

# CHINA

THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA IS THE WORLD'S LARGEST COUNTRY BY POPULATION AND IS THE THIRD LARGEST COUNTRY BY AREA. CHINA'S RECENT RAPID DEVELOPMENT HAS MADE IT A MAJOR FORCE IN WORLD AFFAIRS.



## population

- Population: 1.3 billion
- Density: 141 per sq km
- 92% ethnic Han Chinese
- 55 ethnic minorities (according to the government)

Most of the population live in the east, so density is greater than statistics suggest. Population growth has been controlled by the government promoting late marriages and requiring parents to have only one child. Abortion is legal. Shanghai has a population of 13.5 million and Beijing, the capital, 14.5 million. China is 60 percent rural with an increasing migration of workers to urban areas.

## religions

- Non-religious 49.58%
- Chinese religions 28.5%
- Buddhist 8.38%
- Christian 7.25%
- Traditional ethnic 4.29%
- Muslim 2%

The Communist party in the 1960s attempted to eliminate organized religion. Previously the dominant religions in China had been Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism. Muslim minority peoples such as the Uyghurs, Kazaks and Kirgiz number 20 million and now practice their religion openly. It is illegal to spread the gospel to anyone under 18.

## language

The Chinese have had a written language for more than 3,000 years. The Chinese language has more than a dozen major spoken dialects, some of which are mutually unintelligible. Mandarin [Putonghua] was declared the official language in 1955. It is taught in schools, and knowledge of Mandarin is required throughout China. Government policies to target literacy have resulted in literacy levels increasing from 20 percent to over 80 percent in the last 45 years. Minority peoples also have their own languages.

## geography

China covers 6 million square miles. Little of it is suitable for agriculture, and nearly 50 percent is mountainous. The country is losing arable land because of soil erosion and economic development.

## climate

Temperate climates prevail in much of the country, but there are also extremes. The north averages -18°C [0°F] in January; the southeast averages 26°C [79°F] over the year.

## history

China gave birth to one of the world's earliest civilizations and has a recorded history that dates from some 3,500 years ago. *Zhong guo*, the Chinese name for the country, means "middle kingdom," a reference to the Chinese belief that their country was

the geographical center of the earth and the only true civilization. By the 19th century China had become a politically and economically weak nation, dominated by foreign powers.

China underwent many changes in the first half of the 20th century. The imperial government was overthrown, and in the chaotic years that followed, two groups, the Nationalists and the Communists, struggled for control of the country.

In 1949 the Communists won control of China. The Nationalists fled to Taiwan and there set up a government which they called the Republic of China. The accession of the Communist government in 1949 is one of the most important events in China's history. In a remarkably short period radical changes were effected in the economy and society.

The Cultural Revolution [1966-1976], a time of political and social turmoil, impoverished the country significantly. Everyone was pulled down to the same standard in economics, intellect and social standing.

Since the late-1970s China has cast off its self-imposed isolation from the international community and modernized its industrial and economic structures. Deng Xiaoping, paramount leader between 1978 and his death in 1997, successfully transformed the country into a major player in world affairs.

After political changes in 1978 China's GDP has quadrupled. Annual



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economic growth has been running at 8 percent or more for over a decade. In 2003 China was the world's second largest economy after the U.S. (on a purchasing power parity basis). However, in per capita terms, China is still poor.

There were an estimated 68 million internet users in China in 2003, mostly in urban areas. There is some control over internet use.

In 1997 Britain handed back the sovereignty of Hong Kong to China and in 1999 Macau was returned to China by the Portuguese. Taiwan and the Mainland continue sensitive negotiations about unification.

## christianity

Nestorian Christians first entered China in 635 AD along the Silk Route via northwest China. The church they established was largely among foreign groups, not the Chinese.

Thereafter Christian influence fluctuated, often absent for centuries. The Jesuit priest Matteo Ricci obtained permission to live in China in 1583 and established Roman Catholic missions.

Protestant missions were

latecomers to China, traveling on the same boats that brought Western trade and imperialism. Missions established themselves along the east coast in the mid-19th century. James Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission (CIM, now OMF International) in 1865, saw the needs of the inland provinces and he and others moved away from the coast establishing churches and hospitals. Work among the minority peoples in western China, such as the Lisu, also began. A significant number of the CIM missionaries were women.

By 1949 there were about 6,000 missionaries in China and 20,000 Protestant churches with over a million members. Christianity was established, though not accepted as an indigenous faith.

During the next 30 years the Chinese church was isolated and forced underground as the missionaries left, church buildings were closed and pastors and congregations were imprisoned and persecuted. To the



outside world it was difficult to imagine how the church would survive this oppression.

As China emerged after Mao's death, evidence of a thriving church was revealed, sustained by God's grace through the faithfulness of the Chinese Christians, the prayers of Christians abroad and radio broadcasts.

In 1979 Deng Xiaoping allowed churches to re-open under the control of the Three Self Patriotic Movement. The church then had between 700,000 and 1 million members.

The TSPM has seen a growth in membership across China through the last 20 years. Official reports admit to over 22 million Christians in China. Over 30 million copies of the Bible have been printed in China.

Many Chinese Christians will not align themselves with the official church, seeing it as too much under the authority of a Communist government and serving the Party first and God second. These meet in house churches; some isolated, others part of well-organized groups numbering several hundreds of thousands.

Although figures vary, a realistic estimate for the total number of Protestant Christians in China would be about 60 million.

The house-church movement is also at present under great pressure to register with government authorities. Reports over the last five years reveal that incidents of persecution are common. Pastors are imprisoned, materials are confiscated and meetings closed down.

## opportunities available

- Christian professionals in a wide range of disciplines including engineering, development work and medicine
- English teaching
- Language learning programs
- Short-term opportunities

## how to pray

- For peaceful, stable and honest government.
- For Christian professionals to offer their skills for work and witness among Chinese intellectuals, the business community, and in both urban and rural areas.
- For good Bible based teaching in the churches.
- For the training of godly pastors. These men and women are often poorly paid and sacrifice much to lead their churches. As China develops rapidly, young people see the attractiveness of secular work and lifestyle. Pray that more young people will respond to the needs of the church.
- For an end to persecution of house churches who refuse to register with the TSPM, and for the witness of those in prison.
- For Hong Kong Christians to have a sensitive and significant influence in churches in southern China.
- For witness among Christian minority peoples; most have no viable church or no known Christians.
- Radio broadcasts into China provide a valuable means of training leaders and evangelizing non-believers
- For the growing missionary movement within China. Pray for wisdom and appropriate training for the many Christians from rural areas planning to take the gospel to other parts of the world.
- Give thanks for the great growth of the church.