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Heaven on Earth

Written by Qian Jun

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Hangzhou is "the most splendid and most beautiful city in the world," "In the city there's a lake surrounded by magnificent and unique buildings..."

Marco Polo, Italy

Chapter

A City of Culture

Hangzhou, a famous scenic and tourist city which was successively named Qiantang, Yuhang and Lin'an in the ancient times, is located in the north of Zhejiang Province, the People's Republic of China, at the south wing of the Yangtze River Delta and on the estuary of the East China Sea and the Qiantang River. With clearly-demarcated four seasons, pleasant weather, interlaced rivers and streams, as well as picturesque scenery with green mountains and clear waters, today's Hangzhou has been reputed as "Heaven on Earth" and is well-known throughout the world.





Richly-Endowed Geographical Position

With an urban area of 3,068 sq. km. housing about 3,932,000 inhabitants, Hangzhou lists as the No. 5 largest among all the provincial capitals or cities in China. It has jurisdiction over 8 districts, including Shangcheng, Xiacheng, Xihu (the West Lake), Gongshu, Jianggan, Binjiang, Yuhang and Xiaoshan, as well as 5 cities (or counties), including Lin'an, Fuyang, Tonglu, Jiande and Chun'an. The total area of Hangzhou amounts to 16,596 sq. km. and the total population 6,477,800.



Qiantang River



Convenient transportation facilities of Hangzhou can take you to the famous cities and scenic spots like Shaoxing, Ningbo, Putuo Mountain and Tiantan Mountain on the east, Yandang Mountain, Wenzhou, Longhu Mountain of Jiangxi Province by passing Jinhua and Quzhou, and Wuyi Mountain of Fujian Province on the south, Tianmu Mountain, Yellow Mountain of Anhui Province and Jiuhua Mountain on the west, as well as such brilliant metropolises as Shanghai, Suzhou, Wuxi and Nanjing on the north.





Zhijiang River—the Z-shaped Qiantang River traversing the city is alternatively named Zhijiang River and is the mother river of Zhejiang Province.



Ancient Bridge in Liangzhu Area Liangzhu Culture traces back to 4200 years ago, namely the Neolithic Age. It was discovered in 1936 near Liangzhu area.



Liangzhu Culture Museum

Long-Standing History and Splendid Culture

Hangzhou, this famous historical and cultural city, is one of the seven ancient capitals in China. With crystalline lakes and picturesque mountains on the west as well as the grand Qiantang River on the east, it looks like a scroll of Chinese painting dazzling for its brilliant history and culture. As early as more than 4,000 years ago, namely the Neolithic Age, there were people labored, lived in Liangzhu and Laoheshan area, which were respectively located in the north of the city of Hangzhou and on the west of the West Lake, and created the rich "Liangzhu Culture," which is reputed as the "Dawn of the Oriental Civilization." In the recorded history, Hangzhou is regarded as the center of the Wuyue Culture, which, together with Huaxia Culture of Central Plains (comprising the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River), has formed the splendid culture of the Chinese nation.





Hangzhou City has gone through a history as long as over 2000 years. It successively became the territory of the Wu and the Yue States (two of the Warring States during the Eastern Zhou Period) during the period of Spring and Autumn (770–476 B.C.), and later of the Qin Dynasty, when Emperor Yingzheng, the first emperor of the Qin Dynasty, set it as the Qiantang County in the 25th year of his reign (222



Tides of Qiantang River



B.C.). In the Northern and Southern Dynasties, Buddhism was introduced into Hangzhou and soon prevailed. By the Sui Dynasty, Hangzhou, as the terminal of the south-north Grand Canal, has mended its pace of urbanization, which gave priority to the commercial economy, and got the name "Hangzhou" ever since. The Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal, which boasts as a political, economical and cultural giant dragon in the ancient China with its head in Beijing and the tail in Hangzhou, started its canalization from the end of the Spring and Autumn Period and didn't take shape till the reign of Emperor Suiyang, the second emperor of the Sui Dynasty. Having witnessed a history of more than 1,300 years and gone through various vicissitudes of life, this giant dragon, which enjoys the same fame with the Great Wall as an ancient miracle, is still holding hundreds of barges and thousands of sails and has brought Hangzhou opulence and prosperity. Serving as an artery to transport grain, the canal has driven the commercial

flourish of the regions alongside, which accordingly offers fertile soil for the development and prosperity of its culture. Numerous historical and cultural sites scatter pleasingly in the city of Hangzhou.



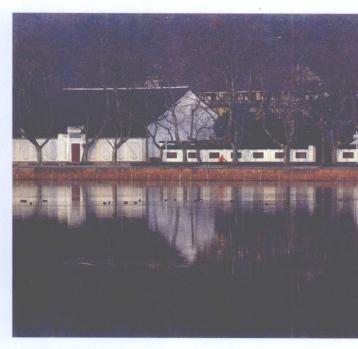
Kuahong Bridge on the Su Causeway →

P



Camphor Trees (city tree of Hangzhou) at Faxiang Temple

With a steady development of its economy and culture, Hangzhou became an important trade port of the southeast coast in the Tang Dynasty, when Buddhism started prevailing. During the Five Dynasties Period, the Wuyue State set up its capital in Hangzhou in 893 A.D. Palaces, government offices and residence housing were built in the city and many Buddhist temples, pagodas and sutra pavilions were put up along the West Lake, which brought Hangzhou the name of "Buddhist World of Southeast China." The policy implemented by the ruler of the Wuyue State, advocating "protecting the border and pacifying the people in an attempt to bring goodness to China," kept this richly endowed area along the southeast coast from any ravage of the war. By the Northern Song Dynasty, Hangzhou claimed to be a renowned county of southeast China and one of the reputed economic and cultural centers throughout the country.





The West Lake



Beishan Street in Winter



Stone Carvings on Damai Mountain

Marco Polo, Famous Italian Traveler →

In the Southern Song Dynasty, Hangzhou, which served as capital of half of the country for as long as 152 years, was the largest international trade, political, and cultural center within China and, with a population of as most as 1.2 million, the most densely impacted city in the world. At that time, the urban economy of Hangzhou developed rapidly, with silk weaving, printing, papermaking and porcelain as the leading industries. Large numbers of imperial and private gardens of high officials were put up around the West Lake, shaping the famous "Ten Scenes of the West Lake."

In the early Yuan Dynasty, Marco Polo (1254–1324), the famous Italian traveler, visited Hangzhou and appraised it as "the most beautiful and heavenly splendid city in the world." Hangzhou has served as the capital city of Zhejiang Province since the Ming Dynasty.