

CHINA KNOWLEDGE SERIES

A  
SIMPLE GEOGRAPHY  
OF CHINA

WANG CHUN-HENG



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## EDITOR'S NOTE

In this book illustrated with maps and photographs, an attempt is made to acquaint the readers with some basic facts about the geography of China. Although many similar books in English are available, they treat inadequately, if at all, of the changes in geographical features brought about after 1949, when the country entered a new historic stage. The present work seeks to remedy this obvious defect.

The book is in two parts. The first deals with China's general geography, that is, its natural features, population and peoples of the country as a whole. The second part describes each of the many regions into which China is customarily divided. Controversy, it is true, is still current among Chinese geographers as to how best the country should be divided geographically, physically and economically. This, however, is a subject outside the confines of this book.

The maps in this book have been drawn according to the *Atlas of China* published by the Shanghai *Shun Pao* before the anti-Japanese war. The administrative divisions, however, have been revised in keeping with the current situation in China.

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*Part I*  
PHYSICAL



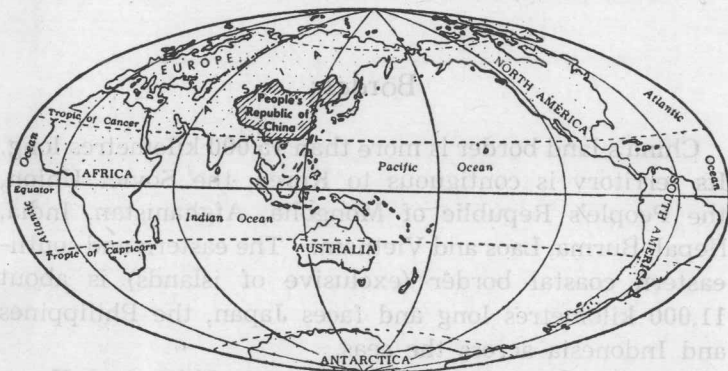
## CHAPTER ONE

# GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION AND BORDERS

### Position and Area

**Position.** China has been placed in a favourable geographical position. It is in the northern hemisphere and is cut in the south by the Tropic of Cancer. Most of the country lies in the temperate zone.

It stands on the south-east of Asia, the world's largest continent, and its eastern coast is washed by the waters of the Pacific, the world's greatest ocean.



**China's Position on the Globe**



**Territory.** China's border (exclusive of islands) is more than 26,000 kilometres long. If one were to walk this distance at the speed of 30 kilometres a day it would take two years and four and a half months. From south to north the territory measures 5,500 kilometres, extending from Latitude  $4^{\circ}\text{N.}$ , south of the Tsengmu Reef, to  $53^{\circ}\text{N.}$ , the midstream of the Heilung Kiang (Amur River), around Moho. From west to east, it is about 5,000 kilometres, starting from the Pamirs, near Longitude  $73^{\circ}\text{E.}$ , to where the Heilung Kiang meets the Ussuri River at  $135^{\circ}\text{E.}$

The time variation between the easternmost and westernmost regions is more than four hours. When the people of eastern Heilungkiang Province have done the morning's work and are preparing their midday meal, it is 7 a.m. for the inhabitants of the western part of the Sinkiang Uighur Autonomous Region.

The total area of the land measures about 9,600,000 square kilometres, making China the third largest country in the world, next to the Soviet Union and Canada.



## Borders

China's land border is more than 15,000 kilometres long. Its territory is contiguous to Korea, the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of Mongolia, Afghanistan, India, Nepal, Burma, Laos and Vietnam. The eastern and south-eastern coastal border (exclusive of islands) is about 11,000 kilometres long and faces Japan, the Philippines and Indonesia across the seas.

**Land Border.** The border between China and Korea is mostly formed by the Yalu and Tumen rivers. The

Changpai Mountains sprawl on the vast plains of North-east China and Korea. The border between China and the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of Mongolia stretches from Kirin to western Sinkiang. In the north-east, Hsingkai Lake and the Ussuri River and Heilung Kiang divide China and the Soviet Union. Here, China shares its mountains and rivers with the Soviet Union, as it does with Korea farther south. In Sinkiang, the border cuts across mountain ranges and rivers. Valleys and waterways are accessible to the peoples on either side, making travel convenient. The Pamirs, known as the Roof of the World, straddle the border between China and the Soviet Union and Afghanistan.

The area between China and the People's Republic of Mongolia is steppe and desert, except for a part where western Mongolia meets Sinkiang. Here the monotony of the desert is broken by the Altai Mountains.

In the south-west, Kwangsi and Yunnan share a common frontier with Vietnam and Laos. The towering Himalaya Mountains stand between China's Tibet and India and Nepal. Several great rivers and mountains of the Hengtuan Mountain Area run across the border between western Yunnan and Burma.

**Maritime Border.** China has not only a long coastline but also many islands: the island groups of the South China Sea, Hainan, Taiwan, Penghu Islands, the Choushan Archipelago, etc., of which Taiwan and Hainan are the biggest. They are strung out like a bow off the south-east coast.

To the east, across the Yellow and East China seas is Japan. To the south-east, across the South China Sea are the Philippines and Indonesia.

## CHAPTER TWO

### SEAS

#### The Coast and Islands

China's long stretch of mainland coast, starting from the mouth of the Yalu River on the Chinese-Korean border in the north and ending at the mouth of the Peilun River on the Chinese-Vietnamese border in the south, is one-fourth the length of the Equator; if the island coasts are included, the total coastline will add up to more than 20,000 kilometres.

**The Coast.** The coast consists of sandy and rocky sections. The characteristics of sandy coast are: (a) the background is a plain; (b) the coastline, in general, is not deeply indented and the coastal waters are shallow; spits are formed by sand and silt in the neighbourhood of the mouths of rivers; (c) in the shallow offshore waters are sand bars, which reveal themselves at low tide; and (d) there are relatively few islands off the coast.

The sandy coast provides wide possibilities for developing the salt and chemical industries and fisheries. But it lacks good natural harbours.

The rocky coast, on the other hand, is opposite in most respects. The land along the coast is uneven and hilly, and the coastline jagged. Islands lie scattered off the shore. It has many excellent harbours and fishing grounds.

Most of the coast north of the Hangchow Bay is sandy. The exceptions are the Shantung Peninsula, the Liaotung Peninsula and Chinwangtao which have rocky coasts. North Kiangsu and the Po Hai coast are famous salt-producing areas and are also rich in marine products. The Shantung and Liaotung peninsulas with their many harbours and islands provide favourable facilities for shipping.

South of the Hangchow Bay, most of the coast is rocky, broken, however, with patches of sandy shoreline in the Leichow Peninsula and at the mouths of some rivers. These rocky coasts have many indentations suitable for the construction of ports and for a highly developed fishing industry.

**Islands.** China has more than 3,400 islands, of which 96 per cent are continental islands and 4 per cent ocean islands. Continental islands are a continuation of the coastal hills which remain above sea level. Ocean islands are mostly in the South China Sea and more often than not mere coral reefs rising only a few metres above sea level.

Most of China's islands lie off the rocky coasts of Chekiang, Fukien and Kwangtung.

## The Seas

**Division of Sea Surface.** The sea forms a semi-circle around the eastern coast. It has been generally divided into four parts: Po Hai (the Po Sea), Huang Hai (the Yellow Sea), Tung Hai (the East China Sea) and Nan Hai (the South China Sea).

1) The Po Hai. The sea between the Shantung and Liaotung peninsulas is called Po Hai which includes the

Liaotung Bay and the Po Hai Bay, carved into the land mass. Eastwards, opening the way to the Yellow Sea is the Po Hai Strait, more than 100 kilometres wide and studded with islands. It is a natural defence strong-point for North China. Most of the Po Hai coast is suitable for drying salt. It is the country's largest salt producer along the coast. To overcome the obstacles of frozen waters and excessive silting along the coast, a giant man-made harbour, named Hsinkang Harbour, has been built at Tangku where the Hai Ho enters the Po Hai Bay. Ice-breakers have ended the pre-liberation "closed season" in winter and cleared the way through the frozen sea for 10,000-ton steamers. Hsinkang Harbour has given a fillip to trade and transport for the provinces of the north.

2) The Yellow Sea. The Yellow Sea covers the sea from the mouth of the Yalu River to the estuary of the Yangtse River. In the north it is hemmed in by the Shantung, Liaotung and Korean peninsulas. Here it is dotted with many islands and bordered by a jagged coastline, and offers favourable opportunities for shipping, fishing and defence. The southern Yellow Sea is a famous salt-producing centre. But its drawbacks are: few harbours and numerous sand bars.

3) The East China Sea. The East China Sea lies between the Yangtse estuary and Taiwan. It has many bays and contains more than half the islands of China. Its islands and the harbours along the coastline are not only strategically important but provide facilities for the fishing fleets. The country's largest fishing ground — off the Choushan Archipelago — is located here.

4) The South China Sea. The South China Sea is situated south of the Taiwan Straits. It is the largest

of the four Chinese seas and the warmest. When the temperature of the water surface of the Po Hai drops below zero in February, it is  $25.5^{\circ}$  C off Hainan Island. It is also the deepest. Depths of as much as 4,000 metres have been sounded.

The northern part of the South China Sea is bounded on the east by Taiwan and the Taiwan Straits, on the west by Hainan Island and the Chiungchow Straits (Hainan Straits). The middle of the sea is dotted with groups of islands, called collectively the South China Sea island groups. The South China Sea lies across the trade routes between the Pacific and Indian oceans and is important for shipping between the Asian continent and the islands of South-east Asia and Australia.

**Use of the Sea.** China's many bays, large rivers flowing into the sea, good harbours and numerous islands have provided the requisites for sea transport. Talien, Tangku, Tsingtao, Shanghai, Canton and Chankiang (Tsamkong) are the more important outlets from which many ships each year sail forth with goods, and passengers bound for other ports at home and abroad.

China's seas, for the most part, are less than 200 metres deep, the waters east of the Chinese mainland covering a broad continental shelf. The shallow waters are teeming with fish.

Most of China's coastal regions are affected by warm currents from the Equator. But close to the land a cold current flows southwards. The point where the warm and cold currents mingle is always the meeting post for fish, which have been halted in their movement by the sudden change of temperature. Such "traffic jams" where two ocean streams meet are ideal fishing grounds. Because of the huge expanse of the continental shelf, the

meeting of cold and warm currents plus fresh water added by the mighty rivers, and the consequential plenitude of fish food, China's shore waters, as well as being splendid fishing grounds, are fertile breeding grounds for fish.

It is estimated that China's coastal fishing grounds amount to 436,000 square nautical miles, or 23.74 per cent of the world's total, which gives her first place in the world. Fish abound in great variety—more than a thousand different kinds are found in China's seas.

**Navigation and Shipping.** As early as the Han dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220), the Chinese had already discovered the compass which, in the Tang dynasty (618-907), was widely used in navigation.

The largest Tang ships reached 60 metres in length and were capable of carrying as many as 700 men; they were then the largest sea-going vessels in the world. During the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) the great navigator Cheng Ho seven times sailed on journeys "to the Western Seas," visiting the islands of South-east Asia, and passing through the Indian Ocean to reach the coast of South-west Asia and as far as Madagascar off the eastern coast of Africa. These seven voyages not only enriched Chinese knowledge of geography but were also important events in world annals of navigation and geographical exploration.

Owing to long years of cramping feudal rule, however, the sea occupations were deprived of full development in China. Since liberation harbours have been improved and rebuilt to develop trade, fishing ports established, and salt farms expanded. Lighthouses and weather stations have been increased to facilitate and safeguard navigation.



## CHAPTER THREE

# PHYSICAL FEATURES

### General Characteristics

**Land Slopes from West to East.** If you open a relief map of China you will see most of the eastern coastal region in green with patches in light yellow. Moving inland the colours become deeper until in the west, especially the south-west, yellow brown areas prevail, interspersed with white depicting places of perpetual snow. The map tells that the land mass is high in the west and descends gradually towards the east. A cross section of the land taken at Latitude  $35^{\circ}$  N. will reveal this feature clearly.

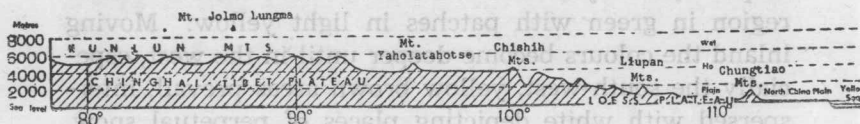
As concerns height China may be divided into three sections. If we draw a line from the Greater Khingan Mountains along the Taihang Mountains through the west of Honan and Hupeh to the east of the Yunnan-Kweichow Plateau, the lands to the east of it would form the first section. Here the country consists mostly of plains and hills of less than 400 metres above sea level. The third section is west of a line drawn from the Holan Mountains south-westwards across the Chiunglai Mountains to the south-east of the Hengtuan Range. Dominating this part are mountain areas and plateaus standing more than 2,000



metres above sea level. Between these two imaginary lines is the second section composed of plateaus and basins of between 1,000 and 2,000 metres above sea level.

This gradual west-east incline of the land mass allows inland areas to catch the warm and moist air currents blowing in from the eastern seaboard, and makes most of the country's rivers flow in an easterly direction into the sea, facilitating economic and cultural exchange between the eastern and western parts of the country.

**Physical Features.** All the five physical features of land are to be found in China: plains, hills, basins, plateaus and mountain areas. Located in China are the majestic Mount Jolmo Lungma,<sup>1</sup> the world's highest; the Turfan Depression, 154 metres below sea level; coastal



**Section Across China at Latitude 35° N.**

<sup>1</sup> As early as 1717, Mount Jolmo Lungma was marked on the map of China in its original name. In 1852, Andrew Waugh, sent by the British general survey office in India to survey the Himalayas, ascertained Mount Jolmo Lungma to be 29,002 feet above sea level, the highest in the world. When he returned to London five years later, he proposed that the mount be named after Sir George Everest, a former surveyor-general of the Indian general survey office, who had also once surveyed the Himalayas. Since then, despite the repeated protests of the Tibetan people, Mount Everest has become the name frequently used in maps published abroad. Mr. Sven Hedin, a Swedish explorer, pointed out that the summit was first discovered by a surveyor sent by the Chinese government 160 years before the British surveyor made his claim. Moreover, Mr. Hedin added, renaming the mount was absolutely unnecessary as it had already a name.