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CHINA

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CHINA (Chin. *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo*), officially People's Republic of **China**, country, E Asia, bounded on the N by the Mongolian Republic and Russia; on the NE by Russia and North Korea; on the E by the Yellow Sea and the East **China** Sea; on the S by the South **China** Sea, Vietnam, Laos, Burma, India, Bhutan, and Nepal; on the W by Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan; and on the NW by Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. The People's Republic of **China** includes more than 3400 offshore islands, of which Hainan, in the South **China** Sea, is by far the largest. The total area of **China** is about 9,572,900 sq km (about 3,696,100 sq mi), not including the Republic of **China** (*see* [TAIWAN](#)). See also The World Almanac: <<wa.nwo01850>>Nations of the World – **China**.

China is the world's second largest country in land area (after Russia) and fourth biggest in total area (after Russia, Canada, and the U.S.), and it is the world's largest country in population. More than one-fifth of the world's total population lives within its borders. **China** gave birth to one of the world's earliest civilizations and has a recorded history that dates from some 3500 years ago. Zhonghua, the Chinese name for the country, means "central land," 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.

The accession of the Communist government in 1949 stands as one of the most important events in Chinese history; in a remarkably short period of time, radical changes transformed both the Chinese economy and society. Since the 1970s, **China** has cast off its self-imposed isolation from the international community and has sought to modernize its economic structure. The standard of living has greatly improved with **China's** rapidly expanding economy, but the nation's huge population continues to place a strain on resources, and rural poverty remains a major problem. The room for personal freedom has expanded considerably. However, pro-democracy demonstrations in 1989 in Tiananmen Square were violently crushed by the Communist regime, which continues to retain tight control over Chinese citizens and the media.

In this article, most Chinese names are spelled in the Pinyin romanization (*see* [CHINESE LANGUAGE: Methods of Transliteration](#)). In some cases, conventional English renderings are given precedence. Unless otherwise indicated, statistics in this article do not include **HONG KONG** which was restored by Great Britain to Chinese sovereignty in 1997.

LAND AND RESOURCES

China encompasses a diversity of landscapes and a corresponding variety of natural resources. Generally speaking, **China's** higher elevations are in the W, where some of the world's loftiest mountain ranges are located. Three of these, the Tien Shan, Kunlun, and Tsiling, date from an episode of Paleozoic mountain building (orogeny) that began late in the **CARBONIFEROUS PERIOD** and ended in the **PERMIAN PERIOD** when all of the world's landmasses had drawn together to form a single supercontinent, Pangaea (*see* [PLATE TECTONICS](#)). A fourth, the Himalayas, is of more recent origin. It formed

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