

China

China's Geography

ZHENG PING

TRANSLATED BY XIAO YING

CHINA
INTERCONTINENTAL
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CHINA'S GEOGRAPHY

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Foreword

Through its reform and opening to the outside world, China has worked an economic miracle and boosted its comprehensive strength, enhancing its standing in the international community. As more and more people around the world are eager to know and understand China, we have compiled the China Series, aiming to provide a shortcut for readers to get the basic facts about this country.

The 12 titles in this series cover China's geography, history, politics, economy, culture, law, diplomacy, national defense, and society, as well as its science, technology and education; its environment; and its ethnic groups and religions. These writings will help readers acquire a basic knowledge of China.

It is our hope that this series will enable readers to get a general idea about China:

Chinese history, culture and civilization, which is the oldest continuous major civilization in the world;

China's basic conditions—the world's largest developing country with a huge population, a country that is developing unevenly on a poor economic base; in light of these conditions, China is following its own path to sustainable development while learning from other civilizations; and

China's future—led by the Chinese Communist Party, the Chinese people are focusing their efforts on economic development and carrying on reform and opening-up; they are building a harmonious society in their own country and working for a harmonious world with lasting peace and common prosperity.

We expect that through these books our readers will begin a new journey of discovery—understanding China.

January 2010

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Preface

Today, there is a very popular song in China starting with “there was a dragon in ancient East, and her name was China.” The song is not only loved by the Chinese people at home, but also popular among the overseas Chinese worldwide. The dragon was the totem of the ancient Chinese people, and all the Chinese in modern world still regard themselves as the descendants of the dragons. China is a land of abundance. Pleasant climate, fertile soil and vast

Most sections of the Great Wall we see today were built in the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) and located in northern China. The photo shows the Great Wall at Jiankou section in Beijing.



expanses of grassland and forests have created favorable living environment for the Chinese people and paved way for China's social, economic and cultural prosperity. Ancient China in the Qin and Han dynasties (221 BC–AD 220) and Tang and Song dynasties (618–1279), when the country saw flourishing economy and peaceful society, was the world's No.1 power at the time.

However, it has to be stressed that the Chinese civilization has its distinctive features when compared to the world's other ancient civilizations like Nile civilization, Mesopotamian civilization and Indus civilization.

The Chinese civilization has an incessant history of more than 5,000 years. The standardized Chinese characters developed 2,000 years ago are slightly different from those that are used today, which is indeed a cultural wonder.

China has always been a highly unified country no matter how many feudal dynasties existed within the Chinese territory, which has been the basic feature of the Chinese history.

The Confucianism, established by Confucius over 2,000 years ago, advocates such concepts as "'benevolence' means loving your fellow men," "peace is valued" and "harmony between the heaven and human" that are still cherished today and even draw worldwide attention.

The presence of the said virtues is greatly ascribed to China's unique geographical environment.

Geographically speaking, China is situated in the east of the Eurasian Continent, the world's largest continent, and the Pacific Ocean, the world's biggest ocean, lies to the east of the country. Despite a part of the Eurasian Continent, it has unsmooth transport connections with the rest of the continent. Adjacent to the thousands-of-kilometers-long Taiga Forest in the north, China faces vast and sparsely populated desert in the west and towering mountains in the southwest. Tibetan Plateau, the world's highest plateau, and Himalayas,



the world's highest mountain, constitute a natural barrier that separates China from South Asia Sub-Continent.

Several significant events of communication between the east and the west once appeared in history. For instance, Zhang Qian of the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC–AD 25) visited the Western Regions; Xuanzang of the Tang Dynasty (618–907) made his way to the West for Buddhist scriptures; The Italian named Marco Polo traveled around China in the Yuan Dynasty (1206–1368); And Zheng He led seven expeditions to what the Chinese called "the Western Ocean" (Indian Ocean) during the rule of Emperor Chengzu (1403–1424). of the Ming Dynasty Such connections with the West, however,

Pit No.1 of Emperor Qinshihuang's Terracotta Warriors and Horses, where more than 1,000 pieces of terracotta warriors, horses and chariots were unearthed. The photo shows a rectangle army of infantry.

were few due to geographical conditions. For the Western people, China has always been located in the so-called "remote East" and is a nation shrouded in mystery.

The relatively independent and closed geographical environment of China serves as barriers that keep itself from the intrusion of other alien powers. This further helped shape a unique culture that is lasting and quite different from those of the Western nations.

But the separation gave rise to closed minds in the past.

Nowadays, China has actively adopted the opening-up policy, welcoming all the foreigners who want to come to China and all forms of foreign capital and technologies. In the meantime, China strives to go international as well.

Knowing China's geography is a must for those who desire to know China. This pamphlet about China's geography is designed to introduce all the geographical sections of China and their respective geographical facts to those who are willing to know China. When finishing this book, you will get fresh, all-sided knowledge about China, the country in the "remote East."

Profile of China's Geography

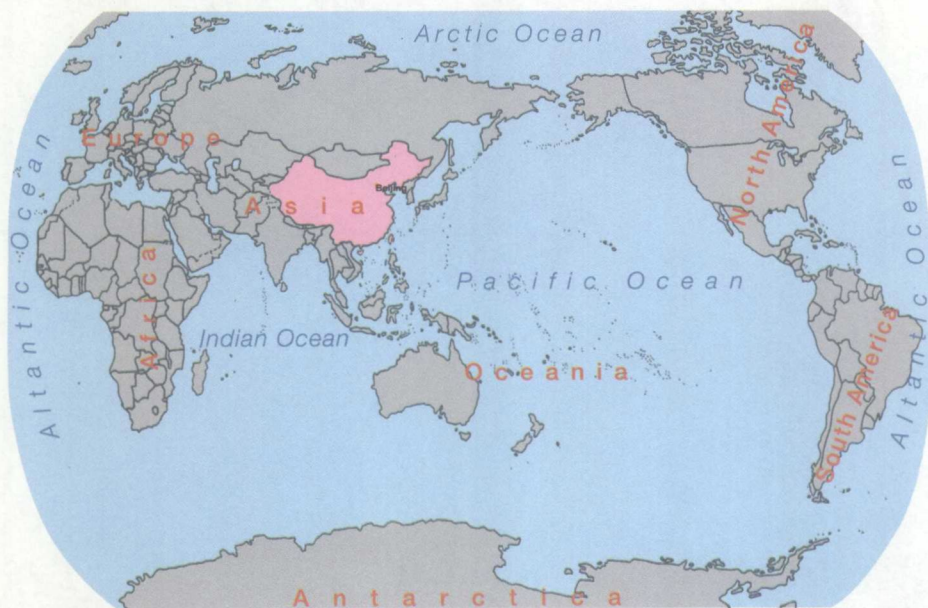


Territorial Location

China is one of the largest countries in the world. With a land area of 9.6 million sq km, it occupies one-fifth of the Earth's and one-fourth of Asia's total area. It is almost as big as the European continent. Only Russia and Canada have a larger land area than China. The country also has about 3 million sq km of sea area under its jurisdiction, based on the *UN Convention on the Law of the Sea* and China's proposal.

China is in the northern hemisphere, with all its territories (including sea area and islands) north of the equator. North to south, its territory stretches 5,500 km from the center of Heilongjiang River to the Zengmu Reef on the southernmost tip of Nansha Islands in the South China Sea. So huge is its land area from south to north that the island province of Hainan still basks in warm sunshine when Heilongjiang

China's Geographical Position in the World



Province is in the grip of freezing winter. The distance from its eastern-most tip at the confluence of Heilongjiang and Wusuli rivers in Fuyuan county, Heilongjiang Province, to its western-most tip in the Pamir Plateau in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region is 5,200 km. When the rising sun sheds its golden light on the Wusuli River, the sky over the Pamirs is still lit by stars.

China has a 20,000-plus-km-long land boundary, extending from the estuary of the Yalu River on its border with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in the east to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan on the west. It also shares its northern borders with Russia and Mongolia, and its southern with India, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam. The Chinese mainland faces the Bohai Sea, the Yellow Sea, the East China Sea and the South China Sea on the east and south, and is separated from Japan, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and Negara Brunei Darussalam by the sea.

The country has a coastline of more than 18,000 km, which starts from the estuary of the Yalu River in the north and ends at the estuary of the Beilun River on its border with Vietnam in the south. China's shape resembles a crescent moon protruding into the sea. Its coastline, divided by the Hangzhou Bay, varies from rocky mountains in the south to sandy plains in the north. The zigzag mountainous coast rises and falls continuously, shaping numerous ice-free natural harbors that allow traffic all year round, allowing favorable geographical conditions for ports and development of sea transport. The flat plain coast, with fewer rainy days, offers wonderful sand beaches for developing tourism, and muddy beaches with strong sunlight that facilitate diversion of seawater to make salt that also serve as raw material for the chemical industry.

About 7,600 islands, big and small, are scattered in China's

territorial waters. Their total area is more than 80,000 sq km, with more than 6,500 of them having an area of 500 sq km or more each. The 36,000-sq km Taiwan Island is the largest among China's islands, followed by Hainan that has an area of 34,000 sq km. The two have long been reputed as "Treasure Islands," boasting abundant resources and beautiful landscapes. The Diaoyu and Chiwei islands northeast of Taiwan are China's easternmost islands. More than 200 islands, islets, reefs and shoals in the South China Sea belong to the Dongsha (East Sandbar), Xisha (West Sandbar), Zhongsha (Middle Sandbar) and Nansha (South Sandbar) island groups, depending on their geographical locations. Collectively, they are called the South China Sea Islands. China's other important island groups include the Miaodao Islands, Changshan Islands, Zhoushan Islands and Pescadores Islands. Zhoushan Islands in the East China Sea is well known for its Putuo Mountain, a Buddhist resort, and the world-famous Zhoushan fishing ground, earning them the nickname of "a holy place of Buddhism in the sea" and "an oriental fishing base."

Geographical Environment

China's superior natural environment is reflected in multiple aspects, from climate to landforms and topography. It is among the few countries whose longitudinal span runs across the highest number of climate zones. From the northern part of Heilongjiang to the southern tip of Hainan, China has six climate zones: cold temperate, mid-temperate, warm temperate, subtropical, tropical and equatorial. That means all the climate zones, except the tundra and permafrost zones found near the poles, can be found in China. The mid-temperate, warm temperate and subtropical zones, which constitute an overwhelmingly large area of China's territory,

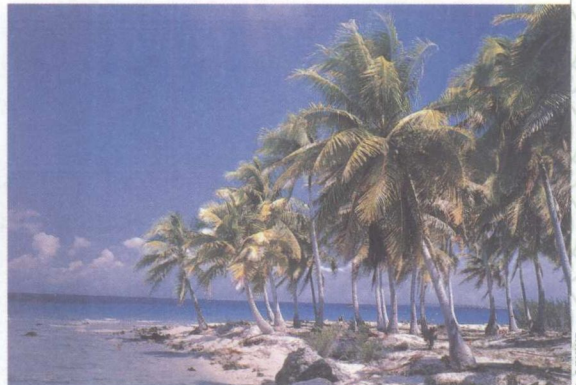
are especially ideal for human subsistence and development because of their moderate climate and four distinctive seasons.

China's huge land area creates great regional differences in water conditions. Its average annual rainfall is 629 mm (more than 6 trillion cubic meters). But its different regions are influenced differently by the summer monsoon and the times for its advance and retreat. They cause uneven spatial distribution of rain and gradual decrease of rainfall from the southeast to the northwest. The southern part, especially the southeastern coastal region, is highly influenced by the monsoon and enjoys an annual rainfall of 1,000 mm or more. Huoshaoliao in northeastern Taiwan Province once experienced an annual rainfall of 8,408 mm, a record in China.

Northwest China, which is part of the Eurasian plate, is less influenced by the monsoon. It has a low annual rainfall of less than 200 mm, except in some high mountains. The result: most areas in that part have turned into deserts or semi-deserts. For instance, Ruoqiang in the Tarim Basin in Xinjiang, has reported an annual rainfall of less than 10 mm for the past several years, and has thus become the driest place in China.

Left: Winter in North China is cold and dry. China's northeastern part has a long winter and short summer, and experiences plenty of snowfall.

Right: South China enjoys plentiful rainfall and a wet climate. China's southernmost province of Hainan has an extremely long summer and is hot and wet all year round.





Most of East China's coastal areas are flat plains and gently rolling hills. The photo shows the Pearl River Delta.

China's climate is greatly influenced by the East Asian monsoon. In summer, the prevalence of southeasterly winds create hot and wet weather, raising the mercury higher than in other areas on the same latitude. The prevalence of northerly winds in winter result in cold and dry weather, and relatively low temperatures than in other areas on the same latitude. High temperatures in summer make most part of South China suitable for crops

such as rice and cotton, and the accompanying wet weather makes them grow better.

The country has diverse landforms, including large areas covered by mountains, plateaus, basins, plains and hills with different natural landscapes. China is a mountainous country, with 65 percent of its territorial land dominated by mountains, plateaus and hills. Many crisscrossing high and long mountain ranges constitute the framework of China's landform.

Topographically, China's western part is higher than its eastern part, creating a cascade-like slope from the west to the east. Its topography may thus be divided into three cascades: the first consists of areas east of the mountain chains, from Daxing'anling in the north to the Taihang, Wushan and Xuefeng mountain ranges. Most of the areas in this cascade

are plains and hills less than 500-m high. The country's three plains, the Northeast China, North China and the Middle-Lower Yangtze plains, as well as its largest hilly area in the southeast are all part of this cascade.

The second cascade comprises areas west of the three mountain chains, most of which are plateaus and basins between 1,000 m to 2,000 m above the sea level. Three of China's four major plateaus—the Inner Mongolian Plateau, Loess Plateau and the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau, as well as all its four major basins, Sichuan, Tarim, Junggar and Qaidam—are part of this cascade.

The third cascade is the Tibetan Plateau, which consists



Most of China's western areas are plateaus and mountains. The photo shows the world's highest peak, Qomolangma.

of stretches of flat plateaus above 4,000 m and a series of long mountain ranges between 5,000-m and 6,000-m high. This plateau has more than ten 8,000-m or higher peaks. The world's highest peak, Mount Qomolangma, is on China's border with Nepal and rises to 8844.43 m, making the Tibetan Plateau the "Roof of the World."

The natural inclining topography makes it easier for the humid ocean air to flow into China. Many rivers, shaped by and dependent on rainfall, not only connect the inland with coastal areas, but also provide huge water energy resources as they flow along the inclining topography with difference in water levels. Taking advantage of the topography, many hydropower stations have been built in the Yangtze and Yellow river valleys.

The Ladder-like Pattern of China's Topography

