatorship's coffers are full, thanks to the huge trade surplus which the United States let Communist China accumulate in their market. There has been talk of \$50 billion for 1996.\* Consequently, the Florida propaganda park is not about to be razed to the ground. On the contrary, its owners have designed a bold 15-year expansion program which the local press reported last December. This project should start this year and notably comprises a Chinese village -- paradoxically named "Hong Kong Village" -- to be reconstituted in its entirety on land acquired for \$15 million in 1994.

What a strange and, incidentally, disturbing phenomenon the "Florida Splendid China" microcosm is: at the same time a projection abroad of mainland China's somewhat artificial real-estate boom, a model enterprise of Peking's "red capitalism" and, finally, a symbol of totalitarianism thrust into the heart of the world's leading liberal democracy.

Gilbert Gendron

\*This was an extrapolation made in November 1996. This article was written before an amount of \$38.9 billion was announced in early February 1997 -- still an enormous figure.

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## Florida Splendid China Media Coverage

### Orlando Business Journal

Still More

From the September 19, 1997 edition

Around Orlando

... Splendid rumors? Is Splendid China set to expand into an amusement park, complete with roller coasters? Or is it ready to close down?

Park officials held an internal meeting about three weeks ago to dispel rumors that the attraction was up for sale.

They are slightly less adamant about the other word on the street: that an amusement park will be built on 311 acres adjacent to the low-key attraction, which features downsized replicas of famous Chinese attractions such as the Great Wall.

"We obviously need to do something with the land," says Scott Shaw, a spokesman for the park. Shaw doesn't rule out amusement rides in the future, but he says, "There is nothing definitive" ...

## Florida Splendid China Media Coverage

### Dalai Lama's brother protests at China park

By Jim Stratton of The Sentinel Staff

Published in The Orlando Sentinel, October 13, 1997

Led by the brother of Tibet's exiled Dalai Lama, a group of about 60 people spent Sunday morning protesting at the ornate gates of Splendid China near Kissimmee.

The demonstrators, carrying banners and homemade signs, urged park-bound visitors to skip the attraction until it changes the portrayal of relations between China and the peoples of Tibet, eastern Turkestan, Taiwan and southern Mongolia. Protesters say the park sugarcoats the treatment of minority groups under Chinese rule, presenting them as a happy part of the People's Republic.

In reality, the Chinese government has sought through force and torture to squash the cultures of those religious or ethnic groups. At the top of China's list has been Tibet, whose spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, fled the country in 1959 after a Chinese invasion. That story is now reaching millions across the United States, with the release of the new Brad Pitt movie *Seven Years in Tibet*.

Sunday, amid chants of "Free Tibet Now," the elder brother of the Dalai Lama said he came to Central Florida to "tell the world about the lie" he said Splendid China is perpetuating.

"This is completely wrong," said T.J. Norbu, a retired college professor who, like his brother, left Tibet after the Chinese takeover. "They are brainwashing the American public."

Norbu said that after the Chinese invaded Tibet, he was held under house arrest for 3 1/2 months while officials tried to convince him communism would work. At one point, they offered him a high-ranking government job if he would kill his brother, he said.

Though Norbu's work has focused on his homeland, the 75-year-old offered support Sunday to other groups he thinks China has mistreated. In a statement, he said the Taiwanese, the Mongols and the people of eastern Turkestan have "been incorporated into China by brute force." And China, he said, "proudly shows off its conquest with this 'park,' pretending that Tibetans and others want to be part of China."

Officials from Splendid China -- which is in part funded by the Chinese government -- did not return calls Sunday. They also did not show up at the demonstration, though a lone security officer did.

He talked quietly with protest organizers and then slowly drove off in a small hatchback. In the window of his car was a faded bumper sticker supporting Tibetan independence.