



DONGGUAN: THE UNKNOWN

PEARL RIVER DELTA SERIES

- Hong Kong: Like No Other (www.demographia.com/rac-hk.pdf)
 Hong Kong: Freeways, Suburbs & Junkyards (www.demographia.com/rac-hkfreeway.pdf)
 Guangzhou: Pearl River Renaissance (www.demographia.com/rac-guangzhou.pdf)
 Macau: West Pearl River Anchor (www.rentalcartours.net/rac-macau.pdf)
 Shenzhen: Start of China's Future (www.rentalcartours.net/rac-shenzhen.pdf)
 The Megacity Book (http://www.rentalcartours.net/megacity_book.pdf)

BASIC INFORMATION		World Rank	Similar to
Urban Area Population (2008)*	7,570,000	31	Essen-Dusseldorf, Tehran, Bogota, Lima
Projection (2025)	9,630,000	33	
Urban Land Area: Square Miles (2005)	500	56 (Tie)	Shenzhen, Portland, Manila, Istanbul
Urban Land Area: Square Kilometers	1,300		
Density: Per Square Mile (2005)	14,500	345 (Tie)	Seville, Toluca, Manaus, Shanghai
Density: Per Square Kilometer (2005)	6,600		
*Continuously built up area (Urban agglomeration) Land area & density rankings among the 723 urban areas with 500,000 population or more. Data from <i>Demographia World Urban Areas Population & Projections</i> (June 2008) http://www.demographia.com/db-worldua.pdf			

1 July 2008

INTRODUCTION

Dongguan is an urban area of “withouts.” It is the largest urban area in the world without a international airport. It is the largest one of the world without an urban rail system. Finally, Dongguan is probably the largest relatively unknown urban area in the world. Few people, including many familiar with urban areas, have ever heard of Dongguan.

Dongguan is another one of those Chinese miracle urban areas. Dongguan has become a principal staging point for opportunity, as China continues its urbanization and industrialization.

Dongguan owes its success to the economic liberalization program of Premier Deng Xiaoping, who began engineering China's transformation almost immediately after the

passing of Mao Zedong. In 1980, China was only 20 percent urban. By 2005, China had become 40 percent urban and by 2030 it will reach 60 percent, according to United Nations projections. Thus, in just 25 years, China added 330,000,000 residents, more people than live in the United States. In the next 25 years, there will be at least as many urban dwellers.

Dongguan has received its share of the new immigrants from the country side. In the 1980s, Dongguan had barely 1,000,000 people and was largely rural. Today, Dongguan has 6,500,000 more people than a quarter century ago. Future growth is expected to be more modest as China decentralizes its urbanization. This is being made possible by such strategies as the rapid expansion of the nation's freeway (motorway) system and a huge expansion of air travel. The result is that many of the interior urban areas have become more competitive in relation to urban areas located along the coast.

Like Shenzhen, its miracle neighbor to the south, there was little to Dongguan 25 years ago. Shenzhen has grown to more than 10,000,000 residents. And, like Shenzhen, Dongguan has grown as a center of export manufacturing. Dongguan, however, is less affluent than its neighbors.

LOCATION

Dongguan is in China's Guangdong province and is immediately to the east of the city of Guangzhou. "Dong" means east, and "Dongguan means "east of Guangzhou."

Dongguan is at the confluence of two rivers. Dongguan's northern border, and border with the city of Guangzhou, is the Dong Jiang (East River). A narrow strip of the Guangzhou urban footprint borders Dongguan across the river. Dongguan's western border is the Zhu Jiang (Pearl River). To the south, the urban area is separated from the Shenzhen urban area by large hills, however along the Pearl River the urban footprint of the two urban areas actually meet.

The Pearl River Delta, of which Dongguan is a part, is one of the emerging regional urbanization centers --- adjacent metropolitan areas that may be the next major change in urban form (Hong Kong, Shenzhen, Dongguan, Guangzhou-Foshan, Zuhai, Macao and more). The urban areas of the Pearl River Delta have a population nearing 50,000,000 --- larger than Tokyo-Yokohama. However, this "mega-region" is not an urban area, it is a string of urban areas.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Dongguan is one of the largest urban areas in the world. Closing in on 8,000,000 residents, Dongguan ranks among the 30 largest urban areas in the world and is nearly as large as London.¹ Dongguan is one of the "Big 4" urban areas on China's Pearl River Delta, along with Shenzhen, Guangzhou and Hong Kong. Together, these urban areas, all of which meet, have nearly 40 million people. However, each of these urban areas is a separate labor market, and so it would be inappropriate to consider them a single urban areas. Moreover, border controls remain between Hong Kong and Shenzhen, which would make it

¹ The urban area (inside the green belt).

impossible to consider Hong Kong and Shenzhen as a single urban area (because international border controls prevent the development of combined labor markets or metropolitan areas).

As a major export manufacturing center and draws employees from all over China. Like Shenzhen and other burgeoning manufacturing centers, low income people from rural China flock to Dongguan seeking a better life. Often workers are housed in dormitories provided by private employers. While this is best thought of as a transitional phenomenon that will doubtless be discarded as the urban area gets more affluent, it makes it possible for locally oriented bus systems to effectively serve the public transport need.

GETTING TO DONGGUAN

Dongguan is the largest urban area in the world without its own airport. Air travelers seeking to reach Dongguan must fly to Shenzhen, Guangzhou or even Hong Kong.

Dongguan, is easily missed on a trip by train or car between Hong Kong, Shenzhen and Guangzhou. The Hong Kong Mass Transit Railway (MTR) operates intercity service from Hung Hom Station in Kowloon (Hong Kong) to Shenzhen, Dongguan and Guangzhou. Until 2007, this service and a considerable amount of the mass transit service in Hong Kong was operated by the Kowloon Canton Railroad (KCR), which has since been leased to the MTR. The MTR was established to operate the Hong Kong Metro system, which is profitable both with respect to paying its capital and operating costs.

There is also a rail shuttle service between Shenzhen, Dongguan and Guangzhou, which according to *Railway Gazette International* is one of the fastest trains in the world, averaging 100 miles per hour (160 kilometers per hour). It was on this train, between Guangzhou and Dongguan, that I lost my *Blackberry*. After a brief bit of concern and a discussion with my carrier, Verizon in the United States, I realized what a relief it was to have lost it, since I found it so dysfunctional.

Dongguan can also be reached by the Guangzhou Freeway, which runs between Guangzhou and Shenzhen (adjacent to Hong Kong). There is also a ferry service from Hong Kong International Airport.

THE URBAN FORM

Dongguan has an unusual urban form. The urban area is a collection of adjacent “towns,” which tend to be relatively self contained (Slide 2). In a sense, Dongguan may represent China’s version of the modern dispersed urban area, having more in common with Essen-Dusseldorf, Milan or Atlanta than Paris, Hong Kong or even Beijing.

Because it is made of adjacent towns, Dongguan has a large amount of green space. There are also considerable parcels undeveloped lands within the towns themselves (something urban planners pejoratively call “leap frog” development). The result could be significantly higher population densities in the future, as these parcels are developed. On the other hand, the city government has projected little future population growth, despite the strong growth rates that have prevailed up to this time.

The main town within the Dongguan urban area is located near the Pearl River. The city government is housed here and the urban area's largest business district is located here. Just to the south of the old business district (if anything can be called old in Dongguan), a large new business center is in the process of construction and appears to have the tallest buildings in the urban area. Few buildings, however, appear to be more than 30 floors.

TRANSPORT

The Guangzhou expressway also runs through Dongguan, on its way between Shenzhen and Guangzhou. An east to west freeway has been completed through most of the urban area and another cross-town freeway is under construction. Two shorter freeway segments are also under construction (Slide 1).

Like many urban areas in China, Dongguan has developed a superior arterial street system. The area is served by wide boulevards capable of quickly moving large amounts of traffic.

Dongguan may also be the largest urban area in the world without an urban rail system. This is for good reason. Dongguan has comparatively low densities for China and little in the way of concentrated destinations. In the longer run, a regional Metro could make sense, tying the cores of the towns together. However a standard urban rail system, whether Metro or a light rail system, would be out of place. Virtually all public transport is by bus and minibus. Moreover, the public transport systems tend to be locally oriented, rather than covering the entire urban area.

PORTS

Dongguan is in the middle of the most intensive water borne commerce in the world. Just to the north, on the Pearl River, is the port of Guangzhou (located in the eastern section of Guangzhou) ---the world's 18th largest port (in containers). To the south is Shenzhen (ranked 4th) and then Hong Kong (ranked 2nd). Dongguan also has a port. All together, these ports account for double the volume of the world's largest independent ports, Singapore and Shanghai.

GLOBALIZATION AND THE LOCAL ECONOMY

Dongguan, like other large urban areas in China, is a full participant in the globalization that is doing so much to improve lives in both the developing world and the developed world. Not only does Dongguan produce --- to paraphrase the sign on the Delaware River Bridge at Trenton, New Jersey --- Dongguan makes, the world takes.

But Dongguan also receives. Western businesses are to be found everywhere. France's Carrefour and Wal-Mart, from the United States, offer large hypermarkets, quality goods and attractive prices. Fast food has made it big as large, with McDonald's and Kentucky Fried Chicken. Though, unlike much of the rest of the world, it appears that the leader is Kentucky Fried Chicken over McDonalds, and by a long shot.

At the same time, there is plenty of indication of strong local commerce. China is truly a nation of shopkeepers, as is obvious from the rows of local businesses that seem to line every street. This is found in Dongguan just as much as in Wuhan or Chengdu (slides 21,22, 105, 119-120, 124, 126, 130).

EATING IN DONGGUAN

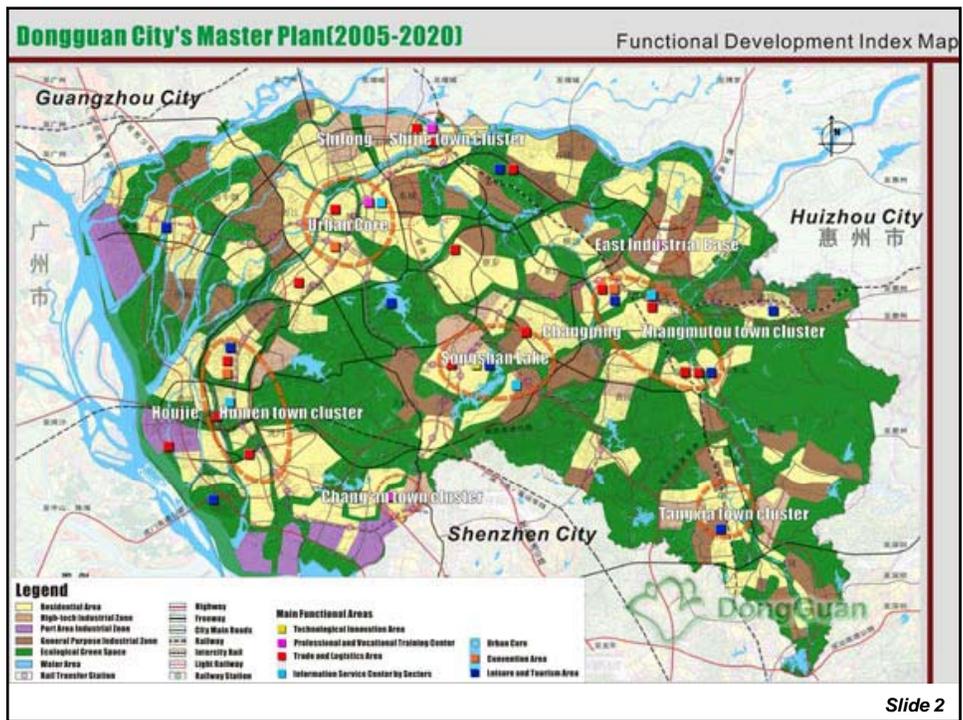
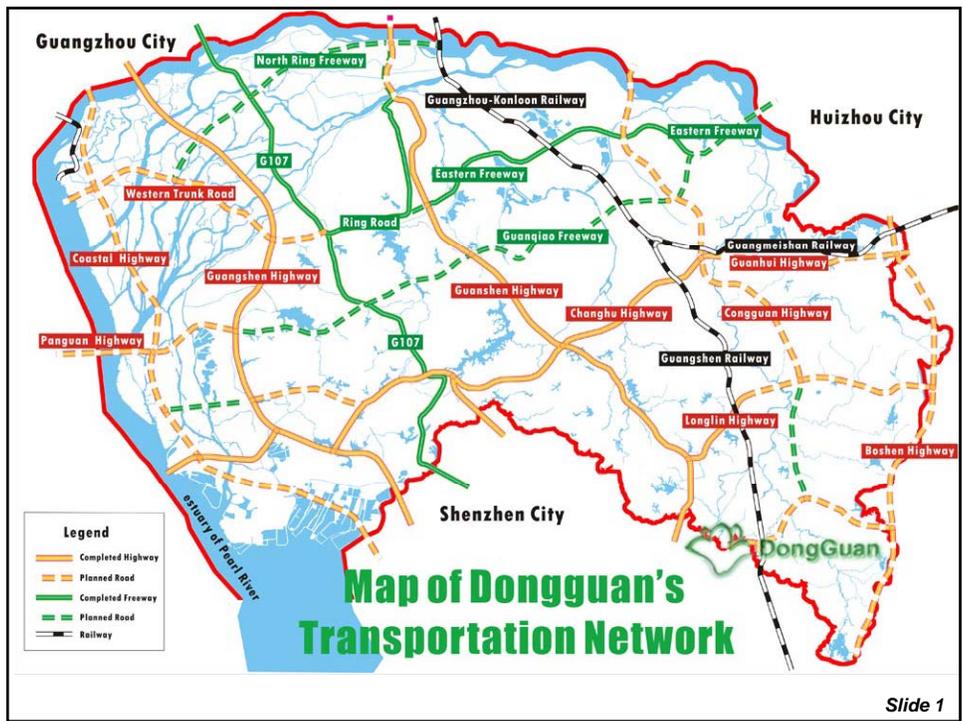
The local food is superb. My rule is to never frequent a restaurant that takes credit cards. That way, there is a good chance of getting genuine local food. The experience is a happy one, though language difficulties make it virtually impossible to enunciate any recommendations. There are, along all business streets in Dongguan and China, a plethora of good local restaurants. Ordering can be difficult, since few such establishments have menus in English (though rather more than have Mandarin or Cantonese menus in Western Europe or the United States). Moreover, given the humble status of these restaurants --- low prices, good food, they will not be found in any of the tour guides.

It is recommended, however, that tap water be avoided. The hotels provide bottled water. Generally, bottled water should be relied on in all but the most affluent nations. This is my unfortunate advice after having contracted Montezuma's revenge on every continent but Australia and Antarctica (where there is little need of urban rental car tours).

CITIES IN CHINA

Analysts often get confused by the "city" terminology used in China. All of the Dongguan urban area is contained within the city of Dongguan. Similarly, most (if not all) Chinese urban areas are contained within a single city. While Chinese cities are municipalities, they are far different from municipalities in the western world. They routinely include large areas of agricultural land, which keeps their density relatively low and leads publishers and analysts to report density data that is so low that it belies a complete misunderstanding of urban geography. For example, the largest municipality in the world is Chongqing, which has more than 30,000,000 people. Its land area is more than 30,000 square miles (more than 80,000 square kms) ---nearly as large as Austria or the state of Indiana.

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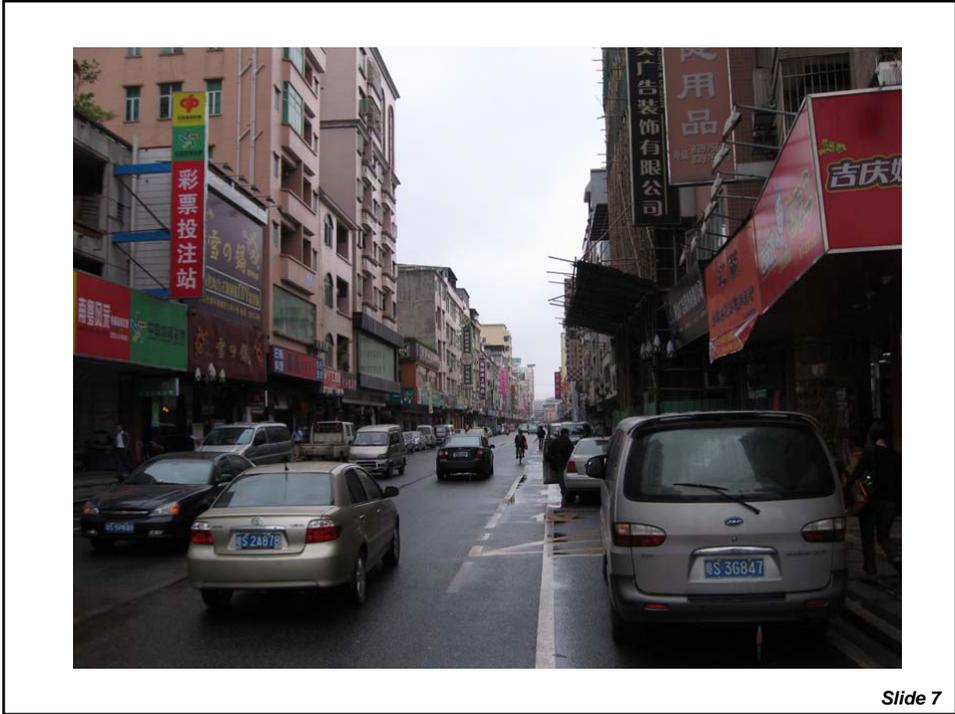
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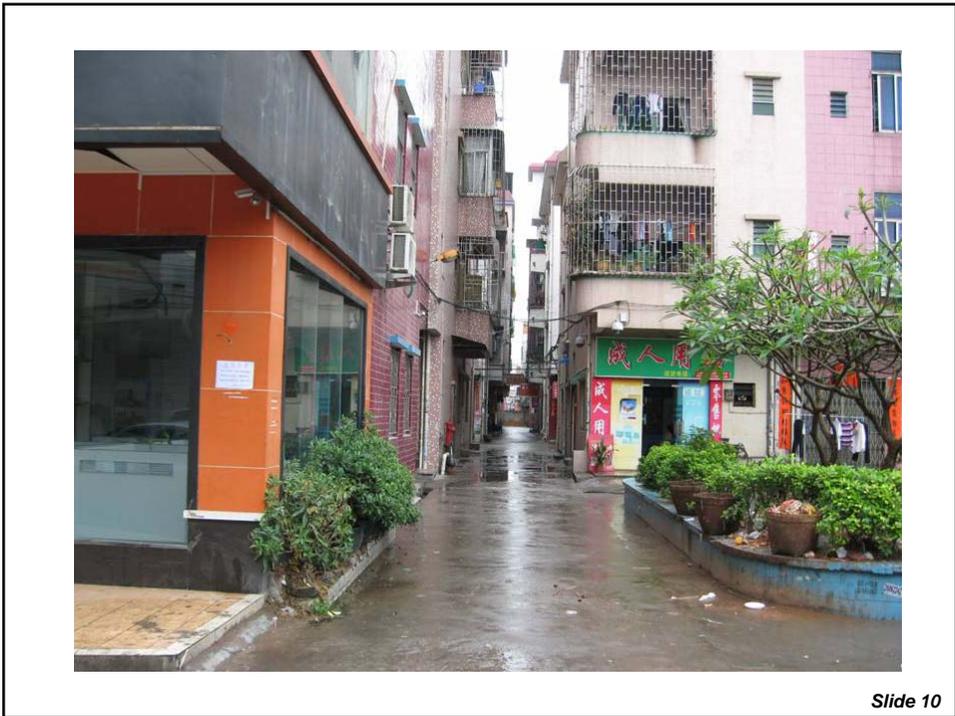
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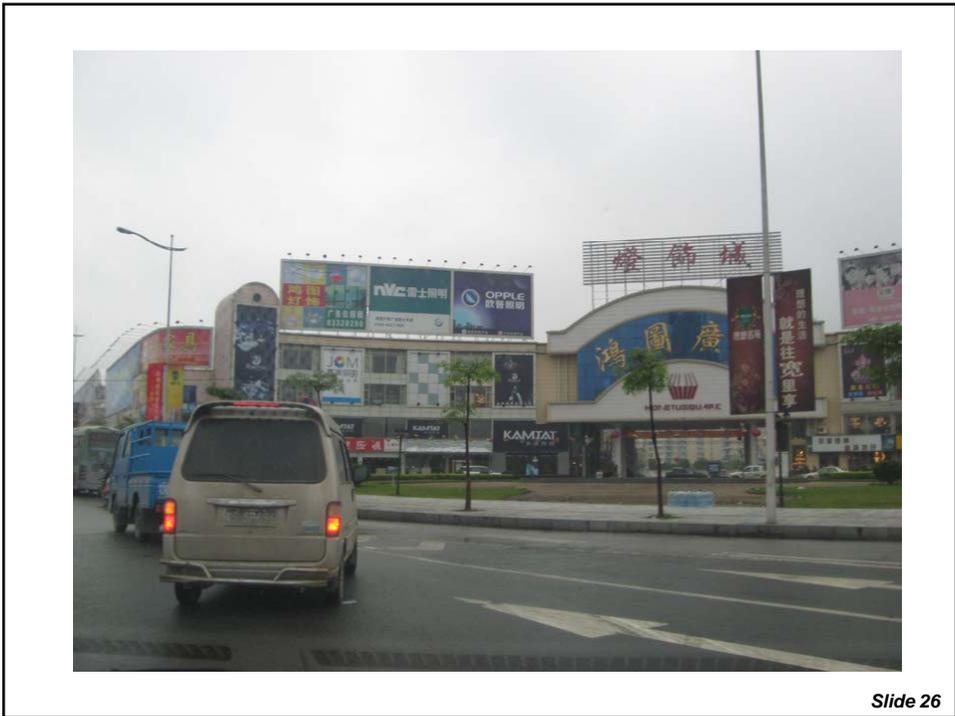
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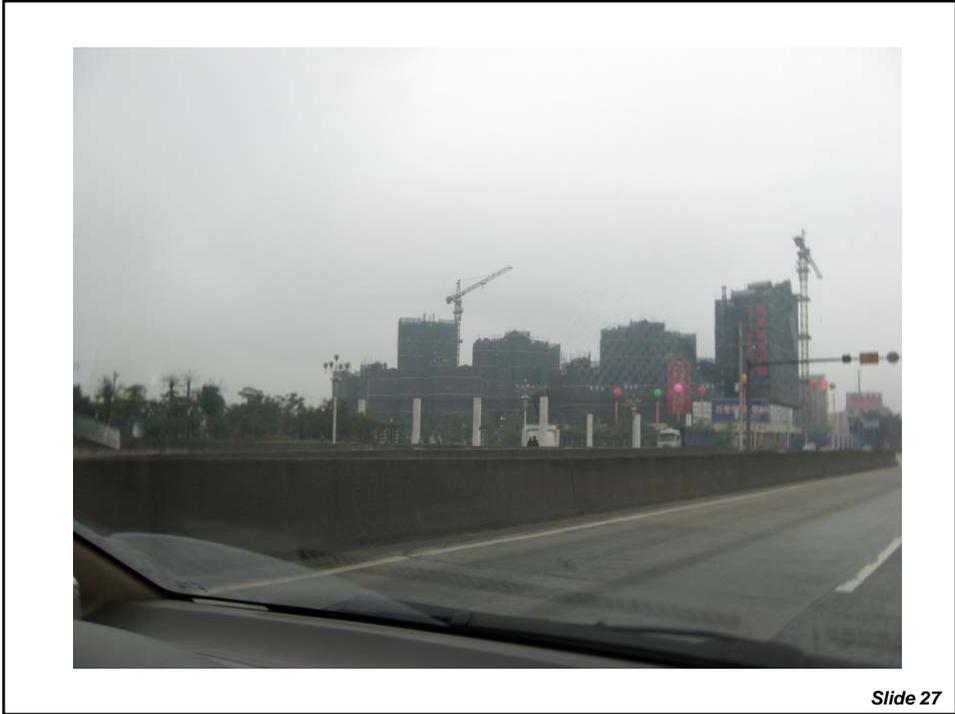
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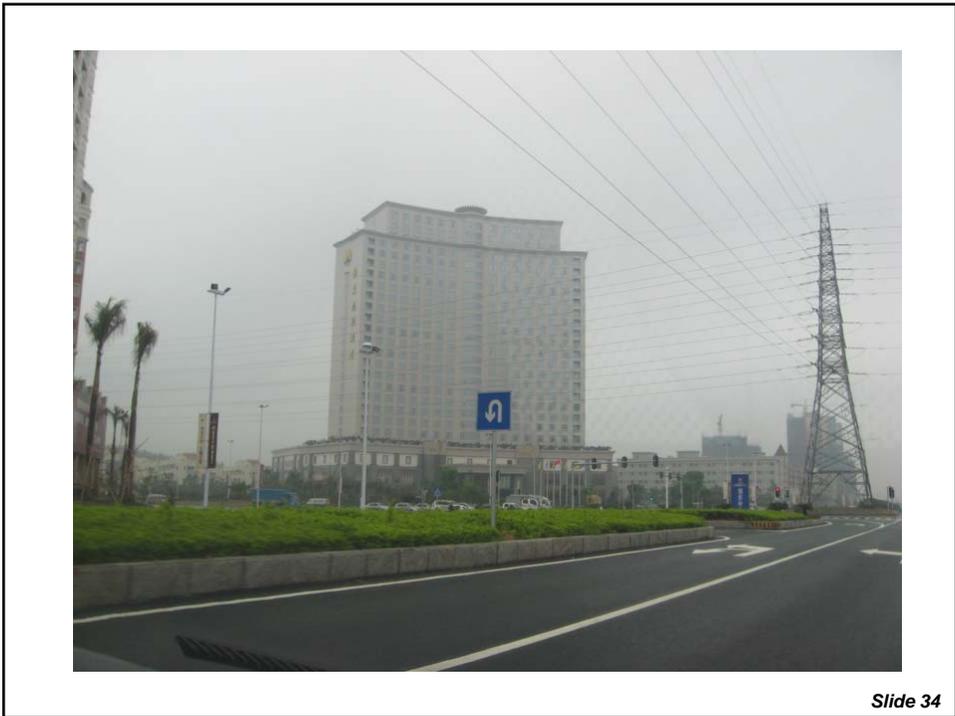
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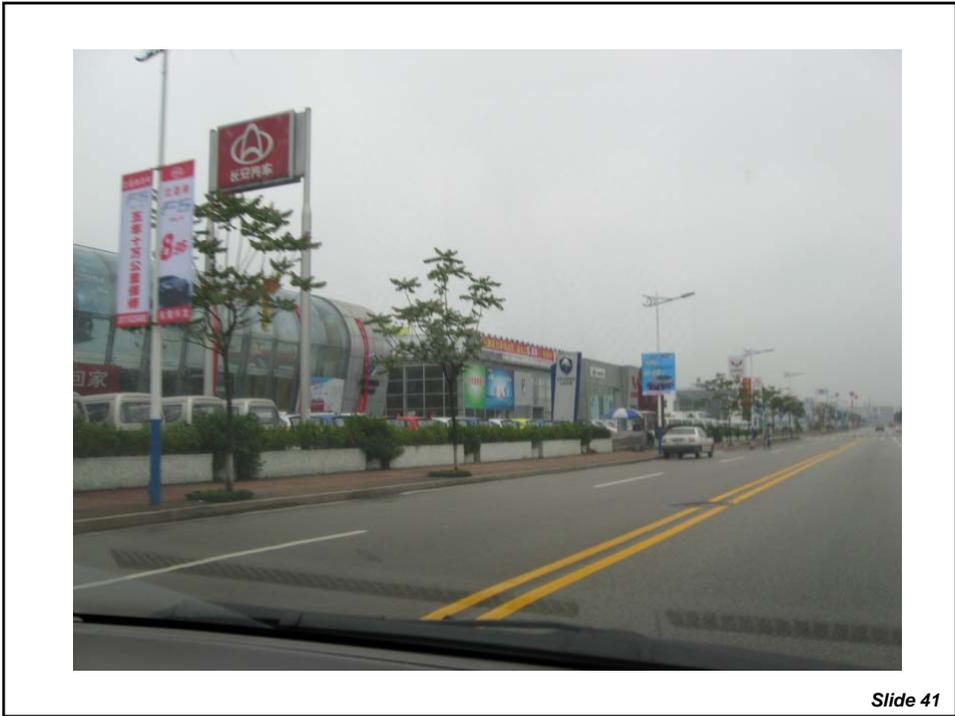
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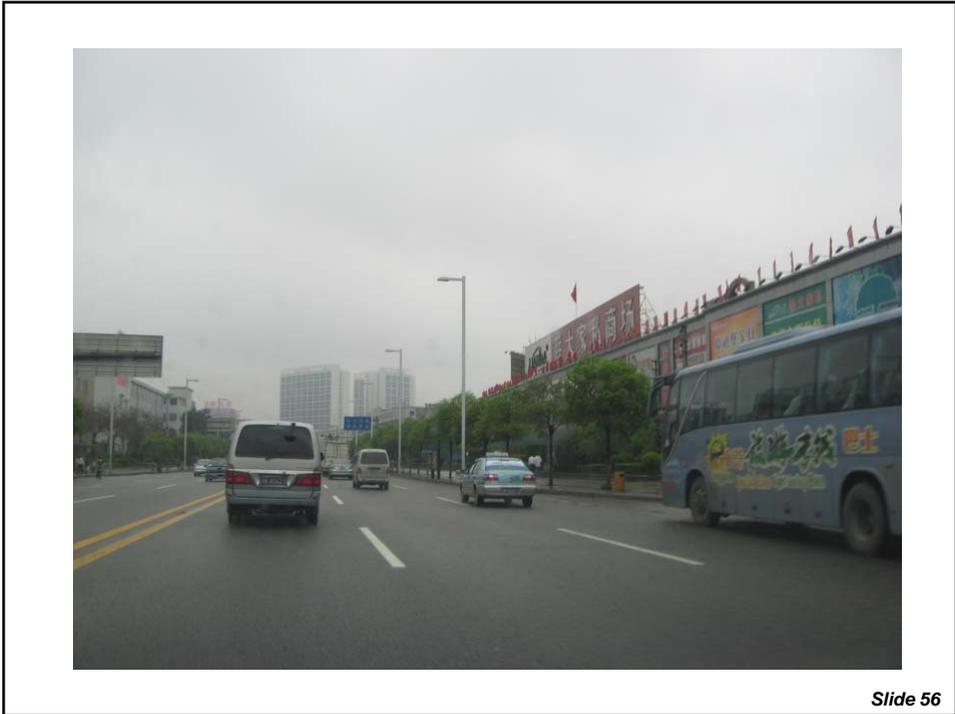
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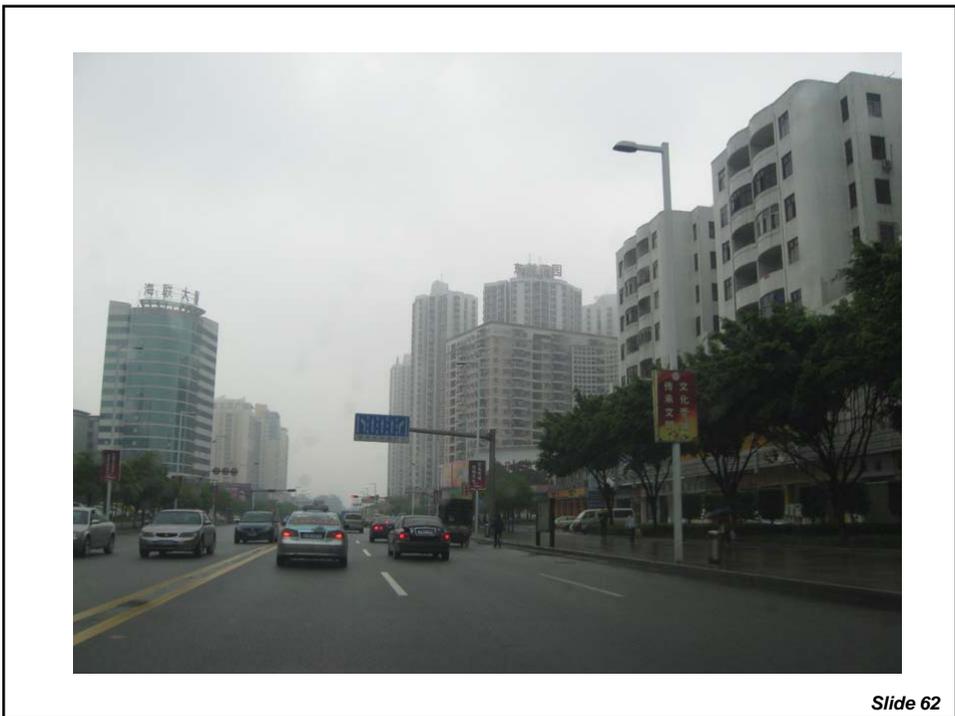
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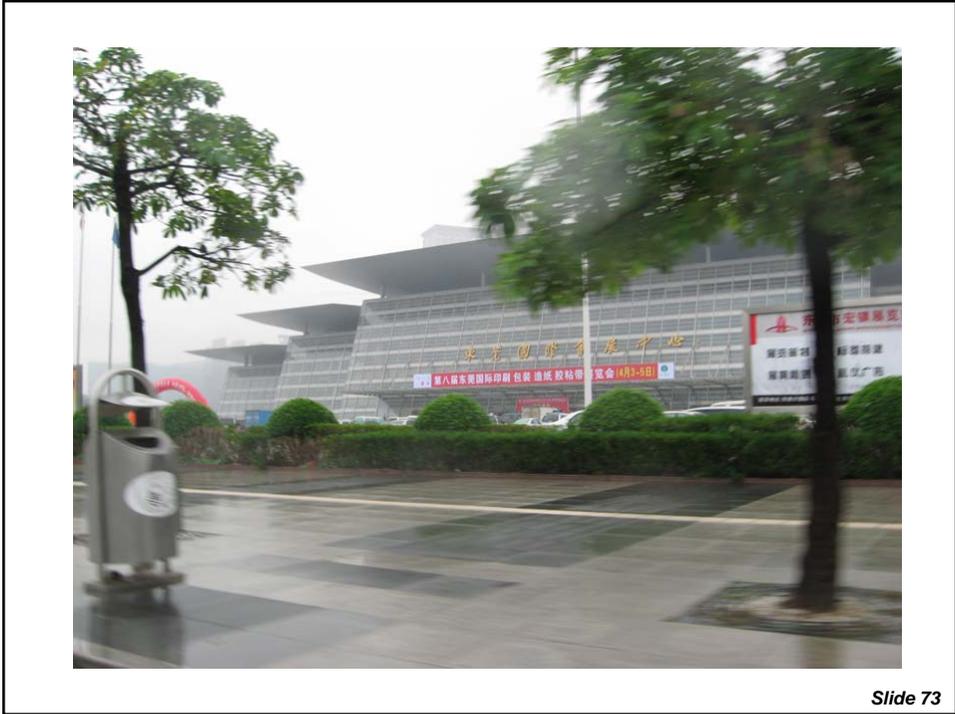
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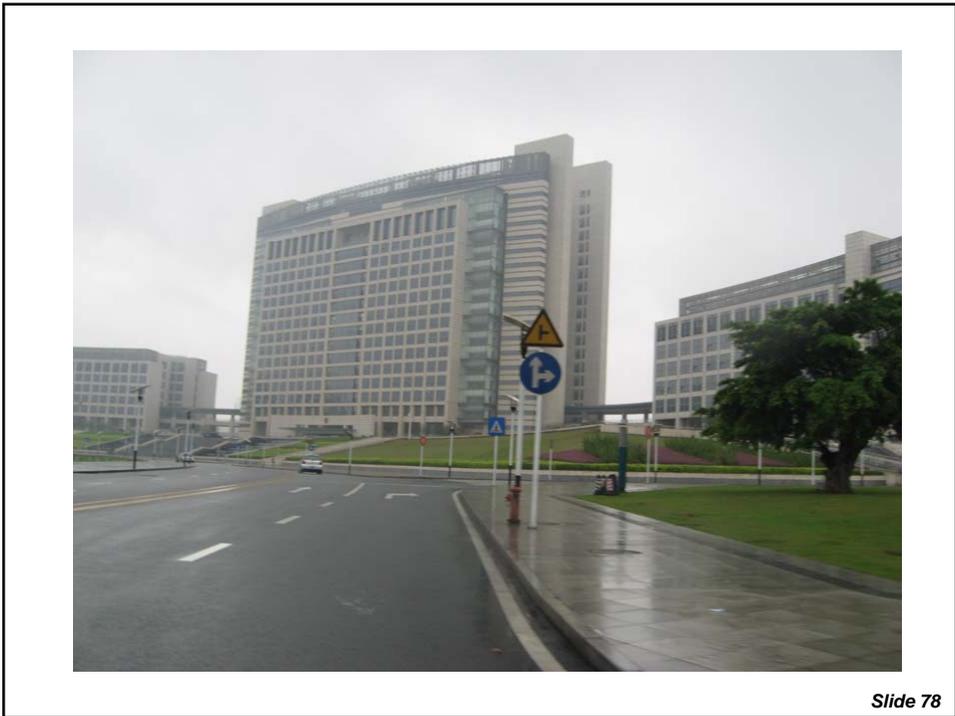
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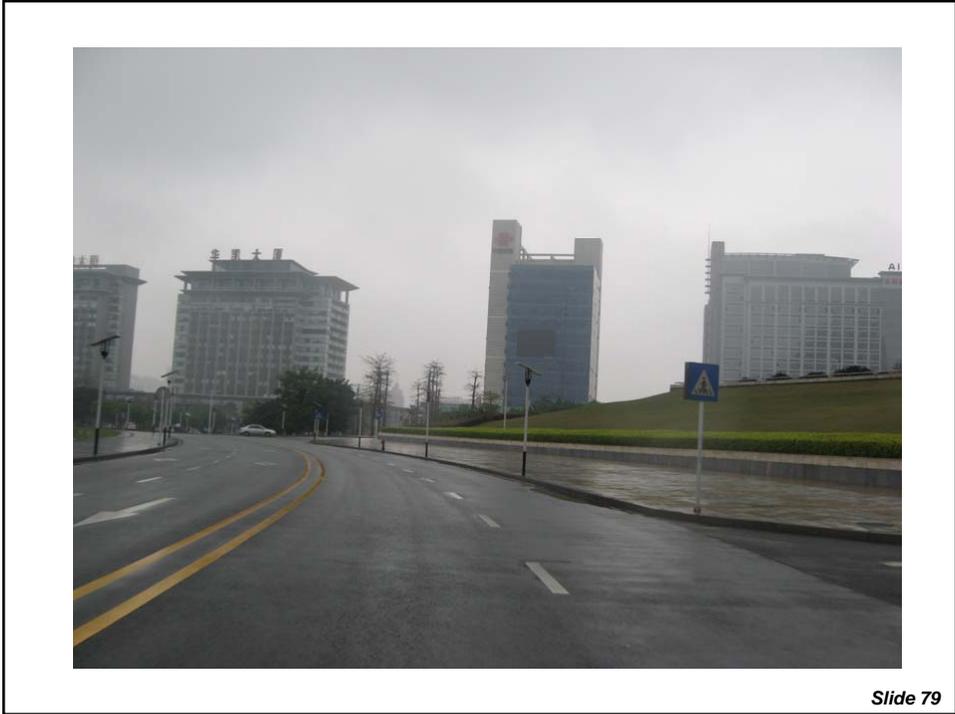


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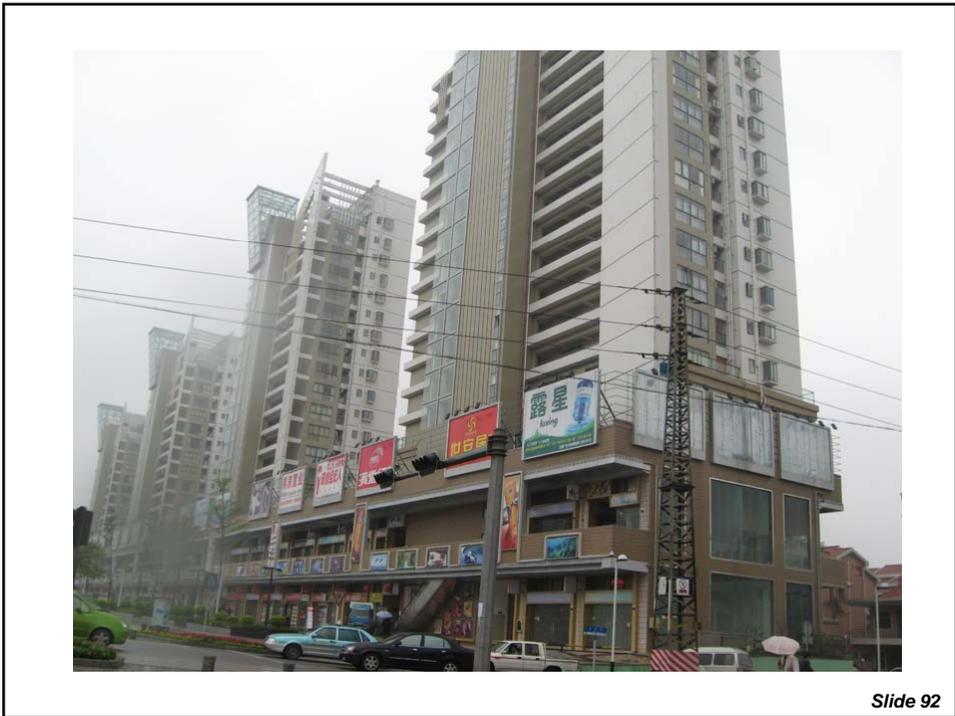
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Slide 102



Slide 103



Slide 104



Slide 105



Slide 106



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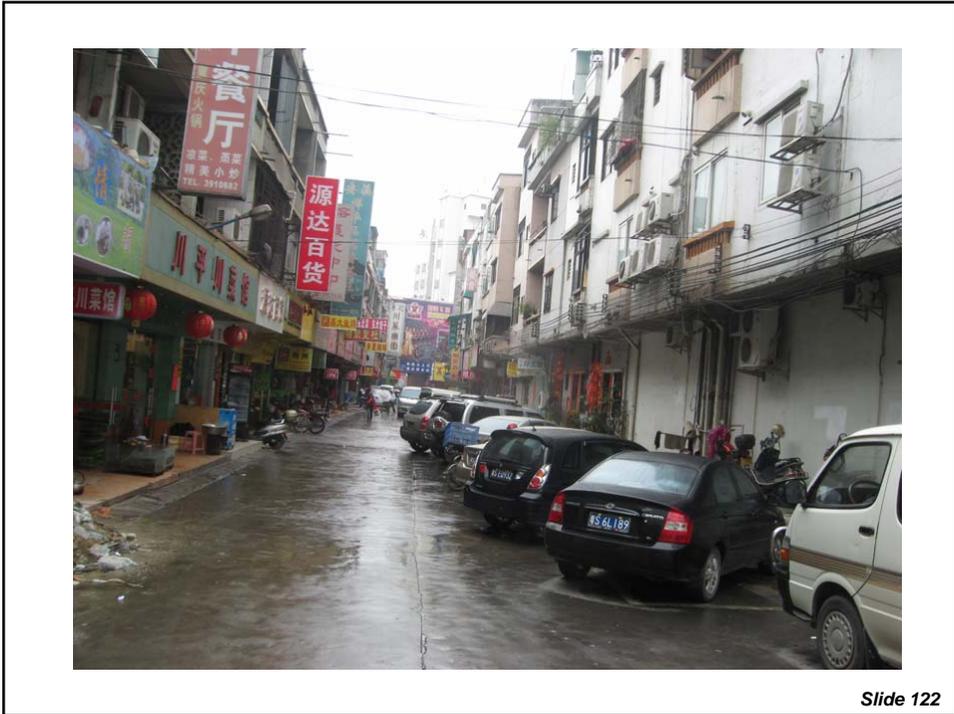
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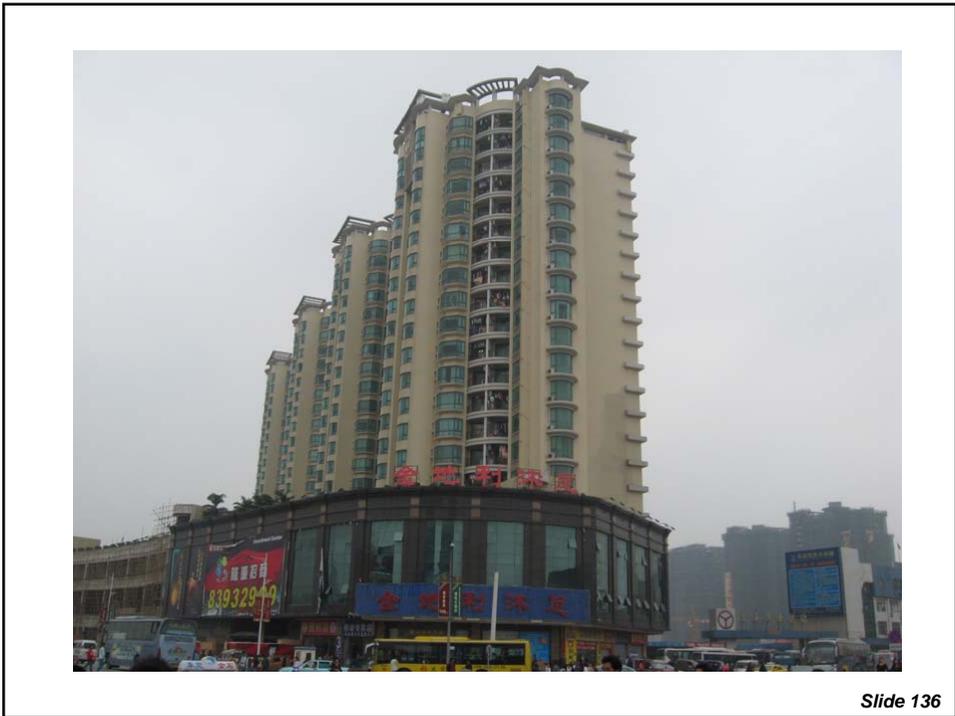
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Slide 146



Slide 147



Slide 148



Slide 149



Slide 150