

# CHINESE SOCIETY — And — CULTURE

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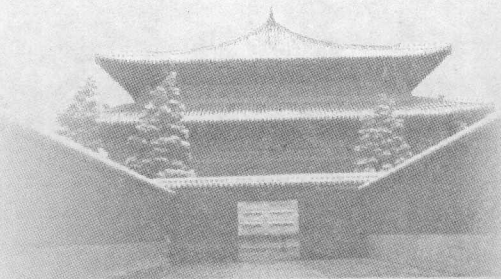
# CHINESE SOCIETY

— *And* —

# CULTURE

中国社会与文化

Yao Baorong 姚宝荣 编著  
Wei Zhou 魏周



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# *Preface*

“Culture” has long been a contentious concept in the world academic field, and numerous scholars have defined it in different perspectives. It is like a hard nut to make a complete introduction to the various cultural aspects of a society, especially the one in China with a 5,000-year history.

Abundant is the Chinese culture that a single book like this can hardly cover both the width and depth of it. Although we have attempted to include a wide range of cultural facts in the book, inevitably we have shortchanged some simply because we do not have sufficient knowledge. Our errors and omissions are not meant to exclude or discount. Rather, they represent the limit of our own experiences and understandings of the Chinese society and culture. While we have tried to be representative, we cannot claim to be comprehensive.

The first edition of this book came out in early autumn of 2002 and has been well-received by English language students as well as tour guides, foreign visitors who came to China to conduct relevant studies and research on Chinese culture and foreign employees who work in many of China's joint venture companies.

It has been four years since the publication of the first edition. Readers of the first edition were generous with their comments and suggestions for improvement. We are very grateful to them and at the same time feel obliged to update the book. In this new edition, the great changes in different facets of the Chinese society since the reform and opening-up in 1978 are added, more illustrations are also used in an effort to provide our readers a better depiction of the subjects discussed and to give the book an entirely new look.

We are grateful to all those who have offered us inspiration and constant support during our writing, particularly Professor Han Qi and Wang Tao, who, because of their heavy workload, were unable to participate in the updating work of this edition. Our thanks also go to our editor Mr. Zhou Hanping who has rendered us his belief in this book and made the improvement of the book possible.

We also want to acknowledge our responsibility for any remaining errors, oversights, misstatements and mistakes that may exist in spite of our efforts and intentions to correct them. Our commitment now and in future editions of this book is to offer our readers more information with accuracy.

*Yao Baorong, Wei Zhou*

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March, 2007

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*PART I*

**The Land and  
the People**



# *Chapter 1*

## **Topography**

China is situated in East Asia on the west coast of the Pacific Ocean. The southeastern portion of the country faces the ocean, while the northwest extends deep into the Eurasian Continent. From north to south, it stretches from Mohe Town on the Heilong River on the northern border of Heilongjiang Province to the Zengmu Reef of the Nansha Islands, a total distance of 5,500 kilometers. From east to west, it stretches from the Pamir Plateau in the west to the confluence of the Heilong and Wusuli rivers in the east, a distance of 5,200 kilometers.

Geographically, China slopes upward from the eastern seaboard to the high plateaus and mountains of Tibet and Qinghai in the far west, where the average elevation is 4,500 meters and mountain peaks of 6,000 and 7,000 meters are common. It is the rain and snow in these western highlands that feed China's great rivers.

In addition to having one of the oldest continuous civilizations, China is also huge in size, encompassing a total of 9.6 million square kilometers in area. China has common



*Sketch map of P. R. China*

borders with more countries than any other nation—15 in all. The land border is 22,800 kilometers and the coastline is 18,000 kilometers long. China is bordered on the east by the Yellow Sea, the East China Sea and the Bohai Sea, on the north by the high plains of Mongolia, on the west by the Gobi Desert, on the southwest by the great Tibetan upthrust, and on the south by the jungle-clad mountains.

Notwithstanding its huge physical size, China is land-poor. Some 80% of the landmass is made up of uninhabitable mountains and deserts. With only about 7% of the earth's cultivated land, China has to feed 22% of the

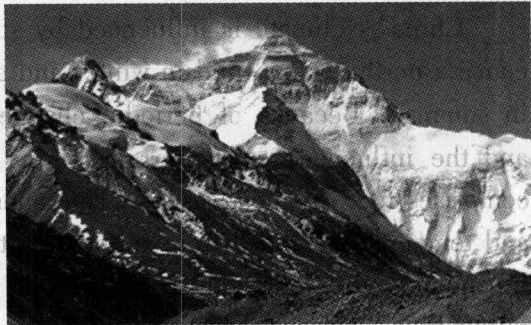
world's population. In addition to its natural border barriers, China is further divided into distinct geographic regions by the Qinling Mountain Range<sup>(1)</sup> extending 1,500 kilometers across Central China. It splits the country into the North and the South. It is South China that is noted for its intensively cultivated paddies and terraced fields, its abundant rain, and swift rivers.

China has three major plains—the Northeast Plain, the North China Plain, and the Middle and Lower Reaches of the Changjiang River Plain. These plains are primarily the result of alluvial silt built-up from rivers, lakes and seas. These densely populated plains occupy 1.1 million square kilometers, or 11% of the nation's territory. They are flat and crisscrossed by a network of rivers and lakes, set off by their fertile soil.

There are three large deltas in the country, namely, the Changjiang River Delta, the Huanghe River Delta, and the Zhujiang River

Delta. The Changjiang River Delta is dotted with 250 lakes and a network of rivers totaling 40,000 kilometers.

Shanghai is the



The Himalayas

main terminus for the Delta. With its fertile soil, the Changjiang River Delta produces abundant grain, cotton, hemp and tea. The Huanghe River Delta is very rich in arable land and natural resources. It sits right at the confluence of China's Bohai Economic Zone and the economic belt of the Huanghe River reaches, separated from Japan and Korea to the east by the Yellow Sea. This favorable location will enable the area to become a major raw material center for Northeastern Asia in the future. The Zhujiang River Delta is located at the entrance of the South China Sea. The delta teems with rice, sugarcane, various flowers and fruits, silkworms and other special crops used to make famous brand-name products. An extensive network of rivers allows inland shipping to flourish. The delta has favorable conditions for developing foreign trade because of its convenient transportation network and its proximity to Hong Kong, Macao and other islands on the South China Sea.

## **Climate**

China's climate is influenced by strong monsoons that cause a northwestern wind in winter and a southwestern wind in summer. Because of periodic changes in the monsoons and the influences of its terrain, China's diverse climate comprises four distinct seasons. The monsoons cause rainfall and temperatures range from tropical to temperate to frigid. In summer, the temperature throughout China is generally rather high. The average temperature in July is about 20°C in Heilongjiang, 15°C in Lhasa and 28°C in Hangzhou. The



average temperature in winter is about minus 30°C in the most northerly part of Heilongjiang but above 10°C in places like Guangdong, Guangxi and Fujian, while in Hainan it can go as high as 15°C or even higher. When the North is a frozen land, coconut groves flourish in the South.

The variability of rainfall is a problem for China's farmers. In North China 80% to 90% of the annual precipitation falls in the summer. As a result, droughts often occur. Southeast China receives the most rainfall due to the fact that this area is also hit by typhoons from July to September.

China's complex climate and its difference in temperature, humidity, and precipitation provide good conditions for agriculture, forestry, and animal husbandry. Many of the world's animal and plant species can be found in China. Its wild animal and fish species form 10% of the world's total, while its bird species 15%.

## **Mountains**

China is a mountainous country, with two-thirds of its surface area covered with mountains or hilly areas. China's mountains fall into three groups according to the direction in which they run, namely, the east-west, the northeast-southwest, and the north-south ranges.

The east-west ranges, mainly in the western part of China, include the Altay, Tianshan, Kunlun, Himalayas, Qinling, and Nanling.<sup>(2)</sup>

The Himalayas, the highest and most majestic mountain range in the world, rise above the southern rim of the Qing-