

The New China

It's amazing how fast things are changing in China. Nowhere was I struck by the truth of that statement more than on my return to Guangzhou nearly eight years after I first visited the city. I recall writing the first time I was in Guangzhou that I couldn't believe a city of its size could hardly have a single traffic light and those it



New Skyline of Guangzhou along the Pearl River.

did have seemed to be completely ignored unless an officer with a whistle was present. Now it seems that almost every corner has a new LED traffic light, and even more remarkable is that people actually pay attention to them. While the traffic lights have helped the navigation of the city by foot by making street crossings much safer, the cities brand new bilingual subway system, complete with flat screen TVs (at one point even showing super bowl highlights!), has made public transportation a breeze. Gone are the days of struggling with a Chinese bus map in hand with one eye on the map and the other out the window of a run down exhaust spewing bus searching for a recognizable landmark. Also a thing of the past, is the huge wild and gruesome Qingping market. On my first visit this market seemed to have nearly every species on planet for sale, and not as pets. Out front was a guy hawking a tiger skin as well



Hanging the sausage out with the cloths on the back streets of Guangzhou

as other parts and horns of what could only be assumed to be similarly endangered species. While the market does exist it is a shadow of its former self, and while there is the occasional bucket of live scorpions (yeah, I like my venomous bugs fresh too), the ban on street side butchering has taken some of the gruesome impact away from the bigger species. And thankfully the endangered species vendors have at least been pushed underground, if not completely removed. Now the new heart of activity is a large pedestrian zone similar to a Chinese “City Walk” anchored prominently by none other than that bastion of global imperialism McDonald’s, and complete with a basketball sneaker shop blaring western rap music. The bicycles are disappearing too although by no means gone, they are slowly being replaced electric scooters. I’ll at least give that to central planning if every bicyclist in China suddenly went to one of the smoke spewing motorcycles you see all over Southeast Asia it would be and ecological catastrophe.

This rush to “modernization” is not without its casualties. And that casualty is the unique centuries old regional architecture of each city. In Kunming the process as nearly reached its fruition. Only a handful of streets with the old wooden facades exist where ones existed blocks upon blocks of these quaint old buildings connected by a labyrinth of narrow alleyways. Bulldozed to make room for Kunming’s cookie cutter copy of Guangzhou’s pedestrian zone, complete with same randomly placed bronze statues interspersed throughout the walkways. It’s not only western eyes that see the shame in this. I was talking with business man from Shenzhen who lamented the fact that once you could go to any city in China and see the unique architecture of the region, now he says everywhere is the same. And he is not alone many “experts” as he called them say the same thing. But the short sighted pull of profits seems too much to stand in this most capitalistic “Communist” country.



Military school training and young boys copying the soldiers, Guangzhou.



The bicycle is not dead yet and its always amazing what you see piled on them (Guangzhou)



Even TVs
(Kunming)