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CIAOGCR PN 61-2684-75 PRO CITY BRIEF SU-CHOU  
NOVEMBER 1975 UNCLASSIFIED PN 61.2684-75

1 OF 1

# PRC CITY BRIEF

*Su-chou* 蘇州



CIA/OGCR/GD  
PN 61.2684/75  
November 1975

SU-CHOU

(pronounced su-joe)

Chinese romanized system of spelling:	Suzhou			
Meaning in Chinese:	plentiful water			
Location:	31°20'N 120°37'E (approx. latitude of Savannah, Georgia)			
Elevation:	30 feet above sea level			
Population:	800,000 (estimated)			
Climate:	<u>Jan</u>	<u>April</u>	<u>July</u>	<u>Oct</u>
Mean daily maximum temperature (°F)	47	67	91	75
Mean daily minimum temperature (°F)	32	49	75	56
Mean number of days with precipitation	10	13	11	9
Mean monthly precipitation (inches)	1.8	2.7	5.4	1.2

SU-CHOU

General

Su-chou, about 50 miles west of Shanghai, is an important cultural and commercial center of approximately 800,000 people in southern Kiangsu Province. The city is noted for its scenic beauty -- and traditionally for the beauty of its women -- and probably ranks second only to Hang-chou, about 90 miles to the south, as a tourist attraction. Su-chou's gardens are especially well-known and several of them represent the best of the Chinese art of garden architecture. As a favorite holiday spot for Chinese and foreigners alike, Su-chou is one of the most accessible urban areas in the PRC: the city is on the main railroad line between Shanghai and Nan-ching; road transport to the city is good, and two navigable canals also connect it with Shanghai.

Su-chou is situated on the flat delta plain of the Yangtze River. Thousands of swamps, ponds, and lakes dot the surface and the entire area is crisscrossed by a maze of canals. Practically every agricultural commune in the Su-chou area is accessible by canal and most villages have their own wharves and docking facilities. Except for a few small hills west of the city, the land in the vicinity of Su-chou is intensively cultivated and the entire region (known locally as Chiang-nan -- south of the Yangtze) is one of China's most fertile and densely settled agricultural areas. Rural population densities of 1,000 people per square mile are not unusual and exceed 2,500 in some localities.

Rice, wheat, and rape are the main crops; tea is grown as a specialty crop. Total food production from this region is large but per capita output is small. Most of the work is done with traditional tools and methods, the high water table precludes the use of mechanized farm equipment. Silk production is also important locally and the Su-chou region ranks as China's most important silkworm breeding area. In recent years much effort has reportedly gone into rejuvenating and expanding the areas devoted to mulberry orchards, particularly along the shores of nearby T'ai Hu, a large but shallow lake noted for its scenery and abundant fishery resources. The mulberry plots, usually located near ponds and canals, are distinctive features; so much mud has been dredged from the waterways and plastered on these sites as fertilizer that they commonly are from 3 to 6 feet above the level of the adjoining ricefields.

Fall, which lasts from October to mid-November, is the best time to tour the Chiang-nan region. The heat of summer has dissipated somewhat and the days are pleasantly warm. Daily maximum temperatures average about 70°F and drop 20 degrees during the night. Rain occurs on about every 4th day. The relatively short spring (April and May) is another pleasant season, although temperatures are slightly higher than in the fall and rain is more frequent. Daily maximum temperatures average in the low 70s and it rains about every 3 days. Although Su-chou is near the east coast and at a latitude comparable to Savannah, Georgia, winters in Su-chou -- which last until late March -- can be surprisingly cold. The most uncomfortably cold month is February when dry winds flow southward into the area from the much colder North China Plain and temperatures drop to slightly below freezing for short periods. Probably the worst season for travelers is summer, temperatures and humidity are oppressively high and rainfall is frequent. Summer begins in June with the onset of the "Plum Rains" -- a period of prolonged, drizzly, gray weather that frequently waterlogs fields, floods reservoirs and lowlying areas, and disrupts the local agricultural schedule by delaying the planting of summer rice.

#### The City Today

Founded in the fifth century B.C., Su-chou remains a uniquely Chinese city that has preserved much of its traditional appearance and has largely retained its economic focus based on handicrafts. Surrounded by a canal, the old city is densely populated and remarkably undisturbed by new construction or motor vehicle traffic; many of the city streets are so narrow that vehicles cannot pass. Unlike most large Chinese cities, Su-chou has experienced a relatively small and controlled suburban industrial growth in recent years. The suburbs in Su-chou have few factories or workers apartments and pagodas are almost as common as factory chimneys.

A distinctive feature of Su-chou is its extensive network of canals which serve as major thoroughfares. As early as the 15th century under the Ming Dynasty, Su-chou became a national center of trade, finance, and industry and traffic flowed into the town by at least 20 main canals, each with its own city gate. Although several waterways have been filled in recent years to accommodate the increasing road traffic, they still play an important role in the transportation of a large proportion of the city's freight. The numerous canals -- spanned by arched bridges and lined with houses that rise directly from their edges -- impart a Venetian flavor to the city, known by many as the "Venice of the Orient." The most famous local waterway is the Grand Canal,

located immediately west of the city. The largest internal waterway in the world, it was constructed to carry tribute rice from the Yangtze plain north to Peking. While the canal is no longer used for long-distance hauls, that portion adjacent to Su-chou is heavily trafficked and provides an important means of communication in this watery environment. The canal's embankments are generally well-constructed masonry structures with a towpath located on top -- used almost exclusively by people in harness. The width of the canal averages 100 feet but narrows to about 30 feet at the numerous picturesque stone bridges that arch gracefully over the waterway. Depths average 7 to 10 feet during the high water season, adequate for small river steamers. There are no locks on the Grand Canal in the vicinity of Su-chou and long lines of cargo barges carrying agricultural products and raw materials from commune fields en route to urban processing plants or warehouses are common sights.

Aside from food production, silk manufacturing has been the leading industry since the 14th century and the few local mills produce a large share of China's best quality silk textiles and embroideries destined for export markets. Other traditional industries include food processing and the production of handicraft items, such as tapestries, velvets, and sandalwood fans.

The Tientsin Treaties of the mid-1800s opened Su-Chou, along with several other major Yangtze river basin cities, to foreign concessions, and an active modern industrial trade soon developed in the southern part of the town. Some of the well-landscaped, spacious residences and several of the factories of the foreign business representatives are still standing in this sector. Foreign interests also developed a second commercial/industrial district north-northwest of the city when the railroad connecting Nan-ching and Shanghai was built in the latter part of the 19th century. A third industrial district, dating largely from 1949, has been established west of the city and contains most of Su-chou's showplace factories and apartments. One of the largest plants in this area builds flat-bottomed concrete lighters for use on the region's complex web of waterways. Other industries include a few small chemical, metal fabrication, and ceramics plants.

#### Gardens, Resorts, and Epicurean Traditions

Excursions to Su-chou's celebrated Sung, Yuan, Ming, and Ch'ing Dynasty gardens are a must for many visitors. The city boasts over a hundred gardens, but only about a dozen are open for public viewing and probably only half that number can be seen at a leisurely pace in a single day. Numerous pavilions, pagodas,

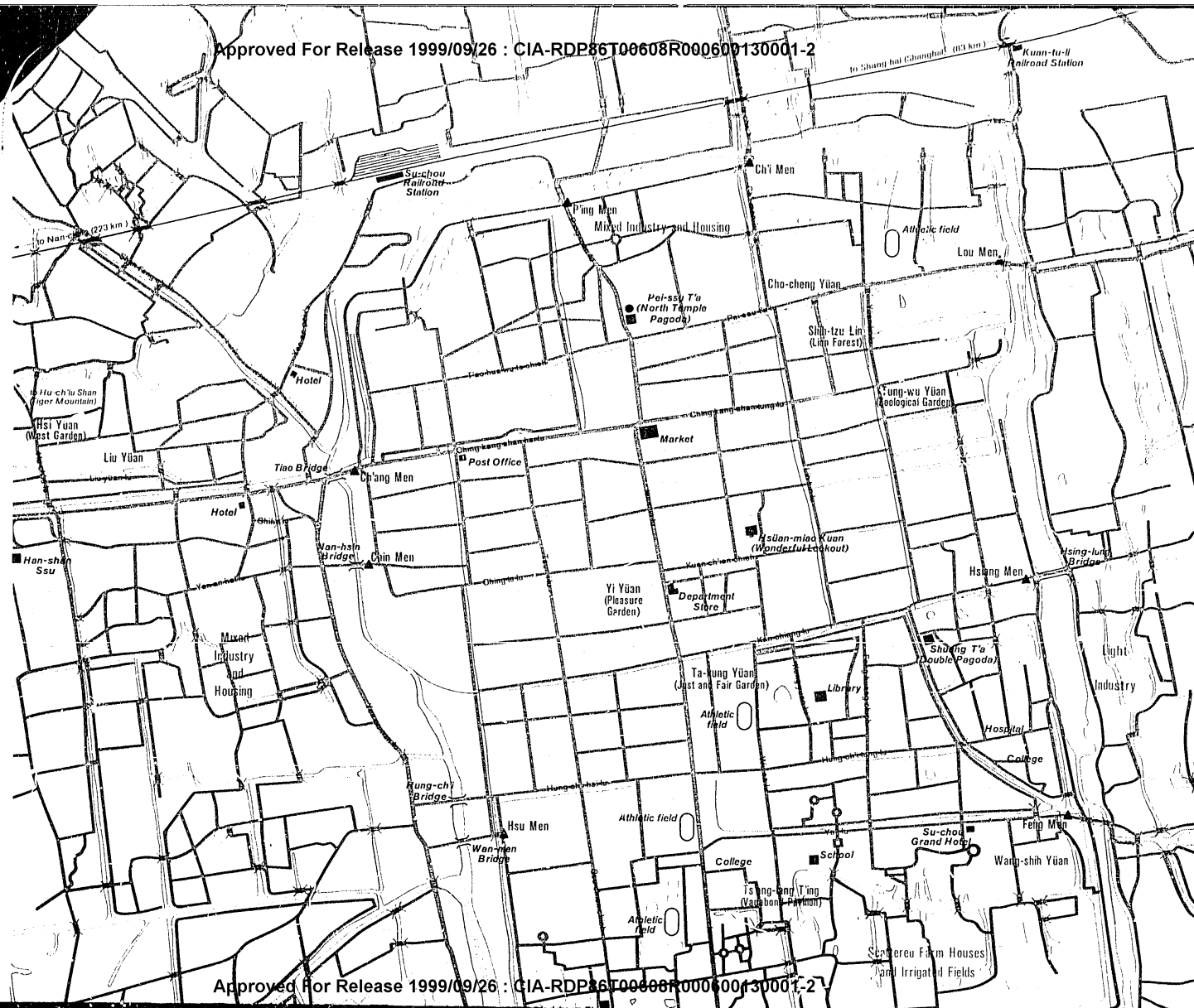
and temples are also located throughout the city and its outskirts and add to Su-chou's impressive catalog of tourist sights.

An interesting overnight trip can be taken to the picturesque T'ai Hu, only about 15 miles to the west of Su-chou. The delightful scenery, hot springs, and relatively plush vacation resorts also attract vacationing Chinese from other parts of the country. While the guest lists at most of the resorts are filled with the names of Chinese government and military officials, some of the hotels have accommodations reserved exclusively for common workers, sent here on all-expense-paid vacations by their factories as a reward for exemplary work efforts.

Su-chou has a deserved reputation as a place for good eating. The city's restaurants -- usually small and spartan in furnishings -- have traditionally attracted many regular patrons from as far away as Nan-ching and Shanghai. The restaurants do an especially brisk business during the city's numerous food festivals, the most popular ones coinciding with the change of seasons. Fish and rice, the two items that dominate the region's food output, are generally featured.

One of the most esteemed festivals, a crab feast, occurs in early autumn. Area fishermen congregate at Yang-ch'eng Hu, a small shallow lake 5 miles to the northeast of Su-chou, and armed with bamboo traps, capture crabs as they emerge from crevices where they have just laid eggs. The prepared crabmeat, called Ta-chahsieh, is considered a delicacy by gastronome and farmer alike.

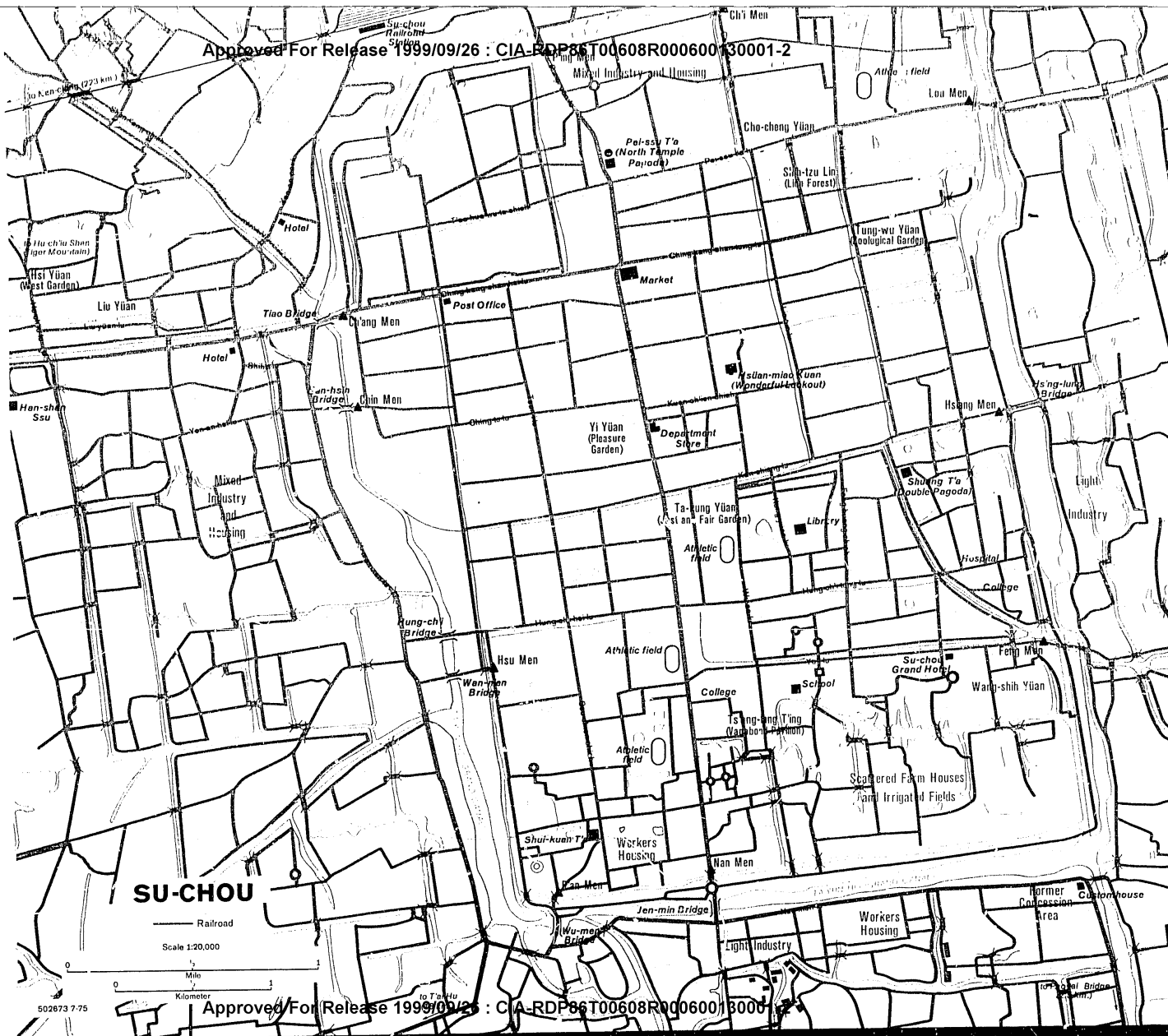
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SU-CHOU

Scale 1:20,000

Mile  
Kilometer

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