

VISIT TO THE CITY OF THE FIVE RAMS

by Lucia Lee

translated by Mary Louise Martin

(A) INTRODUCTION

I was born in Guangzhou (Canton) but came to Hong Kong as a small child with my parents. Since I grew up in Hong Kong I never had the opportunity to see and experience the native customs and lifestyle of China. So I was fortunate that my work provided an opportunity to return to my native city. Here I would like to record for our readers some of my impressions about the history, religion, culture and characteristics of the people of Guangzhou. We hope to share similar material about other places in the future.

China is such a vast country with such a long history and ancient culture that it cannot, of course, be absorbed in a short time. And one cannot in one trip visit all the cities and towns, mountains and rivers, of China. Since Guangzhou is so close to Hong Kong and has many contacts with the people of Hong Kong, I chose it as my first stop. There is a feeling of closeness between the people of the two places and to an extent, Guangzhou's lifestyle has been influenced by Hong Kong. Moreover, it is the capital of Guangdong province and the southern terminus for trains from Beijing. So it is a very important city.

(B) GENERAL GEOGRAPHIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC SITUATION OF GUANGZHOU

Guangzhou lies on the southern shore of the Pearl River at the northern end of the Pearl River Delta. Its mild climate is similar to that of Hong Kong. Some of its alternate names are familiar to many people such as City of the Five Rams and Mouth of the Province, names which have their source in the folklore of the people. In 1958 the population of Guangzhou was 1,867,000 but in the past twenty years it has grown to about 3,000,000.

Guangzhou's chief industries are still manufacturing and agriculture. Comparatively speaking, the people's lifestyle is simple, but since the opening of China to the world changes have taken place and the standard of living is higher than formerly. People now can engage in small private business, of which the most common is a great variety food stalls. There is every kind of sweet and sour food for the visitor to sample. No

one will be disappointed, but we must be careful about our health.

It makes one happy to see the rising standard of living due to economic changes. This is true even though at times we talk about our mainland brothers' avid desire for material things (TV's, tape recorders, rice cookers, etc.) which we know contribute to life but also bring worry and distraction. It is impossible for a materialistic and spiritual life to develop in equal proportion to each other, so we can easily imagine the problems that are bound to arise in a different society. But reflecting a bit more deeply, we can ask: who is responsible for these trends? Is it the people of the mainland, or do not the people of Hong Kong returning to China bear some of the responsibility? Or perhaps we feel that if we can overcome the difficulties of the present as new economic policies are put into effect, a new situation will arise.

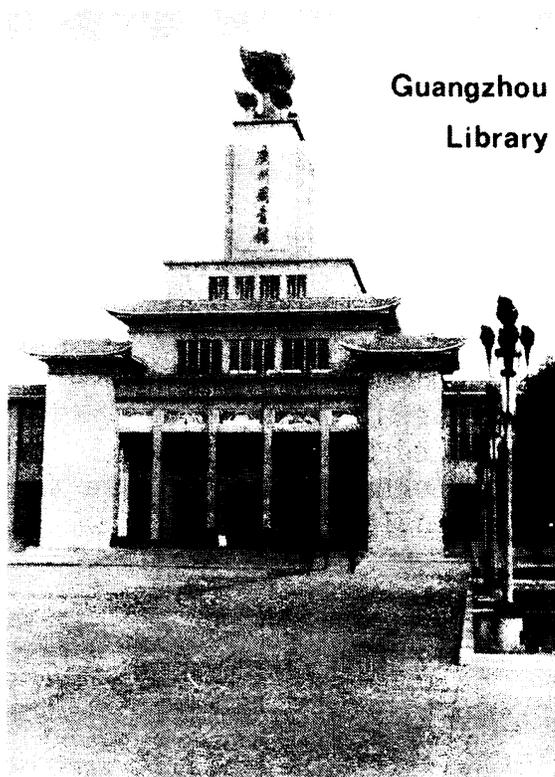


The peoples' most common leisure activities are watching TV, listening to popular music and attending the cinema. One event I would like to mention is seeing a very worthwhile and popular Chinese film called "A feeling of home" (鄉情). It is about a young peasant who lives with his adopted mother and sister. He was raised in an atmosphere of love and care. As the two young people grew to maturity, their temperaments were greatly influenced by the selfless love and labour of their stepmother. The boy had been separated from his real parents by the war and after the war, his father became a high official. The real parents then tried every means to get their son back. They wanted to take him to the city to live with them and be educated. The youth faced a difficult choice involving family, human love and ethical questions. The story ends with the stepmother going away secretly. This spirit of complete selflessness made me reflect on two of the cultural movements in the country at present: the "Five Emphases" and the "Four Beauties". The "Five Emphases" are: civility, courtesy, sanitation, order and morality. The "Four Beauties" are: beautiful soul, beautiful language, beautiful behavior and beautiful environment. People may be surprised that a country with five thousand years of history would be calling loudly today for the promotion of spiritual values. But after thirty years of changes and numerous political movements, peoples' emotions and traditional

moral values have become confused. Is it not more meaningful to promote spiritual civilization and higher education than to regret what happened in the past?

(C) FAMOUS PLACES IN GUANGZHOU

I mention here some places in Canton that are worth visiting.



**Guangzhou
Library**

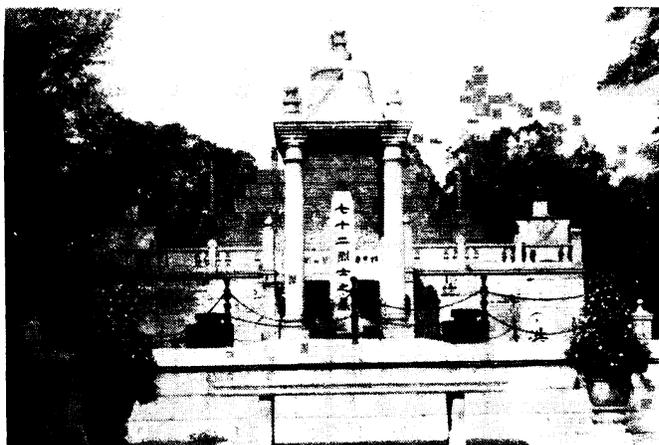
a) From the National Institute of the Peasant Movement Mao Zedong in 1926 directed and trained large numbers of cadres for the Peasant Movement. After liberation the site of the Institute was restored to its present state as a tourist attraction. The tall pillars with a flame at the top at the main gate are an outstanding feature. The former large characters meaning the power of a flame have been changed recently to read "Guangzhou Library." The library has many books and is open to the public.

b) The Memorial Park to the Martyrs of the Guangzhou Uprising commemorates the heroes who died in the unsuccessful uprising of February, 1927. Inside the park there is a circular grave completely covered with fresh white flowers. It is an impressive and beautiful sight.

c) The Huanghuagang (Yellow Flower Hill)

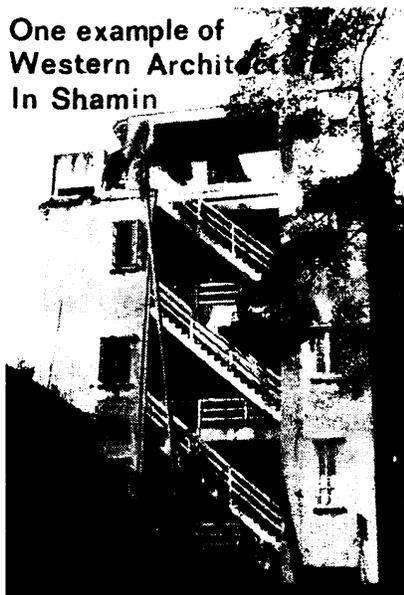
Mausoleum of Seventy-two Martyrs commemorates the revolutionaries who died in the Guangzhou insurrection of the Chinese Revolution in March, 1911. At the entrance there are four large characters, meaning "Bravery lives forever." Several statues standing around the mausoleum that were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution have been restored recently.

Mausoleum of Seventy-two Martyrs ▶



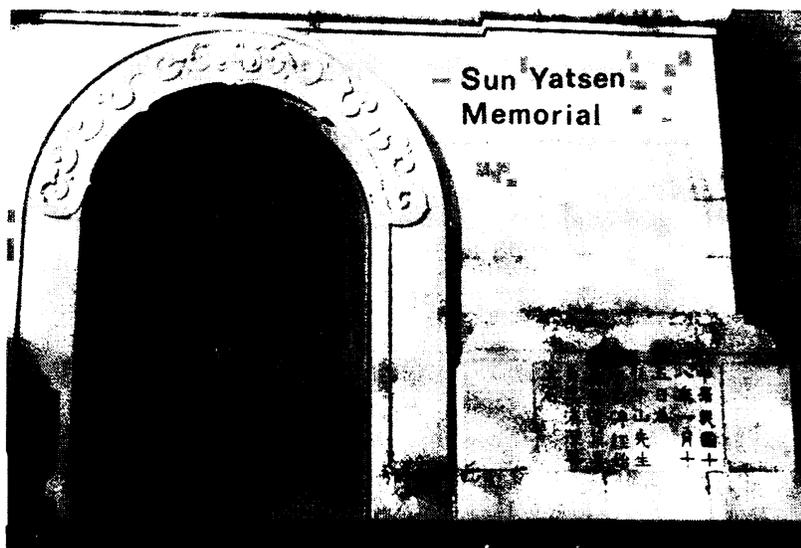
d) The Sun Yatsen Memorial Hall was built in 1931. This large building of octagonal shape and vivid colours is an imposing edifice. The main hall seats five thousand and at present is used for evening theatrical performances. Since it is built along Chinese architectural lines there are no pillars to block one's vision.

One example of
Western Architecture
In Shamin



e) Shamin, a small man-made island in the Pearl River, was known in former times as the diplomatic area. It took on a new appearance after the Cultural Revolution - Chinese people living in Western style houses. The exteriors of the building have deteriorated due to the passage of time, but the lines and appearance are unmistakably Western. Any Chinese person walking in the area cannot but remember the shame inflicted upon us by foreigners. "Chinese and dogs not allowed inside" remains deeply engraved in our hearts.

f) Yuexiu Park includes the Sun Yatsen Memorial, Zhenhai Tower, and a children's recreational centre, a stadium, swimming pool and man-made lakes. Of special interest is the Zhenhai Tower, called the five-story pavilion. In ancient times this was used as a watchtower from which to look afar, study the sea and to watch for enemies that might be approaching. After the population increased so much, the surrounding water was gradually filled in so that when one looks



down now, one no longer sees any water but a mass of people. A museum inside Zhenhai Tower contains historical and cultural objects from various dynasties. Persons interested in archaeology will find this place worth visiting, though it is regrettable photography is not permitted.

In summary it can be said that in Guangzhou there are more man-made edifices than places of natural beauty. Many were built as memorials of past events, and are thought-provoking reminders of China's past.

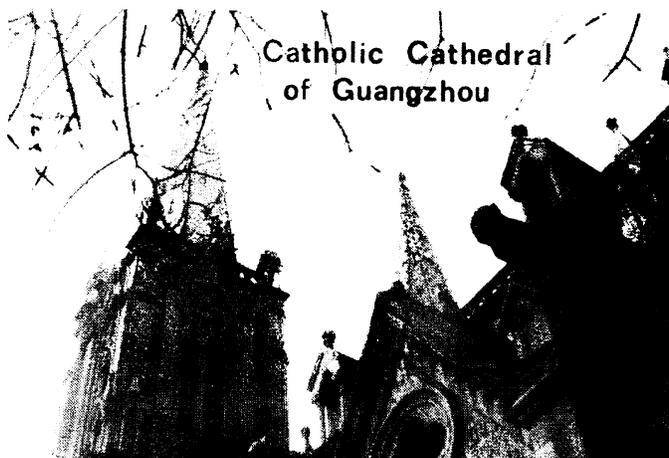
(D) RELIGIOUS PLACES AND ACTIVITIES

January 10th, the last day of my visit, was a Sunday, so I went to the Guangzhou Catholic Cathedral for Mass. The Cathedral was built in 1860 and consecrated in 1863. Over a hundred years old and built in Gothic style, the large church is still a very imposing building, especially its 50 metre high steeple over the front door. I attended the 9:00 a.m. Mass, one of three held every Sunday. Besides the choir there were about 60 people present.

The Catholics could not hear or see clearly during the first part of the Mass, which the priest said without any participation on the part of the congregation. After about a half hour the priest read the Gospel and gave a homily in very fluent Cantonese. Mass immediately concluded after Holy Communion. After Mass, the Catholics seemed unacquainted and did not greet one another, nor did the priest come out to talk with the congregation.

The Tungshan Protestant Church, re-opened on 30th September, 1979, is a place of lively religious activity. There is public worship at noon-time every Saturday and Sunday and those who come for worship participate with great fervor. To care for the number of worshippers another Protestant Church was opened in September, 1980, and about 1500 Christians take part in services there each Sunday. The worship services include hymns, prayers, silent meditation, Scripture readings, a sermon, and a blessing.

Not far from the Catholic Cathedral is the Guang Ta Mosque, but it did not seem open or restored as the other places of worship. One could see that there were people living there. From the sign hanging on the





**Guang Ta
Mosque**

front gate, "This is not the Guang Ta Mosque," I gathered the people inside had been bothered quite a bit by curious onlookers. I felt dissatisfied as I left there.

Of all the churches and temples I visited in Guangzhou, the Liu Rong Buddhist Temple had the greatest religious atmosphere. Inside was a Hall of Worship, three large Buddhas, and a wooden pagoda which attract many Chinese and foreign visitors. One felt enveloped in a smoky fog because of all the incense being burned by the worshipers - certainly no less than that burned at the Wong Tai Sin Temple in Hong Kong.

I asked a Guangzhou youth what his attitude was towards religion. He told me that in the past China had often been opposed to religion. The present generation has absolutely no understanding of religion. Unless religion is propagated, it cannot put down roots and grow. So it was difficult for him to give me an answer. This may represent the attitude of many others. It reminds those of us who are travelling to China to make a greater effort to show the true spirit behind our faith to our compatriots.

(E) CONCLUSION

Because the time was short and there was much to see, I was limited to external observation and was unable to make a deep analysis. But I hope this introductory report will arouse our readers' interest and lead to further study.



Worshipping at Liu Rong Buddhist Temple ▶