



City profile

City profile: Chengdu



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ABSTRACT

Chengdu, located at the western edge of the Sichuan Basin, is the provincial capital of Sichuan Province. The fertile and well-watered basin has given the city a long and splendid history, which has left significant and lasting imprints on its urban form, landscape and cultural life. In the planned economy period, Chengdu serviced as the economic, cultural, logistical and technological center for southwest China, and built a competitive and broad industrial base which now helps the city maintain its leading position in the region. In 2007, Chengdu was assigned as one of two pioneer cities in coordinating urban–rural development. This paper introduces the urban development of Chengdu as a historical city, summarizes the city's economic growth, urban spatial transformation and infrastructure construction as a major city in western China, and discusses its recent efforts in coordinating urban–rural development as a pioneering city in China.

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Introduction

Chengdu's literal meaning is “forming (成, *cheng*) capital (都, *du*)” in Chinese, and it is one of the most historically important cities in China. It is the capital city of Sichuan Province, serving as a political, industrial, culture, logistics, and technology center in the province and a major economic center for the whole of southwest China. Chengdu is located in the Chengdu Plain of the Sichuan Basin, one of China's most fertile and well-watered regions, with a large expanse of flat cultivable arable land. The plain has been able to feed the region's population and export an agricultural surplus for millennia. In 2010 Sichuan Province had a population of 87,247,000 with a land area of 485,000 km², while Chengdu had a population of 14.05 million with a land area of 12,390 km² (CSB, 2011).

Given its historical importance, cultural richness, and economic strength, Chengdu was officially granted sub-provincial administrative status by the Central Government of China on February 25, 1994. After several rounds of administrative boundary adjustment, today Chengdu consists of nineteen separate administrative units—nine districts, four county-level cities, and six counties. There are 193 townships and 1771 village committee in Chengdu. The nine districts are located in the urban core and are quite dense and urban. The surrounding counties and cities are less dense. Fig. 1 shows the location of Chengdu and its urban districts, cities,

and counties. Administrative divisions and grassroots organizations of Chengdu are reported in Table 1.

Among other nicknames such as the “City of Hibiscus” (蓉城, *Rong Cheng*) and “Brocade City” (锦城, *Jin Cheng*), Chengdu has been known through history as the “Land of Abundance” (天府之国, *Tian Fu Zhi Guo*) because of its fertile Chengdu Plain. The Plain has been home to more than four thousand years of civilization, and boasts a distinct dialect, opera, art, music, and other arts and crafts. As for the city, the name, Chengdu, has remained unchanged for more than two thousand years since the 5th king of the Kaiming Kingdom, a local state of Shu (蜀) culture, moved his capital to the city's current location in the early 4th century B.C. The built-up area of Chengdu constructed then still belongs to the central city of Chengdu today. Millennia of civilization have left remarkable imprints on the city, which makes Chengdu a useful reference to understand urban planning and development through Chinese history.

An important feature differentiates this profile from the others: Chengdu's location in the west of China. Since the integration of China's economy into the world economic system, many cities in eastern China have experienced dramatic urban growth and spatial transformation. Shanghai and Beijing, for instance, have emerged as global cities in the world urban system, and even compete with the first-tier world cities such as New York, London, Tokyo and Paris. However, they are very different from most of the cities in western China.

Even a cursory glance at the city profiles of *Cities: The International Journal of Urban Policy and Planning* shows that cities in western China have received far less attention from scholars than cities in eastern, coastal China. The Chinese cities documented in the

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Fig. 1. Location of Chengdu and the districts, cities, and counties in Chengdu.

series include Qingdao (Zhang & Rasiah, 2013), Beijing (Yang, Cai, Ottens, & Sliuzas, 2013), Xiamen (Tang, Zhao, Yin, & Zhao, 2013), Zhuhai (Sheng & Tang, 2013), Urumqi (Dong & Zhang, 2011), Macau (Tang & Sheng, 2009), Wuhan (Han & Wu, 2004), Guangzhou (Xu & Yeh, 2003), Chongqing (Han & Wang, 2001), and Baoji (Wang & Hague, 1995). Among them only three are in western China: Urumqi, Chongqing and Baoji, despite the fact that the western China includes 12 provinces or autonomous regions and

occupies 72% of China's total land area. Chengdu was set as a key center in China's national "Grand Western Development" campaign launched in 2000 to bring the level of development in western China closer to the level of more developed cities in coastal China (Goodman, 2004). As national policy shifts more resources and attention to the west of the country, this profile aims to redress the balance in urban development literature by shedding light on western China.

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