



Suzhou History

Suzhou is one of the oldest cities in the Yangtze Basin dating back more than 2,500 years. The approximate boundaries of the present-day city was established by the ruler of the state of Wu during the Spring and Autumn (Chunqiu) period (770–476 BC) of the Dong (Eastern) Zhou dynasty. Under the Qin dynasty (221–207 BC), it became the seat of a county, Wuxian, and of the Kuaiji commander, who controlled most of present-day Jiangsu south of the Yangtze and Zhejiang province.

With the building of the Grand Canal, Suzhou became an administrative and commercial center for an area that rapidly developed into the major rice-surplus region of China. Under the Song (960–1279) and the Yuan (1206–1368) dynasties, Suzhou continued to flourish. In the 13th century the Venetian traveler Marco Polo visited it and commented on its splendors. Wusong River and Suzhou Creek gave the city direct access to the sea, and Suzhou became a port for foreign shipping, until the silting of the Yangtze River delta and the irrigation and reclamation works that went on continually impeded access. Under the Ming (1368–1644) and early Qing (1644–1911/12) dynasties, Suzhou reached a peak of its prosperity. The city was home to many wealthy landowning families and quickly became a center for scholars and the arts as well as an important source of commercial capital and a finance and banking center. Sources of the city's wealth included the silk industry and embroidery.

From 1860 to 1863 during the Taiping Rebellion (1850–64), Suzhou was occupied by the Taiping leader Li Xiucheng. Although it was one of the few places in which Taiping reform policies seem to have been effectively carried out, the city was, nevertheless, largely destroyed. It was restored in the late 19th century, but its commercial supremacy was then challenged by nearby Shanghai. Under the Treaty of Shimonoseki (between China and Japan in 1895), Suzhou was opened for foreign trade. Before World War II the area was adversely affected by foreign competition, and the silk industry, most of which was on a small handicraft scale, was hard hit. Around that time some modern factories manufacturing satins and cotton fabrics were established, and a large electric power generating plant was set up; however, until the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, there was little modern industry. Suzhou was occupied by the Japanese from 1937 until the war's end in 1945.

In 1981, Suzhou City was listed by the State Council as one of the four cities of historical and cultural heritage protection. Since then, Suzhou has developed into one of the most prosperous cities in China. Suzhou's economy represents the highest growth and the fastest expansion in the past 5-10 years in the region and in China. The city's GDP has surpassed other neighboring cities except Shanghai. More than 80 of the world's top 500 corporations, as listed by *Fortune* magazine, have set up offices within the city.

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