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## Nanning and Guangxi: China's gateway to the south-west

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# Nanning and Guangxi: China's gateway to the south-west

## **Abstract**

Extract:

Nanning is a surprise. An ancient city in China's remote southwest, Nanning turns out to be a vibrant mix of traditional and modern in a region which is now poising itself to become the transport hub of southern China and Indochina as combined road, rail, air, river and port improvements reach fruition in the project called 'the Large Channel to the Sea'. A region which has known conflict and controversy, Guangxi is now striving to make the best of its geographical and cultural diversity, and to form part of a wider economic community embracing nearby Chinese provinces as well as the adjacent nations of Southeast Asia.

## **Keywords**

Nanning, Guangxi, Xich Quy, Southern China, Red Army, People's Liberation Army, Vietnamese

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## *Regions and Cities of China:*

# **NANNING AND GUANGXI: CHINA'S GATEWAY TO THE SOUTH-WEST**

*by R. James Ferguson*

### **Nanning: A New Crossroads**

Nanning is a surprise. An ancient city in China's 'remote' southwest, Nanning turns out to be a vibrant mix of traditional and modern in a region which is now poising itself to become the transport hub of southern China and Indochina as combined road, rail, air, river and port improvements reach fruition in the project called 'the Large Channel to the Sea'. A region which has known conflict and controversy, Guangxi is now striving to make the best of its geographical and cultural diversity, and to form part of a wider economic community embracing nearby Chinese provinces as well as the adjacent nations of Southeast Asia.

Nanning is the regional capital of *Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region* and a gateway to Southwest China and Indochina. It has an urban population of over 1.2 million and controls a total county population of approximately 2.7 million.(1) Guangxi region itself comprises a population of 46 million, with ready access to other southern and southern-western provinces via road, rail, air and river links. It has air routes to Hong Kong, regular air flights to Beijing and Shanghai (via Guilin), easy access to Singapore and Bangkok, and its airport has recently been upgraded as part of China's major expansion of the civil aviation sector.(2) Land routes lead to southern Chinese seaports in Qinzhou and Beihai, and the city is only 235 km from the Vietnamese border. A rail link connects Nanning to the new heavy port facilities in Fangchenggang, now the biggest trade-carrying port in Guangxi, with 25 berths, 9 of which can handle vessels of 10,000 tons.(3)

Nanning has an open door policy that encourages foreign investment and joint ventures. With a subtropical climate, strong agricultural base, growing tourist industry, and emerging textile, chemical, machinery, electrical and Information Technology industries, the region in the last two decades has emerged as one of the most vigorous border areas of China. As a regional capital on a complex border, it has also had an exciting and at times controversial history.



Map adapted from source, courtesy of PCL Map Library

As noted by Song Fumin, mayor of Nanning in 1995: -

In history, Nanning, as a border city in south China, had close economic and cultural exchanges with Indo-China, and the countries and regions in southeast Asia. Backed onto the vast land of south-west China, facing southeast Asia and linking with Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, Nanning is now the political, economic and financial centre of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and an important place in the thoroughfare that links south with north, and east with west in south China. Therefore, the city has great potentialities and brilliant prospects in the fields of economic and technological cooperation, import and export trade, economic development and cultural exchanges. (4)

### The History of Nanning

Nanning as a stone age site goes back several thousand years. In early legend, the area was part of the kingdom of Xich Quy, which included parts of this area, Guangdong and North Vietnam.(5) During the mid-third century B.C. parts of Guangxi were included in the Au Lac Kingdom.(6) Nanning was incorporated into Chinese control circa 214 B.C. when the Emperor Qin Shi Huang unified the area and placed Nanning under the administration of Guilin Prefecture, though secure control was probably not achieved until 207 B.C.(7) However, for a time this region maintained independence under a Chinese General, Chao Tao, and his descendants, who attempted to limit ties with China.(8) From 111 B.C. the region was securely under central Chinese control again, while from 25 A.D. Chinese migration from the north began in earnest and the influence of Chinese cultural practices began to transform both Guangxi and the Tongking Delta area.(9) Various administrative changes followed, with Guangxi for a time organised under the Chiao-chih Circuit of the South, and then in 226 A.D. becoming part of Kuang province.(10) It was not until A.D. 318 that the Eastern Jin set up Jinxing Prefecture with Nanning as its capital. From the ninth century in particular, Nanning became a strategic location in Southern China, with Nanning literally meaning 'peace on the southern border'. (11)

In 1052, the indigenous Zhuang people, under the leadership of Nong Zhigao, tried to overthrow Song control, setting up for a short time the state of Danan.(12) Nong Zhigao declared an amnesty, setting free prisoners, but failed to gain enough strength to maintain independence. His peasant army was crushed in an attack on Guangzhou. A little later, a Viet army under Ly Thuong Kiet attacked the southern parts of China, killing some 8,000 people, and drawing a strong counter-response from the

Song Dynasty, in 1076.(13) From 1284, after various diplomatic manoeuvres, the Vietnamese put up stiff resistance to the Mongols (Yuan Dynasty), defeating several Mongol armies but in turn suffering terrible devastation.(14) Further tensions continued with China in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, maintaining the importance of Guangxi as a strategic frontier area.

From 1912-1936, Nanning served as the capital of Guangxi Province. Nanning had a strong role to play in the early republican and revolutionary movements in China: -

Along the tide of the Revolution of 1911, the Chinese Revolutionary League of Nanning held a mass meeting to declare the Outline of Independence to break away from the Qing Dynasty. The members of the Chinese Revolutionary League founded Guangxi Military Government and the recovery of Nanning was declared. On May 4, 1919, the anti-imperialist and patriotic May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement broke out in Beijing. Nanning held a mass meeting attended by thousands upon thousands of people to support the students in Beijing and discuss the ways of saving the country. After the meeting a mammoth parade started. On August 10, 1921, the resolution on the Northern Expedition was adopted at the Extraordinary Session of the Guangzhou Parliament. Dr. Sun Yat-sen came to Nanning from Wuzhou to persuade Chen Jiongming to join the expedition. He made an important speech on the principle of Guangxi and was warmly welcomed by the people from all walks of life.(15)

In the Guangxi area support for the Communist Party at first came from either peasant movements or local army officers.(16) A self-protection Zhuang Peasant Movement based itself in the Donglan area, and from 1927 opposed nationalist forces with the support of CPC units.(17) From 1929, the CPC sent Deng Xiaoping and Zhang Yunyi to help organise workers and peasants into revolutionary armies, laying the basis for the Bose Uprising of November 1929, the Longzhou Uprising of November 1930, and creation of the Youjiang Revolutionary Base Area.(18) During this time, a number of Zhuang nations were recruited into the Red Army, with Wei Pocheng emerging as a member of the Central Executive Council of the Jiangxi Soviet during the early 1930s.(19) The bases thus established grew to cover some twenty counties, with Deng becoming the political commissar of the 7<sup>th</sup> Red Army.(20) By the end of 1930, both the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Red Armies were effectively defeated by nationalist forces and were forced to march into southern Jiangxi. Deng himself argued that the uprisings had been defeated due to a too early emphasis on military engagement before mass mobilisation had begun to take hold.(21)

During the war with Japan, Guangxi was once again viewed as a strategic area, and parts of the Itagiki Army occupied nearby Kunlun Pass, sixty kilometres east of Nanning, and were only dislodged after two weeks of fierce fighting and suffering more than 4,000 dead, inflicted by the Chinese the 5<sup>th</sup> army of the Kuomintang, commanded by Du Yuming.(22)

Following the end of the war with Japan, this southern region was also actively involved in the Civil War which continued until the Red Army was victorious over divided nationalist forces that were defending the southern and southwest provinces.(23) It was only on December 5, 1949, that Nanning was finally liberated after the People's Liberation Army had occupied Nanjing.(24)



*Nanning Cityscape(25)*

### **Guangxi as a Strategic Border Province**

Guangxi, of course, is one of the most southern regions of China, and the area has a key part of the border with Vietnam, with the Friendship Pass between the two countries being only 235 kilometres from Nanning.(26) At present, the road journey south includes a river crossing, but in future improved road and rail links are expected to improve trade with Vietnam.

As a city near China's southern border, Nanning has not always had a peaceful existence. In 1075, for example, the Jiaozhi (Vietnam) launched a war against China, with a force some 100,000 surrounding Yongzhou (the region of Nanning), which was captured after a siege of 42 days.(27) Relations with Vietnam, stretching over two millennia, have remained complex: -

For nearly one thousand years, Vietnam was an integral part of China: and even after independence was restored in the tenth century, Vietnamese rulers frequently accepted what is often described as a "tributary relationship" with China and often turned to their powerful northern neighbor in time of need. Yet, for the Vietnamese, respect has often been tinged with fear and suspicion. For more than two millennia, China represented the primary threat to the independence and national identity of the Vietnamese people, and it is not too much to say that the Vietnamese nation has been formed, in considerable measure, in the crucible of its historic resistance to Chinese conquest and assimilation. (28)

In spite of the development of a strongly independent national consciousness, the Vietnamese state was profoundly influenced by Chinese administrative practise and by Confucianism, which was formally adapted by Vietnam as its state ideology in the fifteenth century.(29) If China viewed itself as culturally superior to Vietnam (Annam), it had quickly developed a respect for the southern neighbour, as noted in a report to a Ming Emperor, which stated that Vietnam is 'a land in the southeast, not of low culture, having distinct customs, and if we called them barbarian no other barbarian would rival them. On the contrary, Annam is a civilized country that must be treated with circumspection.'(30)

The modern border between China and Vietnam is largely the outcome of the French protectorate which was established over North Vietnam in the 1880s, which forced the Qing dynasty to renounce the tributary relationship which it had held with Vietnam.(31) The land border was based on agreements between France and the Qing in 1887, 1895, and subsequent years.(32)

Modern relations between the PRC and Vietnam have fluctuated from being active allies to actual enemies. For several decades there was cooperation between Vietnamese and Chinese revolutionary forces. Thus, for example, Ho Chi Minh went secretly to China to get aid in the war against the

French, and China was the first country to recognise the DRV (the Democratic Republic of Vietnam) in January 1950.(33) Through much of the 1950s and 1960s, China was willing to give aid to the Vietnamese struggle against French and U.S. opponents. Thus during the 1960s and 1970s, Nanning acted as a staging post for arms and material supplied to Vietnam.(34)

However, by the 1975-1978 period, Sino-Vietnamese relations had begun to seriously decline. This was due to a number of specific bilateral issues, and more importantly to a wider range of geopolitical problems. Bilateral problems included problems on the Sino-Vietnamese land border, including minor incursions (35), the expulsion of a sizeable number of ethnic Chinese from Vietnam which created an exodus of more than 140,000 Chinese in 1978 (36), disputed control over small islands in the Paracel (Xisha) and Spratly (Nansha) Island groups, and subsequent debates over exclusive economic zones in the South China Sea.(37) The disagreements on the land border itself should not be exaggerated as the cause of the conflict: in a border of more 1,000 km only some 60 km were probably in serious dispute.(38)

More importantly, however, China and Vietnam began to have divergent, even conflicting, foreign policies. Vietnam had begun to think of itself as leading a prospective Indochinese Federation, with special relationships with Laos and Cambodia.(39) China, on the other hand, preferred 'a protective belt of neutralist states free of imperialist control along its southern border' (40), states which would accept China's rightful interests in the region but not embroil major foreign engagement, i.e. U.S. intervention. Vietnam also came into conflict with Chinese foreign policy in Vietnam's opposition to the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia. Vietnam sought establish special relations with Cambodia that eventuated in its invasion of Cambodia in 1979, led by more than 100,000 Vietnamese regulars.(41) Lastly, through the late 1970s, Vietnam had begun to align itself more closely with the Soviet Union at a time when Sino-Soviet relations were still extremely tense. Through 1976-1979, Vietnam engaged in close economic, aid and military agreements with the USSR, with Soviet aid on more than 400 projects, and planned aid for Vietnam in the early 1980s soon reaching US\$1.1 billion a year.(42) This culminated in the signing of a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between Vietnam and the USSR in November 1978.(43) Likewise, the stationing of Soviet air (including advanced MiG-23s) and naval units at Cam Ranh Bay, with potential access to Cambodian airfields through the mid-1980s, was viewed as a regional change in power relations. (44) As a result, some Chinese leaders saw Vietnam's alignment with the USSR and Vietnamese intervention into Cambodia as an encirclement of Chinese interests in the south. Combined with niggling border disputes, these factors led to the PRC keeping some 150,000 troops in South China.(45) Vietnam, on the other hand, was worried by China's growing closeness to the U.S. after 1973, and felt that China was bent on dominating affairs in Southeast Asia.(46)

These factors led to a decision by China to engage in a punitive expedition designed to 'teach Vietnam' a lesson, and indicate that China would not tolerate a 'little hegemon' on its southern border. (47) The war began on 17 February, 1979. On the Chinese side, a total of 80-100,000 combat troops, with a further 120,000 in reserve along the border, were commanded by the experienced Yang Dezhi. They were supported by 1,000 aircraft stationed in the region, including fifteen squadrons of fighters, mostly older style MiG-17s and MiG-19s.(48) Six to seven main force divisions launched a five-pronged attack across the border, soon aided another four divisions.(49) The Chinese made it clear that they had limited objectives, and had neither the wish to capture Hanoi nor hoped to overthrow the Vietnamese government, thereby also reducing the prospect of a Soviet countermove in support of its ally.(50) Chinese forces took the border towns of Lao Cai and Dong Dang, then moved deeper to the west to Lao Chau, then finally encircled and captured the city of Lang Son.(51) At this, facing stiffening resistance, the Chinese leadership decided that its objectives had been achieved and withdrew their forces. The main phase of the battle was over, but the border area remained an active front for some years.

Although China achieved some of its objectives, the war had proved more costly than intended, with slow progress, and serious losses in soldiers and material. It is estimated that some 20,000 Chinese troops were killed or wounded, with Vietnamese casualties perhaps reaching 50,000.(52) The

Vietnamese, though not at first being able to withstand the Chinese thrust south, did have more modern equipment, and used militia and regular units to slow the advance. The PLA, in analysing the events of 1979, realised that it needed to seriously improve its coordination of air, artillery and infantry, and the outcome of the war as a whole may have supported the ongoing push towards the modernisation and professionalisation of the PLA as a whole.(53) Moreover, the conflict did not result in a wholesale, immediate withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from Cambodia.(54)

This conflict, of course, led to Guangxi being viewed as a front line area, with both an increased military presence, a closed border to its south, and an increased security regime that temporarily slowed development. That Guangxi was viewed in this way can be seen from the views and actions of one of the Chinese leadership in December 1978: -

Politburo member and Director of the General Political Department of the PLA Wei Guoqing visited Guangxi province, which borders Vietnam, declared that China will "certainly counter-attack" if attacked, and instructed the local population to "heighten . . . alertness to the highest degree to annihilate any enemy who comes." On December 22, before a group of PLA veterans, he argued that Guangxi is on the "frontline of national defense" and that Vietnam had become the "Cuba of Asia." Wei exhorted his listeners to "heighten vigilance, strengthen preparedness against war, be ever ready to wipe out invading enemies, and defend the border and our motherland." (55)

Tensions continued through the early 1980s, with serious artillery and rocket exchanges in April 1983 and March-April 1984 in Yunnan, and along the front near Dongxing in Guangxi, and with attacks and counter-attacks to seize hilltops near the Friendship Pass.(56)

Vietnam tried to persuade Chinese forces that these struggles were fruitless. This was signalled by a clandestine Vietnamese radio station, *1<sup>st</sup> August Radio, Ba Yi* (57), which broadcast such views (in Chinese) on 16 February 1986: -

The long border war has made both China and Vietnam pay a very high price. In such a needless and exhausting war, it is easy for neither side to win overwhelming military victory over the other. If the war continues, the commanders and fighters of both sides will have to shed more blood, and both sides will suffer more losses economically and politically. For the sake of the national interest, the only wise thing to do is end the bloody war and settle the dispute peacefully. (58)

Changing conditions in the late 1980s helped defuse these disputes, though armed clashes still occurred on the land border through 1986 and early 1987.(59)

In 1988, Vietnam began a partial troop withdrawal from Cambodia, leading to a total withdrawal of Vietnamese regulars in late 1989. This was followed by the UNTAC (United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia) operation from 1991-1993, designed to allow internationally monitored elections to take place in Cambodia.(60) Likewise, relations between China and the Soviet Union had begun to improve, so that by the late 1980s serious cooperation became possible, with the USSR regarding Sino-Soviet relations as more important than support for Vietnam's Indochinese policy, though the USSR still provided large amounts of aid to Vietnam.(61) This hastened the Vietnamese military withdrawal from Cambodia, and it is also likely that the Vietnamese leadership had begun to recognise that economic reform had become more imperative than promoting strategic solutions in Cambodia, and that it could not indefinitely sustain large external military operations.(62) Indeed, even with the aid of Soviet material and oil, the Vietnamese effort in Cambodia had placed a major drain on their entire economy.(63) With the collapse of the USSR in early 1992, there was also a parallel decline in Russian military and economic aid to Vietnam, reducing any threat of 'encirclement' to China. By the mid-1990s, Vietnam in turn had begun to improve relations with the U.S. (from 1991 onwards), and since December 1986 had introduced its own economic reforms (*Doi Moi*) designed to open itself to the world economy.

These factors allowed a great improvement of Sino-Vietnamese relations from 1991, with visits between Chinese and Vietnamese leaders in 1995 and 1997 helping cement closer economic ties.(64)

Although certain tensions remained, e.g. over selected reefs and islands in the South China Sea, and low level border disputes on the land frontier,(65) this has not stopped certain areas of cooperation, e.g. in planning regional road and rail links. Indeed, the opening of the land border from February 1989 led to an immediate boom of border trade, with Chinese goods immediately filling markets in the northern Vietnamese town of Lang Son. The border trade is also helped by the fact that the minority Nung Dao community straddle the border, which they now readily cross on business.(66) Unfortunately, the Friendship Railway, first built in 1952, which used to link the two countries had been extremely badly damaged by the conflict, and could not be easily reopened.(67)

Today relations with Vietnam have been normalised (since formal restoration in 1991), with open trade across the land border, and growing efforts at joint development. Nanning was declared an 'open border city' in 1992 as part of China's economic reforms.(68) Direct air routes were resumed in 1992, while major mine clearing activities began in 1993 to reduce the 120 minefields which covered some 20 million square meters along the border.(69) In 1997, the sea route from Beihai to the northeast coast of Vietnam was opened and border trade thrived from 1991 onwards. Trade as a whole between the two countries grew an average of 30% a year between 1991 and 1996.(70) Some 25 border trade centres were opened along the opened border, and helped boost border trade. However, decline in trade began to be experienced from 1997, perhaps due to indirect results of the recent Asian economic crisis, which affected Vietnam rather more seriously than the PRC, and due to stronger self-reliance in Vietnam itself and stiff competition from other international sources. Sino-Vietnamese trade as a whole in 1999 fell 56% from 1998.(71) Border trade, nonetheless, has always been vigorously sought by Guangxi, in part as a way of counter-balancing its historical distance from Beijing and its limited influence on the central government.(72) It is also now possible to arrange a visa into Vietnam through tourist offices in Nanning (73), indicating how open the border has become recent years. Likewise, direct mail services between Guangxi and Lang Son resumed in 1999.(74)

Overall, by late 1990s there was a marked improvement of relations between China and Vietnam, and both sides have the will to resolve any outstanding differences between the two countries, having agreed 'not to resort to the use of threat of force', e.g. over resources in the Tonkin Gulf, though solving the complex claims to the Spratly Island will be more complex.(75) This has found concrete expression since 1997 with both Vietnam and China seeking new ways to strengthen cooperation in offshore oil and gas exploration between their national oil corporations, thereby reducing some of the tensions which occurred between 1992 and 1994 when China and Vietnam awarded exploration contracts in disputed areas to different overseas exploration companies.(76) In October 1997, Vietnam's Prime Minister Phan Van Khai visited China, with a stopover in Nanning, and discussed the similar challenges Vietnam and China faced in the international environment while undergoing economic reform. More specific issues included efforts to increase trade and eradicate smuggling.(77) In early December 1999, Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji visited Vietnam, and called for increased cooperation between the two countries.(78) At the same time it was announced that there was strong progress in negotiations settling the land boundary between the two countries.(79)

Nanning is well aware of its strategic location above Southeast Asia, and just recently, in conjunction with the city of Xiangtan in Hunan province, sponsored a three day 'Commodities and Economic Cooperation Fair' in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, show-casing some 500 commodities and some 50 cooperative projects, including electronics, light industrial products, machinery, building materials and medicines.(80) Like the rest of China, it will need to export more middle and high-end products into Vietnam if it wishes to further boost trade.(81)

Of course, Guangxi's unique position as a rapidly developing border region means that it has not been able to avoid controversy. Being adjacent to international borders, for example, has meant that South Central China has always been sensitive to the problem of smuggling. Marine police in Guangxi have recently stopped 18 smuggling efforts by sea, arrested over a hundred suspects, and captured some six million yuan in contraband goods.(82) Particular areas of concern in smuggling include diesel oil, rubber, cars, and cigarettes.(83) Recent crackdowns on smuggling have also aided revenue returns through increased tariffs to the Guangxi's regional government. The rapidly developing economy has

led to some corruption. The most famous of these cases locally was the arrest last year of Xu Bingsong, former Vice Chairman of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Regional Government, who was found guilty of accepting large bribes between 1995 and 1997. He has been recently sentenced to life imprisonment, indicating serious efforts by Chinese authorities to clamp down on official corruption.(84)

Another area of concern to Chinese authorities has been the smuggling of drugs across the frontier on the southwest into border regions such as Yunnan and Guangxi, a problem which has intensified since 1985 in spite of increased arrests and seizures by police.(85) The problem has been exacerbated by the concentration of drug growing areas in Burma. Drug usage has also led to associated medical problems such as the threat of the increased spread of HIV and AIDS .(86)

Rapid economic development has sometimes displaced certain segments of the population, at least on a temporary basis. There have also been some persistent trends towards relatively high unemployment rates compared to other regions of China, at least for the 1987-1990 period.(87) Rapid modernisation has led to other forms of dislocation. After a large mountain reservoir was constructed as apart of a hydro-electric power project in Guangxi, planned and implemented from 1981 through 1992, some 62,340 persons from 99 affected villages had to be resettled.(88) Although compensation was paid for houses, and new land was allocated, there were some delays in the construction of new houses, delays in the connection of services such as tap water, and in some cases the new lands were in more mountainous terrain (73% of the people moved to higher terrain, and 27% moved out of the local area), with poorer soil.(89) Although production development funds and micro-loan schemes had also been made to those affected, a number of displaced farmers found it difficult to find viable alternative projects to aid or replace their former livelihood.(90)

Alongside this particular project, however, since 1993 some 140,000 people, mostly poor ethnic farmers, have been reallocated as part of Guangxi's poverty reduction program, with the Guangxi government investing almost 400 million yuan to build 170 relocation sites and villages.(91) Rural poverty, in fact, remains a pressing problem in several regions of China, including nearby Guizhou province.(92) However, it should be remembered that parts of the region used to be among the poorest areas of China, and had suffered terribly during the famine years of the past and during the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution.(93) Guangxi has since made serious progress both in terms of prosperity and social stability.

### **Diversity as a Source of Strength**

Guangxi is one of the most ethnically diverse regions of China, and Nanning itself has some 30 ethnic groups, including a majority Zhuang population (over 63% of the city population), plus notable Han, Yao (Mien), Miao (Hmong), Hui, Dong and other groups.(94) This has led to a unique situation, in which cultural diversity is the norm rather than the exception, with a large part of the province comprised of non-Han peoples. In the past, the region had four main dialects, Guan, Zhuang, Ping and Bai (Guangdong) dialects, while today the Nanning Bai dialect (intoned slight differently Guangdong dialect) and Putonghua (Mandarin) are most commonly spoken in the city, while the officially recognised Zhuang dialect is common in Wuming and Yongning countries.(95)

The history of the minorities of the region, of course, is largely a product of the southward movement of Chinese peoples and their associated Han culture over millennia, with Chinese migrants first reaching the area in large numbers after 140 A.D.(96) Different indigenous groups reacted differently, depending on their political, economic and cultural situation. The Zhuang people, for example, tended to more easily assimilate Han Chinese customs, but the Miao and Yao peoples, who had earlier on been pushed out of Hunan and Juangxi, tended to remain in hill regions.(97) The Yao people have scattered villages throughout the Dayao Mountains, with small populations in nearby provinces as well.(98) Conflict with some of these tribes continued down to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and it must be remembered that the Taiping rebellion itself gained strength in Guangxi and nearby provinces.(99) Likewise, a major series of revolts by the Miao and other southern minorities between 1854-1873 in

nearby Guizhou province were not just ethnic rebellions, but were part of a wider pattern of resistance to Manchu rule.(100)

In recent years, many of these groups have begun to develop their own industries, e.g. timber related industries in the forested areas of the Dayao Mountains.(101) The Dong, mainly focused in the mountainous regions of northern Guangxi, are famous for their unique timber-based architecture, including tall drum towers, mortice-and-tenon, covered bridges such as the long Chengyang 'Wind and Rain' Bridge. They also have a unique musical culture with songs used for a number of social purposes and forming a central part of their social life.(102)

Of course, these minority groups now play a major role in the tourism and cultural industries of the region, with specialised crafts, textiles, restaurants and cultural shows a normal part of the city. Major ethnic-cultural fairs occur regularly as well. At the same time, there are limits to how far this tourism can go. Minority style clothing, for example, aside from hangings, scarves, and a few t-shirts, is not readily available for sale in city venues, perhaps because main-stream Han tourists would not be willing to acquire such apparel for their own personal use. Indeed, there is some danger that the presentation of minority groups as 'exotic' cultures can form part of an 'internal orientalism' that turns minority peoples, and especially minority women, into trivialised and romanticised stereotypes.(103)

Guangxi as a whole has become a centre for tourism, in part because of its good climate, natural resources, and low pollution. Guangxi is famed for its natural geography of mountains, karst pinnacles and caves, tropical river ecosystems and forested mountains. Of Guangxi's 230,000 square kilometres, some 70% comprises mountainous terrain, with the region as a whole high on four sides and low in the middle, thereby forming the Guangxi Basin.(104) The region includes the Longgang Nature Reserve, which has rare trees, monkeys, civets, musk deer and silver pheasants.(105) The city of Guilin, with its river and mountain scenery, remains one of China's premier tourist sites, with major intakes of foreign visitors from Japan, the U.S., Korea, and Southeast Asia. Guilin boasts thirty-one hotels and eighteen international travel agencies.(106) In recent years the Guilin municipal government has gone to considerable effort to control river pollution and to protect its unique environment, hoping thereby to continue growth in tourism.(107)

Nanning itself has picturesque mountains and rivers, including the Yongjiang river, as well as nearby caves, lakes and springs.(108) Not far away is the Qingxiu Hill Scenic Area, with temples and pagodas dating back to the Song and Ming period.(109) Phoenix Lake and Yiling Cave are also popular tourist venues. Nanning city itself has over six thousand restaurants, ranging from the most prestigious to small venues near the day market, as well as street stalls alongside Zhongshan and Xiguan roads in the evening.(110) One of the most fascinating parts of the city is its traditional market, a huge warehouse structure where dozens of stalls sell a bewildering variety of goods. Of particular interest is the huge diversity of specialised foods found in this market, flattened chicken and dried squids can be seen side by side with specialised fungi and sea scallops. Many of these items are not just used in culinary delights but form part of the pharmacopoeia of Chinese traditional medicine. Hence the market also boasted preserved frogs and dried lizards, as well as hundreds of powders and spices whose functions are known to locals. Guangxi as a whole is an important grower and developer of such traditional Chinese medicines. One of Nanning's attractions is the Guangxi Medicinal Herb Garden, the largest of its type in China, growing some 2,100 plant varieties.(111)





Nanning also has two cultural performance groups, the Nanning Guangdong Opera Troupe and Nanning Song and Dance Ensemble.(112) Folk dances, such as the Lion Dance and the Ox Dance, as well as the Shaman Play and Yongju Opera, are part of a vigorous local culture.(113) Most counties and townships have their specialised troupes.(114) The region is also noted for its sports and athletics, and the city has modern facilities including Guangxi Gymnasium, Guangxi stadium, and Nanning Stadium, plus a range of sports fields, tennis and badminton courts, and a swimming pool.(115) Tourism in the region has drawn interest from both China and Vietnam, with some 12.7 million from both countries having visited the area. Border tourism between 1993 and 1998 brought in some 745 million yuan.(116)

### **A Modern Development Zone**

The region was once one of the least developed regions in China, in part because of its relative remoteness, but also because as a border province with major security concerns it was one of the slowest to open to economic modernisation and international trade. In 1978, for example, Guangxi only had some 1,000 employed in its private urban sector, but this area began to grow rapidly during the next 10 years (117) as Deng Xiaoping's reforms took hold.

Since the late 1980s, there have been concerted efforts to make up for this lag in development, promoted both by central and local authorities, and now followed by considerable overseas investment. Guangxi province has seen investment from the U.S. Coca-Cola Group, the Kuok Brothers, the Yeo Hiap Seng Group of Singapore, the Suzuki Group of Japan, Siemens China Ltd and the Singapore Manufacturers' Association, especially in Beihai.(118) As a result, the standard of development has improved to bring the region to the 18<sup>th</sup> rank in overall development in China, not far behind the prosperous coast regions. External as well as indigenous investment has lifting the region to the middle rank of prosperity in China. By the early 1990s the region came to be regarded as one of the ten most important areas for future development by the Chinese State Planning Commission.(119) In 1992, Nanning was listed as one of 'China's 50 cities with the Strongest Comprehensive Strength', while by 1994 its GDP had reached 13.61 billion yuan.(120) By 1997, the region as a whole had a GDP of more than 200 billion yuan (US\$24 billion), ranking first among China's autonomous regions.(121)

This renewed prosperity in part results from a strong resource base. The region has strong non-ferrous metal deposits, including manganese, tin, aluminium, gold, and silver, as well as coal, rock crystal and a range of minerals.(122) It also has extensive forests, covering more than four million *mu* (tree coverage of 30%), plus a very diverse range of agricultural products, including rice, maize, sugarcane, sweet potatoes, peanuts, tea, mushrooms and over forty types of subtropical fruit.(123) Nanning is also rich in Chinese traditional herbal cures, with over 300 kinds of medicinal herbs available.(124) The city has therefore hosted international symposiums on traditional medicine, hoping to open up its specialised knowledge to the world market.(125) Specialised beer, wine, tobacco, health care

products, and gourmet powders and seasonings are also produced by local companies, while 1,200 types of processed food are made.(126) Maritime resources are also available, with fishing resources in the Beibu Bay area and Nanzhu pearls originating in the Hepu area.(127)

Guangxi has also become a manufacturing centre, with key products including walking tractors, diesel engines, mining machinery, television sets, plate glass, chemical products, textiles, construction materials, aluminium products, electrical and rubber products, wrist watches, and bicycles, many of which have won Chinese design and quality awards.(128)

Since 1992, Nanning has adopted the trading policies of the open coastal cities, and has planned by the year 2010 to enlarge its urban area from 72 to 160 square kilometres, with the population growing to 1.5 million.(129) As such, efforts have been made to develop entirely new sectors of the city, including the creation of high-rise areas in the South-Lake Synthetic Development Zone (south-east of the city centre), high tech developments in the New and High-tech industrial Development Zone (to the north-west), the Nanning Economy and Technological Development Zone (to the south) and Dashatian Economic Development Zone.(130) The outskirts of the city has the face of a rapidly emerging business capital, with major investment from within China, from Taiwan, and also from overseas Chinese (supporting a special Overseas Chinese Investment Development Zone), including strong investment from Singapore. Large boulevards, proudly lit by ornate street lights and overlooked by five-star hotels and corporate skyscrapers, link these areas of the city, many of which have only emerged in the last five years.



*New Development in the South Lake Area of Nanning*

Over the last four years, the city has emphasised the development of transport, communication and services infrastructure, developed special economic zones, promoted export agriculture, and widened its range of manufactured goods, thereby creating a positive environment for Chinese-foreign joint ventures, foreign investment, as well as efforts to develop its energy resource enterprises.(131) Infrastructure development in the region has also been aided by central government policies which have aimed at boosting infrastructure and resource projects in the less developed central and western areas of China, with some two thirds of the central government's capital construction budget focused on these provinces.(132) Aside from rail and road projects, a significant river transport hub has been developed on Xijiang River, including the dredging of the river between Guigang and Nanning, the commencement of major cargo operations, and the opening of a large hydroelectric power plant. This project was partly completed with a World Bank loans of US\$80 million.(133) Aid has not just come from Beijing and overseas, but also from coastal-provinces as part of a wider plan for mutual cooperation between eastern and western areas of China.(134) Thus Guangdong Province in 1998 allocated some US\$8.5 million to the Guangxi region.(135) This is part of a comprehensive effort at

poverty reduction in central and western provinces. It is estimated that Guangxi still has some 3.6 million people in need of 'basic living necessities'. Japan has also provided some 6.247 million yuan in aid to Guangxi since 1993, with a further six poverty reduction projects announced in late 1999. (136)

This infrastructure development has also helped encourage foreign and joint ventures. In 1994, for example, 144 foreign-investment projects were agreed, leading towards a total investment of US\$287 million, while by the end of that year, a total of 504 foreign-investment enterprises had been registered.(137) Total export volume reached US\$59.1 million, and of this US\$25.2 million was accounted for by foreign-invested enterprises.(138) During the January to June period of 1999, foreign investment was up 25% over the previous year's figures, with 18 corporations adding an extra US\$31.18 million in investment.(139)

Another area given priority development, as in the rest of China, is the expansion of educational resources. Guangxi now has over 741 primary schools, 203 ordinary schools, 33 vocational schools, 81 polytechnic and secondary schools, 16 colleges and universities (140), plus a growing number of private institutes designed to meet specific training needs. The regional also has 10 specialised scientific research units, involving a total of 60,000 scientific and technical personnel.(141)

As a result, there is a high demand for education at all levels, including a need for English language education, computing know-how, business and managerial skills, as well as a top-end demand for access to foreign language institutes and overseas university entrance. With the further opening of China to world trade, it is expected that this demand for overseas expertise will also dramatically expand throughout the PRC. At present some 4.19 million students are enrolled at regular higher educational institutions within the PRC, and even with some expansion of places, there will still be strong excess demand in the future, estimated at 17 million by the year 2010.(142)

Singaporean investors have begun to capitalise on some of these needs with a multi-million dollar investment in a Nanning suburban development, *Singapore Town*, with its own educational institute which seeks linkages with Australian and American Universities. It is located in the Da Sha Tian Economic Development Zone, facing the Yongjiang River and less than three kilometres from central Nanning. Covering some 220 acres, the *Singapore Town* project is an integrated development planned to include bungalows, terrace houses, apartments, offices, a hotel and recreational facilities. The project, hoping to draw further international and local investment, will be by run by Singapore Town Management Service Company, and operate in accordance with international estate management rules. The first stage has been completed, with integrated services coming on-line in late 1999. The administrators of this project argue that '*Singapore Town* is not Singapore, but comparable to Singapore' in its physical environment, its services and management style.



*New Educational Developments in Nanning*

*Singapore Town International Institute* has been developed in tandem with this project, and has been operational as of late 1999, with the development of English courses, soon to followed by programmes in computing and business management. The project was approved by the Guangxi Provincial Governor, and has begun to form links with overseas universities and ESL (English-as-a-Second Language) centres in the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, and Australia.(143)

### **The Future of Nanning**

Nanning is at the heart of a new transnational network, based on rail, river and road communication, that will link it with neighbouring provinces including Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou, Hubei, and Hunan, with routes then leading onto to coastal ports in Guangxi. The new Nanning-Kunming rail link, costing nearly 20 billion yuan, as well as the Guilin Railway terminal, have helped in this project. (144) This integrated scheme, including new highways, river transport, ports and airlines, has been dubbed 'Southwest China's Large Channel to the Sea', and is expected to help greatly open up the entire region to further trade.(145) These projects are part of the government plan to open up the southwest to international commerce, to serve as a poverty-relief mechanism, to balance possible ethnic tensions through economic development, and to narrow the gap in development between the eastern and western regions of the country.

This improvement in transport networks will continue in the near future. A new railway from Neijiang in Sichuan province will link it to Kunming, and thus to Nanning, by October 2001, while new highway networks will be extended throughout southwest China by 2002.(146) Furthermore, the three highways from Yunnan to Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam will be upgraded, and there has been further discussion about proposed railways linking south-western provinces to Tibet, and about the planned Pan-Asia railway that would eventually link China, Laos, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore.(147)

Within the decade this will create a socio-economic network of regions comprising some 250 million, poised just on the border of ASEAN. This can only lead to the increased importance of the area of Guangxi, and to further economic development for Nanning. It is expected that the improvement of port facilities in Beihai and Qinzhou will allow the entire region to participate in improved trade

which will flow on from China's accession into the World Trade Organisation, a development that is highly likely after agreement was made with the U.S. negotiators on a number of issues in November 1999,(148) and with subsequent positive discussions with the Canadian government later in the month.

It is also expected that Nanning will follow patterns that have made some coastal regions highly prosperous, e.g. in the encouragement of township enterprises, which have been highly successful in other areas such as the Suzhou region.(149) In the end, however, Guangxi's prosperity will depend on balanced management of its own resources, combined with special access to China's Southwest, cooperation with its Southeast Asian neighbours, and access to the world economy through its 'large channel to the sea'. In the long term, it is possible to envisage a 'Natural Economic Territory' emerging in the Southwest, with interdependent development linking parts of Vietnam, Laos and Thailand and a number of Chinese border regions including Guangxi and Yunnan. Such developments would transform Guangxi's 'peripheral' border location into a major advantage. Here the international setting radically affects the prosperity of local communities poised for an improved life in China's fascinating southwest.

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