



City profile

Hangzhou

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ABSTRACT

Once an ancient capital of China, Hangzhou has transformed to a post-socialist city that faces profound changes and critical challenges in various aspects of urban development such as historical legacies, market-oriented urban economy, expansive urban spatial patterns, population management, land use restructuring, and affordable housing provision. Under the increasingly stronger market power, the city strives to reposition itself to be an important economic center in the Yangtze River Delta Region, through strategic and innovative urban growth agenda. This profile identifies some fundamental issues and processes that underscore Hangzhou's recent urban development and presents future prospect for a coastal metropolis with regional significance.

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1. Introduction

Hangzhou, the capital of Zhejiang Province, is located at the southern wing of the Yangtze River Delta, the west of Hangzhou Bay, and the lower reaches of the Qiantang River. About 180 km from the 'dragon head' Shanghai, Hangzhou is the second largest metropolis in the Yangtze River Delta Region (Fig. 1). Named 'the Land of Fish and Rice' and 'the Paradise on the Earth' by scholars and writers, the city is well known for its picturesque natural landscape and environment – 65.6% of its land area is hilly and mountainous (with an elevation range between 200 and 1100 meters) distributed in the west, middle and south, and 26.4% of its land area plain (with a surface elevation range between 2 and 10 m) in its northeast, leaving 8% of the area water bodies. Hangzhou is the origin city of the world's longest artificial canal – the Grand Canal (Hangzhou Municipal Government, 2007). The city's northern subtropical monsoon climate creates four distinct seasons with a mild winter and a 'hotpot' feeling summer. Hangzhou's main city (city proper) has nine urban administrative districts – Shangcheng, Xiacheng, Binjiang, Jianggan, Gongshu, Xihu, Xiaoshan, Yuhang and Fuyang. They constitute the core of the Hangzhou Metropolitan Area that also includes two counties (Tonglu and Chun'an) and two country-level cities (Jiande and Lin'an). In 2013, urban resident annual per capita disposable income is 39,310 yuan; and rural resident annual per capita net income is 18,923 yuan in Hangzhou Metropolitan Area (Hangzhou Statistical Bureau, 2014).

A city profile of Hangzhou is desirable for several reasons. First, the city has a long history of five thousand years and is one of China's Seven Ancient Capitals. Many of the city's cultural landscape and historic relics can still be appreciated. Second, Hangzhou is a transitional city known for its prosperous non-state economy, especially Town and Village Enterprises and domestic private industries. Third, the city is a representative coastal metropolis that has experienced almost all significant challenges in local economy since the economic reform. Typical urban strategies such as development zones, administrative annexation, and new CBD have transformed the city. Meanwhile, the post-reform inter-city competition requires Hangzhou to reposition its urban economy and restructure its urban space. Fourth, Hangzhou has been one of the pilot cities for policy initiatives such as land banking, land acquisition compensation, and economic comfortable housing. This profile starts with Hangzhou's history in relation to the current city, and then delineates its urban economy, urban form evolution and master plans, urban population, followed by its recent land use restructuring. The later part of the profile involves a relatively detailed discussion about Hangzhou's housing provision with specific reference to its public housing programs and housing density spatial restructuring. The profile concludes with discussion on future developments of the city.

2. History and present

A county government seat in the Qin Dynasty (221–206 BC) and then the capital of the Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279),

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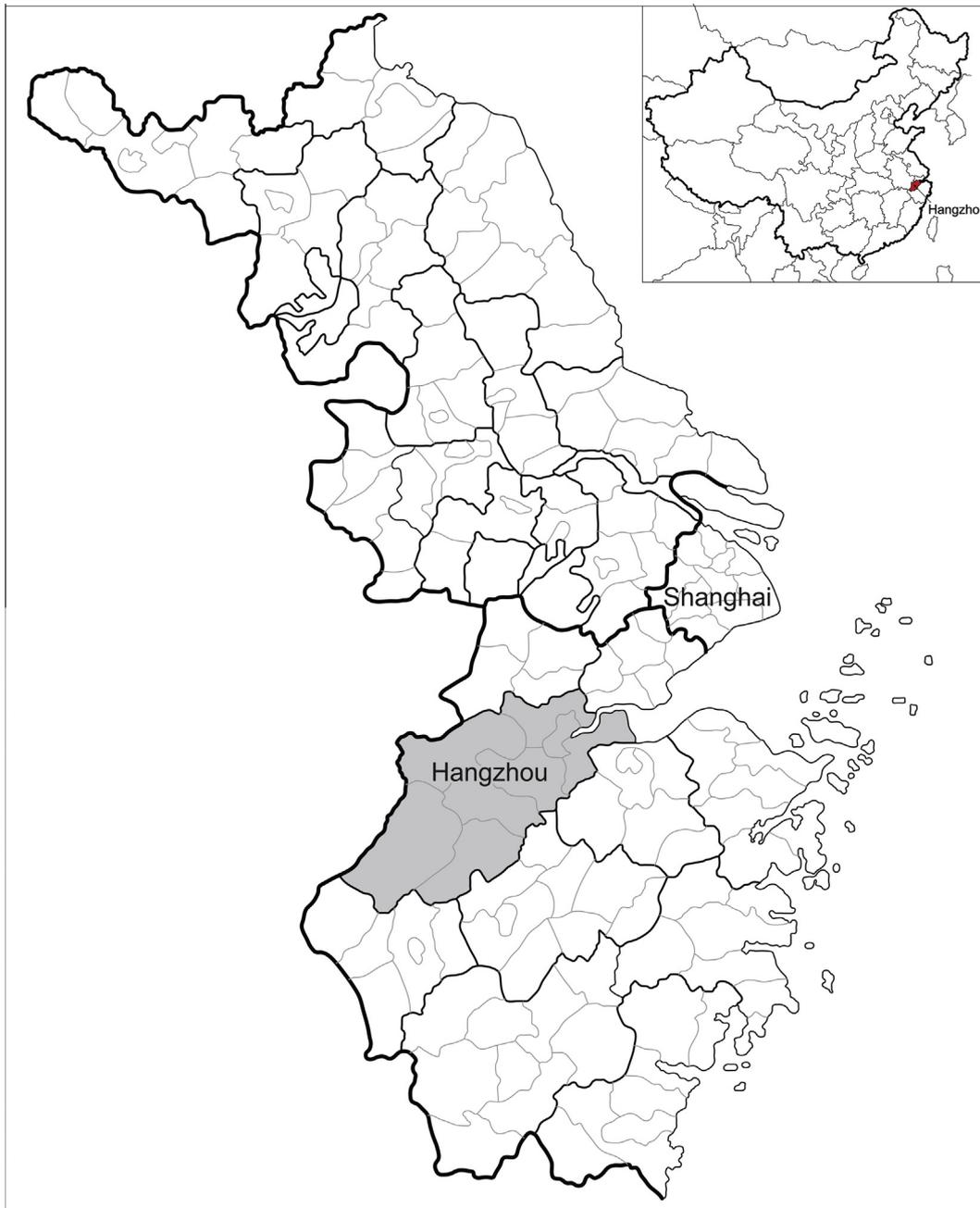


Fig. 1. Location of Hangzhou in the Yangtze River Delta Region and China. *Source:* by the author.

Hangzhou's origin can be dated back to the Neolithic period more than five thousand years ago, marked by the well-documented Hemudu culture. The city's historic urban evolution has been defined, driven, and constrained by three major waters: the West Lake, the Qiantang River, and the Grand Canal (Fu, 1985). The urban economy of Hangzhou, the northbound origin of the Grand Canal leading to the north end in Beijing, was closely knitted with rich water meshes in the region. The West Lake and its neighboring mountains anchored the city's internal structure formation and became the urban physical essentials in early urban development in the Ming (1368–1644) and the Qing (1644–1912) Dynasties. Important urban components such as city walls and gates, bridges, administrative agencies, religious structures, and attractions were more or less connected to the West Lake and its mountainous milieu, because Chinese geomancy believed that the West Lake

and its surroundings offered the city vigor. As early as in the Five Dynasties (907–960), enhanced dykes harnessed strong tides of the Qiantang River and made the River a contributor rather than a threat to Hangzhou's wellbeing. During the Ming and the Qing, Hangzhou rose to be a regional commercial and trading hub and the city's quality silk, tea, and handicrafts attracted merchants from afar; the Renhe County Gazette records that half of the Hangzhou people was in business or trading (Fu, 1985; Wang, 1999). In the late Ming, a Hangzhou-based business tycoon had a fleet of a hundred ships exporting local products to Japan, Luzon, and Indochina coasts. The economic success led to regional growth – the number of towns in the great Hangzhou region doubled. However, since the mid-19th century Hangzhou's regional importance has been eclipsed by the rise of Shanghai that was originally opened as a treaty port. The rich history and unique geographical

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