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: 139 per square km
- 90% ethnic Han Chinese
- 55 ethnic minorities (according to the government)

Most of the population lives in the east, so density is greater than statistics suggest. Population growth has been controlled by the government’s promotion of later marriages and requiring parents to have only one child. Abortion is legal. Shanghai has a population of 16.6 million and Beijing, the capital, 12.4 million. Rapid rural-to-urban migration has resulted in more than half of the population now living in cities.

**Religions**
- Non-religious 44.4%
- Chinese religions 28.5%
- Buddhist 12.5%
- Christian 5.3%
- Traditional ethnic 4.6%;
- Muslim 1.9%

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, Kazakhs 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 more than 80 percent in the last 50 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 -0°F (18°C) in January; the southeast averages 79°F (26°C) 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. ZhongGuo, 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, leading to its disputed status today. 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, the country’s leader between 1978 and his death in 1997, successfully transformed the country into a major player in world affairs.

Since political changes in 1978, China’s GDP has skyrocketed. Annual economic growth has been running at 8 percent or more for nearly 20 years. China is now the world’s second-largest economy after the U.S. (on a purchasing power parity basis) and is expected to ascend to the top spot within the next decade.

According to Internet World Stats, there were an estimated 513 million Internet users in China in 2012, double the amount of users in any other country. There is some government control, often referred to as the “Great Firewall of China,” 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. China is a powerful presence on the international stage. Many have dubbed the 21st century to be the “China Century.”

**Christianity**

Nestorian Christians first entered China in 635 AD along the Silk Route via northwest China. The church they established, how-
ever, 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, and often arrived 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 more than 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 were forced to leave, 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 30-plus years. Official reports admit to more than 23 million Christians in China. More than 50 million copies of the Bible have been printed in China.

Many Chinese Christians, however, 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 or thousands. Although figures vary, a realistic estimate for the total number of Protestant Christians in China could be about 70 million.

The house-church movement is also at present under pressure to register with government authorities. Although there has been significant improvement, reports over the last decade reveal that incidents of persecution are still common. On occasion, pastors are interrogated, materials are confiscated and meetings closed down.

**Opportunities**
- Christian professionals in a wide range of disciplines including engineering, development work and medicine.
- English teaching.
- Short-term opportunities.

**HOW TO PRAY**

- Pray for peaceful, stable and honest government.
- Ask God to lead Christian professionals to offer their skills for work and witness among Chinese intellectuals, the business community and in both urban and rural areas.
- Pray good Bible-based teaching in the churches.
- Lift up the need 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.
- Ask God to end persecution of house churches who refuse to register with the TSPM, and for the witness of those in prison.
- Pray for Hong Kong Christians to have a sensitive and significant influence in churches in southern China.
- Pray 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 in some hard-to-reach areas. Ask God to make them effective.
- Pray 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 in recent decades.