

To the Chinese, the giraffe was more than an exotic animal from a distant land. It was a symbol that suited perfectly their beliefs about the emperor and his rule.

CHAPTER PERSPECTIVE

For much of its history, China had little to do with the rest of the world. Located far from other civilizations, the Chinese viewed their land as the center of the world and their civilization as superior.

As you read, look for these chapter themes:

- ▶ China's civilization influenced East Asia for thousands of years.
- ▶ Traditions based on family and Confucian teachings helped to shape ancient China.
- ▶ Chinese advances in science and technology later spread to other parts of the world.
- ▶ European imperialism and crises in China led to a long process of revolutionary change.

Literature Connections

In this chapter, you will encounter passages from the following works.

"How glorious is the Sacred Emperor,"
Shen Du

Analects, Confucius

The Way of Virtue, Lao Zi

"Work, work—from the rising sun,"
Chinese folk verse

The Travels of Marco Polo, Marco Polo

"Fighting South of the Ramparts,"
Li Bo

For other literature suggestions, see
Connections With Literature, pages
804–808.

1

GEOGRAPHIC SETTING

FIND OUT

How did location shape China's view of the world?

Why is China's population unevenly distributed?

How have rivers influenced the lives of the Chinese?

Vocabulary loess

A Chinese historian guides a visitor to the highest terrace of the Temple of Heaven in Beijing* (bay jhng), China's capital. The tourist gazes at a stone. The guide explains that the ancient Chinese believed the stone was the center of the Earth. The guide notes,

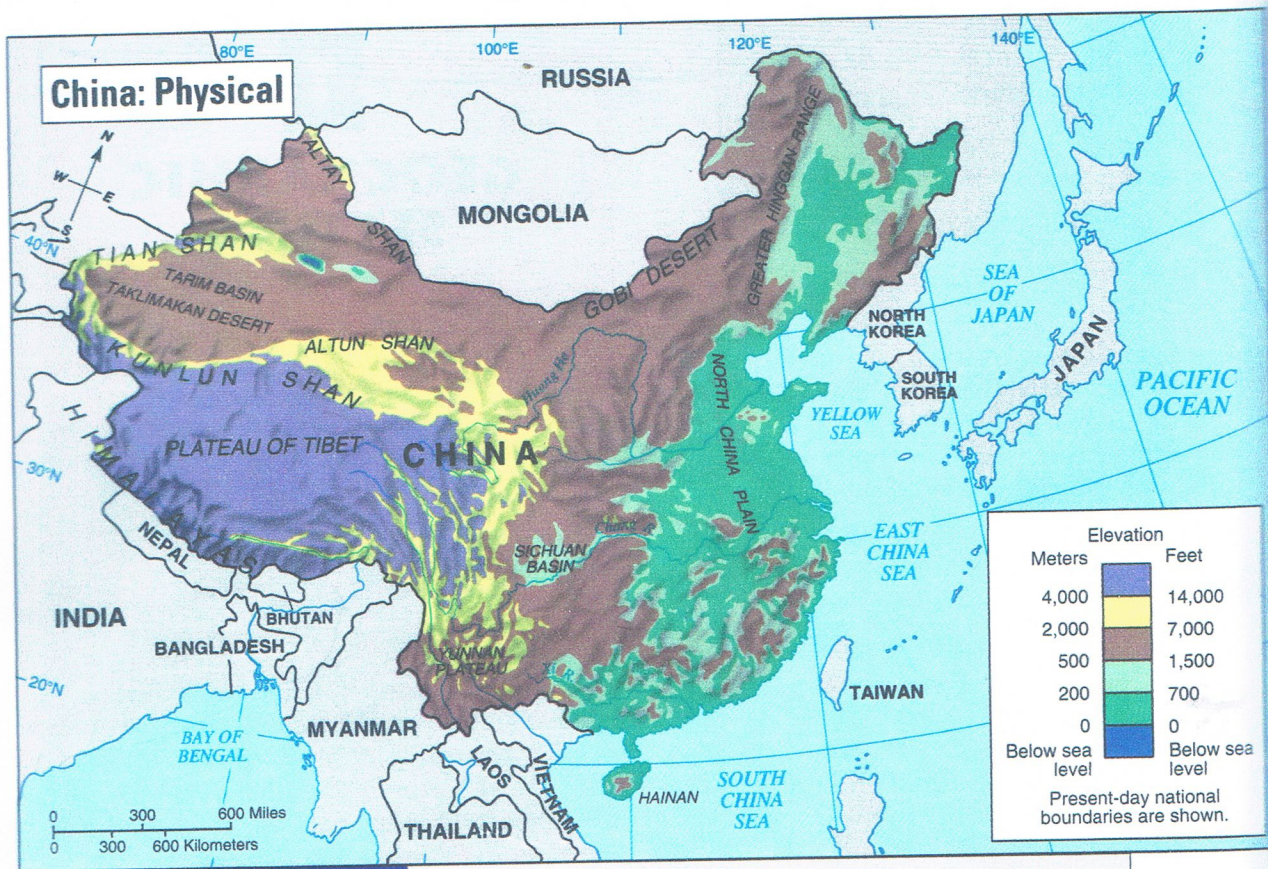
“We Chinese call our country Zhong-guo [Middle Kingdom]. . . . The Chinese for centuries knew no other world than China, for thousands of years no other highly developed culture than their own. . . . The realm of the Han [Chinese] was the center of civilization, the center of the Earth.”

Location

China's location helps to explain why the Chinese thought they lived at the center of the Earth. As the map on page 324 shows, China covers a huge area. Long ago, distance and physical barriers limited contact between China and other centers of civilization.

The physical barriers of China are varied. They include the vast Gobi Desert, the rugged Mongolian and Tibetan plateaus, and the towering Himalaya Mountains. Mountains

* Most Chinese names in this book are spelled according to the Pinyin system established in China in 1979.



MAP STUDY

China's vast landmass extends from the Pacific Ocean into the heart of Central Asia. China is the third largest nation in the world. Eighty percent of its land is mountains and plateaus.

- 1. Location** Identify and give the location of China's three main rivers.
- 2. Region** (a) Describe the relative location of the North China Plain. (b) What is the elevation of most of its land?
- 3. Understanding Causes and Effects** Why does most of China's population live in the eastern part of the nation?

and rain forests also separate China from Southeast Asia. To the east lies the Pacific Ocean.

Despite physical barriers, China did have some contact with other peoples. Trading caravans trekked great distances, carrying goods between China, India, and the Middle East. Buddhist missionaries carried their religion into China. Invaders, too, swept into China, helping to spread ideas and technologies.

Today, China is one of the largest nations in the world. Modern forms of transportation and communication link China to other parts of the world.

Landforms

China is home to more than 1.2 billion people, or more than one fifth of the world's population. It covers a huge area—3.7 million square miles (9.6 million sq km). Yet most Chinese are crowded into the eastern third of the country. Why do most Chinese live in an area that is about half the size of the United States?

The answer lies in part with China's topography and in part with its economy. Today, as in the past, most Chinese are farmers. They live wherever they can find land that will support them.

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Mountains and plateaus cover about 80 percent of China, including much of western China. Because of the rugged terrain and cold, dry climate, the highlands are not suited to farming. As a result, western China has a scattered population, and many people are nomadic herders.

About 20 percent of China is level land, including the coastal plain and the river valleys. Yet only about half of the level land is good for farming. Because there is so little arable land elsewhere, people crowd into eastern China.

To create more farmland, people have constructed terraces, or small, flat fields built into the sides of hills and mountains. The terraces hold the soil in place so that farmers can plant crops.

Regions

China has six main regions. Two regions, which lie in densely populated eastern China, are known as the Chinese heartland. As you will read, the heartland was home to China's first civilization.

The heartland. The two regions of the heartland are North and South China. Together, they stretch from Beijing in the north to China's border with Vietnam in the south.

Because North China and South China have different climates, they produce different crops.

North China has warm or hot summers and cold winters. Rainfall varies greatly, and farmers never know how much to expect. Years of floods may alternate with years of severe drought. The chief food crops of North China are wheat and millet.

The cities of Beijing and Tianjin (tyehn jihn) are manufacturing centers in North China. As China's capital, Beijing has had a major impact on cultural and political affairs.

South China is a much richer farming and industrial region than North China. The mild, humid climate allows farmers to grow rice, cotton, tea, vegetables, and many other crops. Because much of South China is hilly, people are packed onto farmland in the river valleys and around lakes.

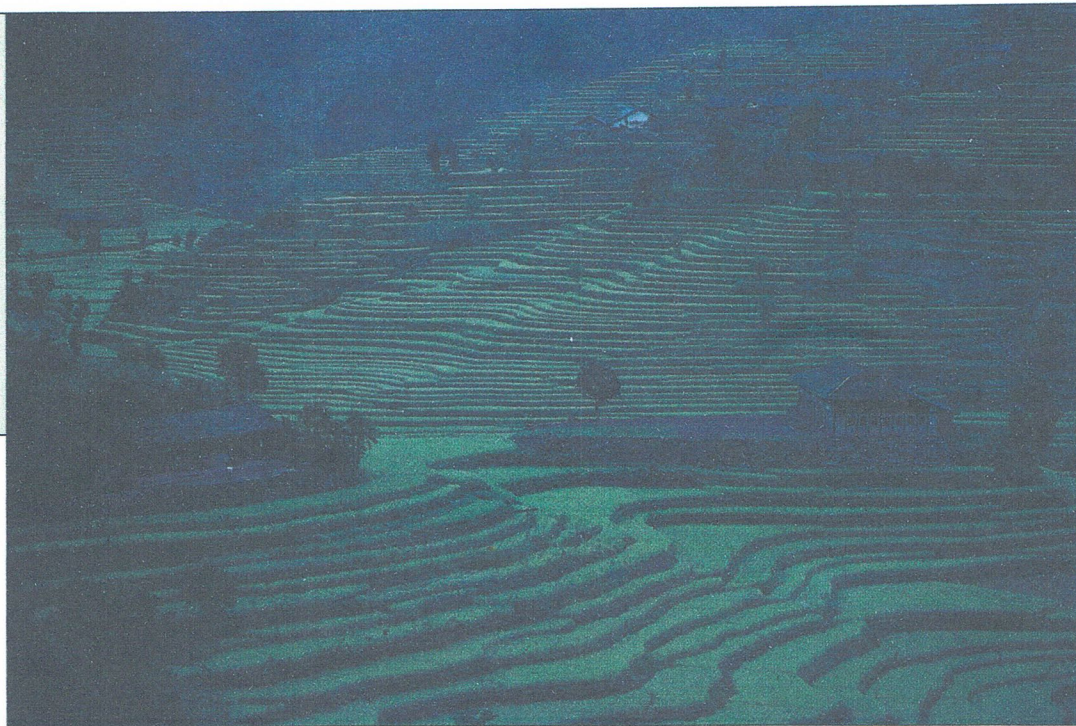
Outlying regions. Four regions lie beyond the heartland: the Northeast, Mongolia,* Xinjiang (sheen jee ahng), and Xizang (shee dzahng). They are home to diverse ethnic groups. Some areas are rich in natural resources.

* One part of Mongolia is an independent country. The other part is under Chinese control.

Terrace Farming

Chinese farmers began terracing hills and mountains at least 700 years ago. Terraces are still needed today because only 7 percent of China's land is arable.

Technology Why must sloping land be terraced before crops can be grown on it?



The Northeast was once known as Manchuria. As you will read, the Manchu (man choo) people who lived there conquered China during the 1600s. Today, the Chinese government is working to develop the region's many resources, including oil, iron, aluminum ore, coal, lead, and zinc. Because of its cold climate, the Northeast is sparsely populated. The government offers special rewards to attract people to the region.

Lying in the parched Gobi Desert, Mongolia, too, has a harsh climate. Summers are extremely hot, and winters are bitterly cold. The government has tried to improve irrigation and thereby promote farming.

The desert basin of Xinjiang is an important oil-producing region. If the government's plans for irrigation succeed, the region may also produce wheat and cotton. Xinjiang is home to many non-Chinese peoples, including Muslim Uighurs, Kazakhs, and Kyrgyz. Although it has been isolated for a long time, Xinjiang is now linked to the heartland by railroads.

Xizang, also known as Tibet, sits among several mountain ranges, including the world's highest mountains—the Himalayas. Much of the region is barren and treeless, but farming is possible in some valleys. Since taking over Tibet in 1950, China has tried to

develop its rivers for hydroelectric power. The region may also have mineral wealth that could help China in the future.

Rivers

Since ancient times, three rivers have held an important place in Chinese life: the Huang He (hwahng huh), Chang (jahng), and Xi (shee). Today, as in the past, these rivers serve as both transportation routes and sources of irrigation water.

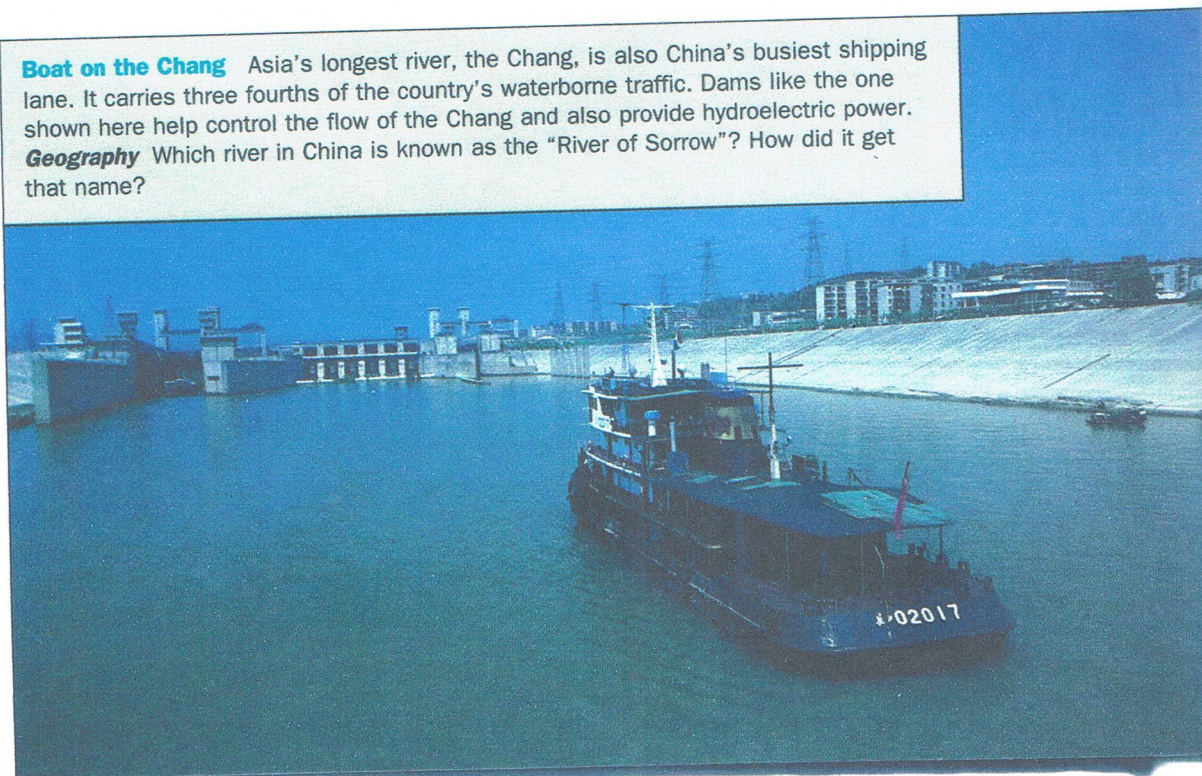
Despite the ever-present danger of flooding, hundreds of millions of Chinese work the fertile land in the river valleys. Earlier, the Chinese had developed the technology to build dikes and canals to help control floods.

Huang He. The Huang He (Yellow River) wanders for thousands of miles across North China before emptying into the Yellow Sea. Its name comes from the yellow-brown soil, called **loess** (LOH ehs), that winds carry across the North China Plain and into the river. This windblown soil is quite fertile and enriches the land.

In China, the Huang He has earned the name "River of Sorrow" because it floods frequently, causing terrible destruction. In 1931, for example, a flood destroyed China's crops and almost 4 million people died of starvation.

Boat on the Chang Asia's longest river, the Chang, is also China's busiest shipping lane. It carries three fourths of the country's waterborne traffic. Dams like the one shown here help control the flow of the Chang and also provide hydroelectric power.

Geography Which river in China is known as the "River of Sorrow"? How did it get that name?



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Flooding occurs because loess clogs the riverbed. After heavy rains, the river overflows its banks. In Chinese writing, the character for “misfortune” is 灾. The symbol is a river with a barrier that causes flooding. Yet the flooding provides one important benefit to the Chinese. The flood waters leave behind a fertile layer of silt after they dry up.

Chang River. The Chang, also known as the Yangzi (yang zih), carries much of China’s trade. For centuries, large ships have sailed hundreds of miles upriver. At the mouth of the Chang lies the busy port city of Shanghai, from which China ships many of its goods to countries overseas.

In recent years, the government has built dams to develop hydroelectric power along the Chang. However, the Three Gorges Dam has sparked furious debate. Government planners say the dam will produce such abundant electric power that the environmental damage it may cause will be acceptable. Critics point out that it will flood farmland and force more than 1 million people to leave their homes.

Xi River. China’s third major waterway is the Xi Jiang, or West River, which flows through South China. Oceangoing vessels can navigate this river to reach Guangzhou (Canton). From this major port, China ships the riches of its southlands to the world.

Tens of millions of Chinese are crowded into the Xi delta. There, ample water, a favorable climate, and good soil enable farmers to produce two or even three crops a year.

People

About 95 percent of the people who make up China’s huge population are Han, or ethnic Chinese. Ethnic minorities such as the Mongols, Tibetans, and Tajiks live in the remote regions of the interior.

Even though most people who live in China are Chinese, they speak different dialects, or regional forms, of Chinese. Dialects differ so much that Chinese from one area cannot understand people from other areas. To promote unity, the government has made Mandarin, which is spoken in North China, the country’s official language.

SECTION 1 REVIEW

- 1. Locate:** (a) Himalayas, (b) Gobi Desert, (c) Huang He, (d) Chang River, (e) Xi River.
- 2. Define:** loess.
- (a) Why did the Chinese call their land Zhongguo? (b) How did China’s location contribute to Chinese ethnocentrism?
- (a) Describe the six regions of China. (b) Why do most people live in the Chinese heartland?
- (a) What are the three main rivers of China? (b) How have they influenced Chinese life?
- 6. Understanding Causes and Effects** How have topography and climate influenced population patterns in China?
- 7. Writing Across Cultures** Write a dialogue in which an American and a Chinese discuss how geography has affected contact between their nation and other civilizations.

2

ENDURING TRADITIONS

FIND OUT

What were the achievements of the Shang civilization?

How did the Mandate of Heaven explain changes in dynasties?

What three schools of thought emerged in China?

How did the Chinese adapt Buddhism to their own society?

Vocabulary ideograph, dynastic cycle, filial piety

In a great flood, begins a Chinese legend, the waters of the Huang He swirled across the North China Plain. The flood lasted for seven years. Finally, a young man named Yu set out to master the waters.