

Geography

TO THE TEACHER

OBJECTIVES OF THIS UNIT: To provide basic background on China's geographic endowment. To raise the issue of Chinese ethnicity and the presence of minority groups in China.

TEACHING STRATEGIES: Most students at the high school or college level will have no difficulty with the concepts or approaches presented in this unit.

To make this material more challenging, teachers could raise such issues as the displacement of other ethnic groups by the Han majority, or the geography of contact between China and the rest of Asia, both in early times and more recent centuries.

WHEN TO TEACH: Even a very brief treatment of China in a world studies class could benefit from an introduction to China's land and people. When time is limited, teachers may want to emphasize material on China Proper and on the Han majority. In a chronologically-organized course, it is traditional to introduce geography at the outset, but it is also useful to return to it with some regularity. For instance, teachers mentioning the Uighurs or Tibetans during the Tang dynasty or introducing the Mongols or Manchus could refer students back to this unit.

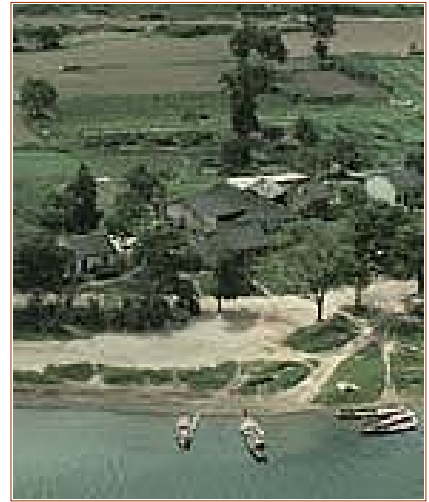


China is located in eastern Asia. Today it occupies approximately 9.6 million square kilometers (3.7 million square miles), or nearly one quarter of Asia's land, making it almost as large as the whole of Europe. From north to south, China extends 5,500 kilometers (3,400 miles), from west to east, 5,200 kilometers (3,100 miles).

Chinese civilization arose in a particular geographical context. While viewing the following pages, try to think of the following questions:

- ***How did geographical location affect Chinese contacts with other early civilizations?***
- ***Through what kinds of different terrain did Chinese civilization spread?***
- ***Why are minorities more common today in some areas than others?***

Suggested Reading



Land



People

FURTHER READING FOR GEOGRAPHY

Blunden, Caroline and Mark Elvin. *The Cultural Atlas of China*. New York: Facts on File Inc., 1983.

Eberhard, Wolfram. *China's Minorities: Yesterday and Today*. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Murphy, Rhoads. "The Land." Murowchick, Robert, ed. *China, Ancient Culture, Modern Land*. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994. 13-23.

Sivin, Nathan, ed. *The Contemporary Atlas of China*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988.

Tregear, T. R. *China: A Geographical Survey*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1980.

Zhou Shunwu. *China Provincial Geography*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1992.

Land

The territory of modern China is characterized by dramatic geographical diversity. Topographically, it is low in the east and high in the west. The land surface ascends like a three-step staircase. The plains and lowlands in the east and southeast constitute the first step, occupying about 12 percent of the land. Two-thirds of the country, the two higher steps, are mostly mountains and high plateaus.

Below is a topographical map of China. *What effects do you think China's topography would have had on the development and spread of Chinese civilization?*

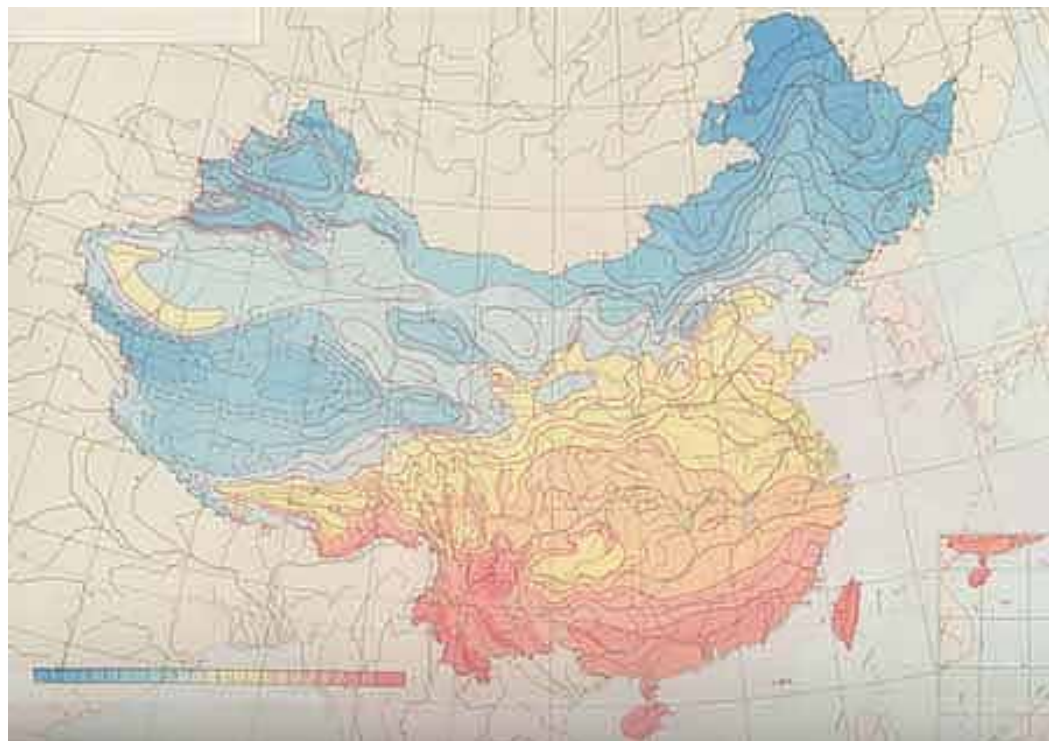


Map 1: East Asia's topography

China's climate ranges from extremely dry, desert-like conditions in the north and west to the rain and heat of the tropical monsoon in the south and southeast. Most of the country, however, lies in the temperate zone and experiences four seasons.

Below are two maps showing the average highest temperatures in January and July.

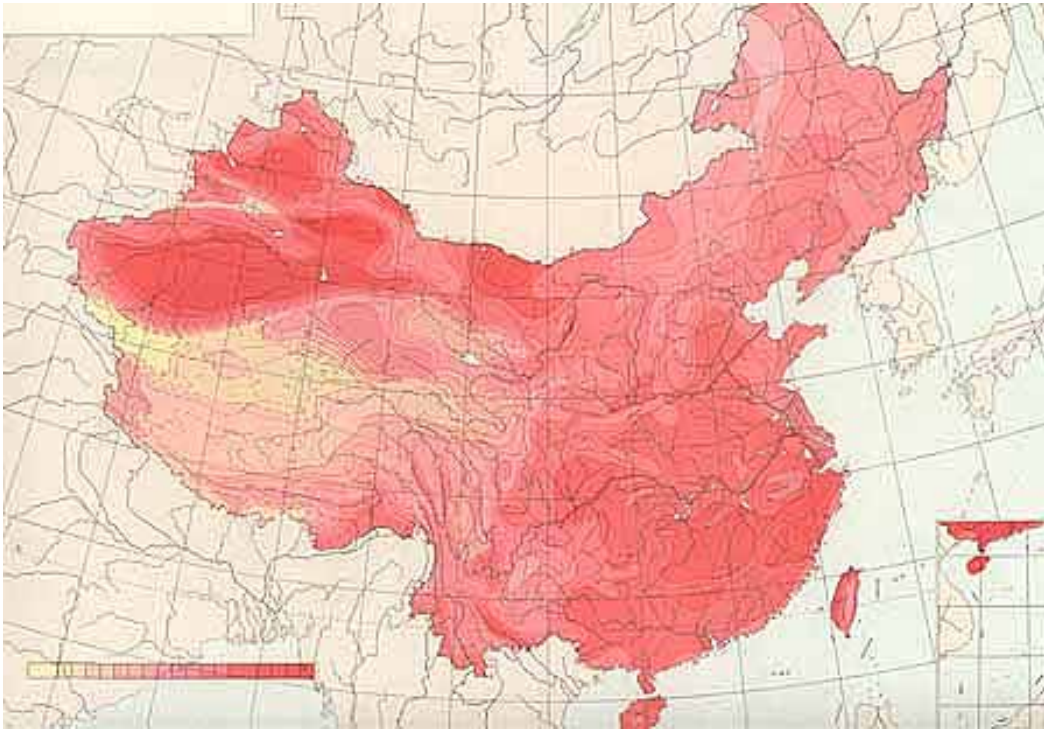
What characteristics do you observe about China's climate from looking at Maps 2 and 3 below? What would have been the most comfortable place to live? Where did Chinese civilization start?



As the barely visible scale at the bottom left shows, the lowest average temperature in January is represented by sky blue (-8°F). It goes up from sky blue to light blue, then to yellow and orange, and on to pink and red (75°F).

Map 2: Temperature differences in January

SOURCE: Zhongyang qixiang ju, ed., *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo qihou tuji*, (Beijing: Ditu chubanshe, 1979), p. 65.



The map on the left shows that the hottest areas in China in July are Xinjiang in the northwest and the provinces in the south and southeast. The highest temperature is represented by the darkest color red (104°F), and the lowest by the lightest yellow (46°F).

Map 3: Temperature differences in July

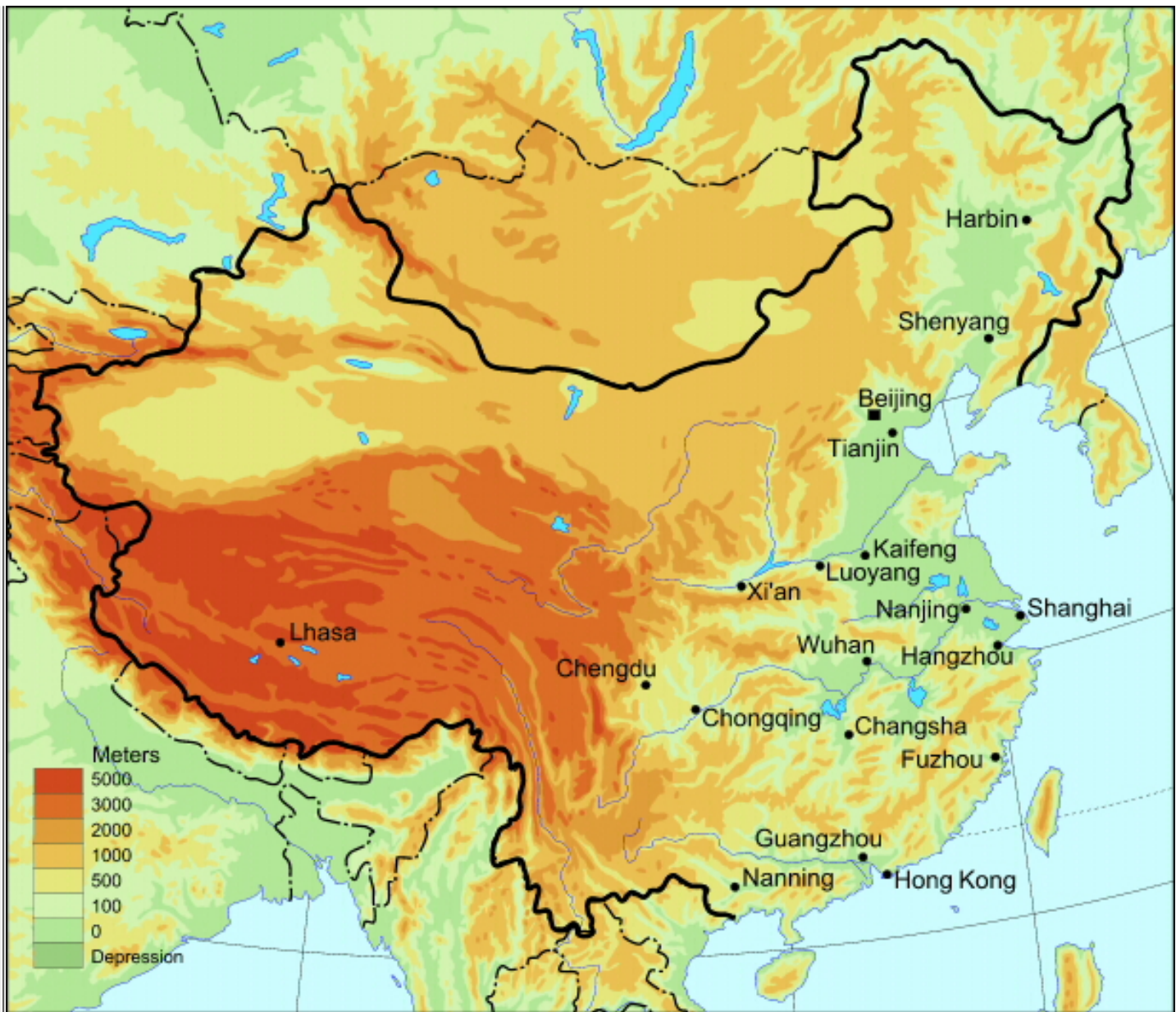
SOURCE: Zhongyang qixiang ju, ed., *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo qihou tuji*, (Beijing: Ditu chubanshe, 1979), p. 69.

Today China has thirty-three administrative units directly under the central government. They consist of twenty-two provinces, five autonomous regions, four municipalities, and two special administrative regions. The names of most of these provinces have been used for many centuries. The government of the People's Republic also claims the island of Taiwan, which has been ruled by the Republic of China since 1949.



Map 4: China's current provinces

Contemporary China has more than 50 cities with populations of half a million or more, and about 25 with a million or more. The capital city, Beijing, is in the north. Coastal Shanghai in central China is the largest city in the country, with a population of around 15 million within the municipality. [Click here](#) to see a map showing contemporary China's major cities (shown below in the Teachers' Guide)

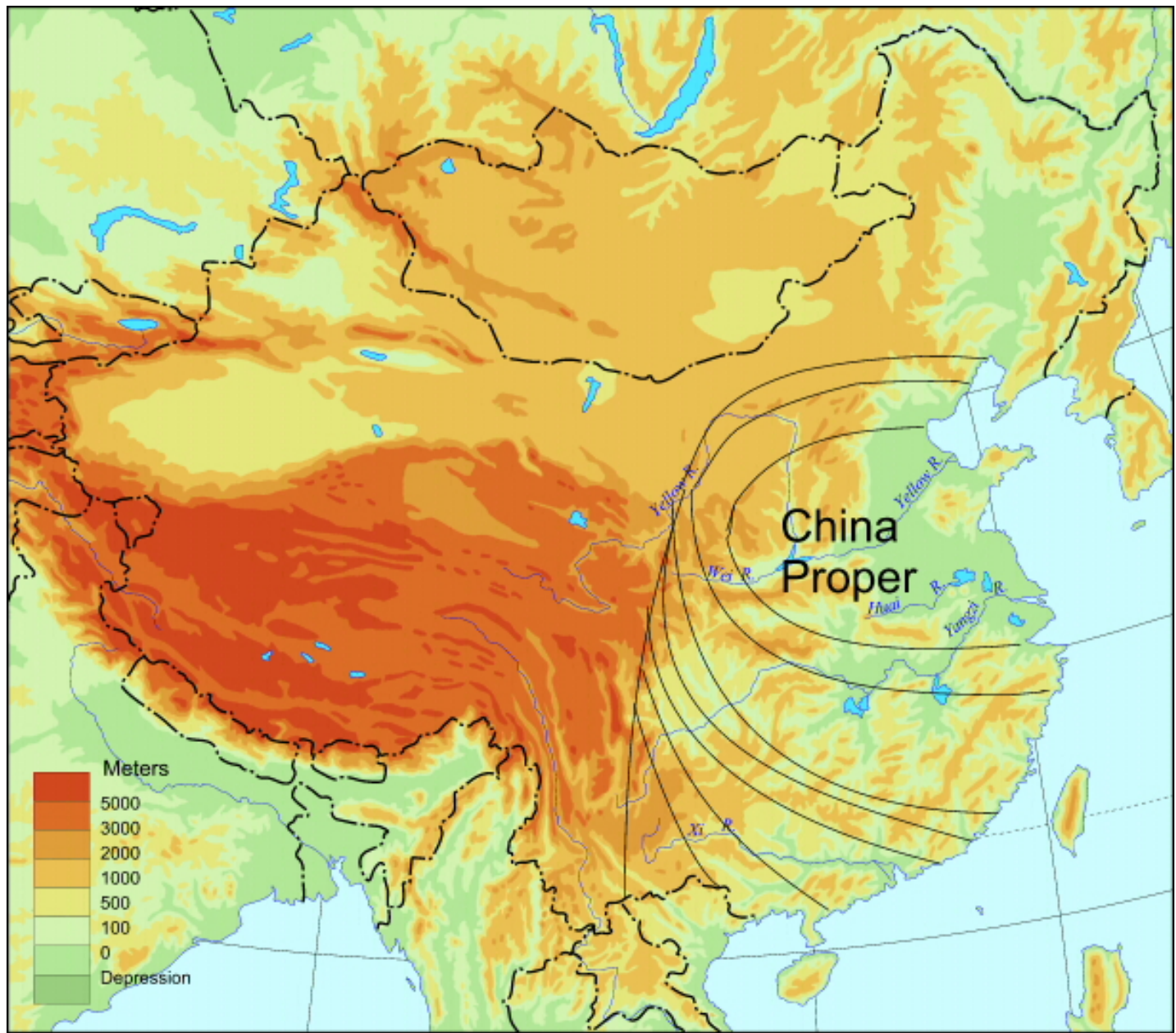


Major cities of China today

To understand Chinese history and civilization, it is helpful to divide China into two large zones, China Proper and Outer China. China Proper is the area--changing constantly over time--where Chinese culture was dominant. Chinese dynasties also sometimes had control of significant regions populated primarily by other ethnic groups, areas we can consider Outer China.

Map 6 below shows these two zones. The curved lines show the gradual expansion of the region where Chinese culture was dominant. The bulk of China Proper is less than 1000 meters above sea level. With fertile alluvial soil, adequate water, and moderate temperatures, this zone is well-suited to agriculture, a key feature of Chinese civilization from its earliest stages.

How would topography and climate have shaped the interaction between China Proper and Outer China?

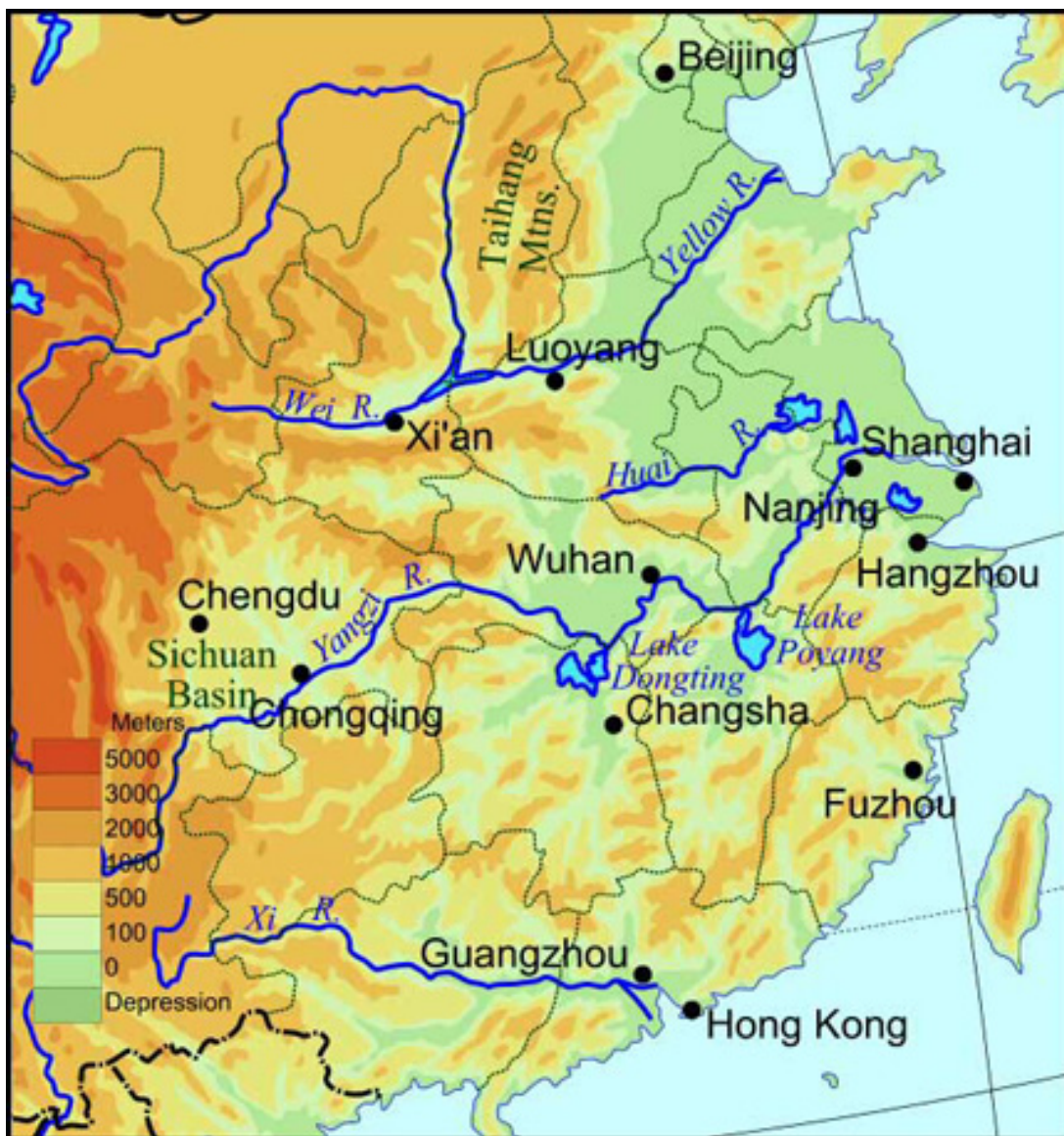


Map 5: China Proper

Move on to [China Proper](#)

China Proper

Two great rivers run through China Proper: the Yellow River in the north, and the Yangtze (or Yangzi) River to the south. In fact, most of China Proper belongs to the drainage-basins of these two rivers. Both originate to the far west in the Tibetan Plateau. The much smaller Xi River cuts through southern China. The map below shows the current courses of these rivers, but over time there have been many changes. Sometimes the Yellow River has emptied south of the Shandong peninsula, rather than north of it as it does today. And for long periods, the Huai River emptied into the sea.



Why do most of the rivers in China flow from the west to the east?

How many of the major cities of China are on major rivers?

Rivers of China Proper

China Proper was separated from the vast territories of Outer China to the north by the Great Wall, a huge construction project and famous landmark of Chinese civilization.

To see pictures of the Great Wall, [click here](#).

North China is dominated by the alluvial plain along the Yellow River (shown on the right). This part of China Proper is mostly flat and the soil, replenished by silt carried down by the river, is well-suited to agriculture.



The Yellow River in its middle reaches is shown below.

For more information about the Yellow River, [click here](#).

Fields in the Yellow River Plain, north of China

SOURCE: Nongmuyu ye bu waishi si and Zhongguo nongxue hui, ed., Zhongguo nongye, (Beijing: Nongye chuban she, 1983), p. 36.



The middle reaches of the Yellow River

SOURCE: Wang yongyan and Zhang Zongyou ed., *Zhongguo huangtu* (Xian: Shanxi renmin meishu chuban she), no page number available.

The middle reaches of the Yellow River flow through the so-called Loess Plateau, shown to the right and below. A type of soil that covers extensive areas in Asia, Europe, and North America, loess is silty and yellowish brown in color. It is a fertile soil that is conducive to agriculture.



Cultivated loess soil

What crops do you think are suited to areas of loess soil?



Loess soil in Shanxi province

SOURCE: Photos courtesy of Patricia Ebrey, Shaanxi Province, 1982.



Wheat

Staple crops of North China include wheat, corn, sorghum (a grass crop related to sugar-cane), millet and soybeans. Recently, thanks to new varieties and methods, rice has become more and more widely grown.



Corn



Millet



Sorghum



Soybeans

SOURCE: Nongmuyu ye bu waishi si and Zhongguo nongxue hui, ed., *Zhongguo nongye*, (Beijing: Nongye chuban she, 1983), p. 50.

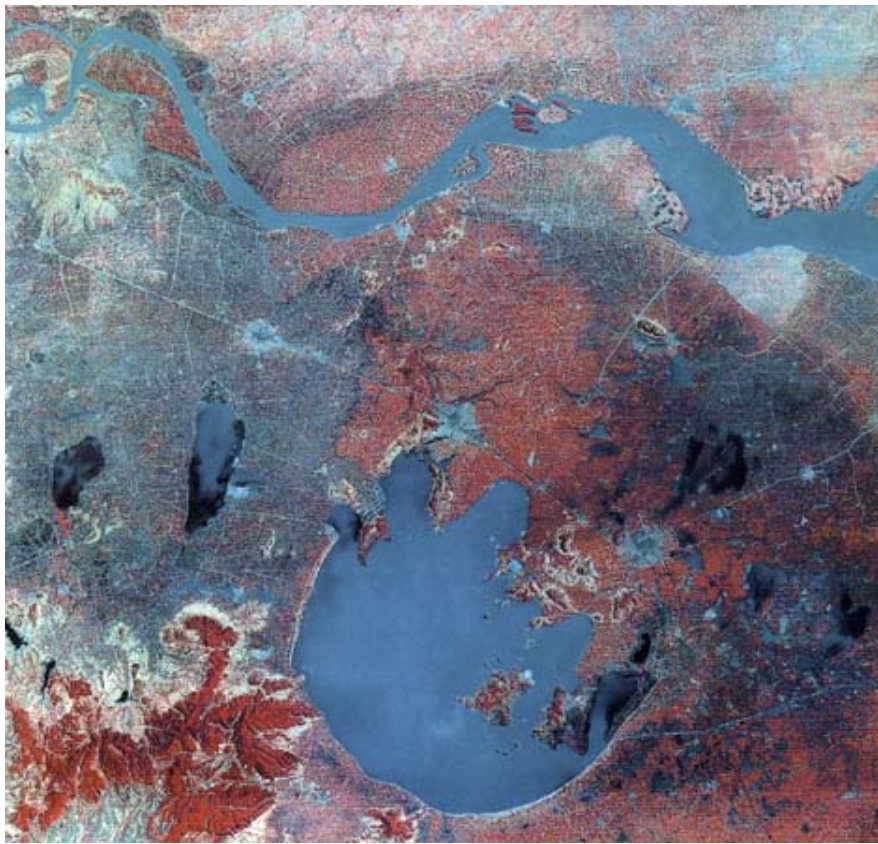


The region drained by the Yangtze (Yangzi) River, loosely called South China, is hillier than North China. The region is also warmer and more humid.

Rice fields, south of China

SOURCE: Nongmuyu ye bu waishi si and Zhongguo nongxue hui, ed., *Zhongguo nongye*, (Beijing: Nongye chuban she, 1983), p. 100.

South China is covered by a network of rivers and lakes and their valleys.



On the right is an infrared satellite picture showing the area around Lake Tai and the Yangtze River. The Yangtze River is near the top, Lake Tai, the half-moon blue shape, at the bottom. The region has been the most prosperous area in China since the tenth century, and is commonly called the "country of rice and fish."

To learn more about the Yangtze River, [click here](#).

Satellite view of Lake Tai region

SOURCE: Zhao Songqiao, *Physical Geography of China* (Beijing: Science Press and New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1986), landsat image 4.

Rivers are an integral part of the daily life of people in South China.

Below is a picture of Suzhou in Jiangsu province showing houses along the Grand Canal. From north to south, the Grand Canal is over 1,700 kilometers (roughly 1,100 miles) long, linking Hangzhou in Zhejiang province with Beijing in the north. An extremely important water project that was first started in the Sui dynasty (589-618), it connects several big rivers and provides an important means of transportation and communication.

With the two pictures below in mind, how do you think the access to rivers and lakes would have made the lifestyle of people in the south different from that of people in the north?



The picture on the left shows a "street" scene from Suzhou.

Canal in Suzhou, 1980

SOURCE: Photo courtesy of Patricia Ebrey.



Although provinces such as Guangxi, much further west, are generally more mountainous, they still usually have navigable rivers.

River near Guilin, Guangxi province, 1978

SOURCE: Photo courtesy of Patricia Ebrey.

Rice is one of the staple crops of South China. Below is a picture of a farmer planting rice. When the fields are flooded like this, farmers allow fish to swim among the stalks.



Why do you think the farmers allow the fish to swim among the stalks?

ANSWER: Aside from providing another source of food, the fish are aesthetically pleasing and eat mosquito larvae.

Plowing a rice field in Taiwan, 1967

SOURCE: Photo courtesy of Howard Wechsler, Huilai, Taiwan, 1967.



What do you suppose these people are doing in the picture on the left?

ANSWER: Transplanting seedlings.

SOURCE: Nongmuyu ye bu waishi si and Zhongguo nongxue hui, ed., *Zhongguo nongye*, (Beijing: Nongye chubanshe, 1983), p. 127.

Tea is widely grown in the hilly regions in South China and many parts of West China, such as Sichuan province. In fact, tea is so popular in China that it is considered a basic necessity of life.



Why do you think tea is so popular?

HINT: Why is coffee so popular in the West?

Picking tea in Zhejiang province

SOURCE: China Pictorial, ed., *China in Pictures* (Beijing: China Pictorial Publishing Company, 1984), p. 53.

In the past China was overwhelmingly an agricultural society, but it has had large cities from early times. Today, China's largest cities look much like cities elsewhere, though some traditional styles of architecture and graphic arts can be also be found.



Chongqing, Sichuan, 2001

SOURCE: Photograph courtesy of Joseph Gotchy

Much of what can be seen on the Bund in Shanghai dates from the first half of the twentieth century. The tall buildings further from the river, below, have largely been built in the last ten years.



The Bund, Shanghai, 2001

SOURCE: Photograph courtesy of Joseph Gotchy

Is there anything about this scene you would be unlikely to see outside China?



Downtown Shanghai, 2001

SOURCE: Photograph courtesy of Joseph Gotchy

Chinese cities, like cities everywhere, bring people together to buy and sell.



Chongqing market, 2001

SOURCE: Photograph courtesy of Joseph Gotchy

For more on the sorts of clothing people wear today in China, see [Eighties and Nineties](#) in the unit on [Clothing](#).



Summer street scene, Shanghai, 2001

SOURCE: Photograph courtesy of Joseph Gotchy



Why would a Chinese city today have both skyscrapers and street vendors? What does their existence tell us about the Chinese urban economy?

Fruit vendor, Shanghai, 2001

SOURCE: Photograph courtesy of Joseph Gotchy

For more on the sorts of billboards and other advertising to be seen in contemporary Chinese cities, see the section on [Contemporary Advertising](#) in the [Graphic Arts](#) unit.



Shopping street, Shanghai, 2001

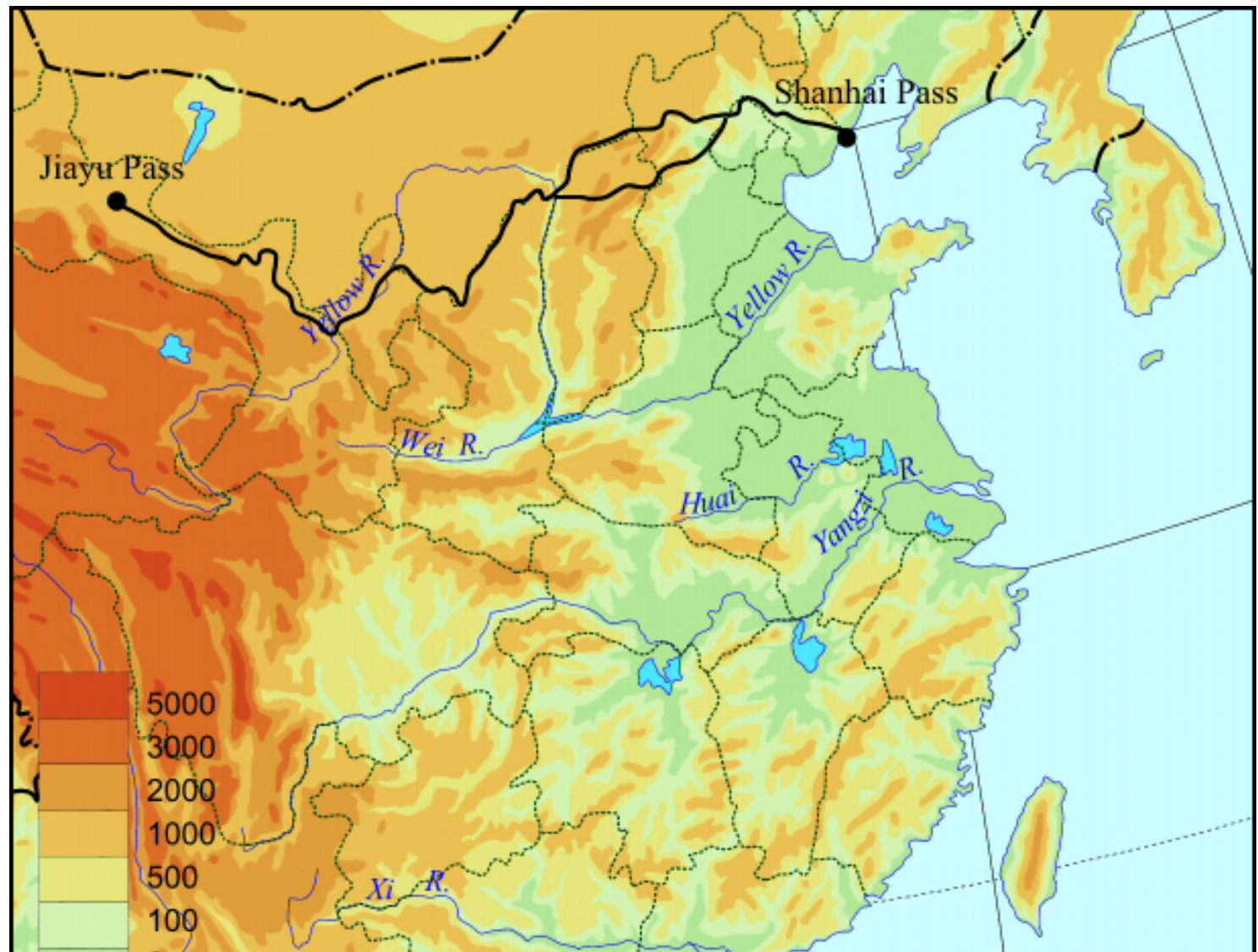
SOURCE: Photograph courtesy of Joseph Gotchy

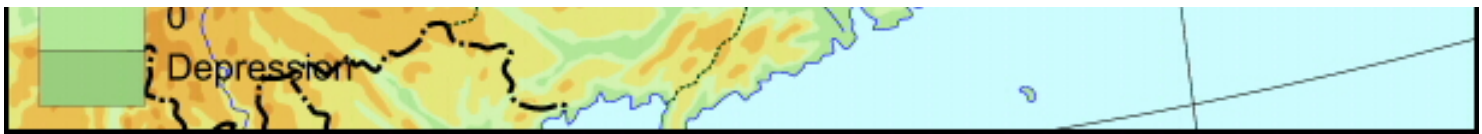
Move on to [Outer China](#)

Great Wall

Ancient Chinese started building fortifications as early as the eighth century BC to help in their military efforts against the nomads to the north. The first emperor of the Qin dynasty (221-206BCE) connected the existing walls into a single system, known as the Great Wall. The Great Wall was periodically rebuilt, with most of the current wall dating to the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). The Great Wall extends about 7,300 kilometers (4,500 miles) from the Shanhai Pass on the east coast to the Jiayu Pass in modern Gansu province.

Below is a map showing the Great Wall's starting point at the Shanhai Pass in the east and its ending point at the Jiayu Pass in the west.





The path of the Great Wall, from Jiayu Pass to Shanhai Pass



To the left is a picture of Shanhai Pass (which means "the pass where the mountains meet the sea"). It is the easternmost point of the Great Wall.

Which do you think proved more difficult, the Wall's construction and maintenance or the stationing of troops along it?

Shanhai Pass

SOURCE: Zhongguo dili congshu bianji weiyuanhui, *Zhongguo zonghe ditu* (Beijing: Zhongguo ditu chubanshe, 1990), p. 160.

SOME THOUGHTS: Peasants could be conscripted during the winter to build and maintain the Great Wall, whereas stationing troops along the Wall required permanent garrisons of professional soldiers.

Below are two pictures of the Great Wall, one showing a section in decay and the other one undergoing renovation to encourage tourism.

How effective do you think this kind of fortification would have been in pre-modern times?

What do you imagine would have been the most efficient means of communication along the Great Wall in times of war?



SOURCE: Left, *Beijing, Glimpse of History* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1994), p. 97. Right, *China Reconstructs* 34.3 (March, 1985), p. 12.

ANSWER: The wall proved quite effective when maintained and garrisoned; however, at different times throughout history, it was breached because of treachery, disrepair, lack of troops, and tactical blunders. The relatively short distance between towers allowed communication through such means as beacons and runners.



The picture to the left shows the Jiayu Pass in Gansu province, the westernmost point of the Great Wall.

The high mountains in the background mark the Tibetan Plateau.

Jiayu Pass

SOURCE: Zhongguo meishu quanji bianji weiyuanhui, Zhongguo meishu quanji, jianzhu yishubian (Beijing: Zhongguo jianzhu gongye chubanshe, 1987), p. 163.

Yellow River

The Yellow River is the second longest river in China. It runs 5464 kilometers (3395 miles) and is often called the cradle of Chinese civilization.

Below is a picture of the high plateau in Qinghai province where the Yellow River starts.

Would such terrain be suitable for farming?



Qinghai plateau

SOURCE: China Pictorial, ed., *Across China* (Beijing: China Pictorial Publishing Company, 1985), p. 11.



Much of the lower reaches of the Yellow River are not navigable, but raftmen, like the man to the left, have found ways to get goods across the river.

Raftman on the Yellow River

SOURCE: Zhongguo shaoshu minzu diqu huaji congkan zongbianji weiyuanhui, ed., *Zhongguo shaoshu minzu diqu huaji congkan, qinghai* (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 1986), no page number available.

Below are two pictures showing the Yellow River in its middle reaches running through the Loess Plateau and in its lower reaches running through Shandong province. The huge amount of silt the river carries is deposited in these lower regions, raising its bed above ground level in the flat North China plain.

Why do you think flooding has been a frequent problem for people living near the Yellow River?



Hukou waterfalls on Yellow River in Shaanxi province

SOURCE: China Pictorial, ed., *Across China* (Beijing: *China Pictorial Publishing Company*, 1985), p. 24.



Yellow River in Shandong province

SOURCE: Shuilibu huanghe shuili weiyuanhui, ed., *Huanghe gengguang* (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 1982), no page number available.

The Yellow River has changed its courses several times over the centuries, causing great hazards. The picture below shows the river right before it flows into the sea.



Yellow River Plain in Shandong province

SOURCE: Shuilibu huanghe shuili weiyuanhui, ed., *Huanghe gengguang* (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 1982), no page number available.

Yangtze River

The Yangtze River (or, "Changjiang" in Chinese, literally, the "long river"), is the longest river in China, running 6,300 kilometers (3915 miles). It is also the third longest river in the world. Its basin, extending for some 2,000 miles from west to east and for more than 600 miles from north to south, drains a huge area in South China. The Yangtze also carries more water than any other river in China.



Source of the Yangtze in Tibet

SOURCE: *Zhongguo shaoshu minzu diqu huaji congkan zongbianji weiyuanhui, ed., Zhongguo shaoshu minzu diqu huaji congkan, qinghai* (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 1986), no page number available.



The Yangtze is open to navigation all the year around. The picture to the left features one of the so-called "Three Gorges," dangerous to navigate because of its currents and shallows, but of incredible beauty.

A bird's eye view of the Yangtze river

SOURCE: China Pictorial, ed., *Across China* (Beijing: China Pictorial Publishing Company, 1985), p. 125.



Lake Dongting is the second largest lake in China. It lies in a basin in northern Hunan province to the south of the Yangtze River and is connected to the river.

Lake Dongting

SOURCE: Nongmuyu ye bu waishi si and Zhongguo nongxue hui, ed., *Zhongguo nongye*, (Beijing: Nongye chuban she, 1983), p. 31.

The picture to the right shows the Yangtze River flowing into the sea near the biggest city in China, Shanghai.

Do you think Shanghai's geographical situation helps explain its prominence?



Satellite view of the Yangtze River delta

SOURCE: Lu Yinghui, *Xinbian Shanghai daguan* (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 1993), no page number.



Outer China

Outer China is the huge area to the north and west of China Proper. It ranges from 1,000 to 5,000 meters above sea level. The zone includes part of Northeast China (also known as Manchuria), Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau, part of the Loess Plateau, and a stretch of mountains.

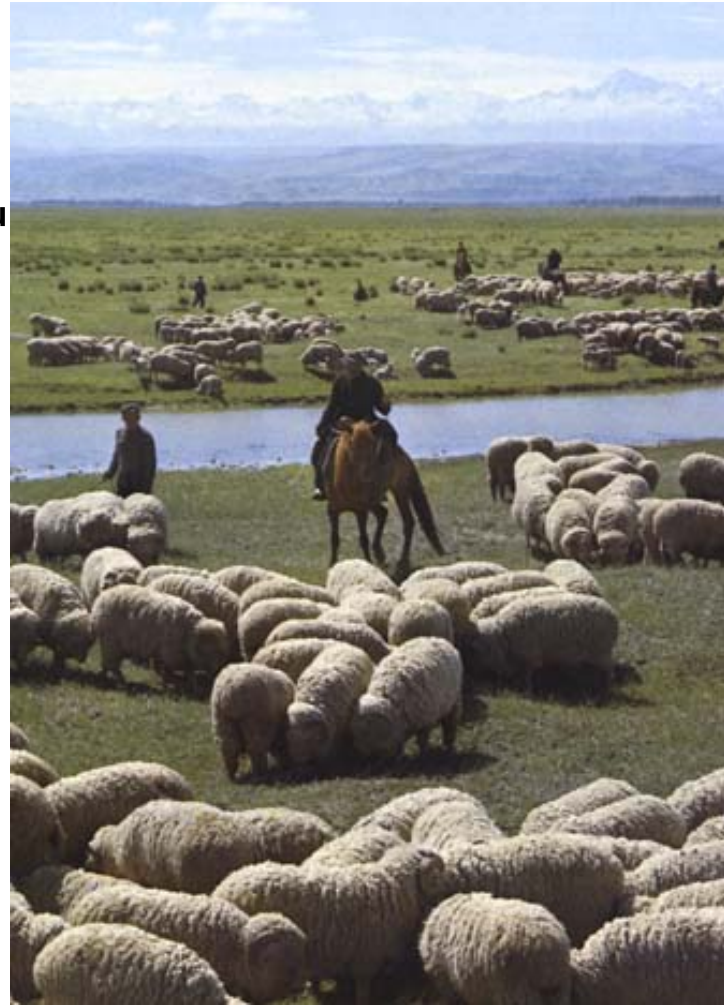


Among the domesticated animals in the Northeast are reindeer.

Sleds pulled by reindeer in Inner Mongolia

SOURCE: Zhongguo shaoshu minzu diqu huaji congkan zongbianji weiyuanhui, ed., *Zhongguo shaoshu minzu diqu huaji congkan, neimenggu* (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 1986), p. 106.

North of China Proper, the Inner Mongolian Plateau is a combination of prairie, mountain, and desert, much of it suitable for raising sheep.



Sheep herding in Inner Mongolia

SOURCE: Nongmuyu ye bu waishi si and Zhongguo nongxue hui, ed., *Zhongguo nongye* (Beijing: Nongye chuban she, 1983), p. 146.



The Yili area of Xinjiang is famous for its horses.

MORE: In contrast with the Mongol ponies, the Yili horses are of Arab stock. During the Han dynasty (206BCE - 220CE), a tale circulated of horses so high-spirited that they would sweat blood (in reality, possibly caused by parasites), and it was for the possession of these horses that the costliest military campaign in the entire dynasty was waged.

Group of horses in Yili Valley in Xinjiang province

SOURCE: Zhongguo shaoshu minzu diqu huaji congtan zongbianji weiyuanhui, ed., *Zhongguo shaoshu minzu diqu huaji congtan, xinjiang* (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 1986), no page number available.

Northwestern China has extremely dry weather, which is good for growing such fruit as melons and grapes.

To the right is a picture of ethnic Uighurs in Xinjiang province making raisins.



Producing raisins in Xinjiang province

SOURCE: Zhongguo shaoshu minzu diqu huaji congkan zongbianji weiyuanhu, ed., *Zhongguo shaoshu minzu diqu huaji congkan, xinjiang* (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 1986), no page number available.



To the left is a picture of the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau in the southwest.

Considering the sharp elevation, why do you think people went to such great effort to terrace the land?

HINT: Think of supply and demand.

Terraced fields, south of China

SOURCE: Nongmuyu ye bu waishi si and Zhongguo nongxue hui, ed., *Zhongguo nongye* (Beijing: Nongye chuban she, 1983), p. 18.

The Tibetan Plateau in Southwest China occupies about one-fourth of the land area of the PRC. It is composed of high and super-high mountains and massive highlands, averaging between 4,000 and 5,000 meters (13,000 to 15,000 feet) above the sea level.



The Tibetan Plateau as seen from a satellite

SOURCE: Zhao Songqiao, *Physical Geography of China* (Beijing: Science Press and New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1986), illustration 1.



People on the Tibetan Plateau live mostly in the river valleys.

In the summer, herders move their tents to new pastures.

Summer camps in Tibet

SOURCE: The Office of Research and Analysis Center, Security Department of H. H. the Dalai Lama Gangchen Kyishong Dharamshala-176215, ed., *Tibet, An Enchanting Land* (Kangra District, India: the Office of Research and Analysis Center, Security Department of H. H. the Dalai Lama Gangchen Kyishong Dharamshala-176215), no page number available.



Yaks, depicted here, provide both milk used for butter and cheese and wool used for felt.

Yaks in Tibet

SOURCE: Nongmuyu ye bu waishi si and Zhongguo nongxue hui, ed., *Zhongguo nongye* (Beijing: Nongye chuban she, 1983), p. 38.

The highest point along the Tibetan Plateau, Mount Everest (known in Chinese as Mount Zhumulangma) is also the highest mountain in the world. It is located on the Sino-Nepalese border and rises 8,848 meters (29,028 feet) above sea level.



The world's highest peak: Mt. Everest

SOURCE: China Pictorial, ed., *Across China* (Beijing: *China Pictorial Publishing Company*, 1985), p. 12.



Called the "roof of the world," the Himalayan Mountains along the Tibetan Plateau pose a great challenge to transportation and communication.

Why would it be worth building highways like this to link Tibet to the rest of China?

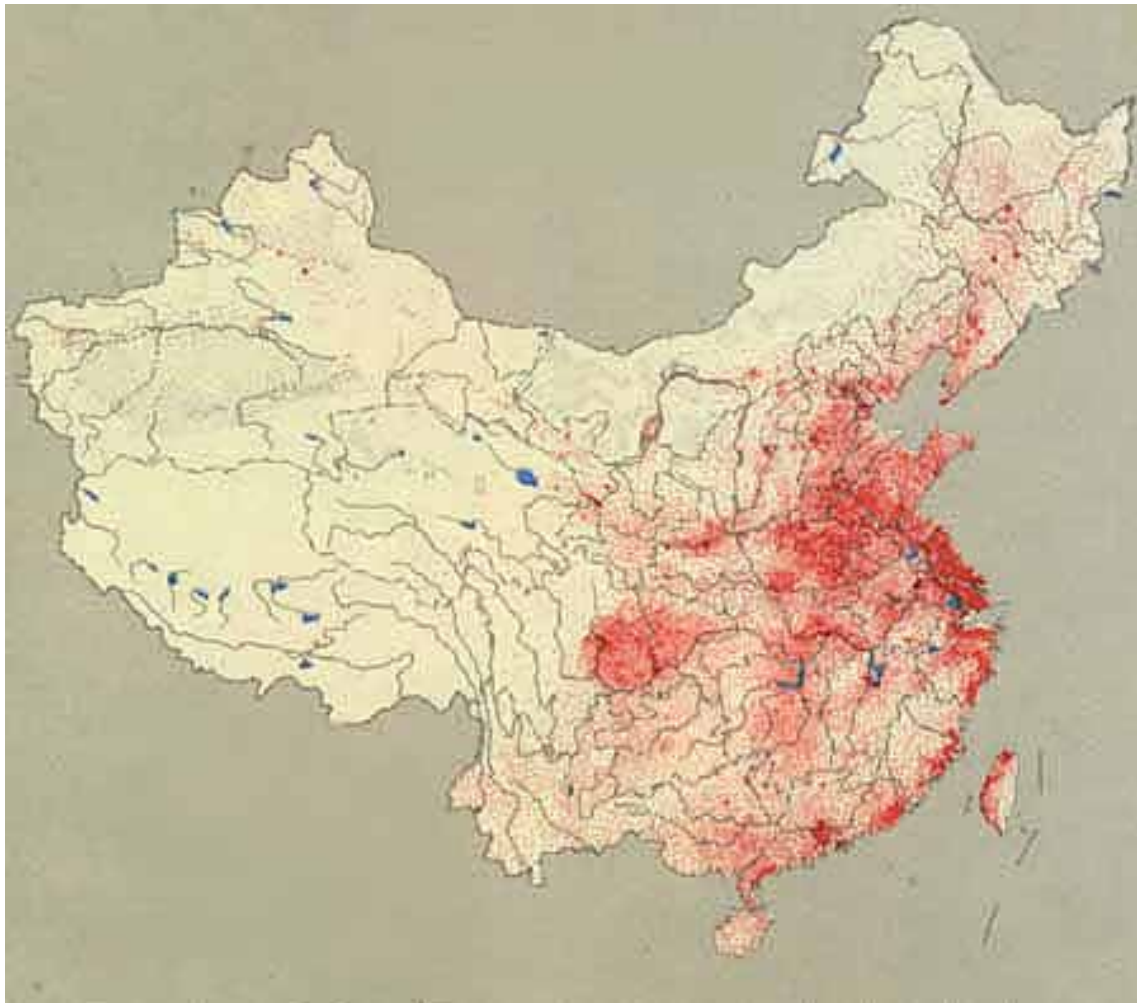
The highway from Tibet to Sichuan Province

SOURCE: Zhongguo shaoshu minzu diqu huaji congkan zongbianji weiyuanhui, ed., *Zhongguo shaoshu minzu diqu huaji congkan, sichuan* (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 1986), no page number available.

Move on to People

People

China, with more than 1.2 billion people, is the most populous country in the world. Overall population density of the country is somewhat over 110 people per square kilometer, which is only about one-third that of Japan and less than many other countries in Asia and in Europe. Regional variations, however, are dramatic as over 90 percent of the Chinese population live on less than 40 percent of the land.



To the left is a map showing the distribution and density of China's population. One tiny dot indicates 50,000 people.

How does the distribution of China's population relate to its topography and climate?

Map of China's population density

SOURCE: *Zhongguo dili congshu bianji weiyuanhui, Zhongguo zonghe dituji* (Beijing: Zhongguo ditu chubanshe, 1990), p. 47.

Immediately after the 1949 revolution the Chinese government encouraged its people to have large families in order to increase the work force depleted by years of war. However, production and modernization could not keep up with the growing population, thereby forcing a change in government policy. An extensive birth control program has been in effect since the late 1970s. Nowadays, city-dwellers are required to adhere to the one-child policy, and even in the countryside families rarely have more than two or three children.

This population control propaganda poster reads "Control population growth, improve our human race."

What are the liabilities of a huge population for China?



Population control propaganda poster from 1988

SOURCE: Photo courtesy of Marc Abramson. Chengdu, Sichuan Province, 1988.

MULTI-ETHNIC NATION

China, like all other large states, is multi-ethnic. The Han people, however, form the large majority, with about 94 percent of the population. While former Chinese governments traditionally acknowledged the Han, Manchu, Mongol, Turkish, and Tibetan ethnic groups, the current Chinese government officially recognizes 56 ethnic groups, including the Han. The Han majority speak Chinese, but most of the minorities speak other languages, falling into 15 main language families.

MORE: Prior to the two major non-Han dynasties, Yuan (Mongol, 1206-194) and Qing (Manchu, 1644-1911), membership in the Han majority was often a matter of assimilation, for example adopting a Han surname and Han customs, rather than of heritage. In fact, some Han surnames and some Han heroes are of non-Han origin, but have been adopted by centuries of association.

Below is a map showing the distribution of China's population in terms of the major language families. Note that what is generally termed Chinese is here divided into Mandarin and Southern.

Which region has the greatest variety of minorities?



Map of China's current language groups

SOURCE: Courtesy of The General Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

Han Chinese are also marked by further linguistic diversity, in that the spoken forms of their different dialects vary as widely as the languages of Europe. All of the Han nonetheless use a common written form of Chinese and share common social organization, values, and cultural characteristics that are recognized as Chinese.

If these dialects are not mutually intelligible, how can they use a common written form?

ANSWER: Each word is represented by one or more Chinese characters, which vary in pronunciation from dialect to dialect. For more information on the Chinese writing system, see the Calligraphy unit.

To the right is a picture of a farmer's market in Shandong province in North China

How do you suppose people in China would recognize that the buyers and sellers here are Han Chinese?

ANSWER: Their physical appearance rules out certain minorities but not others. Their clothing, however, is typical of that worn by Han Chinese of their age in their day, and most people would pay as much attention to clothing as to physical appearance. Clothing, of course, is a very complex medium for conveying information about ethnicity, as it also carries messages about age, class, occupation, interest in fashion, and even politics. For more on this subject, see the unit on Clothing.



A market in Shandong, early 1980s

SOURCE: Nongmuyu ye bu waishi si and Zhongguo nongxue hui, ed., *Zhongguo nongye* (Beijing: Nongye chubanshe, 1983), p. 193.



Individuals in a **Sichuan** courtyard, 2001

SOURCE: Photograph courtesy of Joseph Gotchy

The majority of ethnic minorities today live in the northeast, northwest, and southwest, undoubtedly as a consequence of the expansion of the Han Chinese over the centuries.

Below and to the right you see members of the Korean minority playing a traditional game.

MORE: From the first century BCE to the tenth century CE, Northeast China was ruled for the most part by Korean kingdoms, first Koguryo (through the eighth century) and then Parhae (in cooperation with the Malgal people). Since that time, the border has stuck fairly close to the Yalu River, but people have continued to move back and forth across it.

Why do you think there are so many Koreans in China?



Korean child dressed in furs

SOURCE: China Pictorial, ed., *Across China* (Beijing: China Pictorial Publishing Company, 1985), p. 109.



Seesaw game

SOURCE: China Pictorial, ed., *China in Pictures* (Beijing: China Pictorial Publishing Company, 1984), p. 94.

ANSWER: The northern border of Korea touches China. For some ethnic Koreans, China is their ancestral home; for others, it is where their grandparents sought refuge during the Japanese occupation of Korea from 1905 to 1945.



Mongols are one of the largest minorities in China, concentrated especially in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region.

Many Mongols outside the cities still live in large round tents called yurts.

A Mongol family outside their yurt helping an injured swan

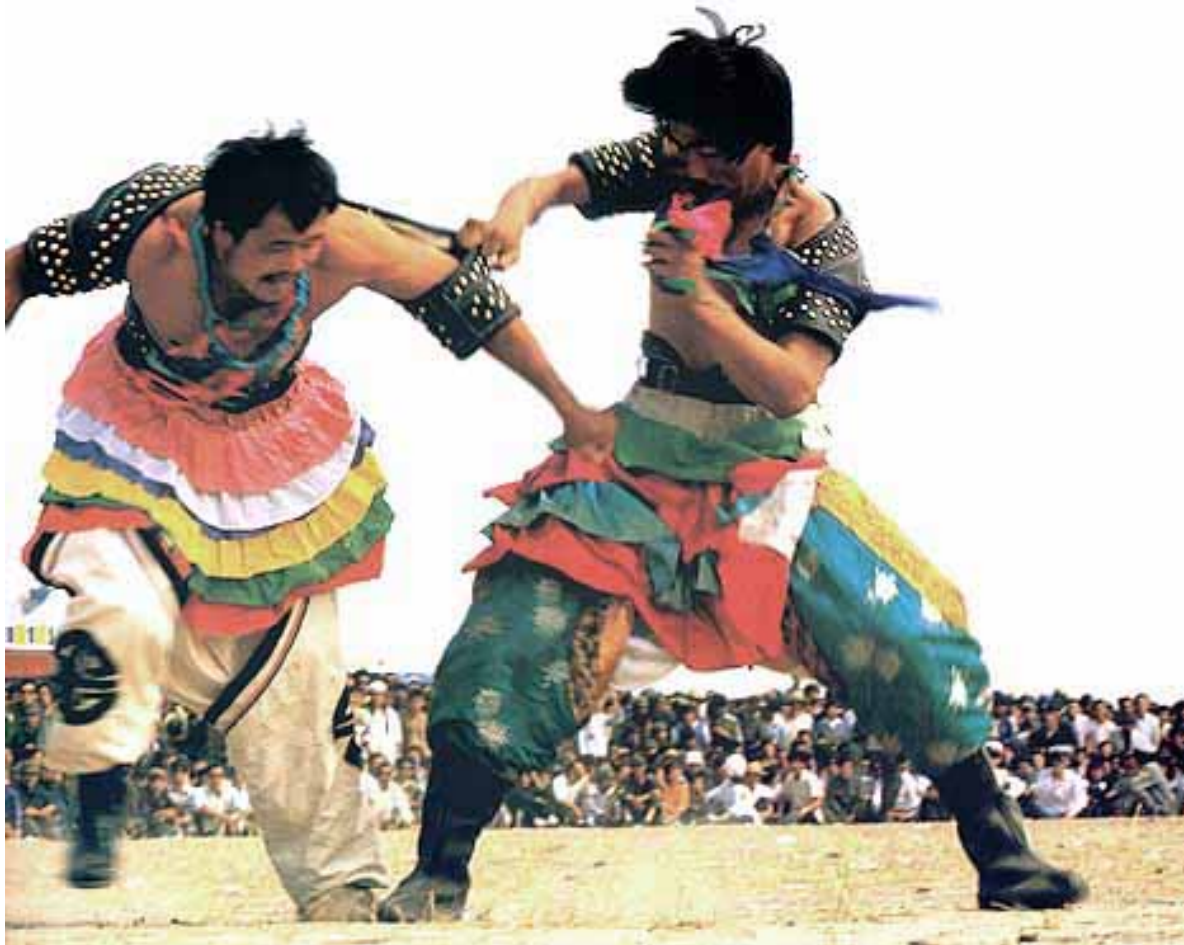
SOURCE: *China Reconstructs* 33.7 (July 1985), p. 10.



Three Mongol children

SOURCE: China Pictorial, ed., *Across China* (Beijing: China Pictorial Publishing Company, 1985), p. 108.

Wrestling, shown below, is a sport the Mongols love.



Mongol wrestlers

SOURCE: Zhongguo shaoshu minzu diqu huaji congkan zongbianji weiyuanhui, ed., *Zhongguo shaoshu minzu diqu huaji congkan, Neimenggu* (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 1986), p. 175.

Most ethnic Uighurs live in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region. Beginning in the Han dynasty, Han Chinese fought for hegemony along the Yili and Tarim caravan routes through this region, but it was not until the Qing dynasty that the area was fully incorporated into the Chinese state. Uighurs speak a Turkish language and most are Moslem.



Uighur hat vendor

SOURCE: Photo courtesy of Steven Harrell, Xinjiang.



Most Tibetans live on the Tibetan Plateau, which includes Qinghai province as well as the Tibetan Autonomous Province.

To the left is a woman in traditional Tibetan clothes. Below is a scene showing a Tibetan opera performance.

SOURCE: *Tibet, An Enchanting Land* (Kangra District, India: the Office of Research and Analysis Center, Security Department of H. H. the Dalai Lama Gangchen Kyishong Dharamshala-176215), no page number available.



Tibetan opera performance on a public square

SOURCE: Zhongguo shaoshu minzu diqu huaji congkan zongbianji weiyuanhui, ed., *Zhongguo shaoshu minzu diqu huaji congkan, Xizang* (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 1986), p. 96.



To the left is a picture showing Buyi women from Southwest China.

Among ethnic minorities, women's and children's clothing and hairstyle often seems to diverge more from Han customs than men's do.

Can you think of any explanations for this?

SOME THOUGHTS: There could be several factors involved. In some societies, women are the keepers of tradition. When holidays arrive, they make the preparations. Often, they stay at home and tend to the children and the aged. Thus, they receive less exposure to new ways. When girls become women, they are married off to other families and continue the tradition, but when boys become men, they go out into the world and learn new ways. In addition, men may worry less about the effect of change on social patterns if women seem visibly traditional.

Stone village in Guizhou Province

SOURCE: China Pictorial, ed., *Across China* (Beijing: China Pictorial Publishing Company, 1985), p. 115.

To the right is a picture of Qiang people in Southwest China.

What do you think these people are doing?

ANSWER: They are drinking rice wine.



Courtyard scene in Sichuan province

SOURCE: Zhongguo shaoshu minzu diqu huaji congkan zongbianji weiyuanhui, ed., *Zhongguo shaoshu minzu diqu huaji congkan, Sichuan* (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 1986), p. 63.

To the left is a picture showing a Yi woman from Southwest China.

What might be the purpose of the intricate design on her jacket?

SOME THOUGHTS: Aesthetics aside, in other cultures intricate design may show village membership, social class, or personal skill. Which do you think is the case here?



Yi woman in her costume, Sichuan province

SOURCE: Zhongguo shaoshu minzu diqu huaji congkan zongbianji weiyuanhui, ed., *Zhongguo shaoshu minzu diqu huaji congkan, Sichuan* (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 1986), p. 49.