

七十九

Yet the wonders of Guizhou
made up for them all
the Dong town of Zhaoxing
Huangguoshu waterfall
In the gorges near Xingyi
we kayaked white water
arriving in Guangxi
heard Liu San Jie's daughter



Chapter 79 – Guizhou Cornucopia

From the Dong Village of Zhaoxing in the far south-eastern corner of Guizhou, we travelled west to Kǎilǐ 凯里. There, they have a fun Sunday market where Dong and Miao people ply their crafts, art, and household wares. Thirty years ago wooden buckets could be picked up in any rural community in southern China. I remember friends riding bicycles through Guangdong and buying these buckets off farmers for a few pennies. I'm sure local people were dismayed by anyone wanting to buy their night soil buckets, but at that time, the farmers could turn around and buy several new buckets for those same pennies. Today, shop keepers laugh at me when I ask if they sell “木桶 mù tǒng.” Why would anyone want a wooden bucket, when plastic buckets are so much lighter and easier to take care of? That said, a few years ago, I was still able to find a few new wooden buckets in the Kaili Sunday market.

From Kaili to Guiyang is only about one-half hour by high speed train or a couple of hours by car. Guìyáng (贵阳) is the capital of Guizhou and is mostly unpretentious. That said, Guiyang is making a name for itself in the area of “big data.” In this city of 4.5 million people, there are over 20,000 surveillance cameras aimed at the people of Guiyang. Flashback to Tom Cruise in the 2002 futuristic movie “Minority Report.” The future is here. The claim is that marketing analysis can be obtained real time by using the appropriate tools at a grand scale. Big data is not as much about the amount of data gathered, but rather how that data is organized to discover patterns and trends related to human behavior. And China is sitting on big data's cusp. Part of China's advantage has to do with China's 730 million internet users. Guizhou got the nod for storing big data for companies like Tencent Holdings Ltd (腾讯 Téngxùn) largely because of its isolation and its insulation.



Continuing southwest about 100 miles, we arrived in Ānshùn (安顺) and from there it was another 25 miles south to Huangguoshu Waterfall (黄果树瀑布 Huángguǒshù Pùbù) the largest waterfall in China. It was late June and it had been raining a lot so the falls were at their fullest and they were really impressive. We broke out our rain gear and thoroughly enjoyed splashing our way through natural shower geysers firing at us from all directions. I remember walking under the water curtain into a cave (水帘洞) reminiscent of the one where the monkey king was born. Other waterfalls seem to converge from several directions into what looked like a massive earthenware sink called the Rhinoceros Pool (犀牛潭 Xīniú Tán) where I imagined a giant horned herbivore stooping down to do his morning ablutions. Still other waterfalls seemed more like strands of vermicelli or glassy Thai bean noodles hanging over a ledge in the distance. For an hour or more, we wandered through this natural water wonderland. When we came out near where we began, we were tired, soaked, and smiling.



Maling Gorge (马岭河峡谷 Mǎlǐnghé Xiágǔ) near Xingyi (兴义 Xīng yì) has been called the birthplace of whitewater kayaking in China. I wish I could say that we actually got to test the wild water there ourselves, but alas, this was something we had not planned for and our time was too short. Still, we got to look down on the white water from the concrete Maling Gorge Arch Bridge, the first high bridge over the gorge. From our vantage point at the scenic lookout next to the bridge we could see at least a dozen waterfalls tumbling more than 100 meters down sheer cliffs into the roiling waters below. When our host asked us if we'd like to go down to the water, we thought she was kidding. We found hiking paths and steps that led us down about 30 meters, but the big surprise

was a 73-meter outdoor elevator which took us the rest of the way down (and back up – of course.) At the bottom of the gorge there were foot bridges that allowed visitors to feel the river up close and personal. In 1998, China's first whitewater kayak competition was held there and since the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Maling Gorge has been the "National Training Base of Whitewater Kayaking."

The story of Liu San Jie (刘三姐) is another popular story in China. Liu is a family name. The term "San Jie" means the "third oldest sister." I mentioned in an earlier story that Chinese are commonly called by their rank in the family. I think of the girls in one family of close friends who, to this day, I only know as Da Jie (big sister), Er Jie (second oldest sister), and San Mei (third youngest sister.)

Liu San Jie (3rd sister, Liu) belonged to the Zhuang Minority (壮族 Zhuàngzú) and lived in the Guangxi Autonomous Region due south of Guizhou. The 1960 Hundred Flower award winning film, Liu San Jie, started with a haunting song being sung by a female voice coming from a boat going through what looked like the karst hills around Guilin. The voice itself was not appealing to my western trained ear, but I kept listening as the picture panned into an old man and a handsome young man fishing from a small covered wooden boat where they were mesmerized by the voice. White egrets and small nesting birds shared the screen with seven men with ropes around their bodies pulling a boat laden with merchandise up the river. Then, in a distance, Liu San Jie appears and we see actress Huang Wanqiu (黄婉秋) on a small boat made of tree branches, still covered with leaves, singing as she steers her way down the river with nothing but a bamboo pole. The two men decide to check her out so they pole their way over to her small skiff. The old man asks who she is, and Liu San Jie responds to all of his questions in song. Suddenly the young man lurches forward and says, "I know who you are. You are Liu San Jie!" They invite her on board and she accepts their invitation. The old man bursts into song, and the young man then dives into the water, catches a fish and then bursts into song himself. Liu San Jie is renowned in the area for her beautiful voice, her intelligence, and her courage. She had been orphaned at a young age and had been raised by her elder brother. Singing was a natural way for the Zhuang people to communicate. Liu San Jie sang songs about freedom and justice and about the way that the peasants were abused by the wealthy landowners. The laobaixing 老百姓 (common people) loved Liu San Jie, but the upper crust did not. Early in the movie, Liu San Jie got into a singing duel with one of the ruling elite and he had a heart attack and died after hearing the harsh accusations that Liu San Jie made about him and his family. The man's family accused Liu San Jie of killing the man and arranged for her to be arrested. There are many incidents during the story where Liu San Jie stands up against tyrants like the infamous Mo Huai Ren. When the young man she befriends early on in the movie, defeats Mo Huai Ren's

lucky in a fist fight, Mo Huai Ren informs them that he owns everything in the area and that Liu San Jie and her friends would no longer be able to fish or hunt there. Liu San Jie challenges Mo Huai Ren to a singing duel and Mo accepts. Mo then hires three scholars who know “all the songs in the world” as his backup. Like freestyle battles between rappers, Liu and Mo’s songs go one after one another until Mo finally challenges Liu with the lines: “Tell me now, young lady, without pause: How many nails are there on our boat? How much do those mountains over there weigh? AND How many grains are there in a basket of oats?” To which, Liu San Jie answers without hesitation. Liu then quietly disappears from the scene with her lover, Li Xiao Niu.



In 2004, acclaimed director Zhang Yi Mou decided to stage Liu San Jie as yet another grand spectacular on the Li River in Yangshuo near Guilin. As with the Tea Horse Road extravaganza in Lijiang, this show involves approximately 600 performers who have been hired mostly from the local Zhuang community. They included fishermen, merchants, farmers, and young people. The 70 minute show portrays actors on bamboo rafts performing on the actual Li River. “San Jie Liu Impressions” claims to be performed on the world’s largest natural stage. If you don’t understand Putonghua (Mandarin), becoming familiar with the story ahead of time really helps get more out of the experience. You could also ponder how Liu San Jie might have answered those questions: “How many nails are there on our boat? How much do those mountains over there weigh? How many grains are there in a basket of oats?”

刘三姐 - Liu San Jie - Third Sister Liu - full Chinese movie - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zm8Yj3XyHLg>