

**Chongxi Pagoda,
Zhaoqing**



A VACATION VENTURE TO GUANGZHOU

BY PETER BARRY

A few weeks before Christmas, the Hong Kong newspapers, both Chinese and English, were full of advertisements suggesting places where Hong Kong citizens might wish to spend their Christmas holidays. The warmer climates of southeast Asia, and the equally warm welcome of the friendly peoples of the countries in that area, such as Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines, beckoned the would-be holiday traveler. The visitor was assured a restful time on sun-splashed benches, or he could stroll through exotic marketplaces, mingling with the friendly people and sampling the local tropical fruit. China was not even considered as a vacation destination because of the weather. After all, how could one walk comfortably along the Great Wall (if he could even get there with the snow on the road) in the sub-zero temperature announced for Beijing on the TV weather report each evening in Hong Kong!

However, I would advise the would be Christmas traveler: don't be too quick to rule China out. After the pleasant holiday an American friend and I spent there the week after Christmas, I would strongly

recommend Guangzhou as a vacation spot. Chinese history, ancient and modern, practically seeps through the sidewalks of this old commercial city, plumped like an age-less queen on the mouth of the Pearl River estuary. One can almost visualize the tall masted ships of the East India Trading Company riding at anchor in the Pearl as they off-loaded their chests of opium to the foreign hongos on Shamian Island in the 1830's. The visitor can also stand in the exact spot (today an obelisk marks the place) where 50 Chinese workers and students were killed by foreign troops on June 25, 1925 as they demonstrated in sympathy with a similar strike held in Shanghai the month previously (the famous May 30 Incident in which a dozen Chinese workers also died). One can also visit the museums, the mausoleum to the martyrs of the Guangzhou uprising and the Sun Yatsen Memorial Hall.

Or the visitor can just walk the streets of the city, visiting parks, going in and out of stores, as my friend and I did, buying souvenirs and striking up friendly chats with the people. Of course, the visitor will sample the exquisite cuisine of Guangzhou, which ranks among the best in the world.

Being Catholics, we of course were interested in the situation of the Catholic Church in Guangzhou. One afternoon we strolled over to the immense Shishi Cathedral, which has a 120 year history (the date on the cornerstone reads 1863). We marvelled at the size of the Christmas creche, which took up the space of one wall in the apse of the Church. My friend and I agreed that a lot of care and faith must have gone into setting it up. We knelt for a silent prayer in front of it.

We did not see any of the priests at the Shishi church, but the next day we visited the recently re-opened Catholic church on Shamian Island. We had read about its opening, on December 12, 1982, in the Hong Kong newspapers. Called Our Lady of Lourdes, the church building is not very large, and looks as if the new benches in it could only seat about 150 people comfortably. In the past this church had been mostly used by foreign Catholics residing in Guangzhou.

The priests' house is located in back of the church. We were met by Father Laurence Liu Lingsi, pastor, Father Francis Liang Kezhi, and a layman, Mr. Yu Haozhang. We were led into a freshly painted sitting room, containing new cushioned chairs. Holy pictures were hanging on the walls, as well as pictures of recent events of significance in the Chinese Catholic Church, e.g., a group photo of the 200 plus attendees at the Third Assembly of the Catholic Patriotic Association, held in Beijing in May, 1980.

The pastor, Father Liu, told us that he had been ordained a priest in 1943 and that he is now 63 years old. Father Liang is a year or two older. The Fathers showed us the photographs of the re-opening ceremony conducted by Bishop Ye Yinyun. Two young foreigners, whom the Fathers told us were from the American consulate, were seated in the front row of the packed church. The Fathers also told us that between 300 - 400 people attended Christmas Midnight Mass, with the overflow participating from the garden outside.

Our hosts then led us on a tour of the church itself. A statue of the Blessed Mother stands above the main altar, while there are statues of the Sacred Heart and St. Joseph on side altars. The stations of the Cross around the walls are from Hong Kong, Fr. Liang told us. A small Christmas crib, certainly not on the scale of the one in the Shishi Cathedral, was set up in the right front corner of the church.

Sunday Masses are at 6:30 and 7:00 A.M., and the daily Mass is at 6:30 A.M. My friend and I attended the daily Mass one morning, and despite the few numbers (five middle-aged ladies and a young man in his 30's, who was the server), we were impressed with the fervor and devotion of both priest and faithful during the service.

We took some photos in front of the church with Fathers Liu, Liang and Mr. Yu, and before saying our goodbyes, Father Liang gave us each a copy of a special magazine printed to commemorate the third anniversary of the re-opening of the Shishi Cathedral in October, 1979. In the magazine, all the contributors, priests, Sisters and laypeople, express their thanks to God and their appreciation to the government for the re-institution of the policy of religious freedom, which resulted in the re-opening of the church. A store house during the Cultural Revolution, the massive Cathedral has now been repaired and cleaned up. Even the garbage heap and truck parking lot have been removed from in front of the church building. A garden has been planted around the building (and poinsettias were in full bloom there on the day we visited). Father Liang commented proudly, "The money for the renovations came from the Chinese Church itself; none came from outside sources."

More importantly, however, Mass, Communion, confession and the rest of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church have been restored, the contributors to the special publication point out. Traditional Catholic devotions, such as Benediction, the Stations of the Cross, and recitation of the rosary, are also taking place again. As the four sisters of the Chinese Immaculate Conception congregation write: "All these things cause us to experience personally the warmth and light of the



*From L. to R.:
Fr. Liu Lingsi,
Mr. Yu Hao-
Zhang, the
author and Fr.
Liang Kezhi*

present religious policy." (p. 12)

Because this year is the 400th anniversary of the famous Jesuit missionary, Matteo Ricci's arrival in China, My friend and I were anxious to visit Zhaoqing, a town on the West River, 110 kilometers west of Guangzhou, where Ricci first resided when he came to China. Zhaoqing is fast becoming a popular tourist attraction with its many scenic places of natural beauty, like Seven Star Park and Ding Hu Mountain. We stayed at the newly opened (October, 1982) Overseas Chinese Hotel. My friend and I visited Seven Star Park, but of course we were also interested in tracing the footsteps of Matteo Ricci. We were not sure where to start, but seeing a sign for the city government's Cultural Bureau, we stopped and asked the officials if they knew the approximate location of Ricci's place of residence in Zhaoqing. We would like to take photographs of the spot, no matter what existed there now, as a commemoration of our visit, we added. The officials replied that they were not certain of the location, but as for taking photographs, we would need the permission of the Foreign Affairs Department. Mr. Li of the Foreign Affairs Office, a young man in his 30's, said that he would inquire about the location of Ricci's place of residence, and inform us at our hotel the next morning. It seemed as if we were getting the official brush-off.

However, much to my surprise, a knock sounded on our hotel room door at promptly 9 A.M. the next morning announcing the arrival of Mr. Li. Mr. Li reported that a professor of history whom he had consulted told him that the site of Ricci's residence could not be determined for certain. Some people say that it was at Star of the Sea (Hai Xing), a section in the old walled city; others say that it was on the site occupied by the town's department store now; still others hold that it was near the Chongxi Pagoda, the famous landmark of Zhaoqing. After living in Zhaoqing for some years, Mr. Li continued, Ricci went to live with some Buddhist monks at a monastery in a mountainous area outside Zhaoqing. Besides preaching a religious doctrine, Ricci introduced western science to China, and also cured some sick people, he said. Ricci's contribution to China is definite and must be acknowledged, Mr. Li concluded. As for taking pictures, we were free to do so anywhere in town - and we even could take them of people, if they did not object, Mr. Li said. I was impressed with the conscientiousness and spirit of service of this young government official.

My friend and I then spent a leisurely morning walking through the old walled city of Zhaoqing. A young shop girl in her teens, a recent high school graduate, whom we chanced to meet, accompanied us on a little tour of the old city. The wall around it was completed during the Ming dynasty, the girl explained. So Ricci would have known of it. The ages had taken their toll, however, and in many places the wall was at ground level, so that we were actually walking on top of it. But it did protrude in some places over ten feet above the ground. We imagined that Ricci might have taken this same stroll on a cool Zhaoqing evening 400 years previously. We felt we were walking in his footsteps.

Upon our return to Guangzhou, my friend and I agreed that the visit to Zhaoqing was the highlight of our trip...due in large part to the friendliness of the people we met there.

Throughout our trip we observed that the people seemed happy, and seemed to have more money to spend. More consumer items seemed to be available, and places like the Nan Fang department store were stocked with every conceivable product, as well as being packed with many potential buyers. In the restaurants, where we ate with local and overseas Chinese in the same dining room, many factories and offices were having year end banquets. The diners all seemed to be having a good time, as they laughed and toasted one another with rice wine.

So, the friendliness of the people is one of the reasons I would recommend Guangzhou as a destination for a vacation trip. At the same

time, the price is right. My friend and I spent only about 1,000 H.K. dollars each for room, board and travel during our week's stay in Guangzhou. And this includes the initial visa charge at China Travel Service in Hong Kong.

In closing, I offer just one little opinion regarding contacts with Chinese Catholic believers. I think that Rev. Alan Chan makes a good point in another place in this issue where he discusses Article 36 of the new constitution, which prohibits foreign "domination" of Chinese religious bodies. Rev. Chan suggests that since Christianity is a universal religion, contact among sister churches in countries around the world is natural to it. Such contact ought not to be considered a violation of the "domination" phrase in Article 36. Thus it is hoped that more frequent

and substantial contacts could take place between Chinese and foreign Catholics, without fear of being considered "domination" or "interference." Such contacts would be an open expression of Christian concern between churches, and mutually beneficial, in this writer's opinion.



Vehicular Ferry across the West River outside Zhaoqing.