Shandong Province

Shāndōng Shěng 山东省

93.67 million est. 2007 pop. 153,000 square km

Shandong Province is located on the country’s northern coast, across the Yellow Sea from the Koreas, and is home to China’s second-largest provincial population (after Guangdong Province on the south coast). Shandong is home to a large portion of the Huang (Yellow) River and once was home to many Neolithic cultures and ancient philosophers such as Confucius. It is now known for its production of wheat, cotton, and sorghum.

Shandong is a large, densely populated northern coastal province on the Shandong Peninsula, which separates the Bohai Gulf from the Yellow Sea. Shandong Province, bordered on the southwest by Henan Province, on the south by Anhui and Jiangsu provinces, and on the northwest by Hebei Province, is about the size of Mexico in both land area and population. It covers 153,000 square kilometers, and its population density of 579.5 persons per square kilometer ranks it second only to neighboring Henan Province in Chinese provincial population density. Emigrants from the crowded province became a major source of the present population of China’s northeast (Manchuria) during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

China’s Grand Canal historically traversed the province, carrying grain and other trade to Beijing from the lower Yangtze (Chang) River valley, but today this commercial route is of little importance. Today the Huang (Yellow) River is Shandong’s dominant geographic feature, crossing the North China Plain to empty into the Bohai Gulf near the Shengli (Victory) oilfield. Before 1950 flooding by the Huang River caused great suffering, but flood-control projects and water diversions have decreased the river’s flow, and the river has posed no threat in the past half-century.

During the Neolithic period (8000–5500 BCE) Shandong was home to several cultures that made up parts of ancient Chinese culture. During the Zhou dynasty (1045–256 BCE), modern Shandong encompassed several important states, including the powerful state of Qi and the lesser state of Lu, closely associated with the Zhou ruling house and its traditions. The ancient philosophers Confucius (551–479 BCE) and Mencius (371–289 BCE) lived in what is now southern Shandong.

In the central mountains Mount Tai has been a major northern China religious site since prehistoric times. The Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901) began in Shandong as attacks on Chinese Christians and foreign missionaries, but in 1900 the uprising shifted its center north to the Beijing-Tianjin area. German imperialism built the port of Qingdao and Shandong’s first railroad after 1898; in 1915 during World War I Japan took over German interests and remained the dominant foreign presence there until 1945.

Agriculturally, Shandong produces sorghum, wheat, and cotton. Its largest cities and richest land are located from Jinan, the provincial capital, eastward through Weifang to Qingdao. Shandong Peninsula has good ports at Yantai, Qingdao, and Weihai. These ports have grown quickly since 1978, when Chinese Communist Party General Secretary Deng Xiaoping (1904–1997) began China’s reform era.
South Korean interests invested heavily in Shandong in the decade before the 1997 Asian economic crisis.

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Further Reading


