

Xinjiang (Sinkiang)

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Xinjiang (Sinkiang) is an autonomous region in northwestern China. Formally named the Xinjiang Uygur (Sinkiang Uighur) Autonomous Region, it is the largest and the least populated administrative division of the country, with an area of 1,646,800 sq km (635,855 sq mi) and a population of 13,081,681 (1982). The region borders Mongolia, Russia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. The capital is Urumqi (Urumuchi).

Surrounded by some of the world's loftiest mountain ranges--the ALTAI and Tarbagatay on the north, the KARAKORAM, PAMIRS, and Kunlun on the south, and the TIAN SHAN (Tien Shan) on the west--Xinjiang also contains some of the lowest and driest areas of China, particularly the TAKLI MAKAN DESERT (Takla Makan) and the Tarim Basin. The climate is continental in the north but relatively mild in the south; precipitation is minimal, especially in the desert areas. Where rainfall permits, herders graze large numbers of sheep, cattle, and horses, and wheat, corn, and cotton are grown. Fruits and vegetables are cultivated in desert oasis. Deposits of iron, coal, petroleum, and tungsten are of commercial importance. About a third of the population is Chinese, the majority being UIGHUR and KAZAKH.

Xinjiang, which was long known as Chinese Turkistan, has been ruled variously by the Chinese, local Uighur warlords, Mongols, and Kalmyks. The SILK ROAD between China and the Middle East crossed the region. Xinjiang became a province in 1884, although its remote location hindered China's control. Xinjiang was made an autonomous region in 1955.

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