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Cities

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/cities

Hefei: An emerging city in inland China

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Hefei
Anhui
Inland China
Urbanization
Industrialization

ABSTRACT

Hefei, the capital city of Anhui Province, is located in China's central region. A city with over 2200 years of history, Hefei was still a middle-sized city at the end of 1970s. Over the past decade, however, the city had experienced a dramatic spatial expansion and economic growth. This paper discusses Hefei's history of development, its achievement in socioeconomic and spatial development, and its challenges with regard to future development. Urban researchers have largely ignored cities in China's central region; as such, this paper will serve to enrich the international literature in this field and enable readers to better understand the urbanization and industrialization efforts of a typical emerging city in inland China.

1. Introduction

Hefei, the capital city of Anhui Province, is located in China's central region (Fig. 1). Lying between the nation's two primary rivers (Yangtze River and Huai River), Hefei is located to the west of the Yangtze River Delta. Southwestern Hefei is home to the nation's fifth largest fresh water lake, Chao Lake. The city's physiognomy is heterogeneous and is comprised of downlands, hilly uplands, low plains, and waterbodies. Its terrain slopes from the northwest to southeast, and its surface elevation ranges between 15 and 80 m. Featured as a humid subtropical climate, Hefei has four distinct seasons and an annual average temperature of around 16 °C.

A city with over 2200 years of history, Hefei was still a small city with a population of only around 50,000 people in 1949 when the People's Republic of China was established. By the end of 2016, however, this city had grown into a metropolitan city with a permanent resident population of 7.87 million, covering a territorial area of 11,408 km². Hefei's city proper has four administrative districts — Yaohai, Luyang, Shushan, and Baohe. The metropolitan region of Hefei also includes four additional counties (i.e., Feidong, Feixi, Changfeng, and Lujiang) and one county-level city (i.e., Chaohu) (Fig. 2). In 2014, the State Council positioned Hefei as a sub-center city of the Yangtze River Delta city-region, which meant that Hefei would be included, along with eastern coastal cities, such as Nanjing, Hangzhou, Suzhou, and Ningbo, in the Yangtze River Delta's national-level strategy pertinent to city-region coordination (Fig. 3).

Being the political, economic, cultural, science, and education center of Anhui Province, Hefei has won many honors, including the

National Garden City, the National Sanitary City, and the National Excellent Tourism City. Hefei is also known as the National Pilot City in Science-Technology Innovation and the National Base of Research and Education due to its strong R&D and learning institutions.

Like many other cities in China's central region, Hefei has largely been ignored with regard to the extant international literature in urban studies. For some time, the central region has been rather regressive in its economic development, which may result in Hefei failing to capture sufficient attention from urban researchers at home and abroad. In terms of the city-profile series of *Cities*, urban researchers have shown more interest in developed and coastal cities (Wu, 1999; Ng, 2003; Xu & Yeh, 2003; Yang et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2015; Yuan et al., 2016; Qian, 2015). However, a city profile of Hefei is valuable and can serve as a contribution to the existing literature in Chinese urban studies for the following reasons. First, the wealth of information that Hefei's city profile can permit scholars and practitioners to better understand the urbanization process of China's central region. The central region has been sandwiched between the nation's primary development policies of the past; in the era of reform and opening-up in the 1980s, the state had given policy priority to the eastern coastal area, and at the end of 1990s, the state had launched a “Western Development Campaign” program to develop western regions. Fortunately, in the mid-2000s, the state began initiating a strategy referred to as the “Rise of Central China,” which brought great development opportunities to Hefei. In addition, Hefei represents the recent emerging cities in inland China. Over the last decade, Hefei's economy increased by 3.7 times and the city's fiscal revenue increased by 4.2 times. Hefei's incredible economic growth has attracted widespread attention due to its dramatic

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2018.01.008>

Received 6 December 2017; Received in revised form 8 January 2018; Accepted 8 January 2018
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Fig. 1. The location of Hefei in China.
(Source: The Municipality of Hefei, 2015).

development speed. Further, as a former science and technological city, Hefei has taken many measures to transform itself into an industrial city; as such, this city profile can help readers to better understand the industrialization efforts of an inland city.

This city profile is structured as follows. In the second section, we present Hefei's development history and its contemporary opportunities. In the third section, we delineate Hefei's socioeconomic development, including economy and industry, population and migrants, housing provision, and science, technology, and education. The fourth section describes the city's urban spatial development, including the master plans, land use plans, and development zone plans. The final section discusses Hefei's future development and challenges.

2. History of development

2.1. Hefei in the history (prior to 1949)

In its 2200 years, prior to 1949, Hefei served as a strategic battlefield for military strategists associated with a number of dynasties. During the Western Han Dynasty (BCE 220–CE 8), Hefei had become one of the eighteen largest commercial and trade markets nationwide. However, the city was repeatedly destroyed due to continued wars. During the Sui Dynasty (CE 585), Hefei built its first city wall, which was repaired and strengthened during the following dynasties. For a long while, the territory of Hefei was constrained within the city walls (Fig. 4). Until 1949, the city area within the city walls totaled a mere 5.2 km², and the built-up area was less than 2 km².

2.2. Modernization of Hefei (since 1949)

In 1952, Hefei was appointed as the capital of Anhui Province, which afforded the city the opportunity to promote its urban

development. In the 1950s, Hefei demolished the old city wall in accordance with the development of a ring road. In 1952, Hefei's built-up area¹ expanded to 9.8 km², and it further expanded to 20.7 km² in 1958. The city's urban development during the 1960s and 1970s, however, was slow due to the national political and socio-economic environment (Fig. 5). In 1978, Hefei's built-up area totaled 50.48 km². Like many inland cities of that time, Hefei was troubled by housing shortages, traffic problems, an insufficient water supply, and poor drainage.

Since the era of reform and opening-up, Hefei's urban development has experienced an accelerated pace. In 1983, Hefei launched the "Urban Redevelopment" program, which is viewed as a milestone regarding the city's comprehensive development and modernization. The city's urban development strategy was adopted by the Central Government and was generalized to other cities nationwide. By the end of 1990s, the city's infrastructure had been significantly strengthened, and many open parks had been developed to improve livability. In December 1992, Hefei, along with Beijing and Zhuhai, was awarded the first batch of "National Garden City" awards by the central government. Hefei's built-up area was expanded to 125 km² in 2001, and the city's built-up area further expanded to 224.74 km² in 2005.

In 2006, Hefei achieved a second milestone with regard to its urban development. The city launched the "141 Urban Spatial Development Strategy," which meant that Hefei would be comprised of one primary city, four satellite towns, and one new area named Binhu New Area (*Lakeside New Area* in English). Hefei expected that this strategy and its proximity to Chao Lake would enable it to become a lakeside city.

¹ In China, the administrative term of "city" means the territorial area within the formal boundary of a municipality, which includes the built-up area and rural area. As a result, we use the term of "built-up" area to indicate the development degree of a city.

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