Given all the new airports that have been built in Asia recently—Kuala Lumpur-Sepang (KLIA—Airways, March 2003), Hong Kong-Chek Lap Kok (Airways, September 2004), Shanghai-Pudong (December 2000), Seoul-Incheon (October 1999 & May 2003), and Centrair (March 2005)—it is hardly surprising that another gigantic gateway airport would be built. And that is exactly what happened. On August 5, 2004, after four years of construction, Guangzhou-Baiyun International Airport opened for business. The first flight to land at the new airport was CZ 3932, a Boeing 777-200 of China Southern Airlines inbound from Los Angeles. An hour later, Flight CZ 328, a Boeing 737 from the same carrier, bound for Haikou on the Chinese island of Hainan, was the first to depart.

Baiyun International (IATA: CAN/ICAO: ZGGG) is about 28km (17mi) from the center of Guangzhou, the historic city formerly known as Canton. Guangzhou’s city airport came into being more than 72 years ago, and the last-used terminal building was opened in 1957. Over the ensuing decades, the airport became one of China’s busiest, with service to 83 domestic and 25 international routes each day. In fact, when the airport closed, it was the busiest Chinese airport in terms of daily movements and flight frequencies. While Hong Kong’s Kai Tak was famous for its checkerboard approach over the built-up residential high-rise neighbourhoods of Kowloon (Airways, Jul/Aug 1994), the approach lights to Guangzhou’s old airport were also nestled amongst apartment buildings.

Guangzhou is often referred to as the ‘world’s factory’. Nearly a quarter of all the nation’s manufacturing is done in southern China, much of it near Guangzhou, so it was only a matter of time before the old airport would outgrow its competitiveness and usefulness. Baiyun, built at a cost of RMB19.8 billion ($2.9 billion), covers an area of 21km² (8sq mi). The terminal building spans 35ha (86ac) and is expected to handle more than 25 million passengers annually when it closed. The new terminal is bright and airy, and has a similar look to many of Asia’s modern airports, with soaring ceilings and liberal use of glass. Lighting in the airport is automatically adjusted throughout the day, so as to provide the same level of illumination at all times.

The airport currently has two parallel runways, but there are plans to expand the airport. Two more runways will be constructed, along with another terminal. The eastern runway (02R/20L) is 3,800m (12,467ft) in length, and is reinforced to meet the weight requirements of the Airbus A380-800. Runway 02L/20R is slightly shorter at 3,600m (11,811ft). At a height of 112m (367.5ft), the airport’s control tower is the tallest in China. Baiyun is a 24-hour airport, although few airlines currently use the airport in the early morning hours.

Transport to the airport is facilitated by a new eight-lane toll highway from the city. An underground train line is scheduled to be built, and when completed will link up with Guangzhou’s metropolitan rail system.
the Pearl River Delta
China Southern Airlines (see page 22) is Baiyun’s anchor carrier, and will gain the most by the opening of a new airport. Already, the airline has been able to boost its cargo capacity, and airline executives suggest that the new airport is an advantage in negotiating full membership into the SkyTeam alliance.

Baiyun’s principal maintenance installation is operated by GAMECO (Guangzhou Aircraft Maintenance Engineering Company), a joint venture between China Southern Airlines and Hutchison Whampoa (China). The engineering base is CAAC-, FAA-, and JAA-certified, can accommodate four wide-body aircraft, and is equipped with a separate paint hangar.

Some have suggested that Guangzhou-Baiyun will simply steal traffic away from Hong Kong, only 170km (105mi) away, but with China’s booming economy there is probably enough people and cargo for both airports. In fact, Guangzhou seems to be creating new business.

From October 31, 2004, Northwest Airlines began service from Detroit via its Tokyo hub. United Airlines has applied to offer service to CAN from Denver, and North American Airlines intends to fly between Oakland and Guangzhou with 777s starting in 2006. Lufthansa began cargo flights to Guangzhou last September, and in March adds nonstop passenger service from Frankfurt, with continuing service to Manila; Finnair adds service in September this year.

In addition, Guangdong China Travel Service, along with A-Sonic Aerospace (Singapore) and China Xpress of Hong Kong are forming a Guangzhou-based airline to operate 150-seat aircraft on domestic routes from mid-2005.

To some, however—like the Guangzhou hotel executives that Airways interviewed—the new airport is not living up to its full potential. For a region that manufactures much of the world’s goods, shopping opportunities are surprisingly sparse and limited. Likewise, despite the world renown of Cantonese cuisine, there are few restaurants, especially once passengers pass through security. But these are relatively minor shortcomings considering everything else this airport has to offer. Indeed, it could truly be said that Baiyun Airport is the pearl in the oyster of Chinese aviation, and a dazzling reflection of modern China.
Baiyun International Airport

IATA: CAN  ICAO: ZGGG

Location:  23° 23' 32.77" N, 113° 17' 55.63" E
          28km (17mi) from downtown

Elevation:  50ft (15m)

Runways
02R/20L  12,467 x 197ft (3,800 x 60m)
02L/20R  11,811 x 148ft (3,600 x 45m)

Communications
Baiyun Tower:  118.1 (Runway 02R/20L), 118.8 (Runway 02L/20R), 124.3
Ground:  121.75 (Runway 02R/20L), 121.85 (Runway 02L/20R), 121.6
ATIS:  128.6