Xinjiang Information

Overview

Xinjiang is the nation’s largest province and is one of the few whose population is not dominated by Han Chinese. It is located in the northwestern corner of the country, covering a staggering 641,350 square miles (1,660,400 sq km), approximately one-sixth of China. However, the province’s population ranks 24th in the country with 19,630,000 people. The capital and largest city is Ürümqi. The province is technically titled Xinjiang Uygur Zizhiqu. Zizhiqu defines the province’s status as an autonomous region.

Xinjiang Geography

Xinjiang province is the northwestern-most province in China. Mountain ranges trace about half of the province’s perimeter. The Tibetan Plateau crosses just over the southern border. In the southeast running towards Gansu, the Altun Mountains mark the northern end of the plateau. Beneath Altun Shan is the Hoh Xil Mountain range, which runs into neighboring Qinghai. The Kunlun Mountains follow the eastern half of the southern border with Tibet (Xizang Zizhiqu). The Tian Mountains run along the western border with Kyrgyzstan and across the province almost reaching Mongolia and Gansu. On the northwestern border with Kazakhstan there are the Ala Tau and Khrebet Tarbagatay Mountains in the south and north respectively. The Aerhtai (Altai) Mountains touch the northern part of the northeastern border with Mongolia. Beneath Tian Shan the Tarim Basin (Tarim Pendi) stretches over a few hundred square miles all the way to the Tibetan Plateau. In all, the province has around 570 large and small rivers. Xinjiang also borders Tajikistan; Pakistan; with a disputed area around Karakoram; India (or Kashmir and Jammu), Afghanistan; and Aksai Chin, which is administered by China and claimed by India.

Xinjiang Demographics

Unlike most Chinese provinces, in Xinjiang, Han Chinese are not the majority. Uyghur make up 45% of the population followed by Han who compose 41%. Kazakh still constitute 7% and Hui 5%. Kirghiz comprise 0.9% of the population followed closely by Mongol who total 0.8%. Dongxiang carry 0.3%. Tajik and Xibe are next with 0.2% each. Ozbek, Russian, Daur, and Tatar are also present.

Xinjiang History

Xinjiang was under the Xiongnu, a well-established nomadic tribe based in Mongolia, during the Han Dynasty (206 BC – 221 AD) until 60 BC when the Han Dynasty finally established the Protectorate of the Western Regions, which included much of modern Xinjiang. In 13 AD many of the states is the protectorate were returned to Xiongnu control. There were a series of expeditions conducted by the Han with intermittent success until 123 AD when most of the region was finally secured.

During the 5th century the region was lost to expanding indigenous nomadic tribes in the north and south. In the 6th century, the Turks made their way in to the area and shortly controlled much of northwestern China. From the arrival of Genghis Khan in the 13th century to the Qing Dynasty (1644 AD – 1911 AD) the region passed through a number of tribes’ and empires’ reigns. The Qing Empire pushed out the Dzungars by the turn of the 18th century only to lose the northwestern part of the province (including parts of modern Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan) to Russia in the mid-19th century. In 1884 most of what constitutes modern Xinjiang had been recovered and was officially incorporated as a province.
The short-lived first East Turkistan Republic was founded here in 1933. The region was then brought back under Han control for about ten years until the rise of the second East Turkistan Republic in 1944. In 1949, the People’s Liberation Army of the new People’s Republic of China entered the area and the transition back into Chinese hands was relatively peaceful. October 1st, 1955, the province officially became an autonomous region of the PRC. Beginning in 1949, there has been a prevalent separatist sentiment in Xinjiang that is still present. Periodic resistance efforts still result in militancy and bloodshed at times.

**Xinjiang Industry**

Xinjiang province has 48,010,000 hectares of utilizable grassland. Much of this is used for fruits and produce production. Cotton, wheat, silk, and sheep are also raised. Xinjiang’s mineral resources make up 80% of the country’s total with 122 types already found. Sixty-seven of these have proven deposits and amount to around half of the country’s total. Coal and oil are relatively rich within the province as well. Also, international and domestic tourism plays a significant role in the province’s economy.