



BACKGROUND

Land and Climate

Area (sq. mi.): 3,705,407

Area (sq. km.): 9,596,961

As the fourth largest country in the world, China is just smaller than the United States. Because mountains or deserts cover much of western China, the majority of the population lives in the east, where rivers and plains allow for productive agriculture. China's geographic features range from the Himalaya Mountains to the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau ("the roof of the world") to subtropical islands. The Great Wall of China stretches 5,488 miles (8,851 kilometers). Some of the world's longest rivers are in China; the Yangtze River runs 3,900 miles (6,300 kilometers).

China's climate ranges from sub-arctic in the north to sub-tropical in the south. Monsoons in the southeast cause frequent summer floods that can kill thousands each year. Sandstorms in the north are increasingly common due to desertification.

China's diverse plant life includes more than 2,800 species of trees, such as metasequoia, bamboo, palm, oak, China fir, evergreen, and China cypress. Deforestation is an increasing problem, especially in the east, as housing developments and industries replace natural forests. As a result of urbanization and a rapid increase in industrial activity, water and air pollution have become major problems.

History

Ancient Dynasties

The Chinese have one of the world's oldest continuous civilizations, spanning some four thousand years. China has long been ruled by dynasties. The first Chinese dynasty was the Xia Dynasty, established around 2000 BC. In more than four thousand years, China experienced at least 28 dynasties with more than five hundred emperors. The first imperial dynasty to unify all of China was the Qin Dynasty (221–206 BC). Qin Shi Huang, known as the first emperor of China, built the Great Wall to guard against invading nomadic groups, and was the emperor for whom the famous Terra-Cotta Army was fashioned.

The Han Dynasty (206 BC to AD 220) was the second unified imperial dynasty and is considered the first Golden Age of China. The Silk Road, or the trade route between western Asia and Europe, flourished during this time. The Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907) is also considered one of the most prosperous periods in China's history. The Tang emperors, one of whom (Wu Ze Tian) was a woman, appointed foreign scholars as senior officials in the royal court. Literature, the arts, science, technology, and trade all thrived during the Tang Dynasty. China's capital during this time, Chang'an (now Xi'an), was the most populous city in the world, and hosted many foreign students and merchants.

Some of the Chinese dynasties were formed by native Han (such as the Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644), and others were established after nomadic tribes from the north conquered China proper (as did the Qing Dynasty, 1644–1911). Nomadic tribes were eventually absorbed into Chinese culture.

Revolution and Communism

A revolution inspired by Sun Yat-sen overthrew the Qing Dynasty in 1911. In 1912, with the country fragmented by opposing warlords, Sun Yat-sen established the Kuomintang (KMT) party in an effort to unify China.

After Sun's death in 1925, Chiang Kai-shek took control (1927) and ousted the once-allied Communist Party. The Communists, led by Mao Zedong, struggled with the KMT for control of China while both groups fought Japan in World War II. After the Japanese were defeated (1945), the civil war ended with Mao's forces in control and Chiang's army fleeing to Taiwan to regroup. They never returned, and Mao ruled from 1949 to 1976. China still considers Taiwan its 23rd province. In 2009, leaders of China and Taiwan exchanged their first direct messages in more than 60 years.

While the Chinese initially welcomed communism, the Great Leap Forward (1958–61) and the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) had disastrous effects on the country. More than 40 million people starved or were killed during Mao's rule.

Moderate Changes

After Mao died in 1976, Deng Xiaoping came to power and gradually moved away from Maoism. His more moderate policies led to foreign tourism, a more liberal economy, private enterprise, growth, trade, and educational exchanges with other nations. The Tiananmen Square massacre in June 1989 and a subsequent government crackdown derailed these measures for a time. By 1992, China was again focusing on economic reform, and it quickly cultivated one of the world's fastest-growing economies. However, Deng did not favor political liberalization.

Since Deng's death in 1997, his successors have reiterated his policy of a socialist market economy with a strong central government. Hong Kong (a British colony) reverted to Chinese control in 1997, and China was admitted to the World Trade Organization in 2001. The nation also hosted the summer Olympic Games in 2008. However, China faces several domestic challenges. Ethnic violence occasionally flares in the Xinjiang and Tibet regions. Several food safety scares have come up in recent years. China's population is rapidly aging. Pollution is becoming a major health hazard in major cities. Many government leaders recognize widespread corruption as a problem as well. Despite these challenges, China continues to rank among the world's leaders in gross domestic product, exports, and receipt of foreign investment.

Ocean Territory Disputes

Many nations bordering the South China Sea have conflicting claims over the region's waters, motivated in part by fishing rights, access to shipping lanes, and potential oil resources. In January 2014, China declared that foreign ships must request permission to enter Chinese-claimed waters. The move, which is based on aggressive territory claims that violate international law, has sparked disputes with neighbors such as the Philippines, Japan, Vietnam, and Malaysia.

Recent Events and Trends

- **Knife attack:** In March 2014, men armed with knives attacked crowds at a train station in south-central China and killed 29 people. As they often have done after terrorist incidents in the past, government officials blamed the attack on Muslim Uighur separatists. The Uighurs, a religious and ethnic minority in western China, resent being displaced by

Han Chinese moving into their homeland, but it is unclear if the Uighurs are actually behind this attack.

- **Territory disputes with Vietnam:** In May 2014, aggressive moves by Chinese ships in disputed waters provoked violent clashes between Vietnamese and Chinese boats, as well as violent protests against Chinese-owned steel mills in Vietnam. Chinese ships evacuated Chinese workers from Vietnam, but the Chinese government refuses to move its ship from the disputed territory.

- **U.S. accusations of Chinese hacking:** In May 2014, U.S. officials accused Chinese military officers of hacking into U.S. companies for several years to find and share trade secrets with Chinese companies. China responded by accusing the United States of spying on Chinese leaders. The accusations have strained political relations between the two countries.

THE PEOPLE

Population

Population: 1,349,585,838

Population Growth Rate: 0.46%

Urban Population: 51%

China's population is the world's largest. To reduce growth, the government sponsors family-planning programs and offers incentives to families with only one child; penalties are imposed on those with more children. This policy, which applies mainly to the Han Chinese (92 percent of the population), varies according to region. Rural families may have a second child if the first is a girl, and according to 2013 reforms, urban couples with one child are allowed a second if at least one of the parents was an only child. Still, the annual growth rate has fallen significantly.

Of China's 55 minority groups, 15 include more than one million people. These are the Zhuang, Mongolian, Hui, Tibetan, Uygur, Miao, Yi, Buyi, Korean, Manchu, Dong, Yao, Bai, Tujia, and Hani nationalities. While about half of all Chinese live in rural areas, the urban population is growing rapidly and in January 2012 exceeded the rural one for the first time. About 100 million rural migrant laborers move in and out of cities in search of work. Shanghai (23 million) and Beijing (19.6 million) are the largest cities.

Language

Standard Chinese (*Putonghua*), or Mandarin, is based on the Beijing dialect and is the national language. It is taught in schools, so most Chinese can read, write, and speak Mandarin. Many people also use the dialects or languages of their geographical region. These include Wu, Min, Yue (Cantonese), and Kejia. Language variations are found more in the central and southern areas of China. Written Chinese uses characters to express words, thoughts, or principles. A Romanized alphabet (*pinyin*) is used to help teach Chinese in school and for international communication. While as many as 50,000 characters exist, only about 8,000 are currently in use. Chinese requires a knowledge of 1,500 to 2,000 characters for basic literacy. While people in different regions

might not understand each other's verbal language, they use the same basic set of characters and can communicate in writing.

Religion

Government policy allows the Chinese to exercise religious beliefs within certain guidelines. Buddhists, Taoists, Muslims, and Christians do practice, but some groups are prohibited. Some studies estimate that as much as 30 percent of Chinese have some religious faith. Temples, mosques, and churches are open to the public, but public worship is frowned upon. Unauthorized or underground religious activities have led to imprisonment and other restrictions. Unique local religions can flourish in small towns, especially in the east; they may focus on one god or form of worship, and they often include elements of Taoism, Buddhism, and ancestor veneration.

Taoism is the only Chinese-born religion. It is generally believed that Lao Zi (571–471 BC) was the founder of Taoism. The principles of Taoism stress peace, calm, nature, and harmony between human and universe; its symbols are *yin* and *yang* and eight trigrams (*ba gua*).

General Attitudes

The Chinese are noted for hospitality and reserve. Confucianism, the ancient philosophy of social order, influences attitudes and encourages a group consciousness—especially in rural areas. The Chinese are very proud of their nation's long history and of past Chinese achievements. They do not appreciate external criticism. The attitudes of people in larger eastern cities tend to be more cosmopolitan than those in the more traditional rural areas.

The central government emphasizes respect for and obedience to authority. Over time, people have lost respect for some local and national leaders. The change is slowly forcing local officials to be more accountable.

The principle of *guanxi* commits friends and associates to do what they can for each other when called upon. To violate *guanxi* is to lose reputation or honor. Children are expected to uphold the family's social standing. This has had different meanings in different eras. For today's urban children, it means being well educated and well dressed, earning money, and practicing traditional values such as loyalty and kindness. For rural Chinese, it means putting the needs of the group (family, community) above oneself. An admired person is one who brings the greatest honor to the family while being the most humble about personal accomplishments.

As more urban Chinese are becoming wealthy in an expanding economy, the gap between rich and poor is growing. Some areas are experiencing unrest because people are losing their jobs and the traditional cradle-to-grave benefits of the *danwei* (work group) system. For the average person, having food, shelter, and clothing is more desirable and understandable than the relatively abstract concept of political freedom.

Personal Appearance

Chinese attire traditionally is conservative and simple. Men mostly wear Western style suits, and women tend to wear

dresses more than pants. Western styles are very popular in urban areas. People like to dress up in public. Rural styles are not always so modern, and some rural Chinese continue to wear the drab pantsuits of Mao's era. Ethnic minorities wear clothing reflective of their cultural past and the climate in which they live.

For some formal occasions and traditional festivals, Chinese people wear traditional attire. The traditional dress for women is the *cheongsam* (a slim, one-piece dress). The traditional dress for men is the *chang-pao* (a long dress with four slits on the lower sides) and mandarin jacket.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings

The Chinese nod politely or bow slightly when greeting. A handshake is also acceptable, especially in formal situations or to show respect. Greetings vary, as they are given in the local dialect. *Ni hao ma?* (How do you do?) is somewhat formal. Informally, people might greet with *Zao* (Morning), *Wan'an* (Evening), or *Zenmoyang?* (How's it going?). Two acquaintances who have not seen each other for some time might say *Hao jiu bu jian le* (Long time no see) or *Zui jin mang ma?* (Have you been busy lately?). Shopkeepers might greet passersby with *Huan ying* (Welcome). Many people start a conversation with a considerate *Ni chi fan le ma?* (Have you eaten yet?), to which it is proper to respond affirmatively, even if the respondent has not eaten.

The Chinese prefer formal introductions; they use full titles for their guests but are less precise in identifying themselves. Chinese names usually consist of a one-character family name, followed by a one- or two-character given name. A person is addressed either by full name or by title and family name. In lieu of professional titles, the Chinese equivalents of “Mr.” and “Mrs.” are used. Thus, Wang Jian-Jun can also be called *Mr. Wang*, but never simply *Wang* and rarely ever *Jian-Jun*. To show special respect, friends might use the terms *Lao* (old) and *Xiao* (young) with or instead of titles.

Gestures

Chinese do not like to be touched by people they do not know. However, close friends of the same gender may sit or stand close or walk arm in arm. Respectful distance is best when dealing with older people or those in important positions. Chinese do not punctuate conversations with gestures nearly as much as Westerners do. To beckon, they wave all fingers with the palm of the hand facing down. Chinese point with an open hand rather than one finger. In some regions of rural China, it is common for people to spit in public after clearing their throat. Since poor health conditions make this necessary, government fines have failed to curb the behavior.

Visiting

Invitations usually are extended for formal events; otherwise people often drop by unannounced. When invited, Chinese are generally prompt; being more than a few minutes late is

impolite. Guests conduct themselves with restraint and refrain from loud, boisterous speech and actions. Invited friends often bring gifts such as tea, cigarettes, fruit, chocolates, cakes, or wine when they visit. One also might take a small gift when visiting an older person. Hosts rarely open wrapped gifts before visitors leave. They usually offer such refreshments as fruit, nuts, or seeds. If guests decline the offer, hosts probably will insist several times before accepting the refusal.

Eating

Among family, friends, and business associates, eating is an important way of socializing and building relationships in China. The Chinese use chopsticks for all meals. Food is placed at the center of the table and may include more than one type of main dish to be eaten with rice. A small tray is offered for every diner, and diners can put food in their rice bowls or on these trays. When finished, a person places the chopsticks neatly on the table, not in the rice bowl. Spoons are used for soup, typically eaten at the end of a meal. In some areas, slurping is not considered impolite; in informal situations, it is a compliment to the host.

At restaurants, diners may choose from several dishes on a revolving tray at the center of the table. Hosts may give a short welcome speech, and guests respond with complimentary toasts. At formal banquets, cold dishes are offered first as appetizers. Rice or noodles are served next to accompany the main, hot dishes. Fruit is served last. Hosts, not guests, turn the revolving tray, and people leave soon after the meal ends. In general, waiters or waitresses serve tea or wine to everyone. On occasion, the hospitable host will serve the guests tea. It is also common for guests to serve the host in a gesture of respect and gratitude. Tipping in restaurants traditionally has been an insult—something a superior does for an inferior—but with economic change, it is now popular in Guangdong and Fujian provinces and is spreading to other parts of the country.

LIFESTYLE

Family

Structure

In China's group-oriented society, the family is considered more important than the individual. Family ties survived the upheavals of the Cultural Revolution, and loyalty to family is still a hallmark of society.

As a result of the one-child policy, most families have only one child, who receives considerable attention from parents and grandparents. However, in 2013 the Chinese government softened this policy. Now, urban couples are allowed to have a second child if just one of the parents is an only child, whereas previously both were required to be.

Parents and Children

The elderly are highly respected in Chinese society. In most regions of China, the entire family has to listen to the father, or to the grandfather if he is alive. If the grandfather has passed away, then the grandmother usually becomes the eldest person, and family members must consult her about big

decisions.

Children may start to help with household chores at age six, but in some wealthy families, the kids are called “little emperors” and are not expected to work around the house. Boys are prized as heirs to the family name. Having children is considered a duty to the family; parents are completely responsible for their children, and children are expected to care for aging parents. Sending elderly parents away from home to receive care is considered shameful.

Gender Roles

Women play an important role in China; the Chinese believe that women hold up half of the sky. Many women serve as government leaders or in managerial positions. Women's social status is higher than it once was. Formerly in China, a woman stayed at home as a full-time housewife. It was her duty to raise the children, take care of the parents or parents-in-law, and do the housework. Today, women are still responsible for these traditional roles, but an increasing number of women have one more task—to work and make money. In big cities, wives work in order to lower the financial burden on their husbands' shoulders.

Housing

Urban

Urban housing was once supplied by a person's work unit. Now, the government encourages people to buy their own homes or apartments. City dwellers typically live in apartment buildings of six or seven storeys. Most apartments are small, some as small as 480 square feet (45 square meters). To save space, the kitchen is often located on an enclosed balcony. New high-rise apartment buildings (sometimes 20 to 30 storeys high) are replacing more traditional neighborhoods in many cities, offering more spacious and luxurious apartments for those who can afford them.

A new trend in urban housing is community facilities. Companies build several apartment buildings close to each other and provide green spaces, security services, medical facilities, supermarkets, and schools. These buildings are colorful on the outside, and their apartments are relatively big. However, only the well-off can afford them.

Rural

Rural homes are larger than urban apartments, though they may lack running water and other amenities. Central heating is typically available only in cold climates (north of the Yangtze River); in the south, people more often rely on electric heaters and coal stoves. Farmers lease their land from the government for fifty or one hundred years.

Dating and Marriage

Dating and Courtship

Young people like to go to parks, dances, or parties at friends' houses. Intimate relations and public displays of affection are discouraged throughout the country but are increasingly common in cities. Online dating and matchmaking is becoming more common. Dating indicates a serious commitment between two people and is uncommon before one of the partners is over age 20 or has graduated from college.

Marriage in Society

Most Chinese expect to get married, because family is considered the most important thing in a person's life. The minimum sanctioned age for marriage is 22 for men and 20 for women. Those who marry before that age are not eligible for certain benefits. Until recently, college students were forbidden to marry until after graduation. Most urban people do not marry until their late twenties. Many young people practice cohabitation, but usually hide it from their more traditional parents. Socioeconomic status is still considered important when choosing a spouse. Divorce is becoming increasingly common, but it is sometimes difficult for women with children to marry again.

Weddings

After deciding to wed, a couple must apply for permission from the local government. A legal contract is signed and recorded; the bride retains her maiden name, but the couple's children will take on their father's surname. A couple is considered truly married after they celebrate their union with family and friends.

In rural areas, wedding festivities last for two days. Brides wear red, which represents happiness and good luck. In some weddings, the bride may wear red in the morning when the groom arrives to pick her up and change into a white dress for a main banquet.

Urban wedding dinner parties combine traditional customs with Western customs; wedding rings are becoming more common. If the couple is religious, the wedding ceremony may be held in a church. Traditionally, the groom's family pays for the wedding and may give some money to the bride's family as a gift during the engagement. The bride's family usually buys household appliances for the couple, and the mother of the bride makes quilts for them.

Life Cycle

Birth

The mother and mother-in-law of an expecting mother usually come to stay with her before the baby is born. Ultrasounds to determine the gender of a baby are illegal because discrimination against female children has often caused parents to abort or abandon them. Expecting mothers are not allowed to eat rabbit meat because it is believed that this may cause the baby to have a harelip. Chinese women generally do not receive epidurals while in labor because of fears for the health of the baby's brain.

Chinese celebrate the arrival of a newborn one month after its birth at a *Man Yue Jiu* (30 days) dinner party. Family and friends attend, bringing red envelopes of money for the baby. The parents will also hold a party when the baby is 100 days old; relatives and friends are invited to a meal to celebrate. Children are named according to family history or a trend at the time. For example, people who were born in the 1950s or 60s usually have the Chinese character *Guo* (country) in their name, reflecting the nationalistic attitude of that time period. Though the child's name may not always be decided on at birth, infants are always given nicknames.

Milestones

People are considered adults when they get married, which usually takes place in a person's twenties.

Death

When a person dies, family members wear black bands around their upper arms for a month or two. At the funeral, an enlarged picture (usually drawn) of the deceased is displayed. Black and white are the colors for the dead, and people wear white clothes to a funeral and bring presents of white and black cloth or of money. Family members burn incense and yellow paper. The yellow paper is considered money for the dead. Family members burn yellow paper on every anniversary of the person's death.

Funerals differ in different regions; the Han usually cremate deceased bodies, and celestial burial (in which deceased bodies are ritually dissected and left to decompose or for birds of prey to consume) is practiced in Tibet. Buddhism's influence has brought belief in reincarnation into Chinese culture.

Diet

Except in larger cities, a wide variety of food is unavailable to the average person. What people eat largely depends on what is produced in the region where they live. Dishes with rice, potatoes, cornmeal, tofu, and other grains are staples. Noodles are very common. Dishes made with pork, beef, chicken, or fish (a symbol of abundance) are popular but expensive. Specialties vary from region to region, from duck in Beijing to spicy dishes in the Sichuan province. Fruits and vegetables are eaten in season; few dairy products are available. Sauces are mixed with vegetables and meats and eaten with rice or noodles. *Man tou* (steamed bread) is a staple in northern China. Chinese dumplings (*jiaozi*) are popular in many parts of the country. Seeds (sunflower, pumpkin, watermelon, etc.) and nuts are favorite snacks, and fruit is a preferred dessert. People may eat frequently at local restaurants.

Recreation

Sports

Most cities have sports facilities. The country's favorite sports include soccer, table tennis, swimming, and badminton. Basketball, dancing, playing pool (among boys), yoga (among women), jogging, and walking are also popular. Those who are wealthy often play tennis or golf.

Parks and courtyards are often filled in the morning by those practicing *taijiquan*, a traditional form of shadowboxing that provides exercise and therapy. Tai chi, a slow-moving martial art, is popular in Shanghai.

Leisure

Favorite pastimes include eating, singing karaoke, and watching imported movies; the average Chinese attends more than 10 movies each year. However, going to the cinemas is becoming more expensive, so many people buy DVDs and watch them at home instead.

People enjoy gathering for conversation or card and table games, which the Chinese play in homes and parks. *Majiang* is the most popular table game; most people know how to play it. The rules for *majiang* are slightly different from place to place. *Wei qi* is a strategy game played in more educated circles. Chinese chess is another favorite. Many children play video games at internet cafés, especially if their parents will not allow video games at home; these games are more popular

with boys than with girls.

Vacation

As incomes have increased in recent years, traveling to other parts of China to see places like the Great Wall, the terra-cotta warriors, and other scenic sites has become popular. Traveling takes place during holidays like May Day, National Day, and Chinese New Year, and many join tour groups for their travels. It is becoming more common for people to have private cars, which enables them to travel easily. Many middle-aged people take their elderly parents to visit places in China or overseas. Shopping overseas is popular, because name brands are less expensive in other countries than in China.

The Arts

Traditional Chinese arts include poetry, calligraphy, paper cutting, shadow puppetry, painting, pottery, and jade carving. Calligraphy is thought to enrich a person's life by teaching self-mastery. Like calligraphers, painters strive for beautiful lines. Many contemporary painters incorporate this tradition with other styles.

Chinese music is distinct in tone and rhythm and is based on a five-tone scale. Traditional instruments include percussion instruments like cymbals, drums, and gongs; stringed instruments like the *guzheng*; and wind instruments like the Chinese flute. Chinese opera is popular and depicts folktales or significant events. Theaters, ballets, and films are well attended in urban areas. Traveling cultural groups perform operas in rural areas. In some regions, families will invite opera troupes to perform at big events.

Holidays

Official public holidays are New Year's Day (1 Jan.), Labor Day (1 May), and National Day (1–2 Oct.). Other public holidays, set according to the lunar calendar, include Tomb-Sweeping Day, the Dragon Boat Festival, Mid-autumn Festival (also called Moon Festival), and Chinese New Year (also called Spring Festival). Students have extended vacations at these times.

Spring Festival (New Year's)

As the most important holiday of the year, the Spring Festival is marked by banquets, family gatherings, carnivals, dragon dances, and fireworks. It begins on the first day of the first lunar month, and usually occurs about one month later than the Gregorian calendar's New Year. It lasts for fifteen days; the first five days are the most important, and the Lantern Festival, which is the last of the fifteen days, is also important. On the day of the Lantern Festival, parks are filled with games, performances, beautiful lanterns, and firework displays. Families gather and eat sweet rice dumplings. On Chinese New Year's Eve, families have a big dinner and children receive money in a red envelope. Those who were born in a year with the same animal as that year receive red presents to bring them good luck.

Tomb-Sweeping Day

Tomb-Sweeping Day is also known as the Qing Ming (Pure Brightness) Festival, held each year in early April. People come to the cemeteries to sweep tombs and offer sacrifices of food and flowers to the dead. They burn incense and paper

money and bow before the tombstones. Those who can't visit cemeteries where their families are buried usually burn some paper money at night on city streets.

Dragon Boat Festival

The Dragon Boat Festival is held on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month. This festival is said to have been started to commemorate the death of Qu Yuan (340–278 BC), a minister of the State of Chu and one of China's earliest poets. People eat *zong zi* (pyramid-shaped, sticky rice dumplings wrapped in reed or bamboo leaves) and drink *xionghuang jiu* (a kind of liquor believed to prevent illness). Dragon boat races are held mainly in the southern part of the country. As the gun is fired, racers in dragon-shaped canoes pull the oars harmoniously and hurriedly, speeding toward their destination. Their rowing is accompanied by the rapid beat of drums.

Other Festivals

Other festivals are held throughout the year but are not public holidays. The Double Seventh Festival, for example, is held on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month and is called the Chinese Valentine's Day. It honors a legend of two star crossed lovers who were separated by the Milky Way. They could only cross the sky on a bridge of *magpies* (a type of bird) to meet once a year on this date.

SOCIETY

Government

Head of State: Pres. Xi Jinping

Head of Government: Premier Li Keqiang

Capital: Beijing

Structure

The president of China is head of state and is formally elected by the 2,987 members of the National People's Congress, the country's legislature. The president serves for a five-year term and is eligible for a second term. The premier is head of government and is nominated by the president and confirmed by Congress. Members of Congress are indirectly elected at local levels or through the military to serve five-year terms. In about half of all villages, local leaders are elected rather than appointed.

Political Landscape

In the People's Republic of China, the office of president is mostly symbolic, with the president's real power deriving from also holding the positions of General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (usually considered the government's most powerful position), Chairman of the Central Military Commission, and first member of the Politburo Standing Committee. National policy is determined by a 25-member Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and, more importantly, its 7-member Standing Committee, which is believed to make decisions based on consensus. There have been conflicts recently within the CCP regarding the direction the country needs to be taken. There is also reportedly some conflict between younger members of the CCP who do not have strong memories of life before China's economic success and older members of the party

who do.

Government and the People

The Chinese government is generally thought to be repressive, and freedoms of speech, assembly, religion, and press are not well respected. China is considered by many to have a poor record respecting human rights. Reports of widespread corruption are also common. Despite these concerns, some hope that leadership changes in early 2013 will provide an opportunity for at least some political reform. For government posts that are filled through elections, the voting age is 18. Only members of the CCP or candidates that the CCP approves are elected.

Economy

GDP (PPP) in billions: \$12,380

GDP (PPP) per capita: \$9,100

China's large economy is offset by its population, meaning the real gross domestic product per capita is at the level of a developing country. While overall income is rising, wealth is not equally distributed. In a state accustomed to equal wages for all, this has been a source of contention among average people. Still, successful and honest entrepreneurs are well respected, even in rural areas. The government applauds the vibrant and growing private sector, even as it struggles to control it. Leaders contend that communism is not synonymous with poverty. Urban areas have a growing middle class. For villagers, the growing economy means better diets, but it also draws labor away from the fields and into the cities.

About half of the population is employed in agriculture. Future agricultural production may require greater mechanization and better seed and fertilizer. Although only one-tenth of its land is arable, China is a world leader in producing rice, tobacco, corn, barley, soybeans, and peanuts. Wheat, eggs, pork, fish, and potatoes are also important products. China produces manufactured goods, oil, minerals, coal, and steel.

The economy grew rapidly in the 1990s. The 2008 global economic crisis led to a sharp decline in world demand for China's exports, a contributing factor to the economy's recession. With past growth, the government has invested heavily in public infrastructure. Pollution, corruption, crime, and rising unemployment are serious problems. A large deficit threatens the social security network and other institutions. The currency is the *renminbi*; the standard unit is the *yuan* (CNY).

Transportation and Communications

Internet Users (per 100 people): 38

Cellular Phone Subscriptions (per 100 people): 73

Paved Roads: 84%

Individuals travel by foot, bicycle, motorcycle, train, bus, pedicab (or rickshaw), or private minibus. But a growing number of people now have their own cars. Domestic air travel is expensive. In some areas, people travel by river barge or ferry. The government has undertaken a massive road construction project to create a north-south and an

east-west freeway to link with intercity highways. In 2012, China opened the world's longest high-speed rail route between Beijing and Guangzhou. Public transportation, including buses and subways, is becoming more common.

China's government television station (CCTV) has 16 channels. All local channels and radio stations are under the control of the government or the Communist Party, and all programming must be approved. There is no independent press, and the government censors the internet. Most people have televisions. The telephone system is expanding, and the internet reaches into most cities and a growing number of rural areas. Cellular phone use is common and growing.

Education

Adult Literacy: 92.2%

Mean Years of Schooling: 7.5

Structure

Education is very important to the Chinese, and parents do everything they can to help their children finish school and obtain a good education. China seeks to provide an elementary education to every citizen, and nine years of education are compulsory. Nearly 100 percent of first-grade-age children are enrolled, and most finish elementary school. Rural girls are least likely to be enrolled because they are needed at home.

Access

Most primary schools are public and free. The selection exam for going to high school is very difficult, and it is hard to get into the most prestigious high schools, which guarantee the best education and give better chances for getting into good universities.

High schools and universities require tuition, which is paid for by the students' parents. University students may also sign a contract with a state company that will sponsor them in return for a few years of work after graduation.

China's literacy rate (the percentage of people over age fifteen who can read and write) is above 90 percent. To increase adult literacy, universities offer instruction over radio and television.

School Life

Students attend school five or six days a week for several hours, depending on the region. Chinese, English, and math are usually the most emphasized subjects in primary schools. Learning is done largely by memorization, although discussions are becoming more common in class. Computer-aided teaching is also increasingly common. Students spend a large amount of time on homework outside of class: roughly two hours for primary students, four hours for middle school students, and four to five hours for high school students. The better the school is, the more time students spend on homework. Rural schools are not as good as urban schools. Cheating is forbidden and is considered shameful.

Higher Education

When students finish their courses in high school, they take the college entrance exam to universities. High scores will allow students to go to the most prestigious universities. Students who do poorly will usually go to vocational training

schools. There are over 1,500 universities in China. Evening courses are also provided for working adults to obtain higher-level education.

Health

While malaria and cholera are problematic in China, people are generally healthy. However, the system of guaranteed care is being replaced by an insurance-based system where patients are required to pay for part of their care. Since rural Chinese often lack money, health conditions are declining and disease is spreading. Unlike many developing countries, Chinese health care concentrates on prevention. An extensive network of programs emphasizes immunizations, prenatal care, pediatrics, and sanitation, though access in rural areas is sometimes limited. Facilities are simple, but the system has greatly improved basic health—especially in urban areas. Still, water is usually not potable and open sewers are common. Increased pollution in recent years is becoming a major public health problem in most urban areas. Traditional Chinese medicine (use of medicinal herbs and acupuncture, among other things) is combined with Western medical techniques in treating illness and injury.

AT A GLANCE

Contact Information

Embassy of China, 3505 International Place NW, Washington, DC 20008; phone (202) 495-2266; web site www.china-embassy.org/eng. China National Tourist Office, phone (888) 760-8218; web site <http://www.cnto.org>.

Country and Development Data

Capital	Beijing
Population	1,349,585,838 (rank=1)
Area (sq. mi.)	3,705,407 (rank=5)
Area (sq. km.)	9,596,961
Human Development Index	101 of 187 countries
Gender Inequality Index	35 of 148 countries
GDP (PPP) per capita	\$9,100
Adult Literacy	96% (male); 89% (female)
Infant Mortality	15.2 per 1,000 births
Life Expectancy	72 (male); 75 (female)
Currency	Renminbi/yuan