

13 – GUANGZHOU (CANTON)

Once we had broken through the cloud, we could see blue sky and the sun shining. At this point the air conditioning was turned on. If Mr Yao had not told us what was happening, we would have thought that there was something radically wrong with the plane, for clouds of steam came billowing out of vents above the luggage racks. Mr Yao laughed; no doubt he was not surprised as the plane had been made by the now despised Russians. (I had noticed signs printed in Russian here and there.)

Shortly afterwards, water began to drip down from the luggage racks – another consequence of the primitive air conditioning. An expressionless hostess in a brown uniform appeared and mopped up the drips with a towel. Eventually most of the drips stopped, though a couple of them continued so badly that two of us had to change seats. We were all making faces at one another.

As there was nothing but cloud to be seen from the window, I lay back and dozed. I was woken later by the arrival of a cup of tea, which the hostess handed to me. After I had drunk it, I fell asleep again.

When I woke about an hour later, we were flying over lush green scenery. I was told that we were approaching Guangzhou. Far below I could see winding rivers, mountains, and paddy fields that were not as symmetrically laid out as those in the north of the country. The land looked very fertile.

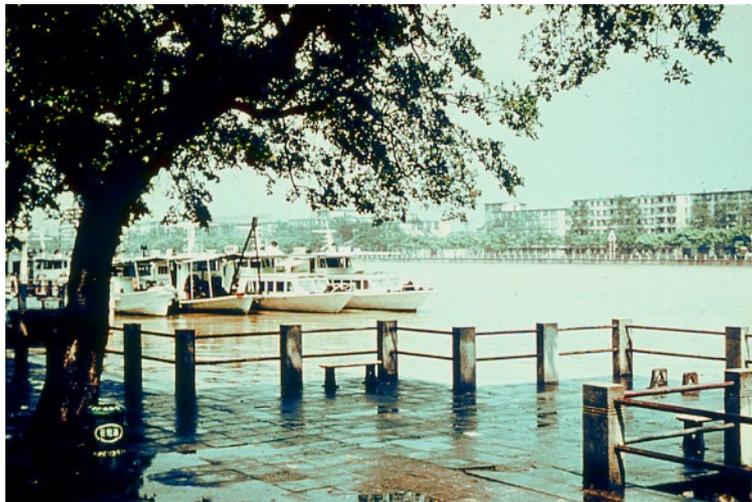
Shortly afterwards we began our descent. The scenery now became clearer, more beautiful, and lush. We were now just south of the Tropic of Cancer, in the same latitude as Calcutta in Bangladesh and the centre of Saudi Arabia. When we eventually touched down at the airport, we found ourselves still surrounded by countryside and beautiful wooded mountains. As we taxied along the runway, we could see a large and extensive airport building, which seemed to be quite empty.

When we stepped outside, the heat suddenly hit us. The temperature must have been about 30° Centigrade. Coats and jackets were hastily removed as we walked over to the main building, which looked quite modern. Inside the smart terminal it was a little cooler; we sat on comfortable bamboo chairs while our passports were checked. As we were not expecting this, several of us (including me) had put our passports in our main luggage.

We now met our new local guides. Li Qian, otherwise known as Miss Li, was a very pleasant and good-looking young lady with excellent poise. Mr Li (not related – Li is a very popular name in China) was a small and lean young man with spectacles. Another man, whose name I did not catch, was tall and well built, and had very short hair.

When everything had been sorted out and our luggage had been retrieved, we were led out of the terminal building to a square, where a smart and clean coach was waiting for us. As we drove towards the city, we noticed something that was quite different about this part of China: the way the locals dressed. Instead of the drab blue and green suits worn farther north, men wore short-sleeved white shirts and trousers, and women wore colourful blouses and short summer skirts. Undoubtedly this was because of the warmer climate. In general, there seemed to be a more cosmopolitan look about the place, and the locals took little notice of us.

As we approached Guangzhou, it suddenly began to rain. No wonder everything was so green! Those on bicycles either ran for shelter or quickly donned transparent plastic capes and hats; people on pathways either found shelter, put on rainwear, or just continued to walk in the rain, knowing that it would soon stop and that they would dry out.



Pearl River, Guangzhou (PF)

Eventually the countryside began to melt away as we drove into the suburbs of Guangzhou. The city centre looked very prosperous as it was full of modern buildings, some of which were quite tall, and shops. It certainly looked more pleasant and prosperous than Shanghai. We drove by the Zhu Jiang or Pearl River, where we saw many modern boats but no traditional sampans. Throughout the journey I chatted to the tall guide whose name I had missed, and who sat beside me; he turned out to be a gentle and smiling individual. Like everyone else, he said that I looked very young, and

asked me if I was studying or working. Amongst themselves, our guides chatted either in Mandarin Chinese or Cantonese.

We finally turned into a wide road where our hotel, the Dongfang, was situated. We clambered out of the coach and stepped into the huge reception area, which was pleasantly cool. Although the hotel looked a little old-fashioned, it seemed to be quite comfortable. When we were given the numbers of our rooms, Christopher and I went up in the lift to the fifth floor. Our room was large and painted in shades of green and brown; two large mosquito nets hung over our beds, and one had to push aside panels of fine mesh before opening glass doors that led to a small balcony. From here we could see the Hall of Chinese Export Commodities Fair across the road and the mountains beyond the city.

At four o'clock we set off in the coach for the Former National Institute of the Peasant Movement – a five-hundred-year-old Confucian temple in which Mao had trained students for the peasant revolutions back in 1926. By now Comrades Yao and Wei had discarded their grey suits and were now wearing white short-sleeved white shirts and dark trousers. As a result, they looked quite different and much more informal.

When we arrived at the entrance of the fine old Temple of Confucius, it was still raining. However, as we had been supplied with umbrellas, it was not too bad. Here we were greeted by a tall and good-looking young lady who was to be our guide. She immediately palled up with Miss Li, and they chatted and giggled like schoolgirls. Miss Li translated her explanations faultlessly.

Because this place had been preserved because Mao had worked here (in league with the Nationalists, which I do not think they told us), the guides seemed to know little or nothing about the original use of this large temple, which had been damaged by the Nationalists and restored in 1953. There were many fine buildings in the complex, all in good order; in between them were pretty courtyards. Although the rooms contained rustic wooden furniture of little interest or worth, the place was quite homely. We were shown Mao's bedroom-cum-office, which I had seen illustrated in a magazine at home. The room was almost bare but for a crudely-made four-poster wooden bed, a desk, a chair, and some large suitcases. We were told that Mao was thirty-two when he came here in the autumn of 1925. We were then shown the teachers' room, the duty room, the reading room, and the dormitory, which looked out on to a courtyard.

Off another courtyard, we saw a large classroom in what had originally been the main hall of the temple. This was full of simple wooden desks and seats. Finally we looked at the students' dining room and a military office. We then left after we had said goodbye to our pleasant guide. By now it had become quite dark because of the clouds and rain. On our way back to the

hotel, we were driven around the city. Guangzhou had been China's first city to trade with foreign countries and was China's best-known foreign trade port. It used to be famous for its silk and enamel ware.

We arrived back, feeling hot and wet, at about six o'clock. An hour later we made our way to the top floor, where we had to walk a long distance to the foreign visitors' dining room. En route we passed dining rooms for the local people. We had not realized how large the hotel was. When we were eventually seated at our high circular tables, we had to wait for half an hour before being served a delicious meal, as the staff seemed to be quite busy. Here we were given soup first. The main dishes, which were more familiar to us because of the proliferation of Cantonese restaurants at home, were delicious.

When we finished our meal and returned to our rooms, I spent the rest of the evening, which we actually had free, writing eighteen postcards and bringing my diary up to date. Before we went to bed, we unravelled the mosquito nets. One had to be careful here; I was taking anti-malaria tablets just in case I was bitten.

I woke at seven this morning in a bath of perspiration, for the air conditioning had turned off during the night and we had closed the windows in order to keep out mosquitoes. I leapt out of bed and pulled back the curtains. I opened the glass doors, had a shower, and joined the others for our usual breakfast of fried eggs and toast. Paddy Flanagan and I decided to order the Chinese breakfast for tomorrow, as it would be our last full day in mainland China.

At 8.30 we boarded our coach, armed with raincoats and umbrellas, and set off for the town of Foshan (variously known as Fushan, Fusan and Fatshan), some ten miles southwest of Guangzhou. The words *Fó Shān* in Mandarin Chinese mean 'Buddha's Mountain'; Indian Buddhists used to come here to preach their doctrine to the people. It took about an hour to reach the town. Soon after we left Guangzhou, we stopped at a sign which stated that foreigners were not permitted to proceed any farther without special permission. This was the first time that we had seen anything like this, though I had read that checkpoints were to be found outside every major city. One of our guides hopped out of the coach to present our permit, and within a few minutes we were on our way once again.

As the coach was warm inside and as the scenery was not particularly interesting, I dozed off and woke when we drove into Foshan. We stopped at a fine old Buddhist pagoda in the middle of the town, where we picked up our local guide, a middle-aged man. As we drove to our first stop, he told us about the town, using one of our new guides as an interpreter. In the past, Foshan had produced silk and ceramics; now the town had 150 light

industries. We were informed that our first stop would be the local Electric Light Bulb Factory, which did not sound particularly exciting.

We soon reached the factory and stopped outside a red-bricked building, where we shook hands with members of the management team. We were then brought upstairs to a large reception room, where we sat at a long table and were given cups of local black tea. This type of tea (*hóng chá*, 'red tea' in Chinese) is stronger in flavour and slightly bitter compared to the green or jasmine tea produced in the north of the country.

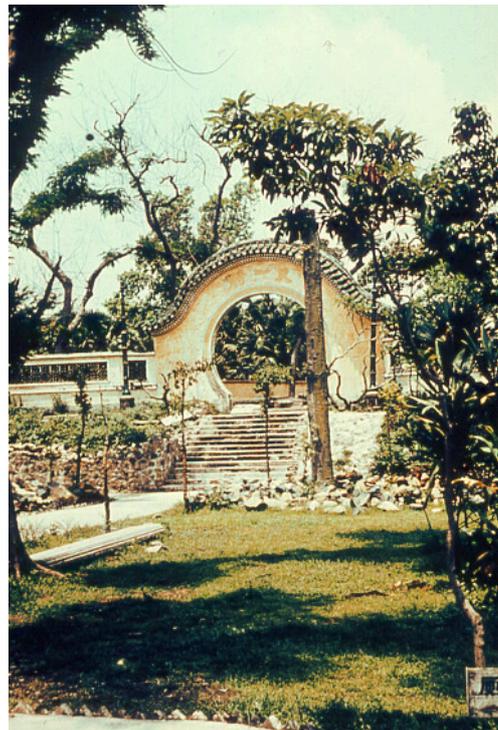
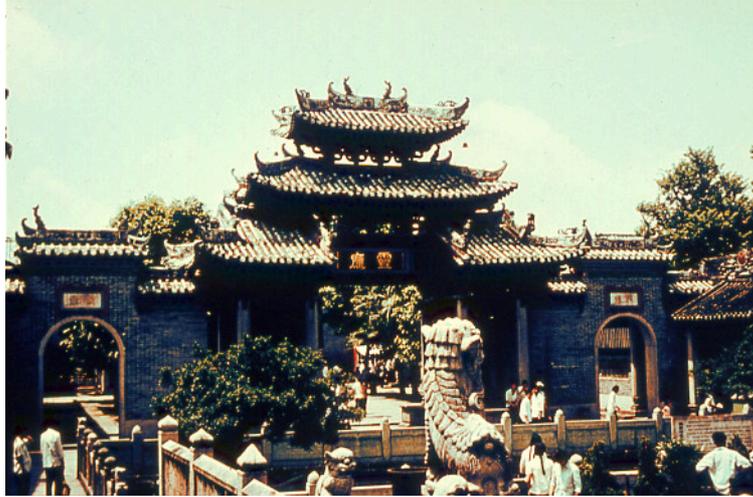
After the customary briefing, we were shown a display of the different type of bulbs made in the factory, then taken around the various workshops. To get to them, we had to go outside, where a local radio station was being broadcast over loudspeakers at top volume. First of all we saw young men blowing glass in rather dark and dirty conditions inside a large building. Next came machines that did this work automatically. We then saw bulbs being assembled manually and automatically. It seemed rather unusual to have manual and automatic processes side by side. Watching all this proved to be quite interesting; I kept with our guide, Patricia and Catherine, while the others, overcome with the heat, lagged behind or sat down outside.

The various workshops, which were rather drab, were mostly full of pretty girls who were doing very monotonous work. In general the workers were more distant here and did not bother to look at us. However, they did laugh and joke among themselves. As they were allowed to rest their eyes from time to time, we saw many of them chatting to one another or strolling around outside. We asked if the workers found their jobs boring. No, was the answer; they were working for their country... and more propaganda followed.

When we had seen around the factory and collected the others, we clambered back into our coach and set off for what was described to us as an 'ancestral temple'. (I later discovered that it was the Cu Ci Miao Daoist Temple, which had been founded in the Ming dynasty, though the present buildings were of the Qing dynasty.) This turned out to be a fairly large complex of attractive buildings not far from the pagoda. We stopped at an elaborate ornamental gateway, where we saw crowds of people coming and going. When we stepped out of the bus into the heat and sunshine, a pleasant and well-built middle-aged man met us, welcomed us, and brought us inside.

As everything looked quite photogenic, I took out my ciné camera and got quite carried away taking pictures of the fine architecture while my companions went on ahead. I followed them into a magnificent courtyard, which was full of people. I filmed this, then looked for the others. As I could not see them, I went through the main entrance of the temple into a building, which was full of magnificent articles and carvings. I took several

shots of the interior, then tried to find my companions. However, all I could see were hundreds of Chinese visitors. I was then rescued by one of our guides and brought to a smaller room, where we were given a briefing.



Cu Ci Miao Daoist Temple, Foshan, near Guangzhou (PF)

Afterwards we were shown around the complex. When our host discovered that I was a commercial artist, and interested in Chinese art and architecture, he was very pleased and answered many of my questions. The various halls of this temple were wonderful to behold. In the darkness and coolness of the rooms we admired a fine bronze figure, some 520 years old, ancient tripods, incense burners, carvings in lime wood, carvings covered in

gold leaf, and weapons for the guards of honour, which were displayed on the walls.

In the centre of the halls, forming two lines, were many large and lifelike statues of Daoist deities, who either smiled or snarled at us. All of them were angled forward slightly. These impressive figures were actually made of lacquered linen, and their feet were moveable. The long black moustaches and beetling eyebrows were made of some sort of hair. In order to see all these sights, crowds of colourfully-dressed Chinese people were waved out of the way by our guide.

After this we went back out into the courtyard and had a proper look at it. In the centre was a square pond, which contained slimy green water and a stone statue of a turtle. Then, passing through an exquisite ornamental gateway, we walked into a second courtyard. It was quite large; at one end was a magnificent stage that had a black wooden backdrop with gold decorations. On each side of the courtyard were boxes for the spectators.

Having seen this, we were brought into a series of rooms, where we were shown an exhibition of modern arts and crafts that looked very poor compared to what we had just seen.

By way of contrast, we saw cartoons of the Gang of Four being 'smashed with one blow' on a noticeboard outside when we left the exhibition. We then wandered back to our coach while chatting to our guides and watching young Japanese people photographing one another. I was told that some of them roped members of our party into their group photographs.

Back at the entrance, we shook hands with our pleasant guide and wished him goodbye. Although everything had been very interesting, our tour had been too rushed.

We now drove to a hotel that was opposite the pagoda. We were brought upstairs to a dining room, where we were given quite a delicious meal. As we had time to spare after our meal, I wandered down a corridor where I found Frank Cahill and our new guide, Miss Li, sitting in comfortable armchairs; they were talking to a little girl dressed in white. The lovely girl skipped around and laughed, unable to make up her mind whether to be shy or not. Miss Li had discovered that the little girl's daddy had brought her here all the way from Guilin in Guangxi province, west of where we were now.

I then sat down beside Miss Li and chatted to her. I found her a very pleasant young lady; she had a habit of staring into one's eyes all the time, which some of the other lads found rather mesmerizing. As she came from Shandong province in the north of China, she did not like the heat down here. We talked about travelling and the difference between East and West. She was interested to hear about my trips, and surprised me by asking about the number and type of churches in various countries. (I found out later that

the other lads had been giving her exaggerated accounts of our various religions and pulling her leg.) She told me that she had been learning English for three years; she certainly could speak the language fluently. She seemed interested to discover that I was a commercial artist. It was obvious that she was a highly intelligent girl, and from what she told me I could detect that she had a good sense of judgement, and that she had good taste. She seemed to be interested in learning about other countries. I guessed that if she had the chance, she would be off like a flash to see the rest of the world. She was bold enough to make jokes about swapping places with us. She spoke her mind, and was quite open in conversation. She also had a good sense of humour, and was able to speak in an intellectual manner one moment, then tell jokes the next. As we had never met anybody like this in China so far, it was very refreshing to talk to her. It was possible that her parents were well connected or had links with the outside world. Although she looked like a teenager, she later told us that she was twenty-one. We did not know whether to believe this or not!



Arts and crafts workshop, Foshan (PF)

Following a short rest after our lunch, we left the hotel and walked across the road to an arts and crafts institute. Here, in rather drab surroundings, we saw young people painting exquisite pictures and cutting elaborate paper designs. I was very interested to watch how this was done. First of all, a pattern was created and drawn on a sheet of white paper, which was then placed on top of several layers of coloured paper. Using a very sharp knife,

and following the pencil lines, the artist then cut the design through all the layers of paper. The finished work was so fine and detailed that we wondered how the artist managed not to cut or tear the paper in the wrong places.

Another skill we saw was cutting designs out of bronze foil and sticking coloured paper behind certain parts of the composition. Also to be seen here were various types of decorations and carvings, some made from cuttlefish bone.

The workers paid little or no attention to us. Every two hours they were given a ten-minute break so that they could rest their eyes. I noticed that none of them had adequate working conditions; the lighting was rather dim and they sat on hard wooden stools at small tables. In an exhibition room upstairs I bought several pretty paper cuts that were very inexpensive considering the amount of work that had gone into them. I also bought four simple dolls, which cost about 35p each – very cheap by our standards.

At the end of our visit, Miss Li wanted to know if I had enjoyed it. I told her that it had been a very interesting experience watching the young people at work. At this point we said goodbye to the guide who had brought us around Foshan, clambered aboard our coach and returned to Guangzhou.

When we reached the city, we saw preparations and festivities for welcoming visiting delegates from different parts of the country. At various places we saw girls in white dresses waving red and orange paper flowers, and boys and young men dressed in blue and white. There were lorryloads of people, and plenty of noise: the beating of drums, the clashing of cymbals, and the deafening explosions when fireworks were let off. They even cheered and made a commotion when they saw us in our coach!

When we arrived at our hotel by about three o'clock, there were celebrations at the gate, for a crowd of people were awaiting the delegates and representatives. The people were dressed in dazzling white shirts and dark trousers, and had banners, streamers, and fireworks. To the noisy accompaniment of drums and cymbals, a highly ornamented lion, operated by two men, danced, twisted and snapped at some people wearing rather peculiar-looking masks. It was all very colourful and lively.

I filmed this scene from the balcony of our room, and then at ground level just as a group of representatives came marching in. Here I met Donal and John, who were trying on one of the masks that the Chinese people were wearing. As the mask went all around the head and was a little too small for them, I tried it putting it on and it fitted me. For this I received a cheer from the Chinese people who were watching us.

After a little while, Donal, John and I decided to go out for a walk. When we got to the hotel entrance, we turned right and walked to the end of the

tree-lined road. We then turned right again and began to walk down the long Jiefang Road, which would eventually bring us to the Pearl River. As I felt very hot and tired, I found it difficult to keep up with the lads, especially as my sandals were proving to be rather uncomfortable.

Farther on we met Frank Cahill. I stayed with him, and the two lads disappeared up another street. Together Frank and I walked along, taking in everything around us. The place was quite colourful, and the houses and buildings were small, old, and quaint. For most of the distance we were able to walk in the shade, under the awnings of the shops. There were people everywhere; the road was full of bicycles, bicycle rickshaws, various types of extended bicycles piled with all sorts of things, people pulling heavy cartloads of goods, and various other vehicles such as lorries and buses. The shops were small, old-fashioned, dark, and crowded; on sale were food, drinks, groceries, cigarettes, sweets, and books. We passed barbershops, hair salons, and tiny workshops full of assorted bits and pieces. We peeped into the tiny rooms of houses containing wooden furniture and various odds and ends, such as bicycles. Here and there we were able look down narrow side streets that were bustling with life and activity.

The place was delightfully chaotic; people continually bumped into one another, talked and shouted rapidly in Cantonese. Fathers and grandfathers brought little boys and girls for walks, and children played on the paths outside the open hall doors of their houses. Many children had large green crickets tied to long lengths of string, which flew around in circles,.

In general, the people did not take any notice of us, and did not bother to smile. I had the feeling that the people here were more used to the presence of foreigners than those in the cities that we had visited farther north. However, the people did seem to be relatively happy and perhaps less oppressed by the lumbering political system. Many seemed to be exhausted by the energy-sapping heat, and were either lolling around or sitting in the shade, their backs resting against a wall that had been whitewashed many years previously.

We eventually reached the end of the road, where we saw Haizhu Square, a park, and the modern Haizhu steel bridge that spanned the Pearl River. By now, after more than half an hour's quick walk, both of us were tired and hot. We tried to catch one of the bicycle rickshaws, but to no avail. Either the drivers did not want to transport us or wanted us to catch one at a terminus somewhere. One person led us to a bus stop, but we were not interested. We decided that we would have to walk back.

When we finally arrived at our hotel, my feet were aching and I was damp with perspiration. Back in my room, I threw myself on my bed, rested, then had a very welcome cold shower and washed my hair. Refreshed, I left to join the others for dinner at seven. In the lift going up to the top floor, I met

a man and two ladies from Canada who were telling each other that there was a group of Irish people in the hotel. I discovered that they had come to China for three months in order to give instruction to English teachers. At the moment they were having a short holiday before starting their work. They realized that their job here would be quite tough; at home they worked a twelve-hour week, whereas here they would have to work a twenty-two hour week!

This evening our meal was served on time. Once again it was delicious and we finished with an orange. It had become clear during our holiday that the Chinese never finished their meals with a dessert.

Like yesterday, we were free to do whatever we wanted in the evening. I posted thirteen of my eighteen cards, for I did not have enough money left to post the rest of them, and bought the pocket edition of Mao's Little Red Book with the remainder, 50 *fen* (about 15p). At one time this book was to be found everywhere; now it was only available in bookshops. Now that Mao had passed away, it seemed that he was slowly beginning to fade from people's memory as a new era was on its way. The door that had been firmly closed against the outside world was now cautiously being opened a little. Various types of entertainment previously banned by Mao's widow were now being revived, and an appreciation of ancient works of art was once again being encouraged. I had a feeling that the current and obsessive criticism of the Gang of Four would eventually disappear. The members of this 'gang' had quite recently been expelled from the government, and Deng Xiaoping, a statesman who had been purged twice by Mao during the Cultural Revolution, had been reinstated.

Despite having been bombarded with so much propaganda during our stay here, and having such a gruelling schedule imposed upon us for most of the time, we felt sorry that our tour around China would come to an end after tomorrow.