

Another island to the south-east Er sha tou, is covered with sports grounds.

Canton has been a centre for overseas trade for more than two thousand years; Arab traders came here centuries before the Europeans. Canton, one of China's chief trading ports has been eclipsed to some extent in recent years by Hong Kong, eighty miles to the south-east on the Pearl River estuary; the shallowness of the Pearl River at Canton and problems in dredging have made docking difficult for large ocean-going vessels. However, the twice-yearly trade fairs held in the Exhibitions Centre (increasingly important as China's trade with the outside world grows) have restored Canton to much of its former importance as a commercial centre. The city is also a highly important regional communications centre, with road, water and rail communications with a wide hinterland.

A shortage of coal in the interior prevents any great development of heavy industry, but there is dock and harbour work and light industry, especially textiles. Canton is also a cultural centre, with the Sun Yat-sen University, several higher education establishments, a museum and libraries. The South China botanical gardens are in the suburbs.

Canton, extensively modernized in the 1920's is today mainly the town built by Sun Yat-sen, though since 1949 there have been further changes. The most successful contribution of the present regime is the Pearl River Square, a huge open space by the riverside, bordered by the tall white buildings of the Exhibition Hall.