

A  
CONCISE GEOGRAPHY  
OF CHINA

JEN YU-TI

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PEKING

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# CONTENTS

## PART I GENERAL DESCRIPTION

CHAPTER ONE LAND AND PEOPLE	3
Position and Area	3
Administrative Divisions	5
650 Million	8
A Great Family of Unity and Fraternity	10
CHAPTER TWO TOPOGRAPHY AND MINERAL RESOURCES	12
Three-Section Staircase	12
Varied Land-Forms	14
Mineral Resources	20
CHAPTER THREE CLIMATE AND VEGETATION	23
Temperature and Seasons	23
Precipitation Pattern	26
Cold Waves and Typhoons	28
Vegetation	30
CHAPTER FOUR RIVERS AND LAKES	32
Rivers	32
Lakes and Underground Water Resources	35
Making Rivers Serve the People	38
CHAPTER FIVE SEAS	42
The Seas and Islands	42
Marine Products and Salt Fields	45
CHAPTER SIX AGRICULTURE, INDUSTRY AND TRANSPORT	47
Agricultural Regions	47
The Distribution of Industry	51
Principal Railways and Inland Shipping Routes	55

## PART II PROVINCIAL GEOGRAPHY

CHAPTER SEVEN THE MIDDLE AND LOWER YELLOW RIVER REGION	64
The City of Peking	65
Hopei Province	72
Shantung Province	77
Honan Province	81
Shansi Province	86
Shensi Province	90
CHAPTER EIGHT THE NORTHEAST REGION	94
Heilungkiang Province	96
Kirin Province	102
Liaoning Province	106
CHAPTER NINE THE MIDDLE AND LOWER YANGTSE REGION	111
The City of Shanghai	112
Kiangsu Province	117
Anhwei Province	122
Chekiang Province	125
Kiangsi Province	130
Hunan Province	135
Hupeh Province	139
CHAPTER TEN THE SOUTH CHINA REGION	143
Fukien Province	144
Taiwan Province	148
Kwangtung Province	152
The Kwangsi Chuang Autonomous Region	159
CHAPTER ELEVEN THE SOUTHWEST REGION	163
Szechuan Province	165
Kweichow Province	173
Yunnan Province	177
CHAPTER TWELVE THE CHINGHAI-TIBET REGION	181
The Tibetan Autonomous Region	183
Chinghai Province	188
CHAPTER THIRTEEN THE INNER MONGOLIA- SINKIANG REGION	193
Kansu Province	194
The Ningsia Hui Autonomous Region	199
The Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region	202
The Sinkiang Uighur Autonomous Region	206
INDEX	215

**PART I**

**GENERAL DESCRIPTION**





## Chapter One

# LAND AND PEOPLE

### POSITION AND AREA

China stands on the eastern part of Asia and its east coast is washed by the waters of the Pacific. With the exception of a small part in the South which is tropical, the country lies in the temperate zone with marked differences between the four seasons. This favourable geographical position allows the moist maritime air-masses to penetrate the inland areas, a factor contributing to China's agricultural development. It also facilitates contacts with other countries.

With a total area of 9.6 million square kilometres, China is one of the largest countries in the world. From east to west, China's territory measures some 5,000 kilometres, covering 62 degrees in longitude from the meeting point of the Heilungkiang (Amur) and Ussuri Rivers to the Pamirs. In the easternmost region the sun rises more than four hours earlier than in the westernmost. While the Ussuri is basking in the early morning sunshine, the Tien-shan Mountains and the Pamirs are still wrapped in darkness.

The distance from north to south is about 5,500 kilometres, extending over 49 degrees in latitude from the middle of the Heilungkiang River



around Moho to the neighbourhood of the Tsengmu Reef at latitude 4° N. When spring ploughing is under way in southern China, snowflakes are still dancing in the northern regions.

China's land border is more than 20,000 kilometres long. It marches with those of the Soviet Union and the Mongolian People's Republic in the north, the Korean Democratic People's Republic in the northeast, the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam in the south, and Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, Burma and Laos in the west and southwest. To the east and southeast, China faces Japan, the Philippines and Indonesia across the seas.

Off the eastern and southern coasts stretch the Pohai, the Yellow, the East China and the South China Seas which join the Pacific. Over 5,000 islands dot these seas. The islands in the South China Sea, the Hainan Island, Taiwan, the Penghu Islands and the Choushan Archipelago, of which Taiwan and Hainan are the biggest, are strung out like a bow off the southeastern coast, forming a maritime "Great Wall". The mainland coastline extends 14,000 kilometres, and longer if the island coasts are included.

The Chinese government has declared the breadth of China's territorial sea as 12 nautical miles. This provision applies to all territories of China, including the Chinese mainland and the coastal islands. It also applies to Taiwan and its surrounding islands, the Penghu, Tungsha, Sisha, Chungsha, Nansha and all other islands belonging to China which are separated from the mainland or its coastal islands by high seas. The entire Pohai Sea and Chiungchow Straits are China's inland seas. At

present, the biggest island of China, Taiwan, as well as scores of islands near it, including the Penghu Islands, and the islands of Quemoy and Matsu of Fukien Province are still forcibly occupied by U.S. imperialism. As these islands are integral parts of China's territory, the Chinese people are determined to liberate them in order to preserve the sovereignty and territorial integrity of their country.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS**

China is divided administratively into 22 provinces, 5 autonomous regions, and 2 cities directly under the central government. Below these divisions are more than 2,000 counties (including autonomous counties) and cities, which in turn are subdivided into people's communes.

Autonomous regions and autonomous counties are set up in areas where national minorities live in compact communities. All these autonomous areas are component parts of the People's Republic of China.

Peking, the capital of the People's Republic, is the political, cultural, communications and economic centre of the nation. Shanghai is the biggest industrial and commercial city and the biggest port in the country. Both cities are under the direct jurisdiction of the central government.

Changes are sometimes made in the administrative divisions to suit the needs of the nation's political and economic development.

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS AND DISTRIBUTION  
OF POPULATION  
(1957)

<i>Region</i>	<i>Province, auton- omous region, or city directly under central government</i>	<i>Capital</i>	<i>Population</i>
Northeast	Heilungkiang Province	Harbin	14,860,000
	Kirin Province	Changchun	12,550,000
	Liaoning Province	Shenyang	24,090,000
Middle-Lower Yellow River	Peking City		4,010,000
	Hopei Province*	Tientsin	44,720,000
	Shantung Province	Tsinan	54,030,000
	Honan Province	Chengchow	48,670,000
	Shansi Province	Taiyuan	15,960,000
	Shensi Province	Sian	18,130,000
Middle-Lower Yangtse	Shanghai City		6,900,000
	Kiangsu Province	Nanking	45,230,000
	Anhwei Province	Hofei	33,560,000
	Chekiang Province	Hangchow	25,280,000
	Kiangsi Province	Nanchang	18,610,000
	Hunan Province	Changsha	36,220,000
	Hupeh Province	Wuhan	30,790,000

<i>Region</i>	<i>Province, autonomous region, or city directly under central government</i>	<i>Capital</i>	<i>Population</i>
South China	Fukien Province	Foochow	14,650,000
	Taiwan Province		10,100,000
	Kwangtung Province	Canton	37,960,000
	Kwangsi Chuang Autonomous Region	Nanning	19,390,000
Southwest	Szechuan Province	Chengtu	72,160,000
	Yunnan Province	Kunming	19,100,000
	Kweichow Province	Kweiyang	16,890,000
Chinghai-Tibet	Chinghai Province	Sining	2,050,000
	Tibetan Autonomous Region	Lhasa	1,270,000
Inner Mongolia-Sinkiang	Kansu Province*	Lanchow	12,800,000
	Ningsia Hui Autonomous Region*	Yinchuan	1,810,000
	Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region	Huhehot	9,200,000
	Sinkiang Uighur Autonomous Region	Urumchi	5,640,000

\*1958 figures.

China is the most populous country in the world. According to the statistics of 1957 it has a total population of 650 million and more, not including the figures for Hongkong and Macao and the overseas Chinese. This amounts to about one-fourth of the world's total, or more than 12 times the population of Britain and more than three times that of the United States.

China's big population is a great source of strength to the nation. The 650 million hard-working and courageous people, in addition to the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, are also a decisive factor in building China into a great socialist country with a modern industry, a modern agriculture and a modern science and culture.

The population density averages 68 per square kilometre, a much lower average than that of Britain, Japan or India. Considering the natural conditions of China with its vast territory and rich resources, 650 million is not such a great number, and falls short of the manpower needed in the country's long-range, large-scale construction and development programmes.

The population is unevenly distributed. In the crowded eastern part of the country, the average density is over 100 persons to the square kilometre, and in a number of places over 400. The western part is thinly populated, with an average for most of the area of less than 10 persons to the square kilometre, and for some places less than one. Such a wide disparity in population is due, on the one

hand, to the unfavourable natural conditions of this high, cold and dry area and, on the other hand, to the prolonged rule of the reactionary regime which combined with the imperialist aggression held back economic development over so long a period. Tibet's population, for example, far from going up in the last few centuries, went down. This drop in the population can be laid at the door of the cruel serf system. Since liberation, following the rapid progress in the country's socialist construction, continuous efforts have been devoted to the development of the western areas. The population of western China is now going up fast as a result of various projects to transform natural conditions, such as water conservancy work and erection of shelter belts, and the building of factories, cities, farms, forests and pastures.

Millions of overseas Chinese have made their homes in various parts of the world, mainly in Southeast Asia. Most of them are labouring people who for generations have worked side by side with the people of the countries of their residence, forming close ties and friendship with them, and making definite contributions to the local economic development. In recent years, large numbers of overseas Chinese have returned to China and have settled down with the ready help of the People's Government. They are now contributing their share to the country's socialist construction.

## A GREAT FAMILY OF UNITY AND FRATERNITY

China is a unitary multi-national state. Of its total population, the Han nationality is the most numerous, accounting for 94 per cent. The remaining 6 per cent, or 40 million, are made up of more than fifty national minorities, including the Mongolians, Huis, Tibetans, Manchus, Chuangs, Uighurs, Miaos, Yis, Puyis, Koreans and Kaoshans.

The Hans figure predominantly in the distribution pattern of China's many nationalities, with the minority peoples mixed among them in communities of varying sizes. Scattered all over the country, the Hans are most concentrated in the eastern regions. The minority peoples are widely distributed; they are found in 50-60 per cent of the country's territory, mainly in the northwestern and southwestern regions.

Through the gradual development of economic ties and cultural contacts, the peoples of various nationalities within China's borders established a united nation long, long ago. But under the reactionary rulers who pursued a policy of national oppression, there was no equality between them. Foreign imperialist aggression aggravated their hardships. These conditions hampered their development and the realization of unity among them. In the last 100 years, all nationalities in China have waged common struggles against imperialism and feudalism. In the last 30-odd years they gradually came under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party in their anti-imperialist and anti-feudal struggles, and this bound them together with



inseparable ties. The victory of the Chinese people's revolution which overthrew the rule of imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism and established the People's Republic of China has ended for ever the system of national oppression. Unity and equality between the different nationalities in China was attained and the relationships among them were placed on an entirely new footing. Thus, an era was opened for fraternal co-operation and common prosperity.

Since liberation the Chinese Communist Party and the People's Government have implemented their policy of unity and equality between nationalities. Regional autonomy for national minorities has been put into practice, with full rights for all minority groups. The people of all nationalities take part on an equal footing in the formulation of policy decisions on, and the administration of state affairs, and are the real masters of this great united country. All this has heightened their patriotism, strengthened their solidarity, given full scope to their initiative in their common efforts to build socialism and promoted the economic and cultural development in the national minority regions.

At the time of the founding of the People's Republic, about 30 million of China's minority peoples languished under the system of feudal landownership, over four million under feudal serfdom and one million under the slave system. Survivals of the clan system of primitive communism still existed in areas inhabited by some 600,000 minority people. The minority areas were extremely backward

economically and culturally. In some places, the primitive farming method of "slash and burn" was still in use, while many people remained hunters or nomads, and the production level was incredibly low. The Communist Party and the People's Government guided the minority peoples in carrying out social reforms. Most of them have shaken off the fetters of feudal or slave system, or have emerged from primitive communism, and are now forging towards socialism, skipping one or several stages of social development. With the active help of the government and the Han nationality, the minority peoples have, during the past decade and more, progressed by leaps and bounds in their political, economic and cultural development, and their living standards have been raised conspicuously.

## *Chapter Two*

# **TOPOGRAPHY AND MINERAL RESOURCES**

## **THREE-SECTION STAIRCASE**

The relief map of China shows that its land mass is generally high in the west and low in the east. This west-east inclination is like a three-section staircase.

The first and the highest section is located in the southwest where the Chinghai-Tibet Plateau rises