China

Location

China is a massive country located on the easternmost border of the continent of Asia. It encompasses more than 3,705,387 square miles. The bulk of China is located between the latitudes of 10 and 45 degrees north and between the longitudes of 75 and 120 degrees East longitude. Because it is such a large country, it shares its borders with many other countries. Its western border is made up of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, India, and Nepal. To the south there is Bangladesh, Burma, Laos, and Vietnam. Russia and Mongolia form the northern border of the country. The eastern border is all water – the Yellow Sea, and the North and South China Seas.

Geography

The geography of China is extremely diverse depending on where you are in the country. It is composed of such extremes such as mountains, steppes, marshes, and forests. The western part of the country is made up of mountains and desert. Some of the famous ranges are the Kunlun, the Qinlan, and the Greater Hinggan ranges. Some areas in these ranges have elevations exceeding 13,000 feet. As you move east, the terrain becomes lower in elevation. The Qing-zang plateau, at 4000 meters, is a famous part of this section of the country. The eastern part of the country is made mostly of plains, hills and river deltas. The two best known rivers in China are the Yangtze River and the Huang He, or Yellow River as it is sometimes called, because of the massive amounts of dirt that it carries in times of rain. The Huang He is 5400 kilometers long, while the Yangtze runs for 6300 kilometers.
Climate
Overall, China has a very moderate climate, similar to the United States. However, there are areas of the country that are extremely cold and those that are tropical. The northern part of China near Mongolia is quite cold a good part of the year, although it is temperate in the summer. The southern portion of the country is much warmer most of the year. There are two real seasons in most of China -- the wet monsoon season in the summer, and the dry season in the winter. Precipitation varies regionally. South China can get some rain in the winter, but in North China it is windy, cold, and dry. In the summer, southern China is very hot and humid. In the North, it does get fairly hot, but the humidity is much less.

Important Dates
China is a country extremely proud of its ancient traditions and these are celebrated throughout the year. The biggest celebration of the year is probably the Chinese New Year, which occurs on the first day of the old lunar calendar, in February. National Day on October 1st is their most famous holiday because it features firecrackers and dragon dances. Tomb Sweep Day, in April, is devoted to attending the graves of loved ones.

Population
China has one of the largest populations of any single country in the world. At last count, it had almost 1.3 billion people. This translates to about 125 people per square kilometer. China has a .83% annual increase, which is quite low. 94% of the population lives on about 36% of the land. The population is 37% urban and 63% rural. China’s growth rate has fallen by a large amount in recent years due to the fact that the government has offered benefits to couples only having one child. The average life expectancy for the Chinese is 68 for males and 71 for females.
Currency
The currency in China is the yuan. Currently (‘01) one U.S. dollar is equal to 8.2793 yuans. The People’s Bank in China quotes the midpoint rate against the U.S. dollar based on the previous day prevailing rate in the interbank foreign exchange market. The economy in the Far East has not been good in recent years and as a consequence, the exchange rate has not been good.

Education
All children in China are required to attend primary school. About 96% of primary aged children attend school. There are 832,000 primary schools in China, attended by 136 million students. There are 104,000 secondary schools attended by 104,800 children. At these schools, children are divided into technical fields where they will be educated to be able to perform a specific occupation. There are programs such as business and agriculture. Only a small number go on to college. There is intense competition at the 1000 extremely selective colleges and universities around China. Approximately 1.7 million students attend these schools. Two of the most sought after schools are Qinghua and Beijing Universities.

Language
The main language spoken in China is standard Chinese or Mandarin. However, this language has many dialects and a person may not understand other dialects at all. Some of these variations are Cantonese, Beijing dialect, Taiwanese, Gan, and Hakka. There are also some minority languages from ethnic groups and the native Chinese. The language changes tremendously by region.

Religion
Chinese have never been people that have thought very highly of religion. It is looked down upon by many, and today, there are fewer religious people than ever. Buddhist monks and Taoist priests are still respected and tolerance of religions is becoming more common, especially in the
countryside. The main religions are Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, or a combination of the three. Other religions practiced are Islam, Christianity, and Animism.

Agriculture
The biggest change for Chinese agriculture in recent years has been the de-collectivization of agriculture. Farms are now small-scale, family-run enterprises. Agricultural output doubled in the 1980s. Much of the ground is too poor for anything but grazing, but some of it is quite good. China has 7% of the world’s arable land. The main products include rice, wheat, potatoes, sorghum, peanuts, tea, millet, barley, cotton, oilseed, pork, and fish. Cotton is the most important commercial crop and has been for many years. China produces one-third of the world’s rice. Meat consumption has been gradually increasing, but dairy products have not because milk is only consumed by children. China has a lot of livestock, but keeps most of the meat within its borders and does not export much.

Trade
China’s main imports are machinery, plastic, chemicals, steel, and mineral fuels. Its main import partners are Japan, U.S., Taiwan, South Korea, and Germany. China’s main exports are machinery, textiles, footwear, toys, and sporting goods. It exports these goods to the U.S., Hong Kong, Japan, Germany, and South Korea. China has only really traded with other countries during this century as it was always a very closed country and did not trade at all through most of its history.

Food
The food of China is quite distinctive. The food can be described as light and mild, but somewhat oily. It is often stir-fried with a mix of vegetables, rice, and some meat. Oriental food is quite different from the rest of the world’s cuisine. The Chinese people eat a large quantity of rice, seafood,
chicken, vegetables, and other meats. They often cook such famous dishes as egg rolls, seafood dumplings, and sweet and sour chicken.

**Landmarks**

There are all kinds of sights in China that are known worldwide. There is even one that is visible from the moon. The Great Wall of China is perhaps the best known of these. It crosses most of the northern part of the country from east to west and was built to protect the country from invasions from the north. It is the most massive man-made structure in the world. The Forbidden City, which was the home of the great emperors of China during the days of the dynasties, is a well-known and often visited national landmark. One should also visit the beautiful Yellow Mountains. There are many ancient buildings throughout China, too many to list, that anyone could visit to get a taste of the past.

Seth Clark