



CHINA

A COUNTRY PROFILE FROM INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS, INC.

GEOGRAPHY

The People's Republic of China is the third largest nation in the world, trailing only Russia and Canada. The country covers an area of 3.7 million square miles, stretching more than 3,000 miles from east to west and roughly 2,500 miles from north to south. The capital is Beijing (often called Peking in the West), located in the northeast part of the country.

China's 14,000-mile land touches North Korea, the former Soviet Union, Mongolia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bhutan, Myanmar, Laos, Nepal, and Vietnam. The country's coastline, bordering the southeastern edge of China, is enriched from north to south by the Yellow Sea, the East China

Sea, the Taiwan Strait, and the South China Sea.

The Great Wall of China spans 1,500 miles and averages 25 feet in height.

A large part of China's enormous land mass is covered by mountains and deserts—especially in the west, south, and southeast. As a result, most people live in the fertile central and eastern coastal regions, where abundant rivers and plains provide favorable agricultural conditions.

China can be divided into three major topographical regions. The southwestern region contains the Tibetan Plateau, with its central portion, featuring the Himalayan Mountains, referred to as "the roof of the world."

The northwestern section of the country consists of highlands marked with extensive basin areas. The eastern region contains the country's low-lying areas.

China is served by two major rivers: the Yangtze River, the second-largest river in the world, running 3,900 miles, and Yellow River, traditionally regarded as the cradle of Chinese civilization.

China's climate is similar to that of the U.S., with generally hot summers and cold winters, but also a great deal of regional diversity. Monsoon rains cause frequent summer floods.

PEOPLE & LANGUAGE

China's 1.29 billion people account for over

20 percent of the Earth's people, making it the most populous density of more than 300 people per square mile.

To reduce the annual growth rate (estimated at .57 percent), the government encourages family planning programs by offering incentives in the form of money, housing, and educational opportunities for families that have only one child. This policy applies mainly to the Han Chinese, by far the largest ethnic group in China, constituting nearly 92 percent of the entire population.

More than 56 ethnic groups are recognized in China. The non-Han groups, while far smaller numbers, occupy roughly 90 percent of the border territories.

Eight major languages and more than 600 dialects are spoken throughout China.

Mandarin Chinese, also called “Putonghua,” is spoken by roughly 75 percent of the population and is the country’s official language.

MAJOR CITY CENTERS

Shanghai, with over 13 million people, tops the list of over 40 cities in China with more than one million inhabitants. The capital city of Beijing is the second largest with over 11 million people.

Other major cities include: Tianjin (9.5 million), Shenyang (7.3), Wuhan (8.03), and Canton (6.6).

Despite the proliferation of huge cities, 80 percent of Chinese live in rural areas.

POLITICAL HISTORY

China’s history extends back 22 centuries before Christ. It is believed that the name China (meaning “the center of the world”) originated in the time of the Qin Dynasty (221-206

B.C.), when Qin Shi Huang was the emperor. He was the first emperor to establish a unified China. A succession of dynasties ruled the nation until 1911, when Sun Yat-sen overthrew the Qing Dynasty.

Here are some other noteworthy facts about China’s contemporary political history:

- In 1921, the Chinese Communist party was formed, and Mao Zedong, was one of the participants.
- In 1934, the Chinese Red Army, led by Mao, began its historic 2,000-mile-long march across China to gain control of the country.
- On October 1, 1949, Mao Zedong announced the establishment of the People’s Republic of China.
- In 1957, Mao initiated the anti-rightist campaign to persecute those who criticized him or the party.
- In 1965, in order to consolidate his power, Mao began the “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution,” a movement that claimed thousands of lives.
- When Mao died in 1976, the “Gang of Four,” including Mao’s widow, was arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced to prison.

- In 1977, Deng Xiaoping gained power and began a program of the “Four Modernizations” (science, industry, agriculture, and defense).
- In 1987, Prime Minister Li Peng was appointed.
- In 1989, Jiang Zemin became the Communist Party secretary, replacing Zhao Zhiyang after the massacre in Tiananmen Square.
- The government remains under Communist control, with the country’s only political party being the Chinese Communist Party.

The next five years represent a critical period to China. To investors and firms, China represents a vast market that has yet to be fully tapped. This point is best illustrated by the rapid growth of cell phone and Internet use in China. Human rights issues remain a concern among members of the world community.

ECONOMY

Despite the fact that China’s gross national product (GNP) is one of the world’s largest, its per capita GNP is among the lowest. Living standards have improved in recent

years, yet the average Chinese managers earn less than \$930 U.S. dollars annually.

Just over 15 percent of Chinese are employed in agriculture. Even though only one-tenth of the land is suitable for farming, China is self-sufficient in several food resources. In fact, it is the world’s leader in the production of rice, tobacco, corn, barley, soybeans, peanuts, eggs, and pork. Other important agricultural products include wheat, fish, and potatoes.

The Chinese government decides what careers most individuals will pursue and where they will work.

Major industries include iron and steel, coal, light and heavy machinery, armaments and oil products. The country’s major exports are textiles, metals, and oil.

China’s natural resources include coal, iron, mercury, tin, manganese, lead, zinc, and uranium.

EDUCATION

China’s literacy level is 86 percent. Prior to the

modernization policy of the government in recent years, much of the education was centered on the rote learning of Marxist ideology. But now thousands of students are sent overseas to obtain training in many areas of specialization.

Only about one percent of China's college-aged population gain admission to college.

At present, China is the second-leading place of origin for students coming to the U.S. According to the Institute of International Education (2002/2003), over 64,500 Chinese students are enrolled in colleges and universities in the U.S.

The majority of Chinese students studying in America are enrolled in graduate schools. Students who attend college in China must serve the government for five years after graduation before they can study abroad, or else repay at least part of their educational expenses paid for by the government.

CULTURE

Confucianism, the ancient philosophy of social order, still has a great influence on Chinese attitudes and action.

Friendship is highly valued in the Chinese culture. Ties are so strong that an individual is willing to do virtually anything when called upon by a friend. In China, turning down a friend is improper and embarrassing. The principle that binds friends in this high level of commitment to one another is called *guanxi*.

Arranged marriages, once a common practice in old China, are no longer the rule.

Moral purity is another valued cultural trait. The Chinese discourage public displays of affection as well as premarital sex.

In fact, a sanctioned age for marriage exists: 22 for men and 22 for women. Marrying at an early age may result in the denial of certain benefits. To get married, permission is usually sought from a local government entity, and the woman

retains her maiden name.

Popular recreational activities in China include attending movies, traveling within the country, and sports such as table tennis, swimming, and soccer.

HOLIDAYS

The Chinese New Year (also called Spring Festival) is held for three days in January or February, according to the Chinese lunar calendar. The country's most important holiday is celebrated with banquets, family gatherings, carnivals, and dragon dances.

Other important festivals include: the Lantern Festival (the 15th day of the first lunar month), the Dragon Boat Festival (the fifth day of the first lunar month), Tibet's Fruit Expecting Festival (August), and the Moon Festival, which takes place in mid autumn.

RELIGION

Religion is discouraged by the Communist government of China. However, it plays a major part in traditional

Chinese life. Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism have been the major religions throughout most of Chinese history. The religious beliefs of many Chinese include elements of all three.

Confucianism is based on the ideas of Confucius, a Chinese philosopher born about 550 B.C. It stresses the importance of moral standards and of a well-ordered society in which parents rule their children, men rule women, and the educated rule the uneducated. Confucianism also urges deep respect for one's ancestors and the past.

Taoism teaches that a person should withdraw from everyday life and live in harmony with nature. Taoism began in China during the 300s B.C. and is based largely on a book called the *Tao Te Ching*.

Buddhism reached China from India before A.D. 100 and became well-established throughout the country during the fourth century. Under the influence of Confucianism and Taoism, Chinese varieties of Buddhism developed. They taught strict moral standards and the ideas of rebirth and life after death.

Chinese Buddhists worship many gods and appeal to them for help in times of trouble.

CHRISTIANITY

Known Christian contact with the Chinese people dates back to the seventh century, when Catholic missionaries entered the country. This was known as the “first wave” of Christian missionary activity in China. The “second wave” occurred in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, followed by the “third wave” in the sixteenth century.

The initial success of that “third wave” was due largely to a strategy to reach the upper-class intellectual segment of the Chinese population. In the mid-seventeenth century, however, a dispute arose over ancestor worship, which led Emperor Kang Shi to prohibit Catholic ministry activities.

In 1804, the first Protestant missionary, Robert Morrison of the London Missionary Society, arrived in China. By the end of the first 15 years, Morrison had translated the Bible into Mandarin.

In 1840, the Opium

War further accelerated the evangelization of China, as missionaries were granted privileges and protection by the British Empire. Unfortunately, these actions forever linked Christianity with foreign imperialism and invasion in the minds of most Chinese. Under the banner of the Chinese Evangelism Society, James Hudson Taylor arrived in 1853. Twelve years later he formed the China Inland Mission.

Until the Cultural Revolution, China’s government allowed at least some degree of evangelism. During the revolution, however, the church came under attack. All church buildings were closed; Christian materials—including Bibles—were destroyed; and Christians experienced severe persecution.

Most Chinese now under age 40 have been educated largely through the Marxist system of education, where religion is ignored. As a result, most Chinese students studying in the U.S. consider themselves atheists, although many are open to the Gospel. In the 1950s, the Chinese government officially approved the Three Self Church Movement for

Protestants, and the Catholic Patriotic Association for Catholics. This move allowed for the reopening—under party supervision—of church buildings and worship services.

Recent books on Christianity published in China by the government state that Jesus Christ probably never existed and portray the Bible as a collection of myths.

Christians constitute about three to four percent of the Chinese population. Since China is officially atheist, no recognized missionaries or foreign mission agencies exist.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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