

2. CANTON

Pronounced: Gwang joe

Official transcription: Guang Zhou

Canton on the Pearl River in South China is the "gate of China". With a population of around 2 million, it is an important industrial centre, a busy port and the capital of Kwangtung province. At the beginning of the 20th century it was the largest city in China and although it has since been overtaken and passed by Shanghai, Peking, Shenyang and some other industrial centres of the north, it is still of major importance both in economics and in politics. It was near Canton that the mid-nineteenth century Taiping rebels established their earliest bases, from here the Nationalists began the Northern March of 1926 which re-established the unity of China; the Canton commune of the Communist Party of China was first established in 1927. One of the main tourist attractions of the city is a memorial to the martyrs of an abortive rebellion led by Sun Yat-sen shortly before the final overthrow of the Manchu dynasty.

The city is nestled in a bend of the Pearl River, facing south. Its main streets slope gently down towards the river from the rising ground to the north. The main axis Jie fang lu or Liberation Avenue, divides the town into east and west sectors. Across the axis run both wide boulevards and narrow, crowded, picturesque streets. On the river is a mile of waterfront lined by buildings five or six stories high; a pleasant park on the sandbar island called Sha mian at the south-west tip of the town, site of the former French and British concessions, provides an excellent view over the river and its traffic.