

About China

[https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/china_administrative_map.htm]



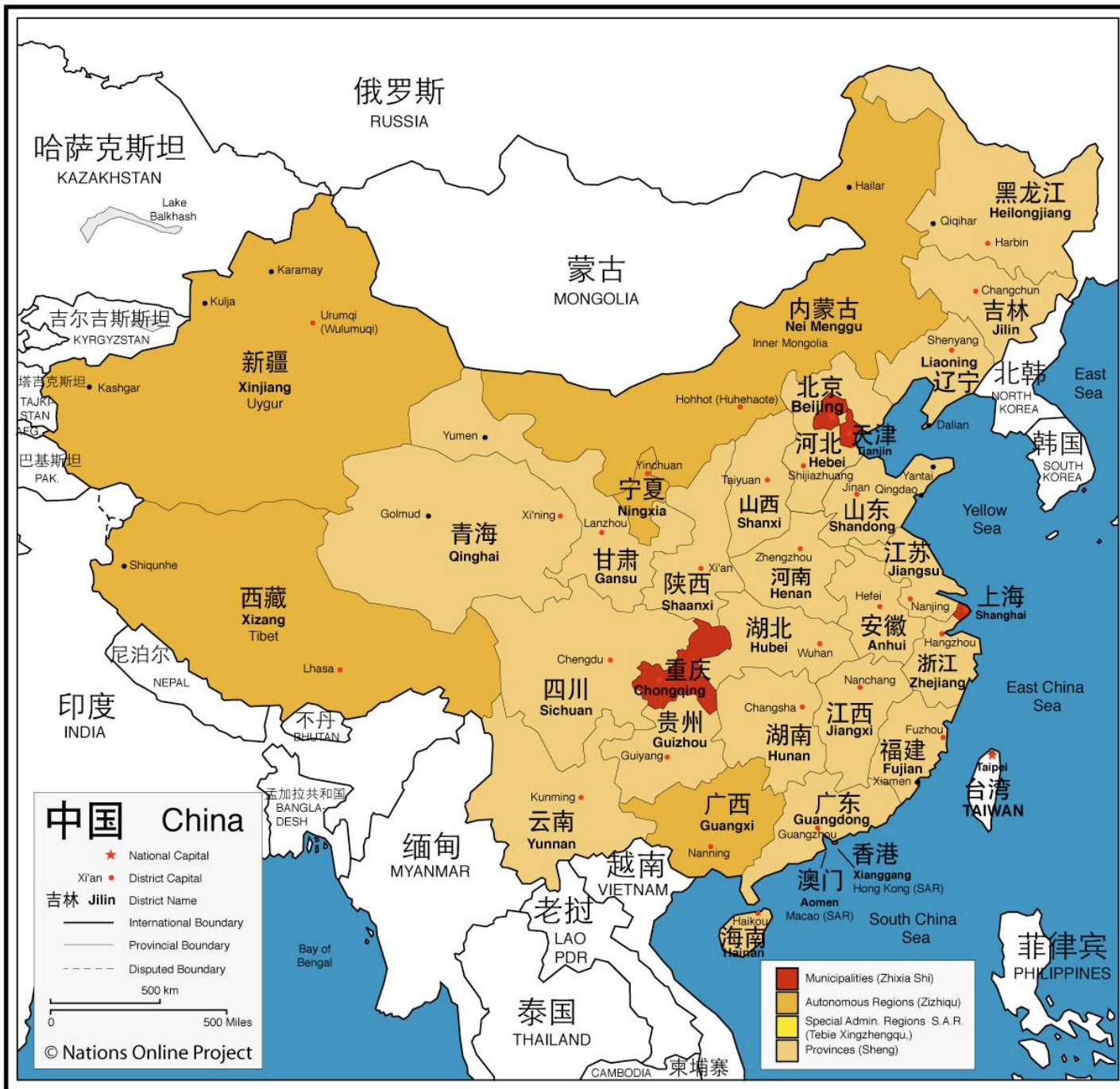
The map shows the provinces of China, officially the People's Republic of China (PRC), a vast country in East Asia. The PRC is bounded by the East China Sea, the Korea Bay, the Yellow Sea, and the [South China Sea](#).

China borders 14 countries: [Afghanistan](#), [Bhutan](#), [India](#), [Kazakhstan](#), [North Korea](#), [Kyrgyzstan](#), [Laos](#), [Mongolia](#), [Myanmar](#) (Burma), [Nepal](#), [Pakistan](#), [Russia](#), [Tajikistan](#), and [Vietnam](#). The country shares maritime borders with [Japan](#), [South Korea](#), the [Philippines](#), and [Taiwan](#). Due to China's claims in the South China Sea, the state also maintains overlapping maritime borders with [Brunei](#) and [Malaysia](#).

The People's Republic covers an [area](#) of 9,597,000 km², making it the fourth largest country on Earth; it is just somewhat smaller than the [United States](#), and 1.25 times the size of Australia.

China has a [population](#) of around 1.44 billion people (in 2021),^[1] making it the world's most populous country.

Administrative Map of China



Political Divisions of China

- **How many provinces are there in China?**
China has 23 provinces (including Taiwan, which the PRC claims as a province).
- **What cities have provincial-level status in China?**
There are four municipalities directly under the central government: Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, and Chongqing.
- **How many autonomous regions are there in China?**
China has five autonomous regions: Guangxi, Inner Mongolia, Tibet (Xizang), Ningxia, and Xinjiang.

What is a “Special Administrative Region” (SAR)?

A Special Administrative Region is a semi-autonomous region under Chinese sovereignty that maintains its own legal and economic systems under the principle of “One Country, Two Systems.” China has two SARs: Hong Kong and Macau.

Regions of China

- **What is the difference between the western and eastern regions of China?**
Eastern China is more densely populated, urbanized, and economically developed, with major ports, export industries, and higher average incomes. Western China is less developed, more rural, and geographically dominated by mountains, plateaus, and deserts, with a larger proportion of ethnic minority groups.
- **Why is interregional trade important in China?**
Interregional trade connects the strengths of different regions. Coastal provinces rely on inland areas for raw materials, energy, and labor, while western regions depend on eastern markets for manufactured goods, capital investment, and infrastructure support. This exchange promotes national economic integration.
- **Do the differences between the regions create problems for China?**
Yes. Regional inequality contributes to large-scale internal migration, especially 流动人口 (migrant workers) who move from rural western or central provinces to eastern cities for work. Many migrant workers face difficulties due to the 户口 (hukou) household registration system, which ties access to public services—such as education, healthcare, and housing—to one’s registered hometown. Without an urban hukou, migrant workers often lack equal access to social benefits, creating social inequality, labor insecurity, and policy challenges for the government.

China's demographic decline is prompting policies that encourage childbirth, integrate regional planning with population trends, and relax barriers for migrant workers' urban settlement. These efforts aim to support labor supply, reduce regional inequality, and improve migrant access to social services, although challenges remain in implementation and in larger metropolitan centers.

Borders and Geography of China

- **Have China's historical borders changed over time? If yes, how?**

Yes. China's borders have varied greatly. Early dynasties controlled much smaller areas centered on the Yellow and Yangzi river valleys. The Han expanded China far into Central Asia, and the Qing dynasty (1644–1912) governed the largest territory in imperial history, extending into what are now Xinjiang, Tibet, Mongolia, and other frontier regions. The modern PRC inherited much of this Qing territorial extent, though borders were reduced in some areas after 1912.

- **Where were the earliest civilizations in China located? Why did people choose to settle in these places?**

The earliest Chinese civilizations developed along major rivers, especially the Yellow River (Huang He) and also near the Yangzi (Chang Jiang). These river valleys offered fertile soil, water for agriculture, and transportation routes, making them ideal for early farming communities such as the Neolithic site Banpo and later the Shang dynasty heartland.

- **What geographical features can be found on China's borders?**

China's borders include major natural barriers: the Himalayas and high Tibetan Plateau in the southwest, vast deserts like the Gobi and Taklamakan in the northwest, mountain ranges and plateaus that rise toward the interior, and long coastlines in the east. These features have shaped historical interactions with neighbors and helped isolate the core agricultural regions.

- **Is it easy to travel across China's borders in terms of the terrain?**

No. Much of China's border terrain is rugged and difficult, with high mountains, deserts, and plateaus that make travel and transport challenging. In contrast, eastern coastal areas and river valleys are more accessible, which is why internal settlement and trade have been concentrated there.

- **Why is China the core of East Asia?**

China is geographically central in East Asia and has historically been the largest and most continuous civilization in the region. Its early development of agriculture, writing, bureaucracy, and major philosophical systems enabled it to exert cultural, political, and economic influence on neighboring societies.

- **What countries in East Asia were particularly influenced by China? Why do you think some others were not?**

Korea, Japan, and Vietnam were strongly shaped by Chinese culture—through the adoption of Confucian ideas, writing

systems (or characters), Buddhism, and administrative models—forming a shared “Sinitic” cultural sphere. Geographic proximity and direct historical contact facilitated this influence. Countries farther away or with strong indigenous traditions, such as Mongolia or areas beyond China’s direct contact, were less deeply Sinicized (though they still experienced cultural exchange).

The South China Sea: Key Border Issues Today

The **South China Sea** is a strategically vital body of water bordered by China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, and Taiwan. It is important because it carries a large portion of global maritime trade and is believed to contain significant oil, natural gas, and fishing resources.

1. China’s Territorial Claims

China claims most of the South China Sea through the “Nine-Dash Line,” which overlaps with the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of several Southeast Asian countries. These claims are disputed under international law, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

2. Key Disputed Areas

Major contested island groups include the **Spratly Islands** and **Paracel Islands**. Multiple countries occupy or claim features in these areas. China has built artificial islands and military installations, increasing tensions.

3. 2016 International Ruling

In 2016, an international tribunal in The Hague ruled in favor of the Philippines, stating that China’s “Nine-Dash Line” claim had no legal basis under UNCLOS. China rejected the ruling.

4. Regional and Global Concerns

- Southeast Asian nations are concerned about sovereignty and fishing rights.
- The United States conducts “freedom of navigation” operations to challenge excessive maritime claims and maintain open sea lanes.
- The issue affects regional stability, trade security, and U.S.–China relations.

5. Why It Matters for China

For China, the South China Sea is tied to national security, access to shipping lanes, energy resources, and historical territorial claims. For neighboring countries, it concerns sovereignty, economic survival (especially fishing), and maritime rights.

Current controversy involving China, Japan, Taiwan, and the United States

1. Core of the Controversy: Taiwan's Security

The flashpoint centers on **Taiwan's political and security status**. China views Taiwan as part of its territory and opposes any foreign interference, while the U.S. and Japan worry about stability in the **Taiwan Strait** and the regional balance of power.

- In **November 2025**, **Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi made remarks in parliament** suggesting that a Chinese attack on Taiwan could be considered a *survival-threatening situation* justifying Japan's military action — a departure from past Japan policy that increased tensions. Japan refused to retract these remarks, prompting a sharp response from China.

2. China–Japan Diplomatic Crisis

Relations between Beijing and Tokyo entered a *diplomatic crisis* after those comments:

- China accused Japan of interfering in its “internal affairs” and violating the **one-China principle**, demanding apologies and corrections.
- Beijing publicly reproached Tokyo and even raised the issue at the **United Nations**, framing the dispute as a threat of Japanese intervention over Taiwan.
- Economic and political fallout has followed, including trade friction, travel advisories, and cultural exchanges being curtailed.

3. U.S. Involvement and Security Guarantees

The **United States** plays a central role:

- Washington continues to oppose unilateral changes to the status quo across the Taiwan Strait and regularly emphasizes support for peace and stability.
- U.S. officials have backed Japan in specific incidents—such as disputes over Chinese military radar tracking Japanese aircraft—highlighting a strengthening U.S.–Japan security partnership.
- However, recent global events (e.g., the U.S. military focus on the Middle East) have raised concerns among allies that U.S. strategic attention and assets in the Indo-Pacific might be stretched thin, potentially weakening deterrence.

4. Taiwan's Own Position

Taiwan remains politically divided internally on defense spending and cross-strait policy, but most Taiwanese identify as culturally separate from China. In April 2026, China hosted a rare meeting between Xi Jinping and a Taiwanese opposition leader who favors closer ties, stirring debate within Taiwan about identity and sovereignty.

5. Why This Matters

- **Regional security:** Taiwan sits at a strategic chokepoint near major sea lanes and close to Japan's southwestern islands, making any conflict there a broader Asia-Pacific security issue.
- **Alliances and balance of power:** The U.S.–Japan alliance is a key counterbalance to China's military rise, especially in areas like long-range missile deployment and joint defense planning.
- **Domestic politics:** Leaders in Tokyo and Taipei are under pressure to respond to China's assertiveness, while Beijing seeks to maintain its core territorial claims without provoking uncontrollable conflict.

In short: tensions are high because Japan's recent comments about Taiwan's security were perceived by China as crossing a red line on sovereignty, the U.S. continues to support regional security, and Taiwan's political identity and defense choices sit at the heart of this geopolitical struggle.