



GUANGZHOU: PEARL RIVER RENAISSANCE

SEE ALSO

- Hong Kong: Like No Other (www.demographia.com/rac-hk.pdf)
- Hong Kong II: Freeways, Suburbs and Junk Yards (www.rentalcartours.net/rac-hkfreeway.pdf)
- Shenzhen: Start of China's Future (www.rentalcartours.net/rac-shenzhen.pdf)
- Macau: West Pearl River Anchor (www.rentalcartours.net/rac-macau.pdf)

FAST FACTS		Similar To
Metropolitan (Labor Market) Population	10,000,000	Tianjin
Urbanized Area* Population	4,043,000	Boston, Toronto, Belo Horizonte, Hong Kong, Sydney
Urbanized Land Area: Square Miles	108	Canberra, Victoria, Caracas, Helsinki, Brasilia
Urbanized Land Area: Square Kilometers	280	
Population per Square Mile	37,400	Moscow, Beijing, Bangkok, Chennai
Population per Square Kilometer	14,500	
*Continuously built up area		

27 December 2003

Revised 22 August 2005

I had the emergency row on an overnight Cathay Pacific flight from Johannesburg on a Boeing-777. As we were landing in Hong Kong, a flight attendant sitting directly across from me asked me about my plans in Hong Kong. I suggested something about wishing that I could take the Kowloon-Canton Railway to Guangzhou, but had not tried to obtain the necessary visa. She said that was no problem, and we determined that the Chinese government travel bureau that could issue such a visa in just a few hours was across Nathan Road from my hotel. It was a Friday, and if I had been an hour later with my visa application I would not have been able to make the trip. Guangzhou, former Canton, had always interested me. It had been the dominant city of the Chinese south when the western powers began their trading and eventually their dominance of much of coastal China. There was no Hong Kong then, Canton was supreme.

Not having planned to go to Guangzhou, I had not prepared for the trip. Guangzhou seemed like an interesting place to go, perhaps to see an old, backward colonial Chinese city. I was able to obtain a not very good map, which seemed to indicate the area of urbanization was small enough that I might be able to tour it on foot. At this time, it was difficult, if not impossible to rent a car. In fact, it wasn't even possible to rent a car to drive from Hong Kong, which I had investigated when it appeared there might be a problem finding room on the train.

I have never been less prepared for what I encountered. There was the trip through the impressive city of Shenzhen, the only city of 10,000,000 in the world that didn't exist when

Gregory, my youngest son, was born. Not too far outside Shenzhen began the condominium and apartment blocks, more than 20 stories high. They are scattered virtually all along the remaining 60 or so miles into Guangzhou.

About the only thing that met my expectation was the railroad station. One of the things I will most miss about communism is the dimly lit government buildings. Well lit transportation facilities in the communist cities of old were as rare as stock trading floors. This is what the Kowloon-Canton Station was like. And, it may well have been indicative of the last flicker of communism in a nation that has decided to call whatever works socialism, as one of its leaders put it. It surely was the last evidence I saw.

The station is on the northeastern periphery of the city, and I headed toward the front door planning to start my walk through this backward place. I was in for a surprise or two.

The shock started when, immediately outside the door of the station one of the world's tallest skyscrapers loomed. This particular building, the CITIC Tower, was at the time the fifth tallest building in the world, looming nearly 1,300 feet over its base --- taller than the Empire State Building with its spire. The building literally sits on a lawn in front of the station.

As I was standing on the steps of the station, a young man came up to me and offered to give me a tour of the city by taxi. I told him I would see it on my own, and he suggested that I wouldn't see much that way. So I gave him \$100 and we spent the day touring Guangzhou by taxicab. He would hire a cab, we would go to a site, pay the cab and then hire another one for the next leg of the tour. All of the cab fares were included in my \$100 payment.

Guangzhou is one of the most prosperous places in China. After the culture shock of Hong Kong's hyper-development, Guangzhou was simply unbelievable. The few miles from the railroad station to the core of the city are interspersed with impressive modern skyscrapers. They continue out for some distance beyond the railroad station to the east. Even the apartment blocks so tastelessly designed around the world are being built with exterior treatments that make them look attractive --- something that is to be found in Beijing as well.

There is a system of wide arterial streets, on a grid. Some of the streets are double-decked, which makes it easier to read the "Bank of America" and other western enterprise signs on top of the buildings.

But there is still a parts of old Guangzhou that have not rushed into the future. The central market is one of the most jarring experiences a westerner can have. Here will be found all manner of consumables that most Occidentals wouldn't think of eating. There are snakes, cattle embryos, insects and other delicacies that are very good for diets, because of the appetite one loses.

There is also the landmark Dr. Sun-Yat-Sen Memorial Auditorium. The founder of the Chinese republic lived here, and this fittingly named building hides a modern theatre facility, seating perhaps 5,000 people, in a traditional Chinese architectural style. There is also the temple of the nine story pagoda, with its Buddhas of the past, present and future.

Modern, ultra-modern and post-modern commercial construction abounds here. There are buildings of 30 to 60 stories seemingly all over. They are not all bunched together as would be expected in a US or Canadian urban area. They are rather spread throughout the urban area,

along major arterials and in centers at the Kowloon-Canton Railway station and elsewhere. In this sense there is a decentralization of commercial activity that is developing in Asian urban areas, with the notable exceptions of Hong Kong and Singapore, with their downtowns that from a distance look western. Even in Tokyo and Osaka, with the world's largest and third largest central business districts, the density of commercial development is much less than is found in New York, Chicago, Toronto, Sydney, Hong Kong or Singapore. In this regard urban areas like Guangzhou, Shanghai and Beijing may well develop in ways that make the automobile function more efficiently, even in higher density, while providing sufficient density for a grid oriented urban rail system to provide practical mobility to more than just a small downtown area.

The core districts of the city, like the urbanized areas of Hong Kong and the core districts of Shanghai have population densities of 90,000 and more. The urbanized area has a population of 4,043,000, covering an area of 108 square miles. Its population density is 37,400, which places it somewhat low for a Chinese urbanized area, but higher than all but a few urban areas outside China.

East Pearl River Delta: With the construction underway between Hong Kong-Shenzhen and Guangzhou, it is clear that a Pearl River Delta megalopolis is in the making. The arc of urbanization along the east side of the Pearl River, from Hong Kong, through Shenzhen, Dongguan to Guangzhou (former Canton) now accommodates as much as 35 million people, approximately the same population as the Tokyo-Yokohama area.

The areas are tied together not only by the railroad, but also by China's world-class tollway system, which is already the world's second most extensive limited access highway system (only the U.S. interstate highway system is longer). It is now possible to drive on this system from the Pearl River megalopolis to Shanghai and Beijing. A section remains to be completed through Wuhan to make direct access to the Three Gorges Dam and eventually it will be possible to drive on a high-quality four lane roadway system all the way to Xinjiang.

Guangzhou is at the center of China's political and economic modernization. Guangzhou will never reassert the dominance it once held, because Hong Kong is here to stay. But there is no question that Guangzhou is in the process of a renaissance that has already established it as one of the giants of the new China.

MUNICIPALITY OF GUANGZHOU: DISTRICTS: 2001

Districts	Population	Square Miles	Density
Yuexiu	341,400	3.4	99,428
Dongshan	556,300	6.6	83,833
Liwan	474,800	4.6	104,295
Core	1,372,500	14.6	93,866
Fangcum	323,800	16.4	19,702
Haizhu	1,237,300	34.9	35,477
Tianhe	1,109,300	41.8	26,549
Baiyun	1,748,700	402.3	4,347
Huangpu	389,400	47.0	8,294
Non-Core Districts	4,808,500	542.3	8,866
City of Guangzhou	6,181,000	556.9	11,098
Huadu City	713,400	370.8	1,924
Conhua City	517,600	761.8	679
Zengcheng City	896,000	671.8	1,334
Panyu City	1,631,400	506.9	3,219
County Level Cities	3,758,400	2,311.3	1,626
Municipality of Guangzhou	9,939,400	2,868.2	3,465



View from Railroad Station: CITIC Tower & Others



Office Buildings



Office Buildings



Office Buildings



Commercial and Residential Buildings



Commercial and Residential Buildings



Double Deck Cross Street



Chinese National Urban Bird: The Crane



Residential Buildings:
Complexes similar to this are all along the route from Shenzhen to Guangzhou



Pagoda at Buddhist Temple



Dr. Sun Yat Sen Memorial Auditorium



Old China: Side Street Scene



Ultimate of Old China: The Guangzhou central market

By Wendell Cox

Return: www.demographia.com/rac-ix.htm

Home: www.demographia.com