

# The Village Database

A Resource for Chinese American Genealogy Research

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## RESEARCH FILES

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by Henry Tom

**UNTIL 1965**, over 90 percent of all Chinese in North America originated from Guangdong Province (廣東 Kwangtung), which includes Zhongshan County (中山 Chungshan), Sanyi District (三邑 Sam Yup), a three-county region composed of Nanhai County (南海 Namhoi), Panyu County (番禺 Punyu), Shunde County (順德 Shuntak), and Siyi District (四邑 Say Yap or Sze Yup), a four-county region that includes Xinhui County (新會 Sunhui or Sunwei), Taishan County (台山 Toisan or Toishan), Kaiping County (開平 Hoiping), and Enping (恩平 Onping or Yanping). Within Sanyi, Taishan County accounts for over half of the 90 percent of this migration.<sup>1</sup> As a retired U.S. federal geographer and cartographer, I have spent the past sixteen years helping Chinese Americans research their ancestors from these regions using the *Village*

*Database* directory. I have used this invaluable resource to conduct over 3,000 queries, of which over 85 percent have found successful matches. Currently, no comparable database of surnames and village name exists for Chinese originating outside the Siyi region. There are approximately 50 million people of Chinese ancestry across the world, many originating from Guangdong Province, so the *Village Database* is useful globally as well as by those living in the United States. The following narrative provides an explanation of how to use the *Village Database* to find the ancestral villages of Chinese people originating from Guangdong province without having to be Chinese-literate or a geographer. My hope is that this article will help future researchers use this resource to learn more about their own family histories.

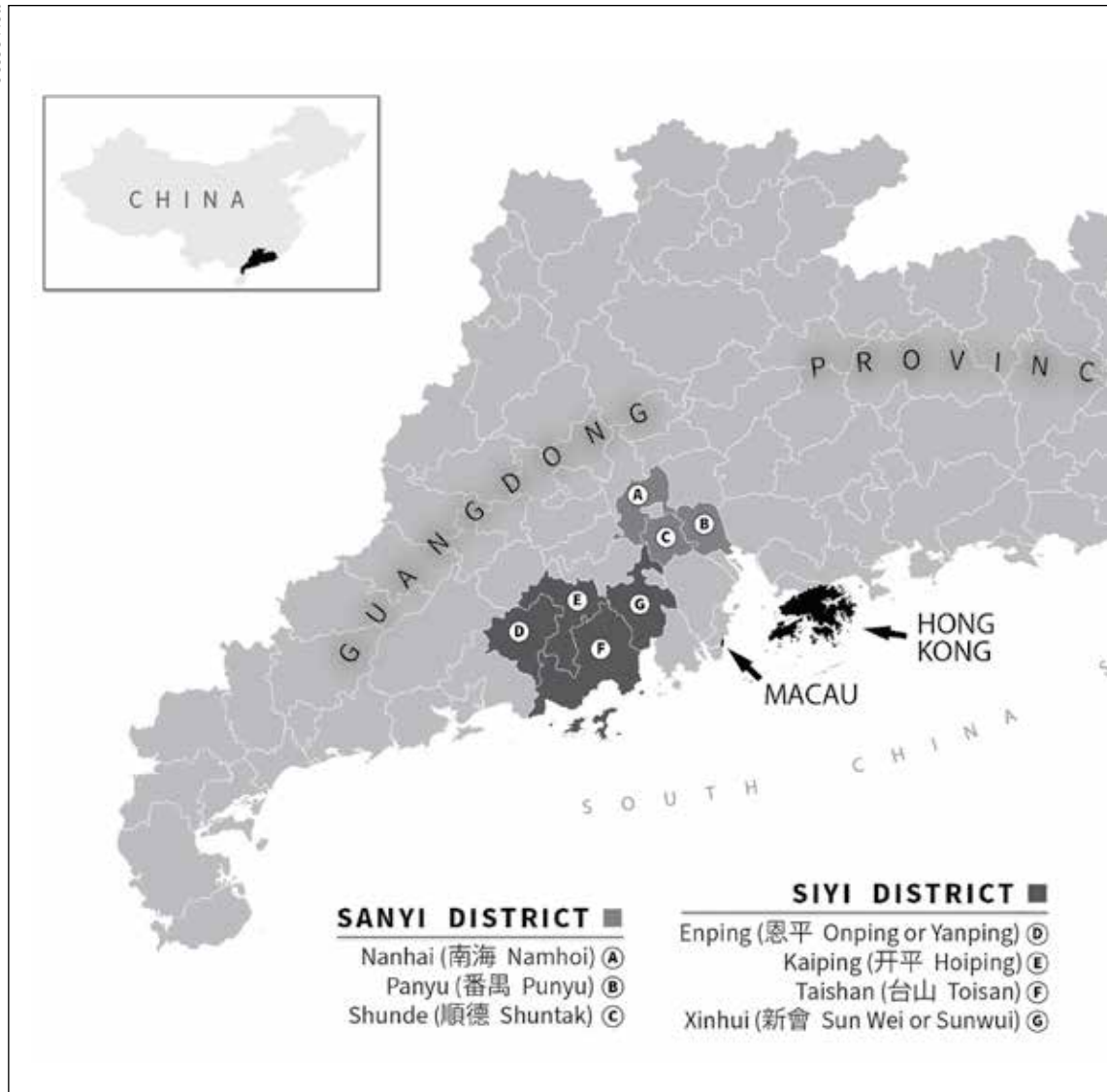
### THE VILLAGE DATABASE AND WHY IT IS USEFUL

The *Village Database* is an online compilation of county directories from Guangdong Province in China that the American Consulate in Hong Kong published during the 1960s. The

database is based on four books, each book containing entries for a district (or county) in Guangdong province, where the vast majority of Chinese emigrants to North America origi-

Cheung Shan Heung	7022-1472-6763	長山鄉
1st Area, Toishan		
Markets: Toishan City	0669-1004	台城
Sai Moon	6007-7024	西門
Map Location: FQ 8269		
Remarks: Cheung Shan Heung consists of three heungs:		
1) Pak Hang Heung	0554-0977-6763	北坑鄉
2) Kwan Hou Heung	5028-0624-6763	羣厚鄉
3) Pang Sar Hang Heung	1756-3097-0977-6763	彭沙坑鄉
Listed Villages or Lays: Pak Hang Heung		
Sai On	Wong 6007-1344	7806 西安 黃
Pak Hang	„ 0554-0977	„ 北坑 黃
Wing On	„ 3057-1344	„ 永安 黃
Cheung On	„ 7022-1344	„ 長安 黃
Tung Shing	„ 2639-4141	„ 東盛 黃
Nam Sing	„ 0589-0524	„ 南勝 黃
Kau	„ 5283	„ 舊 黃
Miu Tsui	Luk 1680-0731	7120 廟咀 陸
Nam Cheong	Wong 0589-2490	7806 南昌 黃
Tung Lok	„ 0681-2867	„ 同樂 黃
Sai Hung	„ 6007-0077	„ 西亨 黃
Sai Yuen	„ 6007-0954	„ 西園 黃
Tung Sing	„ 2639-2052	„ 東成 黃
Ko Lung	„ 7559-7893	„ 高龍 黃

**THE TOISHAN INDEX OF CLAN NAMES** is one of four books that document residents and villages in Guangdong Province that are searchable on the *Village Database*. This is a sample page from the index.



**THIS MAP** of Guangdong Province, China, highlights the Sanyi and Siyi districts from where a majority of Chinese in Oregon migrated between 1850 and 1942.

nated: *Index of Clan Names by Villages for Toishan District* (1963–1965); *Index of Clan Names by Villages for Sunwei District* (1965); *Index of Clan Names by Villages for Hoiping District* (1965); and *Index of Clan Names by*

*Villages for Chungshan District* (1967). Historian Him Mark Lai rediscovered the original four books, and the *Village Database* is the result of his desire to make a digital version available.<sup>2</sup> The district books are inval-

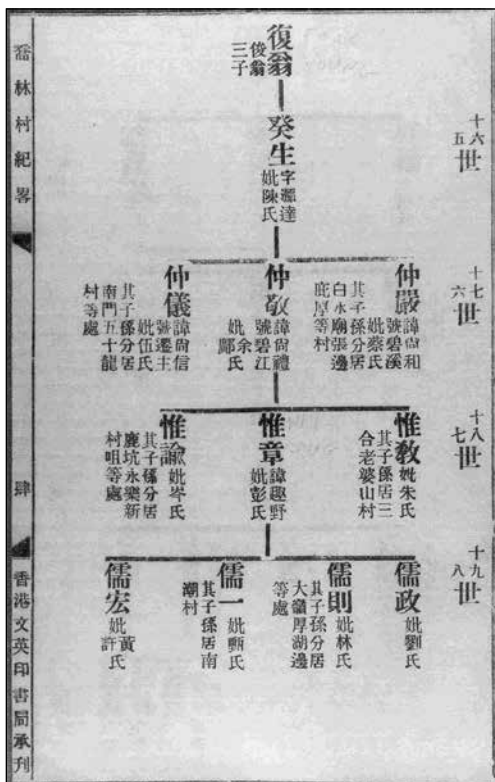


able primary sources for finding family lineages of Chinese descendants from villages in the Siyi region and Zhongshan County. Traditionally, Chinese genealogy lineages include only the names of males, usually by their marriage name. Only the clan surname of the wife is included. In addition to using the district books for investigating Chinese people seeking to fraudulently enter the United States as citizens or children of U.S. citizens — commonly known as paper sons or paper daughters — the U.S. consulate also used them for verifying and processing a large number of visas, passports, and federal benefit applications. There are approximately 14,000 villages and hamlets (small vil-

lages) covered by the four books; however, they do not include all of the villages found in the four counties in Guangdong Province.<sup>3</sup> Each village name is listed with the primary associated clan surname (and occasionally more than one surname), the name of the county, area numbers of county *heungs* (sub-divisions), further subdivided by *subheungs* (sub-districts), and the names of the nearest market

towns. The *heung* is keyed to the county map associated with each book and according to the grid coordinates used by the U.S. Army Map Service.

The original books for the *Village Database* list each village in three ways: by Standard Telegraphic Code (STC) number, romanized Cantonese name, and traditional Chinese characters. In the initial computer implementation of these four books as the *Village Database*, the STC numbers and simplified Chinese characters and Pinyin (the official Chinese romanization) were not implemented. The STC is a four-digit decimal code used in electrical telegraphing messages for representing Chinese characters — each STC number specifies a Chinese character. The romanization of Cantonese names uses Western words that are language-dialect specific to phonetically simulate the Chinese pronunciation of Chinese characters. The *Village Database* likely used Cantonese romanization because almost all the Chinese who came to America between 1849 and 1965 originated from Guangdong Province, where Cantonese was the *lingua franca*. The Cantonese romanization and traditional Chinese characters used in the *Village Database* are also used by the people of Hong Kong and Taiwan, and by many of the 50 million overseas Chinese throughout the world.<sup>4</sup> Many of the names of people, places, and villages found in documents stored at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) do not quite match with village names in the *Village Database* simply because



**MANY ANCESTRAL VILLAGES** have genealogy books that contain family or clan lineages. These books can be especially useful when researching Chinese American ancestry. A page from the Tan genealogy book is pictured here.

well over half of the Chinese people being interviewed or interrogated by immigration officials were from Taishan. Their answers were transcribed in the Taishanese dialect but were incorrectly considered by some as Cantonese romanizations. The lack of standardization for romanizations often leads to several different spellings and confusion, such as “Toishan,” “Tais-han,” and “Toisan,” which are usually accompanied by a Chinese character

or characters for clarification. Knowing how to use the *Village Database* can help researchers confirm the name of their ancestors’ villages as well as clan names associated with the villages and their associated locations.

The *qiaoxiang* (ancestral village or home village) is the starting point for researching any member of the Chinese diaspora, including many Chinese Americans. Multiple villages associated with the same clan surname or village name can be differentiated in the *Village Database* by their locations within heungs, sub-heungs, or by their proximity to the nearest larger market town. Descendants of immigrants who want to see where their ancestors lived or learn about the old ways of village life may find that their ancestral village has a genealogy book that contains family or clan lineage and provides avenues for additional research.

The *sine qua non* of Chinese genealogy is family or clan lineage, which traces back hundreds, or even thousands, of years. Chinese people have struggled and sacrificed to compile, update, protect, and pass on these family and clan lineages, a tradition they have carried on for thousands of years. During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), Red Guards destroyed most of the genealogy books in China. This has been well documented, confirmed in conversa-

tions with elderly villagers, and to this day, many villagers will not easily share their village genealogy books with outsiders for fear that they will be stolen or destroyed. Only about 50,000 genealogies remain in the Shanghai Library and in libraries and archives around the world.<sup>5</sup> About 65,000 Chinese genealogies can be searched on the FamilySearch website or in its Family History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah.

The belligerence of the Cantonese people and Chinese migrants’ carrying theirs overseas, provides a truly unique opportunity for research and travel to their ancestral villages in Guangdong Province and to recover Chinese heritage and lineages. Researchers can confirm the names of ancestral villages and clan surnames as well as general locations documented in genealogy books in the *Village Database*.

### VILLAGE DATABASE HIERARCHICAL ADMINISTRATIVE SUBDIVISIONS

The *Village Database* uses hierarchical administrative subdivision areas with each successive geographic level:

**County:** Toisan, Sunwei, Hoiping, Chungshan

**Area:** County subdivisions numbered 1 to 10

**Heung:** Name of heung or subdivision of a township

**Subheung:** Name of subheung name

**Village:** Name of village / village alias

**Hamlet:** Name of hamlet (small village)

Since the establishment of the People’s Republic in China 1949, some village names have changed, and with the increased usage of simplified Chinese characters, simplified Chinese names for villages sometimes differ from the names originally written in traditional Chinese characters. Fortunately, original village names in NARA-archived

documents, on Chinese gravestones, or in family documents are the same village names in traditional Chinese characters recorded in the *Village Database*. Each village was designated with a village chief who is responsible for the affairs of the village and who visitors should contact with questions about village genealogies or when researching individuals or families.<sup>6</sup> Over time, some clusters of villages and hamlets within a subheung have become known by their subheung name or by the name of the largest village within the subheung. Other heungs, villages, and especially smaller hamlets were consolidated into a larger village entity and became known by the name of the largest village or by a totally new village name. Those village clusters are usually managed by a village cluster committee.

While village clusters can usually be found on modern, digital maps, most of the smaller villages and hamlets may not appear there — but this does not mean they have disap-

peared. When using online mapping websites, and depending on the zooming capability and resolution of its digital cartographic database at the largest scale, some smaller villages and hamlets may appear. In cases where the smaller villages and ham-

lets are not displayed, researchers should consult Chinese gazetteers that record administrative changes to confirm whether villages still exist as distinct geographic entities or if they were consolidated within a larger village cluster.

### SEARCHING AND BROWSING THE VILLAGE DATABASE

The *Village Database* main page provides two options for finding villages and surnames: search and browse. Under the search feature, users can search by clan surnames or by village names by their Cantonese romanization, traditional Chinese characters, and as of July 2020, by their Pinyin romanization. Searching by simplified Chinese characters and STC code are not supported. In the search feature, village names are displayed only in traditional Chinese characters and romanized Cantonese. Search results typically include one or more surnames associated with a village; however, there is usually just one clan surname

for a village. These surnames are shown in parenthesis next to the village name. The screen capture on the facing page is a detail of a search for villages associated with the clan name Wong, which displays a map with heung locations with villages associated with the clan name. Using the browse feature, researchers can display a listing of villages by county, area number for the county subdivision, heungs, and subheungs. On the following pages, screen-captures of the search and browse features illustrate results for searches associated with Der Bin (謝邊 Xie Bian) village in Taishan County.

### VILLAGE DATABASE MAP LOCATIONS

For each of the four Guangdong Province index books that compose the *Village Database*, the American Consulate General in Hong Kong created accompanying district maps. The maps indicate the location of heungs in the district using the Military Grid Reference System (MGRS), based on the Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM) grid system, and are documented in the *Village Database*. For example, Der Bin is

located in Sam Sher (三社) heung, and its map location is FQ7869: FQ is the 100,000-meter square identifier, “78” is the Easting grid line value, which is an approximated value between the 70,000 and 80,000 grid lines, and “69” is the approximated Northing grid line value between the 60,000 and 70,000 grid lines.<sup>7</sup> Although Der Bin’s FQ7869 marker indicates the approximate location of the heung, the district index

Heungs/townships containing villages with surname 黃 (larger circles means more villages with this surname).

#	County	Area	Heung	Village
1	台山 / Toishan	1	永康鄉 / Wing Hong Heung [map!]	五福里舊 / Ng Fuk Lay Kau (黃譯 / Wong, Hom)
2				大江 / Tai Wong (黃 / Wong)
3				雁沙 / Ngan Sar (黃 / Wong)
4				詩裁 / See Hong (黃 / Wong)
5				東成 / Tung Sing (黃 / Wong)
6				南龍 / Nam Lung (黃 / Wong)
7				仁和 / Yan Wo (黃林 / Wong, Lam)
8				田坑 / Tin Hang (黃 / Wong)
9				黃屋 / Wong Uk (黃 / Wong)
10			平墟河鄉 / Ping Ling Tung Heung [map!]	黃灘 / Wong Lan (黃 / Wong)
11			西南鄉 / Sai Nam Heung [map!]	烏石 / Wu Shek (陳黃 / Chan, Wong)
12			石化鄉 / Shek Fa Heung [map!]	東安 / Tung On (黃 / Wong)
13				南安 / Nam On (黃 / Wong)

**TO SEARCH BY SURNAME**, users select from the pull-down menu that displays the romanized surname in Cantonese with the traditional Chinese character next to it. After selecting the surname, the database displays a regional map showing heung locations containing villages with that surname. It also lists all the villages associated with that surname, according to all the districts that contain a village with that surname.



**Friends of Roots**

**VillageDB**

Search by surname  
Search for villages with surname

Browse

Search

About

**Search by other**

Search for villages whose name  starts with

Also search heungs/admin. districts

Searching for heungs, admin. districts, and villages whose name begins with "Der Bin".

#	County	Area	Heung	Village
1	台山 / Toishan	4	三社鄉 / Sam Sher Heung	謝邊 / Der Bin (黃 / Wong)

**Friends of Roots**

**VillageDB**

Search by surname  
Search for villages with surname

Browse

Search

About

**Search by other**

Search for villages whose name  starts with

Also search heungs/admin. districts

Searching for heungs, admin. districts, and villages whose name in pinyin begins with "xie4 bian1".

#	County	Area	Heung	Village
1	台山 / Toishan	4	三社鄉 / Sam Sher Heung	謝邊 / Der Bin (黃 / Wong)

**Friends of Roots**

**VillageDB**

Search by surname  
Search for villages with surname

Browse

Search

About

**Search by other**

Search for villages whose name  starts with

Also search heungs/admin. districts

Searching for heungs, admin. districts, and villages whose name begins with "謝邊".

#	County	Area	Heung	Village
1	台山 / Toishan	4	三社鄉 / Sam Sher Heung	謝邊 / Der Bin (黃 / Wong)

**THE VILLAGE DATABASE** allows users to search by Cantonese romanization (top), traditional Chinese characters (middle), and beginning in July 2020, in Pinyin romanization (bottom). Note the search results include Toishan as the county, the area number 4, Sam Sher Heung, along with the village name.

**Friends of Roots**

**VillageDB**

County 台山  
Toishan

Area 4

Heung 三社鄉  
Sam Sher Heung

Market(s) 來安  
Loy On

Map Location FQ7869  
[\[approx. location on google maps\]](#)  
[\[approx. location on openstreetmap\]](#)

Browse

Search

About

Contains 3 subheungs:

1. 上社 / Sheung Sher
2. 中社 / Chung Sher
3. 下社 / Ha Sher

Contains 41 villages in total:

下社 / Ha Sher

1. 山下 / Shan Ha  
aka 塘美 / Tong May (黃 / Wong)
2. 旺興 / Wong Hing (黃 / Wong)
3. 鳳樓 / Fung Lau (黃 / Wong)
4. 水潮 / Sui Chiu (黃 / Wong)
5. 西湖 / Sai Wu  
aka 山下新 / Shan Ha Sun (黃 / Wong)
6. 龍田 / Lung Tin (黃 / Wong)
7. 謝邊 / Der Bin (黃 / Wong)
8. 紹邊 / Shiu Bin (黃 / Wong)
9. 增塘 / Tsang Tong (謝 / Der)
10. 上橋 / Sheung Kiu (謝 / Der)
11. 坑尾 / Hang May (黃 / Wong)
12. 塘口 / Tong Hou (黃 / Wong)
13. 大朗 / Tai Long (黃 / Wong)
14. 旺邊龍 / Wong Bin Lung (黃 / Wong)
15. 芒菓坑 / Mong Kor Hang (黃 / Wong)
16. 江咀 / Kong Tsui (黃 / Wong)
17. 龍溪 / Lung Kai (黃 / Wong)
18. 小嶺 / Siu Ling (黃 / Wong)
19. 雙門 / Sheung Moon (黃 / Wong)
20. 大圍 / Tai Chap (黃 / Wong)

**THE BROWSE FEATURE** displays listings of villages by county, area number for the county subdivision, *heungs*, and *subheungs*. The group clusters within a particular *heung* or *subheungs* of villages may include the village. Above is the browse result for Toishan County, Area 4, and Sam Sher Heung, with Der Bin village appearing as number seven in the Ha Sher *subheung*. The village details include Chinese characters (謝邊), Cantonese romanized name (Der Bin), and the associated clan surname (黃/Wong).

base maps do not provide enough detail to display the village names and their locations on a map. These MGRS locations have been available on the *Village Database* since 2001, but the built-in district mapping capability was not incorporated until mid 2020. Prior to the upgrade, I provided scanned copies of the original maps, held in the Geography and Map Division of the Library of Congress, to the Chinese Cultural Center of San Francisco, which is the organization that now owns the *Village Database* and the SiYi Forum, an international forum for Chinese genealogy research on the Siyi region of Guangdong Province. Researchers were able to access these maps as references when researching Chinese ancestors.

During the fall of 2009, the online *Village Database* was not available for several months. Since it was such a valuable tool for researching Chinese villages in the Siyi region, several members of the SiYi Forum, including

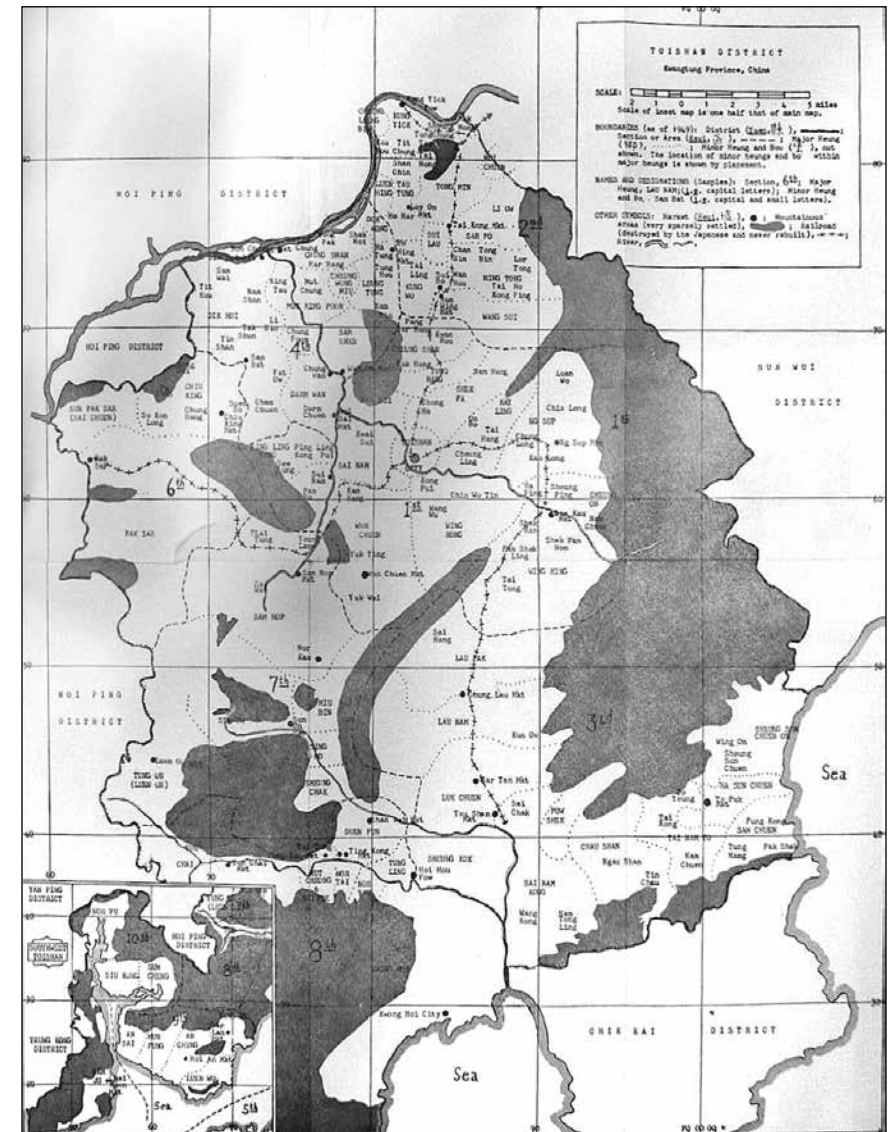
### SEARCHING FOR VILLAGES ON ONLINE MAP WEBSITES

Researchers should keep in mind that online map websites, whether in English or Chinese, have different search parameters and will yield different results. Searching online map websites for a village name by a romanized village name, in either Cantonese or in Pinyin romanization, does not guarantee a successful match. Searching a village name in traditional or simplified Chinese characters also does not always provide a successful match. Online map websites may

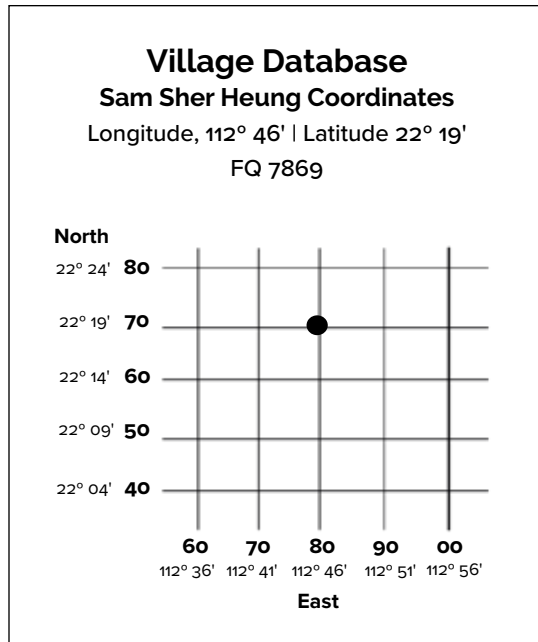
me, wanted to set up an online clone of the *Village Database*. One member had already downloaded the *Village Database* data, and I had geo-referenced maps associated with the database to determine the approximate geographical coordinates of heungs. We halted our project when the *Village Database* came back up online. The charts I created with annotated grid lines, however, have been valuable in presentations at Chinese genealogy workshops that I organized across the United States — they provided important geographical coordinates for researchers before the recent inclusion of mapping in the *Village Database*. An example of one of the grid coordinate charts for Taishan is shown on page 566. In addition to using the built-in mapping features on the *Village Database*, researchers can also use online mapping tools, such as Google Maps, to transpose the general location of a heung, which could help identify the general area where villages are located.

show the general area where a village is located when searching for the names of heungs, subheungs, and market towns, but a visual search of this area on the map may be required. As previously mentioned, in many situations, villages have been absorbed by a heung or subheung and the consolidated villages and hamlets then assumed that name.

To find a village location, researchers may need to collectively confirm any or all of the following: the county



**THIS IS AN EXAMPLE** of a district index map that accompanies the four indexes of clan names. The maps indicate the location of heungs in the district using the Military Grid Reference System (MGRS), based on the Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM) grid system, and are documented in the *Village Database*. The maps, however, do not document places at the village level.



**THIS GRID** shows how to map geographic coordinates for Sam Sher heung in Taishan County. Before geographical coordinates were included in the online *Village Database*, these charts provided important location information for researchers. The bold numbers represent the UTM grid coordinates that are next to sexagesimal degrees.

in which it is located, heung, sub-heung, the names of nearby villages, and the nearest market town. Knowing the general area where the village should be, according to the heung location as indicated in the *Village Database*, usually saves quite a bit of frustration during a process that can be long and arduous. For example, there are 1,126 villages associated with the clan name Wong in the *Village Database*, of which 678 are located in Taishan County. Searching for a Wong village in Taishan County by a

person's surname, such as Lung On (龍安), yields nine Wong villages associated with this name; two of them are located in the same heung and near the same market town. The only distinguishing features are the villages' subheungs, which will be essential in locating them on a map.

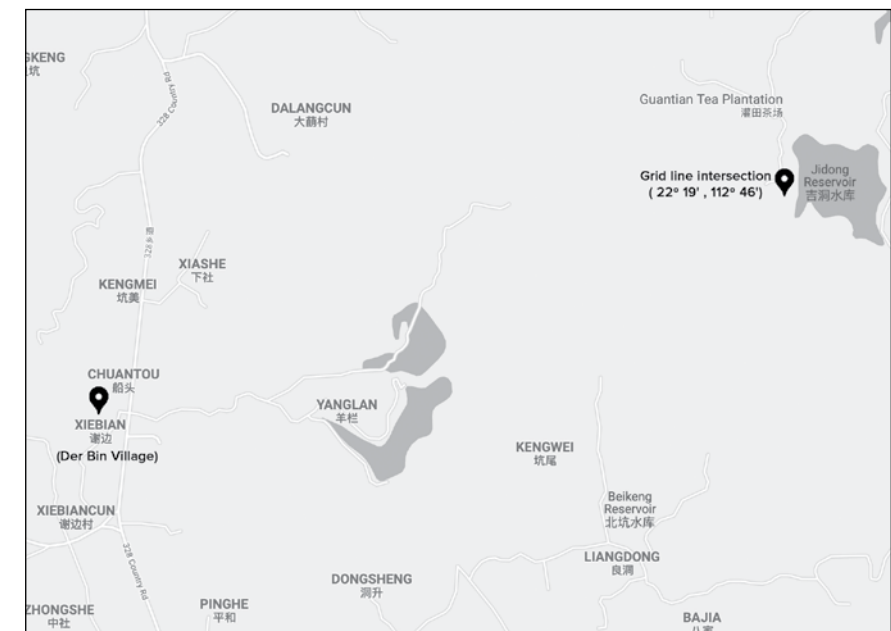
Once the correct village is located on Google Maps, researchers may also want to determine the geographic coordinates of the village in order to visit in person. Locating the village on a Chinese map website, such as Baidu Maps, and making a copy of the map usually helps Chinese drivers locate the village. To obtain the geographic coordinates expressed in decimal degrees on

Google Maps, right click a point on the map and the coordinates will be at the top of the drop-down list. Decimal degrees facilitate mathematical calculations directly, whereas geographic coordinates expressed as sexagesimal degrees, minutes, and seconds require conversion to decimal degrees for mathematical computations. The geographic coordinates for Der Bin village are expressed as: decimal degrees (22.307975 latitude, 112.736593 longitude); sexagesimal degrees (22°18'28.7"N 112°44'11.7"E).

Google Maps will search on geographic coordinates expressed either as decimal or sexagesimal degrees, and the map place-names are listed in English, Pinyin, and simplified Chinese characters. As simplified Chinese characters replaced about a third of traditional Chinese characters, there is roughly a two-third chance of a match if searching with traditional Chinese characters. Tianditu, a free mapping website developed by the Chinese government, is also a useful tool because it currently has the largest mapping database for China and allows greater zooming capabilities that help reveal geographic

entities such as villages and hamlets not included in other map websites. Unfortunately, the website can be rather awkward to navigate for people who are not Chinese-literate.

Sometimes it is difficult to find an accurate village location on Google Maps because the only locational information provided in the *Village Database* is for heungs. When Der Bin's location (FQ 7869 on the Taishan county map) is entered in Google Maps, it is about two miles, as the crow flies, from the actual location. With this information known, it is a matter of searching for the village name in the area. As previously noted, a village or



**FINDING ACCURATE VILLAGE LOCATIONS** on online mapping, such as Google Maps, is sometimes difficult because the only locational information provided in the *Village Database* is for heungs. In this screen capture, Der Bin village is shown about two miles away from its actual location.

hamlet sometimes cannot be located on a map because the village name was changed or the village was incorporated into a larger village cluster. In

such cases, local Chinese gazetteers can help clarify locations. Researchers need to be Chinese-literate, however, to be successful in such searches.

## OTHER TECHNIQUES FOR RESEARCHING CHINESE VILLAGES AND GENEALOGIES

The *Village Database* covers information on villages for 90 percent of Chinese living in North America as well as for Chinese within many other countries, whose ancestors immigrated from the Siyi region and Zhongshan (Chungshan) until the mid 1960s. Researchers should know, however, that discovering the name and location of ancestral villages from the *Village Database* is just the beginning in their quest to recover their family history and Chinese ancestry. When researching ancestors from other regions of China, similar techniques apply as *Village Database* searches — finding villages first by province, then county, then heung and subheung — and village genealogy books help with that search. Although Red Guards destroyed many in China, thousands of Chinese genealogy books outside of China escaped destruction, including genealogy books for Northern China. Once the ancestral village is found, contacting the village chief in China can confirm the associated surname for the village and existence of a village genealogy book. Researchers looking at Guangdong province or other provinces in China can also try to locate nearby villages with the same associated clan surname. Such villages may have village genealogy books that

could include part or all of the family lineage being researched — uncles, brothers, and first and second cousins may have resided nearby. For example, people living in a village named “Dragon” that no longer had enough land to support more houses might buy a nearby piece of land to establish a “New Dragon” village; the original “Dragon” village may then be called “Old Dragon” village. Alternatively, if a village became available, clans with a different surname might move there and rename it. This is likely how some villages came to have more than one associated surname.

Researchers can also try to identify and locate nearby ancestral halls or temples with their ancestor’s clan surname to inquire about whether they hold lineage tablets or a clan genealogy book. The lineages in such a clan genealogy book may not go down to the most recent generations, as a village genealogy book would, but if researchers have family lineages documenting back three or four consecutive generations (traced through direct father-son descent), they may be able to find common ancestors. Then, the family lineage can be linked into clan lineages. Some knowledge of Chinese genealogy is needed to navigate this last technique as the only

## HENRY TOM’S CHINESE NAMES

### Given birth name

*A Name of Expectation*

譚 Tom family / clan name

德 moral, virtuous

欽 money, wealthy

Chinese people typically have three-character names: a family name, middle name, and given name. The second and third characters typically combine to form an auspicious name — generally given by hopeful parents of a newborn child. Generally, the middle name is the same for that generation of siblings or first cousins, regardless of gender.

### Genealogy name, *hao* (名號)

*Given when Chinese males marry*

譚 Tom family / clan name

世 si / generational character

強 kuan ‘strong’ / man’s character

When Chinese males marry, they receive a *hao* (genealogy name). Most Chinese family clans have a family or clan poem, and each character of the poem represents a generation.

known information available is a man’s Chinese name and where he was born. In the Siyi region, most men have two names: a milk (birth name) and a *hao* (marriage name). The milk name is a name of expectation, reflecting some qualities that parents hope their son can attain. The *hao* is given when a man marries, and men are listed in the village genealogy book according

this name, which is composed of three Chinese characters. The first character is the surname, which is announced in the beginning of the genealogy book and not repeated for each name; it is understood that the Chinese character for the surname precedes all the two-character names in the lineages of the genealogy book. The second character in the name is usually the *bon pie*



**TOM CLAN GENERATIONAL POEM**

You Heng Yen Yui Soo Get Dep Way Hot Yet Moon Chale Yui Chong

爾昌友延嗣，捷開文裔光  
宗傳世擇遠，晉本立道隆  
積善家國重，學業廣成芳

**Pinyin Romanization**

Er Chang You Yan Si, Jie Kai Wen Yi Guang  
Zong Chuan Shi Ze Yuan, Jin Ben Li Dao Long  
Ji Shan Jia Guo Zhong, Xue Ye Guang Cheng Fang

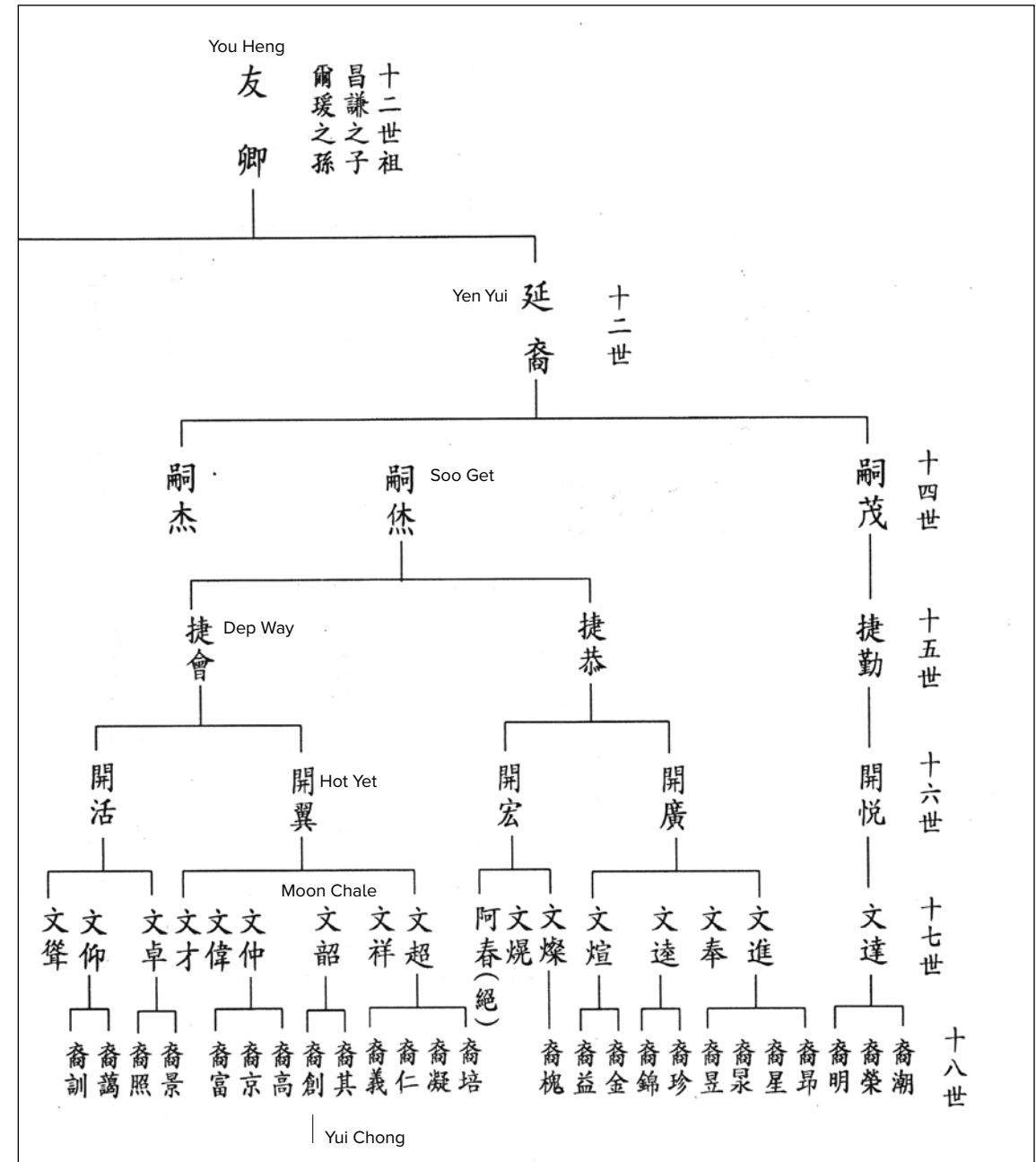
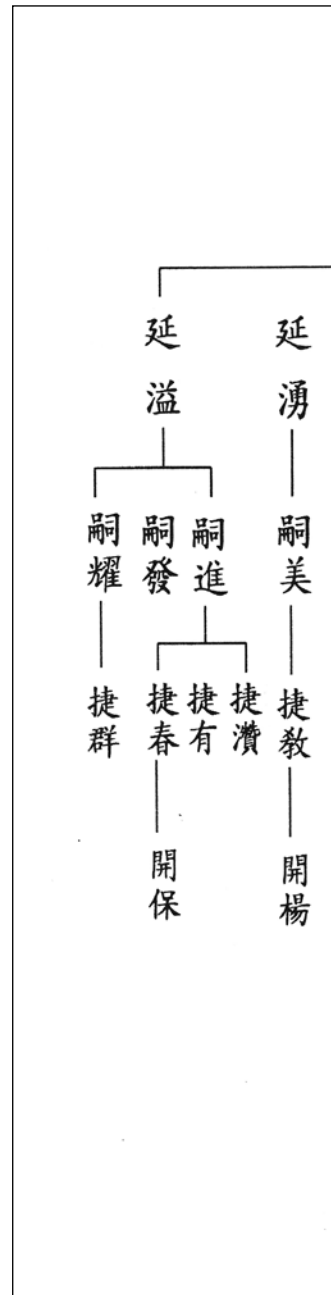
**English Translation**

If your life is prosperous and flourishing, even your friends will continue refurbishing or establishing temples in remembrance of you and your family. This helps to establish a cultured and civilized society.

If your family continues to be successful generation by generation, it continually benefits the world and makes it more beautiful. Its success is secured only while you are an honest, truthful, and virtuous person with a moral life.

Doing kindly deeds is very helpful for your family and country. If you are successful at this and study it well, it may help you to be remembered for generations.

*This Tom generational poem was translated by Yongping Zhao and edited by Henry Tom.*





**HENRY TOM** led a research group to China in November 2019, and they are pictured here at the entrance to Dr. Sun Yat-sen residence and museum in Zhongshan. Tom is kneeling in the center front, seventh person from the left.

(generational character), which is pre-determined and assigned by the clan generational poem. The poems extol the noble virtues that the clan should follow, and each Chinese character in the generational poem represents a particular generation. The third Chinese character in the name reflects the character of the man — the way he turned out as an adult. The previous pages illustrate how names are recorded in genealogy books and an example of a clan generational poem.

In 2007, when researching the family lineage of a Tan clansman, I asked my researcher in China to call the Xinhui County government and ask how many villages in that county had that generation character from his

marriage name. There were just three villages associated with the name, and in another phone call to the village chief, he recognized the name and the person's status as a former Chinese envoy to the United States. The village's genealogy book, however, had been destroyed. When I checked an associated clan genealogy book, I found that man's name and sent the family lineage to his great-grandson. The great-grandson was rather skeptical until he saw an adjoining page that had a photograph of an uncle, who was also included in the family lineage. On a subsequent visit, the great-grandson brought a copy of the genealogy back to his ancestral village. Stories such as these are incredibly rewarding

and reinforce the importance of this time-consuming work.

Since 2005, I have served as a moderator, with the handle name *Location, Location, Location*, in the SiYi Forum, and I have personally assisted many overseas Chinese to start researching their family history. Prior to the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, I organized three-day Chinese genealogy workshops twice a year in San Francisco, California, and Las Vegas, Nevada. These workshops have helped Chinese

Americans to understand and appreciate their Chinese ancestry and family history. In 2018 and 2019, I also organized workshops in China, where researchers visited historical sites of importance for Chinese Americans in Guangdong province, were immersed in rural Chinese village life in the Siyi region, and then visited their ancestral villages. As long as I am able, I will try to keep on organizing Chinese genealogy workshops to continue this important work of documenting Chinese American history.

## NOTES

1. The author confirmed these percentages in discussions with historian Him Mark Lai at "Branching Out the Banyan Tree: 2005 Chinese American Studies Conference," presented by the Chinese Historical Society of America with Asian American Studies Department at San Francisco State University, October 6–9, 2005. Usage of romanization of Chinese varied considerably prior to the use of Pinyin, the official standard romanization. These variations are reflected in this article according to its use in different publications. Pinyin is parenthesized after various romanized Cantonese names.

2. Him Mark Lai was a world-renowned historian, writer, and Chinese community activist. For more on his work and associated digital archives, see <https://himmarklai.org/> (accessed September 20, 2021). The *Village Database* is currently maintained by the Friends of Roots and can be accessed at <https://villagedb.friendsofroots.org/search.cgi> (accessed September 20, 2021).

3. The original four books contain information on approximately 14,000 villages and hamlets, but with the recent addition of villages, the number should be updated to 1,706 Enping villages, which would be approximately 15,700 villages total.

4. Victoria Er, "Top 14 Ancestral Homese of the Chinese Diaspora," *My China Roots*, <https://www.mychinaroots.com/blog/genealogy/top-14-ancestral-homes-of-the-chinese-diaspora> (accessed September 20, 2021).

5. Family Search, "Shanghai Library," [https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Shanghai\\_Library](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Shanghai_Library) (accessed September 20, 2021); Hsiang-lin Lo, "The Preservation of Genealogical Records in China" in *Studies in Asian Genealogy* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1972), 38–55.

6. Traditionally, village chiefs were appointed by the township government. The Organic Law of Village Committees was enacted in 1987 and implemented in 1988, allowing for direct election of village chiefs instead. See Jianxun Wang, "Village Governance in Chinese History," chapter in *Political Economy of Village Government in Contemporary China* (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 2006), <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/2022/7071/umi-indiana-1311.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> (accessed November 9, 2021).

7. Researchers should note that the Easting and Northing numbers for the grid coordinates for heungs in Hoiping county were reversed.