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August 5, 2010 | Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs



Official Name: **People's Republic of China**



PROFILE

Geography

Total area: 9,596,961 sq. km. (about 3.7 million sq. mi.).
 Cities: *Capital*--Beijing. *Other major cities*--Shanghai, Tianjin, Shenyang, Wuhan, Guangzhou, Chongqing, Harbin, Chengdu.
 Terrain: Plains, deltas, and hills in east; mountains, high plateaus, deserts in west.
 Climate: Tropical in south to subarctic in north.

People

Nationality: *Noun and adjective*--Chinese (singular and plural).
 Population (July 2010 est.): 1,330,141,295.
 Population growth rate (2010 est.): 0.494%.
 Health (2010 est.): *Infant mortality rate*--16.51 deaths/1,000 live births. *Life expectancy*--74.51 years (overall); 72.54 years for males, 76.77 years for females.
 Ethnic groups (2000 census): Han Chinese 91.5%; Zhuang, Manchu, Hui, Miao, Uyghur, Tujia, Yi, Mongol, Tibetan, Buyi, Dong, Yao, Korean, and other nationalities 8.5%.
 Religions: Officially atheist; Daoist (Taoist), Buddhist, Christian 3%-4%, Muslim 1%-2%.
 Language: Mandarin (Putonghua), plus many local dialects.
 Education: *Years compulsory*--9. *Literacy*--93%.
 Labor force (2009 est.): 812.7 million. Labor force by occupation (2008 est.): *Agriculture and forestry*--39.5%, *industry*--27.2%, *services*--33.2%.

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Section of the Great Wall in Beijing, China, April 19, 2005. [© AP Images]

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Government

Type: Communist party-led state.

Constitution: December 4, 1982; revised several times, most recently in 2004.

Independence: Unification under the Qin (Ch'in) Dynasty 221 BC; Qing (Ch'ing or Manchu) Dynasty replaced by a republic on February 12, 1912; People's Republic established October 1, 1949.

Branches: *Executive*--president, vice president, State Council, premier. *Legislative*--unicameral National People's Congress. *Judicial*--Supreme People's Court.

Administrative divisions: 23 provinces (the P.R.C. considers Taiwan to be its 23rd province); 5 autonomous regions, including Tibet; 5 municipalities directly under the State Council.

Political parties: Chinese Communist Party, 76 million members; 8 minor parties under Communist Party supervision.

Economy

GDP (2009): \$4.814 trillion (exchange rate-based).

Per capita GDP (2009): \$3,678 (exchange rate-based).

GDP real growth rate (2009): 8.7%.

Natural resources: Coal, iron ore, petroleum, natural gas, mercury, tin, tungsten, antimony, manganese, molybdenum, vanadium, magnetite, aluminum, lead, zinc, uranium, hydropower potential (world's largest).

Agriculture: *Products*--Among the world's largest producers of rice, wheat, potatoes, corn, peanuts, tea, millet, barley; commercial crops include cotton, other fibers, apples, oilseeds, pork and fish; produces variety of livestock products.

Industry: *Types*--mining and ore processing, iron, steel, aluminum, and other metals, coal; machine building; armaments; textiles and apparel; petroleum; cement; chemicals; fertilizers; consumer products, including footwear, toys, and electronics; food processing; transportation equipment, including automobiles, rail cars and locomotives, ships, and aircraft; telecommunications equipment, commercial space launch vehicles, satellites.

Trade: *Exports* (2009)--\$1.194 trillion: electrical and other machinery, including data processing equipment, apparel, textiles, iron and steel, optical and medical equipment. *Main partners* (2008)--United States 17.7%, Hong Kong 13.3%, Japan 8.1%, South Korea 5.2%, Germany 4.1%. *Imports* (2009)--\$921.5 billion: electrical and other machinery, oil and mineral fuels, optical and medical equipment, metal ores, plastics, organic chemicals. *Main partners* (2008)--Japan 13.3%, South Korea 9.9%, Taiwan 9.2%, U.S. 7.2%, Germany 4.9%.

PEOPLE

Ethnic Groups

The largest ethnic group is the Han Chinese, who constitute about 91.5% of the total population (2000 census). The remaining 8.5% are Zhuang (16 million), Manchu (10 million), Hui (9 million), Miao (8 million), Uyghur (7 million), Yi (7 million), Mongol (5 million), Tibetan (5 million), Buyi (3 million), Korean (2 million), and other ethnic minorities.

Language

There are seven major Chinese dialects and many subdialects. Mandarin (or Putonghua), the predominant dialect, is spoken by over 70% of the population. It is taught in all schools and is the medium of government. About two-thirds of the Han ethnic group are native speakers of Mandarin; the rest, concentrated in southwest and southeast China, speak one of the six other major Chinese dialects. Non-Chinese languages spoken widely by ethnic minorities include Mongolian, Tibetan, Uyghur and other Turkic languages (in Xinjiang), and Korean (in the northeast).

The Pinyin System of Romanization

On January 1, 1979, the Chinese Government officially adopted the pinyin system for spelling Chinese names and places in Roman letters. A system of Romanization invented by the Chinese, pinyin has long been widely used in China on street and commercial signs as well as in elementary Chinese textbooks as an aid in learning Chinese characters. Variations of pinyin also are used as the written forms of several minority languages.

Pinyin has now replaced other conventional spellings in China's English-language publications. The U.S. Government also has adopted the pinyin system for all names and places in China. For example, the capital of China is now spelled "Beijing" rather than "Peking."

Religion

Religion plays a significant part in the life of many Chinese. A February 2007 survey conducted by East China Normal University and reported in state-run media concluded that 31.4% of Chinese citizens ages 16 and over are religious believers. While the Chinese constitution affirms "freedom of religious belief," the Chinese Government places restrictions on religious practice outside officially recognized organizations. The five state-sanctioned "patriotic religious associations" are Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism. Buddhism is most widely practiced; the state-approved Xinhua news agency estimates there are 100 million Buddhists in China. There are no official statistics confirming the number of Taoists in China. Official figures indicate there are 20 million Muslims, 20 million Protestants, and 5.3 million Catholics; unofficial estimates are much higher.

Only two Christian organizations--a Catholic church without official ties to Rome and the "Three-Self-Patriotic" Protestant church--are sanctioned by the Chinese Government. Unauthorized churches have sprung up in many parts of the country and unofficial religious practice is growing. In some regions authorities have tried to control activities of these unregistered churches. In other regions, registered and unregistered groups are treated similarly by authorities and congregations worship in both types of churches. The government represses the religious activities of "underground" Roman Catholic clergy in large part due to their avowed loyalty to the Vatican, which the government accuses of interfering in the country's internal affairs. The government also severely restricts the activities of groups it designates as "evil religions," including several Christian groups and Falun Gong.

Population Policy

With a population officially over 1.3 billion and an estimated growth rate of 0.494%, China is very concerned about its population growth and has attempted with mixed results to implement a strict birth limitation policy. China's 2002 Population and Family Planning Law and policy permit one child per family, with allowance for a second child under certain circumstances, especially in rural areas, and with guidelines looser for ethnic minorities with small populations. Enforcement varies, and relies largely on "social compensation fees" to discourage extra births. Official government policy prohibits the use of physical coercion to compel persons to submit to abortion or sterilization, but in some localities there are instances of local birth-planning officials using physical coercion to meet birth limitation targets. The government's goal is to stabilize the population in the first half of the 21st century, and 2009 projections from the U.S. Census Bureau are that the Chinese population will peak at around 1.4 billion by 2026.

HISTORY

Dynastic Period

China is the oldest continuous major world civilization, with records dating back about 3,500 years. Successive dynasties developed a system of bureaucratic control that gave the agrarian-based Chinese an advantage over neighboring nomadic and hill cultures. Chinese civilization was further strengthened by the development of a Confucian state ideology and a common written language that bridged the gaps among the country's many local languages and dialects. Whenever China was conquered by nomadic tribes, as it was by the Mongols in the 13th century, the conquerors sooner or later adopted the ways of the "higher" Chinese civilization and staffed the bureaucracy with Chinese.

The last dynasty was established in 1644, when the Manchus overthrew the native Ming dynasty and established the Qing (Ch'ing) dynasty with Beijing as its capital. At great expense in blood and treasure, the Manchus over the next half century gained control of many border areas, including Xinjiang, Yunnan, Tibet, Mongolia, and Taiwan. The success of

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the early Qing period was based on the combination of Manchu martial prowess and traditional Chinese bureaucratic skills.

During the 19th century, Qing control weakened, and prosperity diminished. China suffered massive social strife, economic stagnation, explosive population growth, and Western penetration and influence. The Taiping and Nian rebellions, along with a Russian-supported Muslim separatist movement in Xinjiang, drained Chinese resources and almost toppled the dynasty. Britain's desire to continue its illegal opium trade with China collided with imperial edicts prohibiting the addictive drug, and the First Opium War erupted in 1840. China lost the war; subsequently, Britain and other Western powers, including the United States, forcibly occupied "concessions" and gained special commercial privileges. Hong Kong was ceded to Britain in 1842 under the Treaty of Nanking, and in 1898, when the Opium Wars finally ended, Britain executed a 99-year lease of the New Territories, significantly expanding the size of the Hong Kong colony.

As time went on, the Western powers, wielding superior military technology, gained more economic and political privileges. Reformist Chinese officials argued for the adoption of Western technology to strengthen the dynasty and counter Western advances, but the Qing court played down both the Western threat and the benefits of Western technology.

Early 20th Century China

Frustrated by the Qing court's resistance to reform, young officials, military officers, and students--inspired by the revolutionary ideas of Sun Yat-sen--began to advocate the overthrow of the Qing dynasty and creation of a republic. A revolutionary military uprising on October 10, 1911, led to the abdication of the last Qing monarch. As part of a compromise to overthrow the dynasty without a civil war, the revolutionaries and reformers allowed high Qing officials to retain prominent positions in the new republic. One of these figures, Gen. Yuan Shikai, was chosen as the republic's first president. Before his death in 1916, Yuan unsuccessfully attempted to name himself emperor. His death left the republican government all but shattered, ushering in the era of the "warlords" during which China was ruled and ravaged by shifting coalitions of competing provincial military leaders.

In the 1920s, Sun Yat-sen established a revolutionary base in south China and set out to unite the fragmented nation. With Soviet assistance, he organized the Kuomintang (KMT or "Chinese Nationalist People's Party"), and entered into an alliance with the fledgling Chinese Communist Party (CCP). After Sun's death in 1925, one of his proteges, Chiang Kai-shek, seized control of the KMT and succeeded in bringing most of south and central China under its rule. In 1927, Chiang turned on the CCP and executed many of its leaders. The remnants fled into the mountains of eastern China. In 1934, driven out of their mountain bases, the CCP's forces embarked on a "Long March" across some of China's most desolate terrain to the northwestern province of Shaanxi, where they established a guerrilla base at Yan'an.

During the "Long March," the communists reorganized under a new leader, Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung). The bitter struggle between the KMT and the CCP continued openly or clandestinely through the 14-year long Japanese invasion (1931-45), even though the two parties nominally formed a united front to oppose the Japanese invaders in 1937. The war between the two parties resumed after the Japanese defeat in 1945. By 1949, the CCP occupied most of the country.

Chiang Kai-shek fled with the remnants of his KMT government and military forces to Taiwan, where he proclaimed Taipei to be China's "provisional capital" and vowed to reconquer the Chinese mainland. Taiwan still calls itself the "Republic of China."

The People's Republic of China

In Beijing, on October 1, 1949, Mao Zedong proclaimed the founding of the People's Republic of China (P.R.C.). The new government assumed control of a people exhausted by two generations of war and social conflict, and an economy ravaged by high inflation and disrupted transportation links. A new political and economic order modeled on the Soviet example was quickly installed.