



City profile

City profile Lanzhou



Huali Tong*, Peiji Shi

College of Geography and Environmental Science, Northwest Normal University, Lanzhou 730070, China

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ABSTRACT

The article summarizes the historical development of Lanzhou, especially during the last 60 years. Two thousand years ago it located just off the Silk Road, which contributed greatly in promoting Lanzhou's economic and cultural exchanges. Now its urban competitive strength has become the second of the five capital cities of northwestern China. While striving to become the new economic power house of western China, Lanzhou is undergoing a profound restructuring of its economic and, more importantly, its physical form and appearance. To face the challenges, Lanzhou has taken a number of planning and infrastructure development initiatives to enhance the competitive strength in the future. This profile outlines the historical development, administrative organizations, urban and economic development, housing provision, spatial planning, critical issues and recent strategy and future development. Field reconnaissance surveys, interviews and secondary sources are used in the presentation and discussion.

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Introduction

Lanzhou is the capital and the largest city of Gansu Province in northwest China. It is situated on the upper reaches of the Yellow River (at 35°34'20"–37°07'07"N, 102°35'58"–104°34'29"E) where it emerges from the mountains and has been a center since early times, being at the southern end of the route leading via the Hexi Corridor across Central Asia. It commands the approaches to the ancient capital area of Chang'an (modern Xi'an) in Shaanxi province from both the west and the northwest, as well as the area of Qinghai Lake via the upper waters of the Yellow River and its tributaries (Jin, 1999; Feng, 1989). Lanzhou is a linear city with mountains on the north and south, its east–west span is over 30 km while its north–south span is only 5–10 km. Lanzhou is strategically significant due to its position on the Silk Road and Eurasian Continental Bridge (Guo & Wu, 1988; Jin, 1999).

After the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, Lanzhou, like the other cities of the country, underwent rapid development. Since 1949, a series of favorable economic and political policies were offered to Lanzhou, and the city received great opportunities for its development. Per capita GDP of Lanzhou in 2012 was 43,261 Yuan (Lanzhou Statistics Bureau, 2013, p. 59), which was 242 times greater than in 1952.

This profile aims to provide a brief but cogent account of the history of urban expansion in Lanzhou, followed by a discussion

of recent changes and contemporary conditions including the administration organization, the economic and urban development, spatial planning and housing provision. The final section outlines remain issues and future development strategy.

Historical development

The earliest settlement in what is now metropolitan Lanzhou can be traced back to the Neolithic Age (over 5000 years ago) when the Majiayao peoples lived and farmed. They created the Majiayao culture (Zhang, 2006). The early economic development of Lanzhou occurred in three periods (the western Han dynasty,¹ the eastern Han dynasty² and Kingdom of Wei³) of discontinuity, which lasted for more than 450 years (Jin, 1999; Zhang, 2006). After the middle of the western Han Dynasty, the Silk Road opened. Lanzhou and the other 4 towns in the Hexi Corridor (Jiuquan, Zhangye, Dunhuang, Wuwei) were called "Five Towns in Hexi" along the Silk Road (Yang & Song, 1992).

Under the Sui Dynasty (581–618) the city became the seat of Lanzhou prefecture for the first time, the built-up area was about 0.5 km² (Guo & Wu, 1988; Yang & Song, 1992). At the beginning of the Ming Dynasty, Lanzhou doubled in size to 0.99 km² (Li and Zhang, 2008); its outer city (named Pass) at that time was twice as large as inner city (Xian, Zhang, Ai, & Wihelm, 1991; Zhang, 1974).

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +86 18893822920.

E-mail address: tonghl_mail@sina.com (H. Tong).¹ 202 BC–9 AD.² 25 AD–220 AD.³ 220 AD–265 AD.

Early in the Qing Dynasty the Chinese domain was gradually united once again.⁴ It was essential to set up a new province in the region including Gansu, Ningxia, and Xinjiang. Thus Gansu Province was founded and separated from the original Shaanxi Province. Henceforth Lanzhou city became the capital of Gansu Province due to its good location. There was a westernization movement in the late Qing dynasty, especially after the Qing General Zuo Zongtang started modern industry⁵ and developed education; Lanzhou gradually became the center of politics, economics and education and an important provincial capital city (Ding, 1989; Li, 1996; Yang & Song, 1992; Zhang, 2006).

In the 1920s and 1930s Lanzhou became a center of Soviet influence in northwestern China. During the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), Lanzhou, linked with Xi'an by highway and became the terminus of the 3200 km Chinese–Soviet highway, used as a route for Soviet supplies destined for the Xi'an area (Yang & Zhu, 1994). This highway remained the primary traffic route of northwestern China until the completion of the railway from Lanzhou to Urumqi, Xinjiang. In the 1940s Lanzhou became a center of the northwest highway network. However, a large amount of goods (furs, medical herbs) still had to be carried by draft animals and small boats made of sheepskin (Fig. 1a and b, except for passengers and a few more expensive materials: Xian et al., 1991).

Lanzhou city was designated as a municipality in 1941. The municipal limits at that time included the urban and suburban districts only, and did not include Gaolan Mountain and Yantan⁶ flat ground. Its area was only 16 km² and its population 86,000 (Lanzhou Ethnography, 1991; Ding, 1989; Liu, 2013). The municipal limits were enlarged in 1947 including the Gaolan Mountain and Yantan flat ground except the west plain on which the Xigu town was situated. Its area became 169.57 km² and its population was more than 180,000 (Ding, 1989; Liu, 2013; Xian et al., 1991). After the foundation of the PRC in 1949, economic construction was begun in the northwest in order to change the situation that the industries concentrated mainly along the coast in old China. Since then Lanzhou's urbanization has developed rapidly. This was heavily influenced by the Soviet Union with a strong emphasis on industrialization and military defense. After 60 years of development, Lanzhou has made tremendous progress in its economy and all aspects of social life.

Recent changes and contemporary conditions

Administrative organization

According to census data published by Lanzhou Statistical Bureau in 2013, Lanzhou covered an area of 13,100 km², with 3.63 million residents. The population density is 246 people/km². Some 2.03 million of the residents were classified as non-agricultural in the household registration system, which makes an urbanization level at 62.7%.

The jurisdiction boundary of Lanzhou was changed from time to time between 1950 and 1970. The current administrative system was the result of the most recent government reorganization in 1985 which removed Baiyin District and 3 towns of Gaolan to Baiyin City (Lanzhou Ethnography, 1991). Now Lanzhou was organized into 5 districts (Chengguan, Anning, Qilihe, Xigu and Honggu) and 3 counties of Yuzhong, Gaolan and Yongdeng (Fig. 2). These districts and county-level cities make up the second

tier of the local government, while the municipal government represents the first level of governance. The sub-district offices of the urban districts and townships within the county-level cities form the third tier of the administration system. In line with the implementation of self-governance, residents' committees and villagers' committees are organized voluntarily (Table 1).

For historical reasons, Chengguan District is viewed as the central downtown, which is located in the central south of Lanzhou, Anning District and Qilihe District are viewed as the sub-downtowns located in the northwest and south of Chengguan. Xigu is located further west and has remained as the traditional industrial area of the city. Xigu District specializes in petrochemical industry. Anning District is known for science, education and other social undertakings. Honggu District is a suburban district. Yuzhong, Gaolan and Yongdeng are the rural areas. Chengguan, Anning, Qilihe and Xigu district make up the main part of the central area of urban Lanzhou, covering a land area of 198.67 km² with a population of 1.87 million in 2012 (Lanzhou Municipal Statistical Yearbook, 2013).

Economic and urban development

Before 1949, there was hardly any infrastructural investment in Lanzhou and the built-up area of the city was only 16 km² (Li and Zhang, 2008; Lanzhou Ethnography, 1991). The central government has placed much emphasis on economic development since 1949. After that date, China developed a centrally planned economy in which urban development in different regions of the country came under the government's control. Lanzhou turned into an industrial city from a consumer city. In the past 60 years the industrial structure has undergone tremendous changes. However, the evolution of industrial structure in Lanzhou is not consistent with the general trajectory of the industrial structural evolution. As shown in Fig. 3, the contribution of agriculture showed a stable trend since 1954 with its share in GDP falling from 11.93% in 1954 to 2.94% in 2012, which was in line with the general evolution of the industrial structure. But the proportion of secondary industry showed the convex curve, and the tertiary industry showed a concave curve. Before 1955, the tertiary industry was higher than the proportion of secondary industry. This is mainly because Lanzhou is located in the junction of eastern China, Mongolia Plateau and Tibet Plateau, three natural zones, and such it is the major area of interaction and integration between the Han and minorities in northwest China. Gradually it became a trade, politics and military city. So the tertiary industry had occupied an important position in Lanzhou since early time. During 1953–1978, China had the “strong support” program for Lanzhou construction to promote the development of its industrial economy, thus there was a significant increase in the proportion of secondary industry. Since the 1980s, Lanzhou implemented the ‘northwest business city development strategy’ to promote the development of tertiary industry. So the proportion of tertiary industry started to go up after 1980. Since 2000, Lanzhou city development strategy has been changed into the implementation of “strong industry city” and a “city developed through science and education” strategy, so that the proportion of related industry has picked up, and the tertiary industry had a relative decline, Lanzhou started to evolve along a reasonable industrial structure track (Fig. 3).

According to the economic trajectory of Lanzhou, it can be divided into three phases (Fig. 4): a construction phase from 1949 to 1978, economic restructuring from 1979 to 2000, and re-engineering phase from 2001 to 2012.

1949–1978: Construction phase

After its liberation in 1949, Lanzhou entered a stage of socialist construction and development with a rate of expansion surpassing

⁴ Mongolia, Tibet, Qinghai and Xinjiang were under the control of the central government one after another since the middle of the 17th century, then the territory in northwest China became stable again (Yang, 1988).

⁵ Lanzhou machine manufacture and Lanzhou machine woven factory.

⁶ Yantan is in the northeast of Chengguan District, it was a township before, now it is governed under Yannan Street, Yanbei Street and Gaoxin Street.

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