



CHANGSHA: CONSTRUCTION CENTRAL



CHANGSHA: BASIC INFORMATION		World Rank	Similar To
Urban Area Population (2010)	2,750,000	128	Taiyuan, Rome, Dakar
Projection (2025)	3,725,000	123	Berlin, Seattle, Melbourne
Urban Land Area: Square Miles (2008)	160	220	Recife, Stuttgart, South Bend
Urban Land Area: Square Kilometers	410		
Density: Per Square Mile (2007)	16,100	359	Osaka-Kobe-Kyoto, Tianjin, Cordoba (Argentina)
Density: Per Square Kilometer (2007)	6,200		
*Continuously built up area (Urban agglomeration)			
Land area & density rankings among the approximately 850 urban areas with 500,000+ population.			
Data from <i>Demographia World Urban Areas</i> (http://www.demographia.com/db-worldua.pdf)			

10 February 2010

Changsha is the capital of Hunan province and one of China's most forward looking metropolitan areas. It is often said that China has three furnaces: [Chongqing](#), [Wuhan](#) and [Nanjing](#), an honor conveyed because of their incredibly hot and humid summer weather. The people of Changsha will tell you that China has four furnaces, with the fourth being Changsha and I can verify it. China's furnaces are indeed uncomfortable places if you, like most westerners, do not have the time to obtain a Chinese drivers license that would permit you to drive around in an air conditioned rental car. When touring one of the furnaces by foot and generally non-air conditioned taxi, each of the four furnaces are very hot. Mercifully, on the afternoon of my first day in Changsha, the weather cooled off unexpectedly, it rained and it remained comfortable for a few days.

The Setting: Changsha is located on the Xiang River, a major tributary of Chang Jiang (the Yangtze River). At Changsha, the Xiang River is approximately 0.6 miles wide (1 kilometer) and there is a series of narrow islands in the as the river flows by the middle of the urban area. The largest part of Changsha is on the east side of the river, however the urbanization spreads to the west as well, with perhaps one-third on the west bank. Changsha is located between Wuhan and [Guangzhou](#) and is the major stop on the new high speed rail line, which is the world's fastest. That line opened after our visit.

Changsha's layout is similar to that of [Taiyuan](#), capital of Shanxi. Like Taiyuan, the main railway station is well to the west of the river. The main east-west street ends at the station and continues to cross the river, where it becomes the principal street on the west side of the river.

Location: Changsha is well located in reference to other markets in China. China's expressway system, which will exceed the length of the US interstate system before too long, provides effective mobility to [Shanghai](#), [Hangzhou](#), Fuzhou, Wuhan and the [Pearl River Delta](#), the largest expanse of virtually continuous urbanization in the world. These urban areas are from 450 to 700 miles away (700 to 1,100 kilometers). As manufacturing labor costs rise on the east coast and as the interest in decentralizing activities and limiting the growth of coastal urban areas rises, urban areas such as Changsha are likely to prosper.

Big Plans: Changsha has big plans. The urban area itself is growing about as fast as any in China, with the possible exception of [Shenzhen](#) and [Dongguan](#). At the beginning of the decade, the core urban area had a population of under 1,500,000, which has since risen to over 2,750,000. By 2020, local officials project a population of 3,250,000. The core urban area is virtually surrounded by new suburbs, which are described below.

Changsha is cooperating with the neighboring Xiangtan and Zuzhou regions to the south to develop a regional high technology sector. The urban area of Xiangtan is 12 miles (20 kilometers) from the Changsha urban periphery and Zuzhou is 16 (26 kilometers) miles away. Both urban areas are also on the Xiang River. Xiangtan was also the birthplace and childhood home of Mao Zedong.

Also, typical of Chinese urban areas, there are large numbers of older multi-unit residential buildings arranged in rows. Chinese associates advise that such buildings were generally constructed in the 1980s and 1990s. Newer construction rings the core, with much higher rise residential buildings. One of the most distinguished features of the older urban area sections is a network of underground pedestrian street crossings, with entrances that look like Metro stops.

The Old Core: Like many urban areas, Changsha has both an old and a new business core. The main business core is approximately three miles (5 kilometers) east of the river. The main railway (Slide 6) and bus stations are located in this area (Slides 3-15). A new high speed rail station has been built to the south of the core.

The New Core: The newer business center is near the river and includes a number of modern high rise buildings (Slides 16-32). However, even with the new construction, the development is sparse enough that there is a considerable amount of older construction in the area.

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The New Suburban Developments: Changsha is ringed by new towns and new development, in a way that is impressive even for China. Major developments are found in virtually all directions. All of the developments have the wide grid of streets that are typical of new developments in China.

The Northeast: Xin Ma is a new development to the northeast and is composed principally of residential buildings and shopping centers (Slides 33-40). The residential buildings are from 20 to 40 floors and there is considerable land yet to be developed. There is also a large number of villas --- single family detached housing --- that cannot be accessed except through security. Overall, the new development in the northeast will cover approximately 30 square miles (90 square kilometers).

The North: Lao Xia is a smaller area of new residential to the north, along the east bank of the Xiang River (Slides 41-50). This more linear development includes a major university. This development will cover about 10 square miles (25 square kilometers) and the density of completed development is less than that of the northeast development. Many residential buildings are approximately 40 floors and one development contains so many large towers that it resembles the Marina area of Dubai (Slides 48-49), though the architecture is less diverse. This area has villas to the northeast.

The West: Hexi is a development of considerable size to the west, across the Xiang River (Slides 51-61). There are new civic buildings on the northern fringe of this development. Much of the additional development is high-rise residential, with buildings of up to 40 floors. This development covers about 14 square miles (35 square kilometers) and the density of completed development is similar to that of the northwest. There are also villas in the area.

The South: Mun Yun is to the south, on the east side of the Xiang River (slides 62-74). This development covers 25 square miles (60 square kilometers). This area has high rise residential buildings, many mid-rise residential buildings and large commercial centers. There is still plenty of land to be developed, with many of the high-rises surrounded by substantial empty space. The logo for this *Rental Car Tour* is taken from the new southern development (Slide 63), which catches much of the essence of current urban China --- cars, high rises and construction cranes. There are also villas on the eastern edge of this development.

A Leading Urban Area: The extent of development and new construction in the Changsha urban area appears to be greater in proportion to the urban area than elsewhere in China. Changsha's vision may be the most aggressive in the nation.

Cities in China ([Urban Definitions](#))

Analysts are often confused by the “city” terminology used in China. No “city” illustrates this more than the municipality of Chongqing, by virtue of its overwhelming size and population, the vast majority of which is rural (not urban). Cities in China are regions.

The following, from our article in *NewGeography.com* elaborates on the term “city” and misunderstandings surrounding it (Source: <http://www.newgeography.com/content/001076-on-cities-ghg-emissions-apples-oranges>).

Whenever someone starts talking about “cities,” it is best to ask what they mean. The word “cities” has so many meanings and is subject to such confusion that I generally avoid using it.

“Cities” might be municipalities, such as the city of [New York](#) or the ville de Paris.

Cities could be urban areas (urbanized areas or urban agglomerations), which are the urban footprints one observes from an airplane on a clear night.

- *“Cities” could be metropolitan areas, which are labor markets and are generally larger than urban areas, because people commute from rural areas (outside the urban footprint) to work in the urban area.*
- *In nearly the entire world, with the exception of China, urban areas and metropolitan areas are larger than municipalities.*

Or, “cities” could be used in the sense of Chinese prefectural, sub-provincial or provincial level cities, which tend to be far larger than any reasonable definition of a metropolitan area. Nearly all of China is divided into cities, in the same way that most of the United States is divided into counties.

These Chinese “cities” themselves often contain county level “cities” that are separate from the principal urban areas.

These differing definitions of municipalities make any international comparison of these entities difficult and often misleading. The ville de Paris represents barely 20 percent of the [Paris](#) region. The “city” of Atlanta represents barely 10 percent of its metropolitan area. The “city” of Melbourne represents only 5 percent of its metropolitan area. Yet, other “cities” are larger than their metropolitan areas, such as Chongqing, China, which has at least five times the population of its genuine metropolitan area (the “city” covers an area the size of Austria or Indiana). The city of San Antonio, with its vast stretches of suburbanization is surely not comparable to the city of Hartford, which is dominated by an urban core.

Any genuine comparison of “cities” must be at the metropolitan area or urban area level. These definitions both represent the city as the organism it is, rather than simply the happenstance of municipal boundaries. Of course, comparisons must be either between metropolitan areas or urban areas to be valid. It will not do to compare metropolitan areas with urban areas; they are as apples and oranges. Moreover, there are no international standards for delineation of metropolitan areas, which makes metropolitan comparisons more complex.

[Description of the Series](#)

[The Megacity Book](#)

[World Urban Areas: Population & Density of All Urban Areas over 500,000](#)

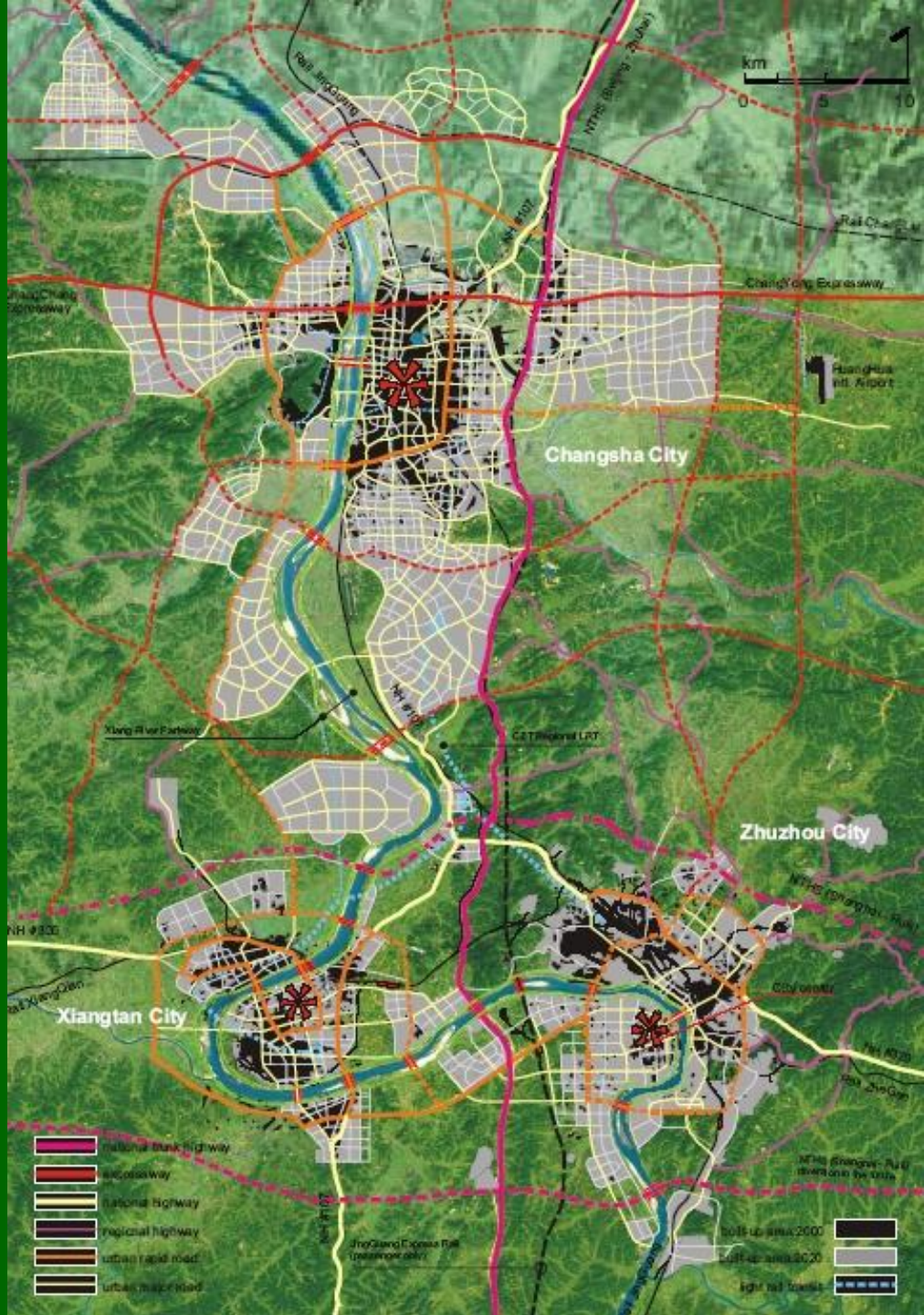
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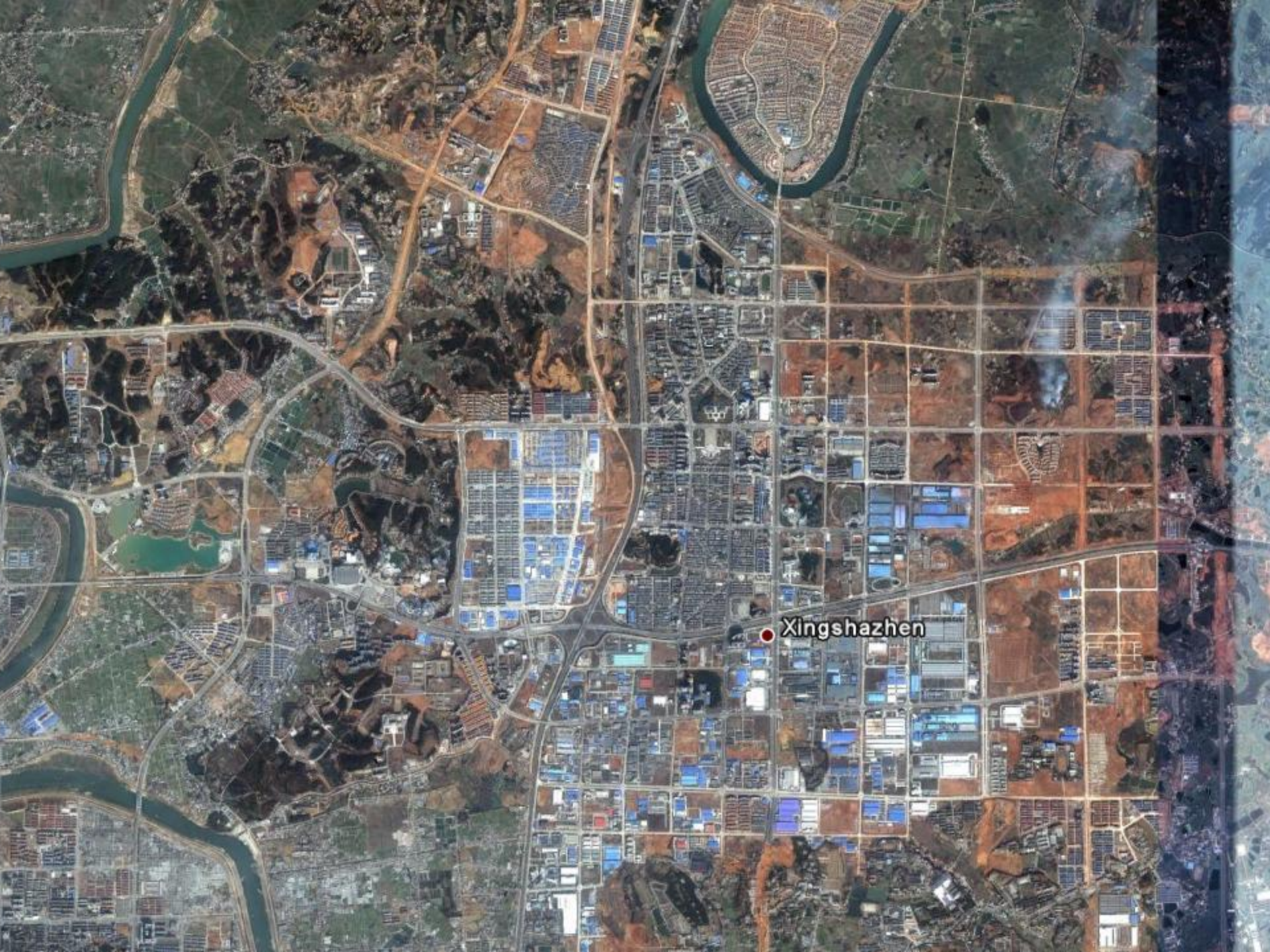
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Northeast (Xin Ma)



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**North
(Lao Xia)**



















餐 下

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**West
(Hexi)**



Leifengzhen

















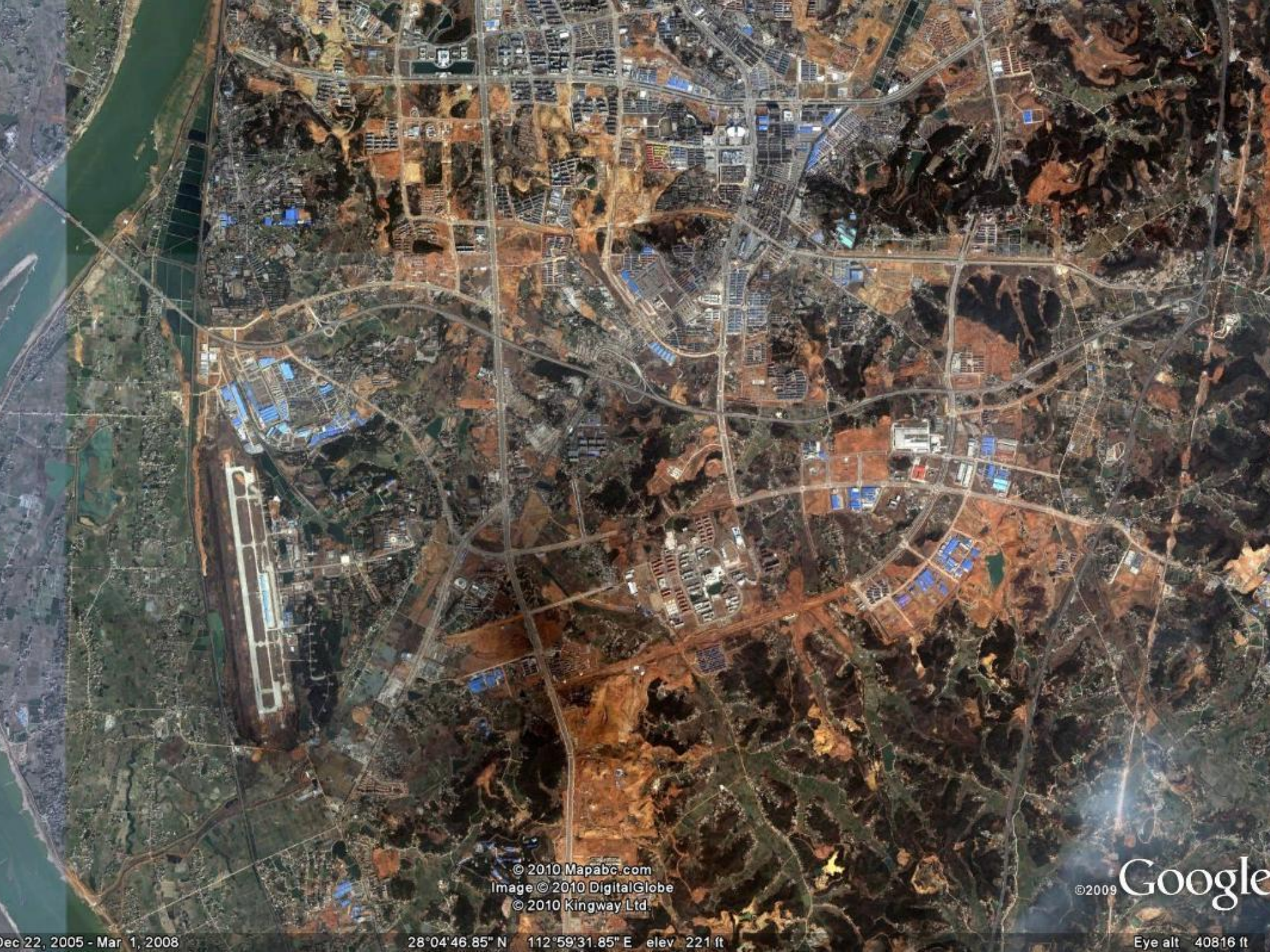


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CHANGSHA RENTAL CAR TOUR



South (Mun Yun)



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