

FEATURES

Tangshan Promises to Play a Key Role in China's Future

By George Koo

Before Shanghai, there was Tangshan; after Pudong, there will be Caofeidian. This statement neatly encapsulates China's past, present and future in economic development.

In the late 19th century, Li Hongzhang, a senior official of a decaying imperial court ruling a China repeatedly pummeled by the western powers, selected Tangshan as the first site for modern industrial development. Tangshan had the advantage of proximity to coal, iron ore and seaport. Organized mining began there in 1878. First locomotive engine in China was built there, first cement made there and first standard gauge railway laid there. Government leaders, including Dr. Sun Yat-sen who overthrew the Manchu dynasty, regularly conducted inspection tours to Tangshan. It was the place to be seen in a way Shanghai is today.



Tangshan was the site of a 7.8 Richter scale earthquake.



Tangshan was the site of a 7.8 Richter scale earthquake with the epicenter right beneath the heart of the city in July 1976. The city was leveled. As much as one-quarter of the population perished in the pre-dawn quake. Officials told us that Beijing's Zhongnanhai heard about it within minutes by radio from some hero who stood by his station to continue to broadcast the disaster despite tremors and shaking buildings. Another band of men jumped onto their truck and careened their way to

Beijing to report in person.

Zhongnanhai mobilized the PLA who descended to the devastated area and rescued 450,000 dazed survivors within first 20 hours. They went to Tangshan in such haste that first arrivals did not bring shovels and dug with their bare hands. Some with fingers so raw that they saw exposed finger bones. They eventually recovered 130,000 injured which had to be

divided and flown to hospitals in other city centers, some as far as Guangzhou. We actually met one survivor, now a government official, who was treated for three months in a Xian hospital. He survived by jumping out of his 2nd floor bedroom before the building came down. There were virtually no survivors who did not lose one or more members of their immediate family. Some 4300 orphans were

collected and about 700 had no related kin to take them and were adopted by others in China.

Besides the rescue effort, planes repeated swooped down and disinfected the devastated area with chemicals for the next ten days. The result was that not a fly could be found and there were no case of disease outbreak. How did the living take to the exposure? One Mr. Han, a master of local shadow puppet show, said, "Look at me, I am 76 and I do not suffer from any after effects." He actually looked real young for 76. Before the shock of the earthquake hit, he told of first hearing a rumble followed by brilliant flashes of light which he called diguang.

Tangshan has been rebuilt and there is nothing remain of the old Tangshan except a museum has been built to memorialize the catastrophe and one building that toppled was preserved. The building was a library of Hebei Polytechnic University just completed and had not been occupied when the earthquake struck. The building was of special interest because three different kinds of earthquake damage can be seen from one location. One part of the building flopped side ways. The second floor of another part of the building folded right on top of the first and became the ground floor. I can't recall the third kind of failure.

As we toured this display and the museum, we were making mental contrast with the Katrina experience. The key difference was that Tangshan had no warning of the devastation about to be visited on the city while New Orleans had days to brace itself. It took China about a decade to rebuild Tangshan. The relative strength

of China's economy was considerably weaker than the U.S. in 2005 when Katrina struck.

At the time of Tangshan's 19th century industrialization, Shanghai was forcibly opened wide by the Europeans and became a cosmopolitan city associated with sin and decadence. Today, of course, Shanghai is the crown jewel symbolizing the nexus of China's miraculous economic recovery and breathtaking growth. Shanghai's success has been in a major part due to the development of Pudong, formerly a sleepy piece of farm land across the Huangpu



Rebuilt Tangshan.

River many times larger than the established commercial area of Puxi across the Huangpu.

By now, Pudong's decade-long transformation into a commercial and industrial hub is well known to the world. The latest investment is the offshore Yangshan deepwater port facility based on islands connected to the Pudong mainland by the 20-mile long Donghai Bridge over open water. Spectacular as that may be,

Tangshan's Caofeidian promises to top Pudong in years to come. Caofeidian is a sandbar, visible only in low tide, which is being enlarged by fill to create a man-made island that will eventually reach the size of half of a Singapore .

Located next to a sea trench, 30 to 60 meters in depth, Caofeidian is a natural harbor with more than twice the depth of Yangshan.

Six hundred thousand ton ships will be able to dock directly with no transfer of cargo to smaller ships needed. The facility will handle minerals, oil, coal and containers to serve as the major seaport in north China and to serve the growing steel and petrochemical complexes moving to Caofeidian. Some of the facilities are already in place and working. Huge pipes continue to spew sand from the sea to fill the land and workers are busily planting trees on land already formed.

According to official spokesperson, a total of 200 billion RMB will pour into Caofeidian by 2010. Since Caofeidian is a 25-year project, my guess is that the total investment will eventually top a trillion Yuan, or in excess of \$130 billion. Not one Yuan of this investment is coming from outside of China. Yangshan and Caofeidian are the most visible indicators of China's confidence in its economic future and the vast internal resources at its disposal to back up that confidence. Today with Caofeidian and a newly discovered major oil field in nearby shallow waters, Tangshan is taking its place as part of the North China economic juggernaut along with Beijing and Tianjin.

Dr. Sun Yat-sen was the first to see the potential and thought Caofeidian would make an excellent depot for naval warships. Contrary to his military vision, Tangshan has become the latest example of China's headlong plunge into economic development, an attitude not apparently understood by U.S. Department of Defense or by U.S. Congress as they continue to view China as an adversary.

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Dr. George Koo, an international business consultant, wrote this report after visiting Tangshan recently.