Province of south central China, bounded to the north by Hubei, to the east by Jiangxi, to the south by Guangdong and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, and to the west by Guizhou and Sichuan; area 210,500 sq km/81,300 sq mi; population (2013 est) 66,906,000. The capital is Changsha; other main cities and towns are Hengyang, Shaoyang, Xiangtan, and Zhuzhou. The main industries are non-ferrous minerals, engineering, chemicals, and electrical goods. Agriculture is the main basis of the province's economy and is based on the cultivation of rice, sweet potatoes, maize, tea, tobacco, and rapeseed.

Although mining and industry have been developed since 1949, Hunan's economy remains mostly agricultural. Hunan ranks first among China's provinces in rice production. Most of Hunan's arable land is farmed using modern techniques, including mechanized irrigation and chemical fertilizers. Most farms are small, however, and mechanization has been confined to the use of simple machines and tools, such as rice transplan ters, foot-operated rice-threshing machines, and a tube water raiser that is replacing the old wooden trough and paddles.

History Hubei was the centre of the powerful Eastern Zhou Kingdom between the 8th and 3rd centuries BC, which, at its greatest, extended into the neighbouring areas of the province. It was conquered by the Qin dynasty in 221 BC and incorporated into their newly-unified empire. Large-scale Chinese migration into the region did not start until the 8th century. In the late 1920s the border area with Jiangxi province became the principal stronghold of the Chinese communists. The farmhouse birthplace of Mao Zedong (1893–1976; head of state of China 1949–59) is in Shaoshan.

Topography The province is generally hilly and coincides with the drainage area of the Dongting Lake, which in turn drains into the Chang Jiang River. The principal rivers feeding the lake are the Xiang Jiang, the Zi Jiang, the Yuan Jiang, and the Li Jiang. Level land alternates with hills, and the lower hillslopes are often extensively terraced for agriculture.

Climate Hunan has hot summers, with July average temperatures around 28°C/82°F. Winters are mild, with January temperatures averaging around 6°C/43°F. The province experiences heavy rains, with nearly half the rainfall occurring from April to June; average annual rainfall is around 1,700 mm/70 in, higher in the south of the province and lower in the north. Changsha's July average temperature of 30°C/86°F makes it one of the hottest cities in China.

Economy Hunan is still predominantly agricultural. Rice, including modern hybrid varieties, is by far the most important crop, and the province is China's leading producer; output has been greatly increased through the use of mechanized irrigation and chemical fertilizers. Tea is also widely grown on the lower hillslopes. Other important crops are cotton, tobacco, and hemp.

Hunan is rich in minerals, particularly non-ferrous minerals; it is the leading province in China in the
production of antimony and mercury. Manganese, lead, zinc, tungsten, and tin are also mined. The principal antimony-producing centre is at Xikuangshan.
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