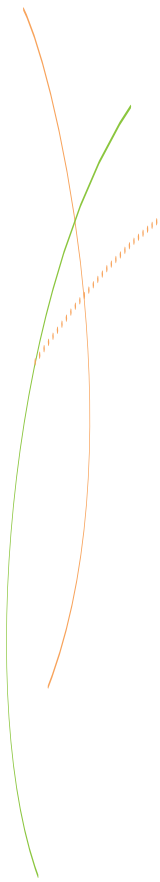


WILDFLOWERS INSTITUTE

OVERVIEW OF PRESENT-DAY NINGBO



OVERVIEW OF PRESENT-DAY NINGBO

Weisheng Liu

Ningbo today is a city of just under six million. It is located a little less than one hundred miles south of Shanghai, across Hangzhou Bay. The city is situated in the northeast corner of Zhejiang province and is about the size of metropolitan Washington, D.C.¹ Ningbo is divided into a rough Y shape by the intersection of three rivers, and it has been a major port since the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE), especially for trade with Japan. Today, Ningbo has the second-largest port in China behind the rival port of Shanghai, though Ningbo handles mostly bulk cargo that is too heavy for Shanghai’s relatively shallow waters.² Historically, Ningbo was known for its merchants and entrepreneurial spirit as well as for the fierce loyalty of its people to their home city. The name Ningbo dates from 1381 CE and means “calm waves,” a reference to the water around the city, which is sheltered by an archipelago of more than five hundred islands.



All of China is divided into the same governmental hierarchy. Ningbo is the second-largest city in Zhejiang province, behind the capital of Hangzhou, and is divided into six administrative districts. The three urban districts are separated by the intersection of the Fenghua River from the southwest, the Yongjiang River from the northeast, and the Yuyao River from the northwest. Each of the three urban districts has a population of more than two hundred thousand, with seven to eight subdistricts (or equivalents) under its jurisdiction. Each subdistrict contains a number of neighborhoods that in turn house approximately six to seven thousand people. The *Economist* noted that in 2003 Ningbo was the first big city in China to conduct direct elections for committee leaders in every neighborhood of an entire district.³

1 Frank Rose, *Hello Ningbo* (2004), http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/12.04/ningbo_pr.html (accessed September 12, 2005).

2 Bill Savadove, “Forgotten Ningbo Emerges from Shadows of Shanghai to Prosper,” *South China Morning Post*, September 2, 2002: 9, *Proquest*, Online (accessed September 12, 2005).

3 *A Qualified Vote* (2003), http://www.economist.com/displaystory.cfm?story_id=1682672 (accessed September 12, 2005).

Haishu, the urban district southwest of the intersection of the rivers, is where the city was founded at its present site. The district is slightly less than eighteen square miles and has a population of 263,000.⁴ Haishu has always been the seat of government, commerce, and culture. Zhongshan Road, the main commercial road in Ningbo, runs from east to west through the center of Haishu. Moon Lake is in the center of Haishu and has always been the cultural center for Ningbo. The oldest existing private library in China, Tianyi Pavilion, dating back 430 years, is right on the lake. Also prominent in Haishu is the Tianfeng pagoda, which dates from the Tang dynasty.

Jiangbei, the second urban district, is north of the fork where the rivers meet. Jiangbei contains the old foreign concession and a “cultural corridor” that includes art institutions, sports and recreation facilities, and a European and colonial section.⁵ The third urban district, to the east of the rivers’ intersection, is Jiangdong. Because the main roads in Haishu run from west to east, it was natural for Ningbo to extend the roads into Jiangdong with the first bridge. Jiangdong is home to one of the old merchant guilds and temples and is near Ningbo University. Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek was born in a town twenty miles southwest of downtown Ningbo, where his parents were salt merchants.

Rapid growth has kept unemployment down and brought more than a million migrant workers to the city in search of work.⁶ According to the Fifth Census of Ningbo in 2000, the city’s permanent population grew by just over 17 percent from just over five million in 1990, mostly through natural growth.⁷ In 2000, Chinese ethnic minorities represented barely over half a percent of the population, and almost all of them have arrived since 1990.⁸ In Ningbo, the aging population is growing, the birth rate is slowing, and the size of households is shrinking. Less than 4 percent of the population has a college education or higher, though that is about three times as many a decade ago, and in the same period illiteracy has dropped to less than half of what it was.

Ningbo’s economy is doing well, thanks to entrepreneurs in the city and their loyalty to it. Ningbo never became a center for state industry after the Communist Party came to power in 1949. But when China began to open up to the free market in the 1980s, many businessmen and government and party leaders displayed their historic loyalty to their city. Taiwanese companies, foreign investors, and returning Ningbo natives (more than three hundred thousand people of Ningbo origin live overseas) have poured billions of U.S. dollars into Ningbo to take advantage of its good transport links as a base for manufacturing goods such as textiles and electronic products.⁹ The city has 50,500 private firms and 210,000 entrepreneurs, who account for two-thirds of the economy. In 2008, the world’s longest bridge will connect Shanghai and Ningbo across the Hangzhou bay. The bridge will cut the driving time between the two port cities in half, to less than two hours.¹⁰ However, port competition between Shanghai and Ningbo is still strong, and Shanghai has lobbied Beijing to spend \$12 billion to build its own deep-water port on its outlying islands.¹¹

4 *Haishu General* (2003), <http://www.haishu.gov.cn/english/General.asp> (accessed September 12, 2005).

5 *Jiangbei District* (2002), <http://www1.ningbo.gov.cn/en/page02-09.html> (accessed September 12, 2005).

6 Savadove, “Forgotten Ningbo Emerges from Shadows of Shanghai to Prosper.”

7 *Main Population Data from the Fifth Census of Ningbo in 2000* (2002), <http://www1.ningbo.gov.cn/en/page10-02.html> (accessed September 12, 2005).

8 Ibid.

9 Savadove, “Forgotten Ningbo Emerges from Shadows of Shanghai to Prosper.”

10 Richard McGregor, “The Shanghai Effect: Galvanising Smaller Cities in the Delta,” *Financial Times*, April 28, 2003: 1, JSTOR, Online (accessed September 12, 2005)

11 Ibid.

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