

= China =

China , officially the People 's Republic of China ( PRC ) , in Asia , is the world 's most populous state , with a population of over 1 @. @ 381 billion . The state is governed by its vanguard party based in the capital of Beijing . It exercises jurisdiction over 22 provinces , five autonomous regions , four direct @- @ controlled municipalities ( Beijing , Tianjin , Shanghai , and Chongqing ) , two mostly self @- @ governing special administrative regions ( Hong Kong and Macau ) , and claims sovereignty over Taiwan . China is a great power and a major regional power within Asia , and has been characterized as a potential superpower .

Covering approximately 9 @. @ 6 million square kilometers , China is the world 's second largest state by land area , and either the third or fourth @- @ largest by total area , depending on the method of measurement . China 's landscape is vast and diverse , ranging from forest steppes and the Gobi and Taklamakan deserts in the arid north to subtropical forests in the wetter south . The Himalaya , Karakoram , Pamir and Tian Shan mountain ranges separate China from south and central Asia . The Yangtze and Yellow rivers , the third and sixth longest in the world , respectively , run from the Tibetan Plateau to the densely populated eastern seaboard . China 's coastline along the Pacific Ocean is 14 @, @ 500 kilometres ( 9 @, @ 000 mi ) long , and is bounded by the Bohai , Yellow , East China , and South China seas .

China is a cradle of civilization , with its known history beginning with an ancient civilization ? one of the world 's earliest ? that flourished in the fertile basin of the Yellow River in the North China Plain . For millennia , China 's political system was based on hereditary monarchies known as dynasties . Since 221 BCE , when the Qin Dynasty first conquered several states to form a Chinese empire , the state has expanded , fractured and reformed numerous times . The Republic of China ( ROC ) replaced the last dynasty in 1912 , and ruled the Chinese mainland until 1949 , when it was defeated by the Communist Party of China in the Chinese Civil War . The Communist Party established the People 's Republic of China in Beijing on 1 October 1949 , while the ROC government relocated to Taiwan with its present capital in Taipei . Both the ROC and PRC continue to claim to be the legitimate government of all China .

China had the largest economy in the world for most of the past two thousand years , during which it has seen cycles of prosperity and decline . Since the introduction of economic reforms in 1978 , China has become one of the world 's fastest @- @ growing major economies . As of 2014 , it is the world 's second @- @ largest economy by nominal GDP and largest by purchasing power parity ( PPP ) . China is also the world 's largest exporter and second @- @ largest importer of goods . China is a recognized nuclear weapons state and has the world 's largest standing army and second @- @ largest defense budget . The PRC is a member of the United Nations , as it replaced the ROC as a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council in 1971 . China is also a member of numerous formal and informal multilateral organizations , including the WTO , APEC , BRICS , the Shanghai Cooperation Organization ( SCO ) , the BCIM and the G @- @ 20 .

= = Etymology = =

The English word " China " is thought to have been originally derived from the Sanskrit word C?na ( ??? ) , which is translated into the Persian word Ch?n ( ??? ) . C?na was first used in early Hindu scripture , including the Mah?bh?rata ( 5th century BCE ) and the Laws of Manu ( 2nd century BCE ) . The word " China " itself was first recorded in 1516 in the journal of the Portuguese explorer Duarte Barbosa . The journal was translated and published in England in 1555 . The traditional theory , proposed in the 17th century by Martino Martini and supported by many later scholars , is that the word China and its earlier related forms are ultimately derived from the state of " Qin " ( ? ) , the westernmost of the Chinese kingdoms during the Zhou dynasty which unified China to form the Qin dynasty . Other suggestions for the derivation of " China " however exist .

The official name of the modern state is the People 's Republic of China ( Chinese : ??????? ; pinyin : Zh?nghuá Rénmín Gònghéguó ) . The common Chinese names for the state are Zh?ngguó ( Chinese : ?? , from zh?ng , " central " or " middle " , and guó , " state " or " states " , and in modern

times , " nation " ) and Zhōnghuá ( Chinese : 中国 ) , although the state 's official name has been changed numerous times by successive dynasties and modern governments . The term Zhōngguó appeared in various ancient texts , such as the Classic of History of the 6th century BCE , and in pre-imperial times it was often used as a cultural concept to distinguish the Huaxia tribes from perceived " barbarians " . The term , which can be either singular or plural , referred to the group of states or provinces in the central plain , but was not used as a name for the state as a whole until the nineteenth century . The Chinese were not unique in regarding their state as " central " , with other civilizations having the same view of themselves .

== History ==

=== Prehistory ===

Archaeological evidence suggests that early hominids inhabited China between 250,000 and 2.4 million years ago . A cave in Zhoukoudian ( near present-day Beijing ) exhibits hominid fossils dated at between 680,000 and 780,000 BCE . The fossils are of Peking Man , an example of Homo erectus who used fire . Fossilised teeth of Homo sapiens dating to 125,000 ? 80,000 BCE have been discovered in Fuyan Cave in Dao County , Hunan . Chinese proto-writing existed in Jiahu around 7000 BC , Dadiwan from 5800 BC to 5400 BC , Damaidi around 6000 BC and Banpo dating from the 5th millennium BC . Some scholars have suggested that the Jiahu symbols ( 7th millennium BC ) constituted the earliest Chinese writing system .

=== Early dynastic rule ===

According to Chinese tradition , the first dynasty was the Xia , which emerged around 2100 BCE . The dynasty was considered mythical by historians until scientific excavations found early Bronze Age sites at Erlitou , Henan in 1959 . It remains unclear whether these sites are the remains of the Xia Dynasty or of another culture from the same period . The succeeding Shang dynasty is the earliest to be confirmed by contemporary records . The Shang ruled the plain of the Yellow River in eastern China from the 17th to the 11th century BCE . Their oracle bone script ( from c . 1500 BCE ) represents the oldest form of Chinese writing yet found , and is a direct ancestor of modern Chinese characters . The Shang were conquered by the Zhou , who ruled between the 11th and 5th centuries BCE , though centralized authority was slowly eroded by feudal warlords . Many independent states eventually emerged from the weakened Zhou state and continually waged war with each other in the 300-year Spring and Autumn Period , only occasionally deferring to the Zhou king . By the time of the Warring States period of the 5th ? 3rd centuries BCE , there were seven powerful sovereign states in what is now China , each with its own king , ministry and army .

=== Imperial China ===

The Warring States period ended in 221 BCE after the state of Qin conquered the other six kingdoms and established the first unified Chinese state . Qin Shi Huang , the emperor of Qin , proclaimed himself " First Emperor " ( 秦始皇 ) and imposed reforms throughout China , notably the forced standardization of Chinese characters , measurements , length of cart axles , and currency . His dynasty also conquered the Yue tribes , incorporating the Lingnan area into China . The Qin dynasty lasted only fifteen years , falling soon after Qin Shi Huang 's death , as its harsh legalist and authoritarian policies led to widespread rebellion .

The subsequent Han dynasty ruled China between 206 BCE and 220 CE , and created a lasting Han cultural identity among its populace that has endured to the present day . The Han Dynasty expanded the empire 's territory considerably with military campaigns reaching southern Korea , Vietnam , Mongolia and Central Asia , and also helped establish the Silk Road in Central Asia . Han

China gradually became the largest economy of the ancient world . The Han Dynasty adopted Confucianism , a philosophy developed in the Spring and Autumn period , as its official state ideology . Despite the Han 's official abandonment of Legalism , the official ideology of the Qin , Legalist institutions and policies remained and formed the basis of the Han government .

After the collapse of Han , a period of disunion known as the period of the Three Kingdoms followed . The brief unification of the Jin dynasty was broken by the uprising of the Five Barbarians . In 581 CE , China was reunited under the Sui . However , the Sui Dynasty declined following its defeat in the Goguryeo ? Sui War ( 598 ? 614 ) .

Under the succeeding Tang and Song dynasties , Chinese economy , technology and culture entered a golden age . After the campaigns against the Turks , China returned control of the Western Regions and reopened the Silk Road during the flourishing age of Tang dynasty , which was devastated and weakened by the An Shi Rebellion in the 8th century . The Song dynasty was the first government in world history to issue paper money and the first Chinese polity to establish a permanent standing navy which was supported by the developed shipbuilding industry along with the sea trade . Between the 10th and 11th centuries , the population of China doubled in size to around 100 million people , mostly because of the expansion of rice cultivation in central and southern China , and the production of abundant food surpluses . The Song dynasty also saw a revival of Confucianism , in response to the growth of Buddhism during the Tang , and a flourishing of philosophy and the arts , as landscape art and porcelain were brought to new levels of maturity and complexity . However , the military weakness of the Song army was observed by the Jurchen Jin dynasty . In 1127 , Emperor Huizong of Song and the capital Bianjing were captured during the Jin ? Song Wars , remnants of the Song retreated to southern China .

In the 13th century , China was gradually conquered by the Mongol Empire . In 1271 , the Mongol leader Kublai Khan established the Yuan dynasty ; the Yuan conquered the last remnant of the Song dynasty in 1279 . Before the Mongol invasion , the population of Song China was 120 million citizens ; this was reduced to 60 million by the time of the census in 1300 . A peasant named Zhu Yuanzhang overthrew the Yuan Dynasty in 1368 and founded the Ming dynasty . Under the Ming Dynasty , China enjoyed another golden age , developing one of the strongest navies in the world and a rich and prosperous economy amid a flourishing of art and culture . It was during this period that Zheng He led voyages throughout the world , reaching as far as Africa . In the early years of the Ming Dynasty , China 's capital was moved from Nanjing to Beijing . With the budding of capitalism , philosophers such as Wang Yangming further critiqued and expanded Neo @-@ Confucianism with concepts of individualism and equality of four occupations . The scholar @-@ official stratum became a supporting force of industry and commerce in the tax boycott movements , which , together with the famines and the wars against Japanese invasions of Korea and Manchu invasions led to an exhausted treasury .

In 1644 , Beijing was captured by a coalition of peasant rebel forces led by Li Zicheng . The last Ming Chongzhen Emperor committed suicide when the city fell . The Manchu Qing dynasty then allied with Ming dynasty general Wu Sangui and overthrew Li 's short @-@ lived Shun dynasty , and subsequently seized control of Beijing , which became the new capital of the Qing Dynasty .

= = = End of dynastic rule = = =

The Qing dynasty , which lasted from 1644 until 1912 , was the last imperial dynasty of China . As a conquest dynasty , it successively conquered the Ming loyalists and Dzungar Khanate , adding Mongolia , Tibet and Xinjiang into the empire , and strengthened the centralized autocracy to crackdown on anti @-@ Qing sentiment . The Haijin ( " sea ban " ) and the ideological control as represented by the literary inquisition caused social and technological stagnation . In the 19th century , the dynasty experienced Western imperialism following the First Opium War ( 1839 ? 42 ) and the Second Opium War ( 1856 ? 60 ) with Britain and France . China was forced to sign unequal treaties , pay compensation , open treaty ports , allow extraterritoriality for foreign nationals , and cede Hong Kong to the British under the 1842 Treaty of Nanking . The First Sino @-@ Japanese War ( 1894 ? 95 ) resulted in Qing China 's loss of influence in the Korean Peninsula , as

well as the cession of Taiwan to Japan .

The Qing dynasty also began experiencing internal unrest in which millions of people died . In the 1850s and 1860s , the failed Taiping Rebellion ravaged southern China . Other major rebellions included the Punti @-@ Hakka Clan Wars ( 1855 ? 67 ) , the Nian Rebellion ( 1851 ? 68 ) , the Miao Rebellion ( 1854 ? 73 ) , the Panthay Rebellion ( 1856 ? 73 ) and the Dungan Revolt ( 1862 ? 77 ) . The initial success of the Self @-@ Strengthening Movement of the 1860s was frustrated by the series of military defeats in the 1880s and 1890s .

In the 19th century , the great Chinese Diaspora began . Losses due to emigration were added to by conflicts and catastrophes such as the Northern Chinese Famine of 1876 ? 79 , in which between 9 and 13 million people died . In 1898 , the Guangxu Emperor drafted a reform plan to establish a modern constitutional monarchy , but these plans were thwarted by the Empress Dowager Cixi . The ill @-@ fated anti @-@ Western Boxer Rebellion of 1899 ? 1901 further weakened the dynasty . Although Cixi sponsored a program of reforms , the Xinhai Revolution of 1911 ? 12 brought an end to the Qing dynasty and established the Republic of China .

= = = Republic of China ( 1912 ? 49 ) = = =

On 1 January 1912 , the Republic of China was established , and Sun Yat @-@ sen of the Kuomintang ( the KMT or Nationalist Party ) was proclaimed provisional president . However , the presidency was later given to Yuan Shikai , a former Qing general who in 1915 proclaimed himself Emperor of China . In the face of popular condemnation and opposition from his own Beiyang Army , he was forced to abdicate and reestablish the republic .

After Yuan Shikai 's death in 1916 , China was politically fragmented . Its Beijing @-@ based government was internationally recognized but virtually powerless ; regional warlords controlled most of its territory . In the late 1920s , the Kuomintang , under Chiang Kai @-@ shek , the then Principal of the Republic of China Military Academy , was able to reunify the country under its own control with a series of deft military and political manoeuvrings , known collectively as the Northern Expedition . The Kuomintang moved the nation 's capital to Nanjing and implemented " political tutelage " , an intermediate stage of political development outlined in Sun Yat @-@ sen 's San @-@ min program for transforming China into a modern democratic state . The political division in China made it difficult for Chiang to battle the Communists , against whom the Kuomintang had been warring since 1927 in the Chinese Civil War . This war continued successfully for the Kuomintang , especially after the Communists retreated in the Long March , until Japanese aggression and the 1936 Xi 'an Incident forced Chiang to confront Imperial Japan .

The Second Sino @-@ Japanese War ( 1937 ? 1945 ) , a theatre of World War II , forced an uneasy alliance between the Kuomintang and the Communists . Japanese forces committed numerous war atrocities against the civilian population ; in all , as many as 20 million Chinese civilians died . An estimated 200 @,@ 000 Chinese were massacred in the city of Nanjing alone during the Japanese occupation . During the war , China , along with the UK , the US and the Soviet Union , were referred to as " trusteeship of the powerful " and were recognized as the Allied " Big Four " in the Declaration by United Nations . Along with the other three great powers , China was one of the four major Allies of World War II , and was later considered one of the primary victors in the war . After the surrender of Japan in 1945 , Taiwan , including the Pescadores , was returned to Chinese control . China emerged victorious but war @-@ ravaged and financially drained . The continued distrust between the Kuomintang and the Communists led to the resumption of civil war . In 1947 , constitutional rule was established , but because of the ongoing unrest , many provisions of the ROC constitution were never implemented in mainland China .

= = = People 's Republic of China ( 1949 ? present ) = = =

Major combat in the Chinese Civil War ended in 1949 with the Communist Party in control of most of mainland China , and the Kuomintang retreating offshore , reducing the ROC 's territory to only Taiwan , Hainan , and their surrounding islands . On 1 October 1949 , Communist Party Chairman

Mao Zedong proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of China . In 1950 , the People's Liberation Army succeeded in capturing Hainan from the ROC and incorporating Tibet . However , remaining Nationalist forces continued to wage an insurgency in western China throughout the 1950s .

Mao 's regime consolidated its popularity among the peasants through the land reform with between 1 and 2 million landlords executed . Under its leadership , China developed an independent industrial system and its own nuclear weapons . The Chinese population almost doubled from around 550 million to over 900 million . However , Mao 's Great Leap Forward , a large @-@ scale economic and social reform project , resulted in an estimated 45 million deaths between 1958 and 1961 , mostly from starvation . In 1966 , Mao and his allies launched the Cultural Revolution , sparking a decade of political recrimination and social upheaval which lasted until Mao 's death in 1976 . In October 1971 , the PRC replaced the Republic of China in the United Nations , and took its seat as a permanent member of the Security Council .

In 1976 , Mao died . The Gang of Four was quickly arrested and held responsible for the excesses of the Cultural Revolution . In 1978 Deng Xiaoping took power and instituted significant economic reforms . The Communist Party loosened governmental control over citizens ' personal lives , and the communes were gradually disbanded in favour of private land leases . This marked China 's transition from a planned economy to a mixed economy with an increasingly open market environment . China adopted its current constitution on 4 December 1982 . In 1989 , the violent suppression of student protests in Tiananmen Square brought condemnation and sanctions against the Chinese government from various countries .

Jiang Zemin , Li Peng and Zhu Rongji led the nation in the 1990s . Under their administration , China 's economic performance pulled an estimated 150 million peasants out of poverty and sustained an average annual gross domestic product growth rate of 11 @.@ 2 % . The country formally joined the World Trade Organization in 2001 , and maintained its high rate of economic growth under Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao 's leadership in the 2000s . However , rapid growth also severely impacted the country 's resources and environment , and caused major social displacement . Living standards continued to improve rapidly despite the late @-@ 2000s recession , but centralized political control remained tight .

Preparations for a decadal Communist Party leadership change in 2012 were marked by factional disputes and political scandals . During China 's 18th National Communist Party Congress in November 2012 , Hu Jintao was replaced as General Secretary of the Communist Party by Xi Jinping . Under Xi , the Chinese government began large @-@ scale efforts to reform its economy , which has suffered from structural instabilities and slowing growth . The Xi ? Li Administration also announced major reforms to the one @-@ child policy and prison system .

= = Geography = =

= = = Political geography = = =

The People 's Republic of China is the second @-@ largest country in the world by land area after Russia , and is either the third- or fourth @-@ largest by total area , after Russia , Canada and , depending on the definition of total area , the United States . China 's total area is generally stated as being approximately 9 @,@ 600 @,@ 000 km<sup>2</sup> ( 3 @,@ 700 @,@ 000 sq mi ) . Specific area figures range from 9 @,@ 572 @,@ 900 km<sup>2</sup> ( 3 @,@ 696 @,@ 100 sq mi ) according to the Encyclopædia Britannica , 9 @,@ 596 @,@ 961 km<sup>2</sup> ( 3 @,@ 705 @,@ 407 sq mi ) according to the UN Demographic Yearbook , to 9 @,@ 596 @,@ 961 km<sup>2</sup> ( 3 @,@ 705 @,@ 407 sq mi ) according to the CIA World Factbook .

China has the longest combined land border in the world , measuring 22 @,@ 117 km ( 13 @,@ 743 mi ) from the mouth of the Yalu River to the Gulf of Tonkin . China borders 14 nations , more than any other country except Russia , which also borders 14 . China extends across much of East Asia , bordering Vietnam , Laos , and Myanmar ( Burma ) in Southeast Asia ; India , Bhutan , Nepal

, Afghanistan , and Pakistan in South Asia ; Tajikistan , Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan in Central Asia ; and Russia , Mongolia , and North Korea in Inner Asia and Northeast Asia . Additionally , China shares maritime boundaries with South Korea , Japan , Vietnam , and the Philippines .

### = = = Landscape and climate = = =

The territory of China lies between latitudes 18 ° and 54 ° N , and longitudes 73 ° and 135 ° E. China 's landscapes vary significantly across its vast width . In the east , along the shores of the Yellow Sea and the East China Sea , there are extensive and densely populated alluvial plains , while on the edges of the Inner Mongolian plateau in the north , broad grasslands predominate . Southern China is dominated by hills and low mountain ranges , while the central @-@ east hosts the deltas of China 's two major rivers , the Yellow River and the Yangtze River . Other major rivers include the Xi , Mekong , Brahmaputra and Amur . To the west sit major mountain ranges , most notably the Himalayas . High plateaus feature among the more arid landscapes of the north , such as the Taklamakan and the Gobi Desert . The world 's highest point , Mount Everest ( 8,848m ) , lies on the Sino @-@ Nepalese border . The country 's lowest point , and the world 's third @-@ lowest , is the dried lake bed of Ayding Lake ( ? 154m ) in the Turpan Depression .

China 's climate is mainly dominated by dry seasons and wet monsoons , which lead to pronounced temperature differences between winter and summer . In the winter , northern winds coming from high @-@ latitude areas are cold and dry ; in summer , southern winds from coastal areas at lower latitudes are warm and moist . The climate in China differs from region to region because of the country 's highly complex topography .

A major environmental issue in China is the continued expansion of its deserts , particularly the Gobi Desert . Although barrier tree lines planted since the 1970s have reduced the frequency of sandstorms , prolonged drought and poor agricultural practices have resulted in dust storms plaguing northern China each spring , which then spread to other parts of east Asia , including Korea and Japan . China 's environmental watchdog , SEPA , stated in 2007 that China is losing a million acres ( 4 @, @ 000 km <sup>2</sup> ) per year to desertification . Water quality , erosion , and pollution control have become important issues in China 's relations with other countries . Melting glaciers in the Himalayas could potentially lead to water shortages for hundreds of millions of people .

### = = = Biodiversity = = =

China is one of 17 megadiverse countries , lying in two of the world 's major ecozones : the Palearctic and the Indomalaya . By one measure , China has over 34 @, @ 687 species of animals and vascular plants , making it the third @-@ most biodiverse country in the world , after Brazil and Colombia . The country signed the Rio de Janeiro Convention on Biological Diversity on 11 June 1992 , and became a party to the convention on 5 January 1993 . It later produced a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan , with one revision that was received by the convention on 21 September 2010 .

China is home to at least 551 species of mammals ( the third @-@ highest such number in the world ) , 1 @, @ 221 species of birds ( eighth ) , 424 species of reptiles ( seventh ) and 333 species of amphibians ( seventh ) . China is the most biodiverse country in each category outside the tropics . Wildlife in China share habitat with and bear acute pressure from the world 's largest population of homo sapiens . At least 840 animal species are threatened , vulnerable or in danger of local extinction in China , due mainly to human activity such as habitat destruction , pollution and poaching for food , fur and ingredients for traditional Chinese medicine . Endangered wildlife is protected by law , and as of 2005 , the country has over 2 @, @ 349 nature reserves , covering a total area of 149 @. @ 95 million hectares , 15 percent of China 's total land area .

China has over 32 @, @ 000 species of vascular plants , and is home to a variety of forest types . Cold coniferous forests predominate in the north of the country , supporting animal species such as moose and Asian black bear , along with over 120 bird species . The understorey of moist conifer forests may contain thickets of bamboo . In higher montane stands of juniper and yew , the bamboo

is replaced by rhododendrons . Subtropical forests , which are predominate in central and southern China , support as many as 146 @, @ 000 species of flora . Tropical and seasonal rainforests , though confined to Yunnan and Hainan Island , contain a quarter of all the animal and plant species found in China . China has over 10 @, @ 000 recorded species of fungi , and of them , nearly 6 @, @ 000 are higher fungi .

= = = Environmental issues = = =

In recent decades , China has suffered from severe environmental deterioration and pollution . While regulations such as the 1979 Environmental Protection Law are fairly stringent , they are poorly enforced , as they are frequently disregarded by local communities and government officials in favour of rapid economic development . Urban air pollution is a severe health issue in the country ; the World Bank estimated in 2013 that 16 of the world 's 20 most @-@ polluted cities are located in China . China is the world 's largest carbon dioxide emitter . The country also has significant water pollution problems : 40 % of China 's rivers had been polluted by industrial and agricultural waste by late 2011 . This crisis is compounded by increasingly severe water shortages , particularly in the north @-@ east of the country .

However , China is the world 's leading investor in renewable energy commercialization , with \$ 52 billion invested in 2011 alone ; it is a major manufacturer of renewable energy technologies and invests heavily in local @-@ scale renewable energy projects . By 2009 , over 17 % of China 's energy was derived from renewable sources ? most notably hydroelectric power plants , of which China has a total installed capacity of 197 GW . In 2011 , the Chinese government announced plans to invest four trillion yuan ( US \$ 618 @. @ 55 billion ) in water infrastructure and desalination projects over a ten @-@ year period , and to complete construction of a flood prevention and anti @-@ drought system by 2020 . In 2013 , China began a five @-@ year , US \$ 277 @-@ billion effort to reduce air pollution , particularly in the north of the country .

= = Politics = =

China 's constitution states that The People 's Republic of China " is a socialist state under the people 's democratic dictatorship led by the working class and based on the alliance of workers and peasants , " and that the state organs " apply the principle of democratic centralism . " The PRC is one of the world 's few remaining socialist states openly endorsing communism ( see Ideology of the Communist Party of China ) . The Chinese government has been variously described as communist and socialist , but also as authoritarian and corporatist , with heavy restrictions in many areas , most notably against free access to the Internet , freedom of the press , freedom of assembly , the right to have children , free formation of social organizations and freedom of religion . Its current political , ideological and economic system has been termed by its leaders as the " people 's democratic dictatorship " , " socialism with Chinese characteristics " ( which is Marxism adapted to Chinese circumstances ) and the " socialist market economy " respectively .

= = = Communist Party = = =

China 's constitution declares that the country is ruled " under the leadership " of the Communist Party of China ( CPC ) . The electoral system is pyramidal . Local People 's Congresses are directly elected , and higher levels of People 's Congresses up to the National People 's Congress ( NPC ) are indirectly elected by the People 's Congress of the level immediately below . The political system is decentralized , and provincial and sub @-@ provincial leaders have a significant amount of autonomy . Other political parties , referred to as democratic parties , have representatives in the National People 's Congress and the Chinese People 's Political Consultative Conference ( CPPCC ) .

Compared to its closed @-@ door policies until the mid @-@ 1970s , the administrative climate is less restrictive than before . China supports the Leninist principle of " democratic centralism " , but

critics describe the elected National People 's Congress as a " rubber stamp " body .

= = = Government = = =

The President of China is the titular head of state , serving as the ceremonial figurehead under National People 's Congress . The Premier of China is the head of government , presiding over the State Council composed of four vice premiers and the heads of ministries and commissions . The incumbent president is Xi Jinping , who is also the General Secretary of the Communist Party of China and the Chairman of the Central Military Commission , making him China 's paramount leader . The incumbent premier is Li Keqiang , who is also a senior member of the CPC Politburo Standing Committee , China 's de facto top decision @-@ making body .

There have been some moves toward political liberalization , in that open contested elections are now held at the village and town levels . However , the Party retains effective control over government appointments : in the absence of meaningful opposition , the CPC wins by default most of the time . Political concerns in China include the growing gap between rich and poor and government corruption . Nonetheless , the level of public support for the government and its management of the nation is high , with 80 ? 95 % of Chinese citizens expressing satisfaction with the central government , according to a 2011 survey .

= = = Administrative divisions = = =

The People 's Republic of China has administrative control over 22 provinces and considers Taiwan to be its 23rd province , although Taiwan is currently and independently governed by the Republic of China , which disputes the PRC 's claim . China also has five subdivisions officially termed autonomous regions , each with a designated minority group ; four municipalities ; and two Special Administrative Regions ( SARs ) , which enjoy a degree of political autonomy . These 22 provinces , five autonomous regions , and four municipalities can be collectively referred to as " mainland China " , a term which usually excludes the SARs of Hong Kong and Macau . None of these divisions are recognized by the ROC government , which claims the entirety of the PRC 's territory .

= = = Foreign relations = = =

The PRC has diplomatic relations with 171 countries and maintains embassies in 162 . Its legitimacy is disputed by the Republic of China and a few other countries ; it is thus the largest and most populous state with limited recognition . In 1971 , the PRC replaced the Republic of China as the sole representative of China in the United Nations and as one of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council . China was also a former member and leader of the Non @-@ Aligned Movement , and still considers itself an advocate for developing countries . Along with Brazil , Russia , India and South Africa , China is a member of the BRICS group of emerging major economies and hosted the group 's third official summit at Sanya , Hainan in April 2011 .

Under its interpretation of the One @-@ China policy , Beijing has made it a precondition to establishing diplomatic relations that the other country acknowledges its claim to Taiwan and severs official ties with the government of the Republic of China . Chinese officials have protested on numerous occasions when foreign countries have made diplomatic overtures to Taiwan , especially in the matter of armament sales .

Much of current Chinese foreign policy is reportedly based on Premier Zhou Enlai 's Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence , and is also driven by the concept of " harmony without uniformity " , which encourages diplomatic relations between states despite ideological differences . This policy may have led China to support states that are regarded as dangerous or repressive by Western nations , such as Zimbabwe , North Korea and Iran . China has a close economic and military relationship with Russia , and the two states often vote in unison in the UN Security Council .

= = = Trade relations = = =



In recent decades , China has played an increasing role in calling for free trade areas and security pacts amongst its Asia @-@ Pacific neighbours . In 2004 , it proposed an entirely new East Asia Summit ( EAS ) framework as a forum for regional security issues . The EAS , which includes ASEAN Plus Three , India , Australia and New Zealand , held its inaugural summit in 2005 . China is also a founding member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization ( SCO ) , along with Russia and the Central Asian republics . China became a member of the World Trade Organization ( WTO ) on 11 December 2001 .

In 2000 , the United States Congress approved " permanent normal trade relations " ( PNTR ) with China , allowing Chinese exports in at the same low tariffs as goods from most other countries . China has a significant trade surplus with the United States , its most important export market . In the early 2010s , US politicians argued that the Chinese yuan was significantly undervalued , giving China an unfair trade advantage . In recent decades , China has followed a policy of engaging with African nations for trade and bilateral co @-@ operation ; in 2012 , Sino @-@ African trade totalled over US \$ 160 billion . China has furthermore strengthened its ties with major South American economies , becoming the largest trading partner of Brazil and building strategic links with Argentina .

= = = Territorial disputes = = =

Ever since its establishment after the second Chinese Civil War , the PRC has been claiming the territories governed by the Republic of China ( ROC ) , a separate political entity today commonly known as Taiwan , as a part of its territory , which includes the island of Taiwan as Taiwan Province , Kinmen and Matsu as a part of Fujian Province and islands the ROC controls in the South China Sea as a part of Hainan Province and Guangdong Province . These claims are controversial because of the complicated Cross @-@ Strait relations , and has been one of the most important principles in Chinese diplomacy .

In addition to Taiwan , China is also involved in other international territorial disputes . Since the 1990s , China has been involved in negotiations to resolve its disputed land borders , including a disputed border with India and an undefined border with Bhutan . China is additionally involved in multilateral disputes over the ownership of several small islands in the East and South China Seas , such as the Senkaku Islands and the Scarborough Shoal . On 21 May 2014 President Xi , speaking at a conference in Shanghai , pledged to settle China 's territorial disputes peacefully . " China stays committed to seeking peaceful settlement of disputes with other countries over territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests " , he said .

= = = Emerging superpower status = = =

China is regularly hailed as a potential new superpower , with certain commentators citing its rapid economic progress , growing military might , very large population , and increasing international influence as signs that it will play a prominent global role in the 21st century . Others , however , warn that economic bubbles and demographic imbalances could slow or even halt China 's growth as the century progresses . Some authors also question the definition of " superpower " , arguing that China 's large economy alone would not qualify it as a superpower , and noting that it lacks the military and cultural influence of the United States .

= = = Sociopolitical issues , human rights , and reform = = =

The Chinese democracy movement , social activists , and some members of the Communist Party of China have all identified the need for social and political reform . While economic and social controls have been significantly relaxed in China since the 1970s , political freedom is still tightly restricted . The Constitution of the People 's Republic of China states that the " fundamental rights " of citizens include freedom of speech , freedom of the press , the right to a fair trial , freedom of

religion , universal suffrage , and property rights . However , in practice , these provisions do not afford significant protection against criminal prosecution by the state . Although some criticisms of government policies and the ruling Communist Party are tolerated , censorship of political speech and information , most notably on the Internet , are routinely used to prevent collective action . In 2005 , Reporters Without Borders ranked China 159th out of 167 states in its Annual World Press Freedom Index , indicating a very low level of press freedom . In 2014 , China ranked 175th out of 180 countries .

Rural migrants to China 's cities often find themselves treated as second @-@ class citizens by the hukou household registration system , which controls access to state benefits . Property rights are often poorly protected , and taxation disproportionately affects poorer citizens . However , a number of rural taxes have been reduced or abolished since the early 2000s , and additional social services provided to rural dwellers .

A number of foreign governments , foreign press agencies and NGOs also routinely criticize China 's human rights record , alleging widespread civil rights violations such as detention without trial , forced abortions , forced confessions , torture , restrictions of fundamental rights , and excessive use of the death penalty . The government has suppressed popular protests and demonstrations that it considers a potential threat to " social stability " , as was the case with the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989 .

Falun Gong was first taught publicly in 1992 . In 1999 , when there were 70 million practitioners , the persecution of Falun Gong began , resulting in mass arrests , extralegal detention , and reports of torture and deaths in custody . The Chinese state is regularly accused of large @-@ scale repression and human rights abuses in Tibet and Xinjiang , including violent police crackdowns and religious suppression .

The Chinese government has responded to foreign criticism by arguing that the right to subsistence and economic development is a prerequisite to other types of human rights , and that the notion of human rights should take into account a country 's present level of economic development . It emphasizes the rise in the Chinese standard of living , literacy rate and average life expectancy since the 1970s , as well as improvements in workplace safety and efforts to combat natural disasters such as the perennial Yangtze River floods . Furthermore , some Chinese politicians have spoken out in support of democratization , although others remain more conservative . Some major reform efforts have been conducted ; for an instance in November 2013 , the government announced plans to relax the one @-@ child policy and abolish the much @-@ criticized re @-@ education through labour program , though human rights groups note that reforms to the latter have been largely cosmetic . During the 2000s and early 2010s , the Chinese government was increasingly tolerant of NGOs that offer practical , efficient solutions to social problems , but such " third sector " activity remained heavily regulated .

= = Military = =

With 2 @.@ 3 million active troops , the People 's Liberation Army ( PLA ) is the largest standing military force in the world , commanded by the Central Military Commission ( CMC ) . The PLA consists of the Ground Force ( PLAGF ) , the Navy ( PLAN ) , the Air Force ( PLAAF ) , and the People 's Liberation Army Rocket Force ( PLARF ) . According to the Chinese government , China 's military budget for 2014 totalled US \$ 132 billion , constituting the world 's second @-@ largest military budget . However , many authorities ? including SIPRI and the U.S. Office of the Secretary of Defense ? argue that China does not report its real level of military spending , which is allegedly much higher than the official budget .

As a recognized nuclear weapons state , China is considered both a major regional military power and a potential military superpower . According to a 2013 report by the US Department of Defense , China fields between 50 and 75 nuclear ICBMs , along with a number of SRBMs . However , compared with the other four UN Security Council Permanent Members , China has relatively limited power projection capabilities . To offset this , it has developed numerous power projection assets since the early 2000s ? its first aircraft carrier entered service in 2012 , and it maintains a substantial

fleet of submarines , including several nuclear @-@ powered attack and ballistic missile submarines . China has furthermore established a network of foreign military relationships along critical sea lanes .

China has made significant progress in modernising its air force in recent decades , purchasing Russian fighter jets such as the Sukhoi Su @-@ 30 , and also manufacturing its own modern fighters , most notably the Chengdu J @-@ 10 , J @-@ 20 and the Shenyang J @-@ 11 , J @-@ 15 , J @-@ 16 , and J @-@ 31 . China is furthermore engaged in developing an indigenous stealth aircraft and numerous combat drones . Air and Sea denial weaponry advances have increased the regional threat from the perspective of Japan as well as Washington . China has also updated its ground forces , replacing its ageing Soviet @-@ derived tank inventory with numerous variants of the modern Type 99 tank , and upgrading its battlefield C3I and C4I systems to enhance its network @-@ centric warfare capabilities . In addition , China has developed or acquired numerous advanced missile systems , including anti @-@ satellite missiles , cruise missiles and submarine @-@ launched nuclear ICBMs . According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute 's data , China became the world 's third largest exporter of major arms in 2010 ? 14 , an increase of 143 per cent from the period 2005 ? 09 .

= = Economy = =

As of 2014 , China has the world 's second @-@ largest economy in terms of nominal GDP , totalling approximately US \$ 10 @.@ 380 trillion according to the International Monetary Fund . If purchasing power parity ( PPP ) is taken into account , China 's economy is the largest in the world , with a 2014 PPP GDP of US \$ 17 @.@ 617 trillion . In 2013 , its PPP GDP per capita was US \$ 12 @,@ 880 , while its nominal GDP per capita was US \$ 7 @,@ 589 . Both cases put China behind around eighty countries ( out of 183 countries on the IMF list ) in global GDP per capita rankings .

= = = Economic history and growth = = =

From its founding in 1949 until late 1978 , the People 's Republic of China was a Soviet @-@ style centrally planned economy . Following Mao 's death in 1976 and the consequent end of the Cultural Revolution , Deng Xiaoping and the new Chinese leadership began to reform the economy and move towards a more market @-@ oriented mixed economy under one @-@ party rule . Agricultural collectivization was dismantled and farmlands privatized , while foreign trade became a major new focus , leading to the creation of Special Economic Zones ( SEZs ) . Inefficient state @-@ owned enterprises ( SOEs ) were restructured and unprofitable ones were closed outright , resulting in massive job losses . Modern @-@ day China is mainly characterized as having a market economy based on private property ownership , and is one of the leading examples of state capitalism . The state still dominates in strategic " pillar " sectors such as energy production and heavy industries , but private enterprise has expanded enormously , with around 30 million private businesses recorded in 2008 .

Since economic liberalization began in 1978 , China has been among the world 's fastest @-@ growing economies , relying largely on investment- and export @-@ led growth . According to the IMF , China 's annual average GDP growth between 2001 and 2010 was 10 @.@ 5 % . Between 2007 and 2011 , China 's economic growth rate was equivalent to all of the G7 countries ' growth combined . According to the Global Growth Generators index announced by Citigroup in February 2011 , China has a very high 3G growth rating . Its high productivity , low labour costs and relatively good infrastructure have made it a global leader in manufacturing . However , the Chinese economy is highly energy @-@ intensive and inefficient ; China became the world 's largest energy consumer in 2010 , relies on coal to supply over 70 % of its energy needs , and surpassed the US to become the world 's largest oil importer in September 2013 . In the early 2010s , China 's economic growth rate began to slow amid domestic credit troubles , weakening international demand for Chinese exports and fragility in the global economy .

In the online realm , China 's e @-@ commerce industry has grown more slowly than the EU and

the US , with a significant period of development occurring from around 2009 onwards . According to Credit Suisse , the total value of online transactions in China grew from an insignificant size in 2008 to around RMB 4 trillion ( US \$ 660 billion ) in 2012 . The Chinese online payment market is dominated by major firms such as Alipay , Tenpay and China UnionPay .

== China in the global economy ==

China is a member of the WTO and is the world 's largest trading power , with a total international trade value of US \$ 3 @. @ 87 trillion in 2012 . Its foreign exchange reserves reached US \$ 2 @. @ 85 trillion by the end of 2010 , an increase of 18 @. @ 7 % over the previous year , making its reserves by far the world 's largest . In 2012 , China was the world 's largest recipient of inward foreign direct investment ( FDI ) , attracting \$ 253 billion . In 2014 , China 's foreign exchange remittances were \$ US64 billion making it the second largest recipient of remittances in the world . China also invests abroad , with a total outward FDI of \$ 62 @. @ 4 billion in 2012 , and a number of major takeovers of foreign firms by Chinese companies . In 2009 , China owned an estimated \$ 1 @. @ 6 trillion of US securities , and was also the largest foreign holder of US public debt , owning over \$ 1 @. @ 16 trillion in US Treasury bonds . China 's undervalued exchange rate has caused friction with other major economies , and it has also been widely criticized for manufacturing large quantities of counterfeit goods . According to consulting firm McKinsey , total outstanding debt in China increased from \$ 7 @. @ 4 trillion in 2007 to \$ 28 @. @ 2 trillion in 2014 , which reflects 228 % of China 's GDP , a percentage higher than that of some G20 nations .

China ranked 29th in the Global Competitiveness Index in 2009 , although it is only ranked 136th among the 179 countries measured in the 2011 Index of Economic Freedom . In 2014 , Fortune 's Global 500 list of the world 's largest corporations included 95 Chinese companies , with combined revenues of US \$ 5 @. @ 8 trillion . The same year , Forbes reported that five of the world 's ten largest public companies were Chinese , including the world 's largest bank by total assets , the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China .

== Class and income equality ==

China 's middle @-@ class population ( if defined as those with annual income of between US \$ 10 @, @ 000 and US \$ 60 @, @ 000 ) had reached more than 300 million by 2012 . According to the Hurun Report , the number of US dollar billionaires in China increased from 130 in 2009 to 251 in 2012 , giving China the world 's second @-@ highest number of billionaires . China 's domestic retail market was worth over 20 trillion yuan ( US \$ 3 @. @ 2 trillion ) in 2012 and is growing at over 12 % annually as of 2013 , while the country 's luxury goods market has expanded immensely , with 27 @. @ 5 % of the global share . However , in recent years , China 's rapid economic growth has contributed to severe consumer inflation , leading to increased government regulation . China has a high level of economic inequality , which has increased in the past few decades . In 2012 , China 's Gini coefficient was 0 @. @ 474 .

== Internationalization of the renminbi ==

Since 2008 global financial crisis , China realized the dependency of US Dollar and the weakness of the international monetary system . The RMB Internationalization accelerated in 2009 when China established dim sum bond market and expanded the Cross @-@ Border Trade RMB Settlement Pilot Project , which helps establish pools of offshore RMB liquidity .

In November 2010 , Russia began using the Chinese renminbi in its bilateral trade with China . This was soon followed by Japan , Australia , Singapore , the United Kingdom , and Canada . As a result of the rapid internationalization of the renminbi , it became the eighth @-@ most @-@ traded currency in the world in 2013 .

== Science and technology ==

## === Historical ===

China was a world leader in science and technology until the Ming Dynasty . Ancient Chinese discoveries and inventions , such as papermaking , printing , the compass , and gunpowder ( the Four Great Inventions ) , later became widespread in Asia and Europe . Chinese mathematicians were the first to use negative numbers . However , by the 17th century , the Western world had surpassed China in scientific and technological development . The causes of this Great Divergence continue to be debated .

After repeated military defeats by Western nations in the 19th century , Chinese reformers began promoting modern science and technology as part of the Self @-@ Strengthening Movement . After the Communists came to power in 1949 , efforts were made to organize science and technology based on the model of the Soviet Union , in which scientific research was part of central planning . After Mao 's death in 1976 , science and technology was established as one of the Four Modernizations , and the Soviet @-@ inspired academic system was gradually reformed .

## === Modern era ===

Since the end of the Cultural Revolution , China has made significant investments in scientific research , with \$ 163 billion spent on scientific research and development in 2012 . Science and technology are seen as vital for achieving China 's economic and political goals , and are held as a source of national pride to a degree sometimes described as " techno @-@ nationalism " . Nonetheless , China 's investment in basic and applied scientific research remains behind that of leading technological powers such as the United States and Japan . Chinese @-@ born scientists have won the Nobel Prize in Physics four times , the Nobel Prize in Chemistry and Physiology or Medicine once respectively , though most of these scientists conducted their Nobel @-@ winning research in western nations .

China is rapidly developing its education system with an emphasis on science , mathematics and engineering ; in 2009 , it produced over 10 @,@ 000 Ph.D. engineering graduates , and as many as 500 @,@ 000 BSc graduates , more than any other country . China is also the world 's second @-@ largest publisher of scientific papers , producing 121 @,@ 500 in 2010 alone , including 5 @,@ 200 in leading international scientific journals . Chinese technology companies such as Huawei and Lenovo have become world leaders in telecommunications and personal computing , and Chinese supercomputers are consistently ranked among the world 's most powerful . China is furthermore experiencing a significant growth in the use of industrial robots ; from 2008 to 2011 , the installation of multi @-@ role robots in Chinese factories rose by 136 percent .

The Chinese space program is one of the world 's most active , and is a major source of national pride . In 1970 , China launched its first satellite , Dong Fang Hong I , becoming the fifth country to do so independently . In 2003 , China became the third country to independently send humans into space , with Yang Liwei 's spaceflight aboard Shenzhou 5 ; as of 2015 , ten Chinese nationals have journeyed into space , including two women . In 2011 , China 's first space station module , Tiangong @-@ 1 , was launched , marking the first step in a project to assemble a large manned station by the early 2020s . In 2013 , China successfully landed the Chang 'e 3 probe and Yutu rover onto the Moon ; China plans to collect lunar soil samples by 2017 .

## === Infrastructure ===

## === Telecommunications ===

China currently has the largest number of active cellphones of any country in the world , with over 1 billion users by February 2012 . It also has the world 's largest number of internet and broadband

users , with over 688 million internet users as of 2016 , equivalent to around half of its population . The national average broadband connection speed is 9 @. @ 46 MB / s , ranking China 91st in the world in terms of internet speed . As of July 2013 , China accounts for 24 % of the world 's internet @- @ connected devices . Since 2011 China is the nation with the most installed telecommunication bandwidth in the world . By 2014 , China hosts more than twice as much national bandwidth potential than the U.S. , the historical leader in terms of installed telecommunication bandwidth ( China : 29 % versus US : 13 % of the global total ) .

China Telecom and China Unicom , the world 's two largest broadband providers , accounted for 20 % of global broadband subscribers . China Telecom alone serves more than 50 million broadband subscribers , while China Unicom serves more than 40 million . Several Chinese telecommunications companies , most notably Huawei and ZTE , have been accused of spying for the Chinese military .

China is developing its own satellite navigation system , dubbed Beidou , which began offering commercial navigation services across Asia in 2012 , and is planned to offer global coverage by 2020 .

= = = Transport = = =

Since the late 1990s , China 's national road network has been significantly expanded through the creation of a network of national highways and expressways . In 2011 China 's highways had reached a total length of 85 @, @ 000 km ( 53 @, @ 000 mi ) , making it the longest highway system in the world . In 1991 , there were only six bridges across the main stretch of the Yangtze River , which bisects the country into northern and southern halves . By October 2014 , there were 81 such bridges and tunnels .

China has the world 's largest market for automobiles , having surpassed the United States in both auto sales and production . Auto sales in 2009 exceeded 13 @. @ 6 million and may reach 40 million by 2020 . A side @- @ effect of the rapid growth of China 's road network has been a significant rise in traffic accidents , with poorly enforced traffic laws cited as a possible cause ? in 2011 alone , around 62 @, @ 000 Chinese died in road accidents . In urban areas , bicycles remain a common mode of transport , despite the increasing prevalence of automobiles ? as of 2012 , there are approximately 470 million bicycles in China .

China 's railways , which are state @- @ owned , are among the busiest in the world , handling a quarter of the world 's rail traffic volume on only 6 percent of the world 's tracks in 2006 . As of 2013 , the country had 103 @, @ 144 km ( 64 @, @ 091 mi ) of railways , the third longest network in the world . All provinces and regions are connected to the rail network except Macau . The railways strain to meet enormous demand particularly during the Chinese New Year holiday , when the world 's largest annual human migration takes place . In 2013 , Chinese railways delivered 2 @. @ 106 billion passenger trips , generating 1 @, @ 059 @. @ 56 billion passenger @- @ kilometers and carried 3 @. @ 967 billion tons of freight , generating 2 @, @ 917 @. @ 4 billion cargo tons @- @ kilometers .

China 's high @- @ speed rail ( HSR ) system , built entirely since the early 2000s , had 11 @, @ 028 kilometres ( 6 @, @ 852 miles ) of track in 2013 and was the longest HSR network in the world . The network includes the Beijing ? Guangzhou ? Shenzhen High @- @ Speed Railway , the single longest HSR line in the world , and the Beijing ? Shanghai High @- @ Speed Railway , which has three of longest railroad bridges in the world . The HSR track network is set to reach approximately 16 @, @ 000 km ( 9 @, @ 900 mi ) by 2020 . The Shanghai Maglev Train , which reaches 431 km / h ( 268 mph ) , is the fastest commercial train service in the world .

As of May 2014 , 20 Chinese cities have urban mass transit systems in operation , with a dozen more to join them by 2020 . The Shanghai Metro , Beijing Subway , Guangzhou Metro , Hong Kong MTR and Shenzhen Metro are among the longest and busiest in the world .

There were 182 commercial airports in China in 2012 . With 82 new airports planned to open by 2015 , more than two @- @ thirds of the airports under construction worldwide in 2013 were in China , and Boeing expects that China 's fleet of active commercial aircraft in China will grow from 1 @, @

910 in 2011 to 5 @, @ 980 in 2031 . With rapid expansion in civil aviation , the largest airports in China have also joined the ranks of the busiest in the world . In 2013 , Beijing 's Capital Airport ranked second in the world by passenger traffic ( it was 26th in 2002 ) . Since 2010 , the Hong Kong International Airport and Shanghai Pudong International Airport have ranked first and third in air cargo tonnage .

Some 80 % of China 's airspace remains restricted for military use , and Chinese airlines made up eight of the 10 worst @-@ performing Asian airlines in terms of delays . China has over 2 @, @ 000 river and seaports , about 130 of which are open to foreign shipping . In 2012 , the Ports of Shanghai , Hong Kong , Shenzhen , Ningbo @-@ Zhoushan , Guangzhou , Qingdao , Tianjin , Dalian ranked in the top in the world in container traffic and cargo tonnage .

= = = Other infrastructure = = =

According to data presented by the Joint Monitoring Program for Water Supply and Sanitation of WHO and UNICEF in 2015 , about 36 % of the rural population in China still did not have access to improved sanitation .

Water supply and sanitation infrastructure in China is facing challenges such as rapid urbanization , as well as water scarcity , contamination , and pollution . In June 2010 , there were 1 @, @ 519 sewage treatment plants in China and 18 plants were added each week .

= = Demographics = =

The national census of 2010 recorded the population of the People 's Republic of China as approximately 1 @, @ 370 @, @ 536 @, @ 875 . About 16 @. @ 60 % of the population were 14 years old or younger , 70 @. @ 14 % were between 15 and 59 years old , and 13 @. @ 26 % were over 60 years old . The population growth rate for 2013 is estimated to be 0 @. @ 46 % .

Although a middle @-@ income country by Western standards , China 's rapid growth has pulled hundreds of millions of its people out of poverty since 1978 . Today , about 10 % of the Chinese population lives below the poverty line of US \$ 1 per day , down from 64 % in 1978 . Urban unemployment in China reportedly declined to 4 % by the end of 2007 . At present , the urban unemployment rate of China is about 4 @. @ 1 % .

With a population of over 1 @. @ 3 billion and dwindling natural resources , the government of China is very concerned about its population growth rate and has attempted since 1979 , with mixed results , to implement a strict family planning policy , known as the " one @-@ child policy . " Before 2013 , this policy sought to restrict families to one child each , with exceptions for ethnic minorities and a degree of flexibility in rural areas . A major loosening of the policy was enacted in December 2013 , allowing families to have two children if one parent is an only child . The government is now dropping the one @-@ child policy in favor of a two @-@ child policy . Data from the 2010 census implies that the total fertility rate may now be around 1 @. @ 4 .

The policy , along with traditional preference for boys , may be contributing to an imbalance in the sex ratio at birth . According to the 2010 census , the sex ratio at birth was 118 @. @ 06 boys for every 100 girls , which is beyond the normal range of around 105 boys for every 100 girls . The 2010 census found that males accounted for 51 @. @ 27 percent of the total population . However , China 's sex ratio is more balanced than it was in 1953 , when males accounted for 51 @. @ 82 percent of the total population .

= = = Ethnic groups = = =

China officially recognizes 56 distinct ethnic groups , the largest of which are the Han Chinese , who constitute about 91 @. @ 51 % of the total population . The Han Chinese ? the world 's largest single ethnic group ? outnumber other ethnic groups in every provincial @-@ level division except Tibet and Xinjiang . Ethnic minorities account for about 8 @. @ 49 % of the population of China , according to the 2010 census . Compared with the 2000 population census , the Han population

increased by 66 @, @ 537 @, @ 177 persons , or 5 @. @ 74 % , while the population of the 55 national minorities combined increased by 7 @, @ 362 @, @ 627 persons , or 6 @. @ 92 % . The 2010 census recorded a total of 593 @, @ 832 foreign citizens living in China . The largest such groups were from South Korea ( 120 @, @ 750 ) , the United States ( 71 @, @ 493 ) and Japan ( 66 @, @ 159 ) .

### = = = Languages = = =

There are as many as 292 living languages in China . The languages most commonly spoken belong to the Sinitic branch of the Sino @-@ Tibetan language family , which contains Mandarin ( spoken natively by 70 % of the population ) , and other Chinese varieties : Wu ( including Shanghainese ) , Yue ( including Cantonese and Taishanese ) , Min ( including Hoochew , Hokkien and Teochew ) , Xiang , Gan , and Hakka . Languages of the Tibeto @-@ Burman branch , including Tibetan , Qiang , Naxi and Yi , are spoken across the Tibetan and Yunnan ? Guizhou Plateau . Other ethnic minority languages in southwest China include Zhuang , Thai , Dong and Sui of the Tai @-@ Kadai family , Miao and Yao of the Hmong ? Mien family , and Wa of the Austroasiatic family . Across northeastern and northwestern China , minority ethnic groups speak Altaic languages including Manchu , Mongolian and several Turkic languages : Uyghur , Kazakh , Kyrgyz , Salar and Western Yugur . Korean is spoken natively along the border with North Korea . Sarikoli , the language of Tajiks in western Xinjiang , is an Indo @-@ European language . Taiwanese aborigines , including a small population on the mainland , speak Austronesian languages .

Standard Mandarin , a variety of Mandarin based on the Beijing dialect , is the official national language of China and is used as a lingua franca in the country between people of different linguistic backgrounds .

Chinese characters have been used as the written script for the Sinitic languages for thousands of years . They allow speakers of mutually unintelligible Chinese varieties to communicate with each other through writing . In 1956 , the government introduced simplified characters , which have supplanted the older traditional characters in mainland China . Chinese characters are romanized using the Pinyin system . Tibetan uses an alphabet based on an Indic script . Uyghur is most commonly written in a Perseo @-@ Arabic script . The Mongolian script used in China and the Manchu script are both derived from the Old Uyghur alphabet . Modern Zhuang uses the Latin alphabet .

### = = = Urbanization = = =

China has urbanized significantly in recent decades . The percent of the country 's population living in urban areas increased from 20 % in 1980 to over 50 % in 2014 . It is estimated that China 's urban population will reach one billion by 2030 , potentially equivalent to one @-@ eighth of the world population . As of 2012 , there are more than 262 million migrant workers in China , mostly rural migrants seeking work in cities .

China has over 160 cities with a population of over one million , including the seven megacities ( cities with a population of over 10 million ) of Chongqing , Shanghai , Beijing , Guangzhou , Tianjin , Shenzhen , and Wuhan . By 2025 , it is estimated that the country will be home to 221 cities with over a million inhabitants . The figures in the table below are from the 2010 census , and are only estimates of the urban populations within administrative city limits ; a different ranking exists when considering the total municipal populations ( which includes suburban and rural populations ) . The large " floating populations " of migrant workers make conducting censuses in urban areas difficult ; the figures below include only long @-@ term residents .

### = = = Education = = =

Since 1986 , compulsory education in China comprises primary and junior secondary school , which



together last for nine years . In 2010 , about 82 % 5 percent of students continued their education at a three - year senior secondary school . The Gaokao , China 's national university entrance exam , is a prerequisite for entrance into most higher education institutions . In 2010 , 27 percent of secondary school graduates are enrolled in higher education . Vocational education is available to students at the secondary and tertiary level .

In February 2006 , the government pledged to provide completely free nine - year education , including textbooks and fees . Annual education investment went from less than US \$ 50 billion in 2003 to more than US \$ 250 billion in 2011 . However , there remains an inequality in education spending . In 2010 , the annual education expenditure per secondary school student in Beijing totalled ¥ 20 ,023 , while in Guizhou , one of the poorest provinces in China , only totalled ¥ 3 ,204 . Free compulsory education in China consists of primary school and junior secondary school between the ages of 6 and 15 . In 2011 , around 81 % 4 % of Chinese have received secondary education . By 2007 , there were 396 ,567 primary schools , 94 ,116 secondary schools , and 2 ,236 higher education institutions in China .

As of 2010 , 94 % of the population over age 15 are literate , compared to only 20 % in 1950 . In 2009 , Chinese students from Shanghai achieved the world 's best results in mathematics , science and literacy , as tested by the Programme for International Student Assessment ( PISA ) , a worldwide evaluation of 15 - year - old school pupils ' scholastic performance . Despite the high results , Chinese education has also faced both native and international criticism for its emphasis on rote memorization and its gap in quality from rural to urban areas .

== Health ==

The National Health and Family Planning Commission , together with its counterparts in the local commissions , oversees the health needs of the Chinese population . An emphasis on public health and preventive medicine has characterized Chinese health policy since the early 1950s . At that time , the Communist Party started the Patriotic Health Campaign , which was aimed at improving sanitation and hygiene , as well as treating and preventing several diseases . Diseases such as cholera , typhoid and scarlet fever , which were previously rife in China , were nearly eradicated by the campaign . After Deng Xiaoping began instituting economic reforms in 1978 , the health of the Chinese public improved rapidly because of better nutrition , although many of the free public health services provided in the countryside disappeared along with the People 's Communes . Healthcare in China became mostly privatized , and experienced a significant rise in quality . In 2009 , the government began a 3 - year large - scale healthcare provision initiative worth US \$ 124 billion . By 2011 , the campaign resulted in 95 % of China 's population having basic health insurance coverage . In 2011 , China was estimated to be the world 's third - largest supplier of pharmaceuticals , but its population has suffered from the development and distribution of counterfeit medications .

As of 2012 , the average life expectancy at birth in China is 75 years , and the infant mortality rate is 12 per thousand . Both have improved significantly since the 1950s . Rates of stunting , a condition caused by malnutrition , have declined from 33 % 1 % in 1990 to 9 % 9 % in 2010 . Despite significant improvements in health and the construction of advanced medical facilities , China has several emerging public health problems , such as respiratory illnesses caused by widespread air pollution , hundreds of millions of cigarette smokers , and an increase in obesity among urban youths . China 's large population and densely populated cities have led to serious disease outbreaks in recent years , such as the 2003 outbreak of SARS , although this has since been largely contained . In 2010 , air pollution caused 1 . 2 million premature deaths in China .

== Religion ==

Over the millennia , Chinese civilization has been influenced by various religious movements . The " three teachings " , including Confucianism , Buddhism , and Taoism , historically have a significant role in shaping Chinese culture . Elements of these three belief systems are often incorporated into

popular or folk religious traditions . Freedom of religion is guaranteed by China 's constitution , although religious organizations that lack official approval can be subject to state persecution .

Demographically , the most widespread religious tradition is the Chinese folk religion , which overlaps with Taoism , and describes the worship of the shen ( 神 ) , a character that signifies the " energies of generation " . The shen comprises deities of the natural environment , gods representing specific concepts or groups , heroes and ancestors , and figures from Chinese mythology . Among the most popular folk cults are those of Mazu ( goddess of the seas ) , Yellow Emperor ( one of the two divine patriarchs of the Chinese race ) , Guandi ( god of war and business ) , Caishen ( god of prosperity and richness ) , Pangu and many others . China is home to many of the world 's tallest religious statues , including the tallest of all , the Spring Temple Buddha in Henan .

The government of the People 's Republic of China is officially atheist . Religious affairs and issues in the country are overseen by the State Administration for Religious Affairs . A 2015 poll conducted by Gallup International found that 61 % of Chinese people self -identified as " convinced atheist " . Scholars have noted that in China there is no clear boundary between religions , especially Buddhism , Taoism and local folk religious practice . According to the most recent demographic analyses , an average 30 ? 80 % of the Chinese population practice some form of Chinese folk religions and Taoism . Approximately 10 ? 16 % are Buddhists , 2 ? 4 % are Christians , and 1 ? 2 % are Muslims . In addition to Han people 's local religious practices , there are also various ethnic minority groups in China who maintain their traditional autochthonous religions . Various sects of indigenous origin comprise 2 ? 3 % of the population , while Confucianism as a religious self -designation is popular among intellectuals . Significant faiths specifically connected to certain ethnic groups include Tibetan Buddhism and the Islamic religion of the Hui and Uyghur peoples .

= = Culture = =

Since ancient times , Chinese culture has been heavily influenced by Confucianism and conservative philosophies . For much of the country 's dynastic era , opportunities for social advancement could be provided by high performance in the prestigious imperial examinations , which have their origins in the Han Dynasty . The literary emphasis of the exams affected the general perception of cultural refinement in China , such as the belief that calligraphy , poetry and painting were higher forms of art than dancing or drama . Chinese culture has long emphasized a sense of deep history and a largely inward -looking national perspective . Examinations and a culture of merit remain greatly valued in China today .

The first leaders of the People 's Republic of China were born into the traditional imperial order , but were influenced by the May Fourth Movement and reformist ideals . They sought to change some traditional aspects of Chinese culture , such as rural land tenure , sexism , and the Confucian system of education , while preserving others , such as the family structure and culture of obedience to the state . Some observers see the period following the establishment of the PRC in 1949 as a continuation of traditional Chinese dynastic history , while others claim that the Communist Party 's rule has damaged the foundations of Chinese culture , especially through political movements such as the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s , where many aspects of traditional culture were destroyed , having been denounced as " regressive and harmful " or " vestiges of feudalism " . Many important aspects of traditional Chinese morals and culture , such as Confucianism , art , literature , and performing arts like Peking opera , were altered to conform to government policies and propaganda at the time . Access to foreign media remains heavily restricted .

Today , the Chinese government has accepted numerous elements of traditional Chinese culture as being integral to Chinese society . With the rise of Chinese nationalism and the end of the Cultural Revolution , various forms of traditional Chinese art , literature , music , film , fashion and architecture have seen a vigorous revival , and folk and variety art in particular have sparked interest nationally and even worldwide . China is now the third -most -visited country in the world , with 55 . 7 million inbound international visitors in 2010 . It also experiences an enormous volume of domestic tourism ; an estimated 740 million Chinese holidaymakers travelled within the country in October 2012 alone .

## == = Literature = = =

Chinese literature is based on the literature of the Zhou dynasty . Concepts covered within the Chinese classic texts present a wide range of thoughts and subjects including calendar , military , astrology , herbology , geography and many others . Some of the most important early texts include the I Ching and the Shujing within the Four Books and Five Classics which served as the Confucian authoritative books for the state @-@ sponsored curriculum in dynastic era . Inherited from the Classic of Poetry , classical Chinese poetry developed to its floruit during the Tang dynasty . Li Bai and Du Fu opened the forking ways for the poetic circles through romanticism and realism respectively . Chinese historiography began with the Shiji , the overall scope of the historiographical tradition in China is termed the Twenty @-@ Four Histories , which set a vast stage for Chinese fictions along with Chinese mythology and folklore . Pushed by a burgeoning citizen class in the Ming dynasty , Chinese classical fiction rose to a boom of the historical , town and gods and demons fictions as represented by the Four Great Classical Novels which include Water Margin , Romance of the Three Kingdoms , Journey to the West and Dream of the Red Chamber . Along with the wuxia fictions of Jin Yong , it remains an enduring source of popular culture in the East Asian cultural sphere .

In the wake of the New Culture Movement after the end of the Qing dynasty , Chinese literature embarked on a new era with written vernacular Chinese for ordinary citizens . Hu Shih and Lu Xun were pioneers in modern literature . Various literary genres , such as misty poetry , scar literature and the xungen literature , which is influenced by magic realism , emerged following the Cultural Revolution . Mo Yan , a xungen literature author , was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2012 .

## == = Cuisine = = =

Chinese cuisine is highly diverse , drawing on several millennia of culinary history and geographical variety , in which the most influential are known as the " Eight Major Cuisines " , including Sichuan , Cantonese , Jiangsu , Shandong , Fujian , Hunan , Anhui , and Zhejiang cuisines . All of them are featured by the precise skills of shaping , heating , colorway and flavoring . Chinese cuisine is also known for its width of cooking methods and ingredients , as well as food therapy that is emphasized by traditional Chinese medicine . Generally , China 's staple food is rice in the south , wheat based breads and noodles in the north . The diet of the common people in pre @-@ modern times was largely grain and simple vegetables , with meat reserved for special occasions . And the bean products , such as tofu and soy milk , remain as a popular source of protein . Pork is now the most popular meat in China , accounting for about three @-@ fourths of the country 's total meat consumption . While there is also a Buddhist cuisine and an Islamic cuisine . Southern cuisine , due to the area 's proximity to the ocean and milder climate , has a wide variety of seafood and vegetables ; it differs in many respects from the wheat @-@ based diets across dry northern China . Numerous offshoots of Chinese food , such as Hong Kong cuisine and American Chinese food , have emerged in the nations that play host to the Chinese diaspora .

## == = Sports = = =

China has become a prime sports destination worldwide . The country gained the hosting rights for several major global sports tournaments including the 2008 Summer Olympics , the 2015 World Championships in Athletics and the upcoming 2019 FIBA Basketball World Cup .

China has one of the oldest sporting cultures in the world . There is evidence that archery ( shèjiàn ) was practised during the Western Zhou Dynasty . Swordplay ( jiànshù ) and cuju , a sport loosely related to association football date back to China 's early dynasties as well .

Physical fitness is widely emphasized in Chinese culture , with morning exercises such as qigong and t 'ai chi ch 'uan widely practised , and commercial gyms and fitness clubs gaining popularity in

the country . Basketball is currently the most popular spectator sport in China . The Chinese Basketball Association and the American National Basketball Association have a huge following among the people , with native or ethnic Chinese players such as Yao Ming and Yi Jianlian held in high esteem . China 's professional football league was established in 2004 , it is the largest football market in Asia . Other popular sports in the country include martial arts , table tennis , badminton , swimming and snooker . Board games such as go ( known as wéiqí in Chinese ) , xiangqi , mahjong , and more recently chess , are also played at a professional level . In addition , China is home to a huge number of cyclists , with an estimated 470 million bicycles as of 2012 . Many more traditional sports , such as dragon boat racing , Mongolian @-@ style wrestling and horse racing are also popular .

China has participated in the Olympic Games since 1932 , although it has only participated as the PRC since 1952 . China hosted the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing , where its athletes received 51 gold medals ? the highest number of gold medals of any participating nation that year . China also won the most medals of any nation at the 2012 Summer Paralympics , with 231 overall , including 95 gold medals . In 2011 , Shenzhen in Guangdong , China hosted the 2011 Summer Universiade . China hosted the 2013 East Asian Games in Tianjin and the 2014 Summer Youth Olympics in Nanjing .