

Ancient China: Geography

I. Location and Boundaries

China is a huge country located in Asia. Mountains, deserts, seas and oceans have acted as “geographic barriers”, protecting and isolating China from the rest of the world. The Gobi Desert, Himalayan Mountains, and Pacific Ocean have isolated China from the rest of the world. The isolation permitted China to develop a uniform and independent culture among its people. It also promoted some degree of “ethnocentrism”, or the belief that one’s culture is superior to other cultures. Having little contact with other cultures, the early Chinese believed that their culture was the center of the Earth, so they called it the “Middle Kingdom”.

II. Topography

Of China’s land surface, one-fifth consists of coastal and river plains, the remaining four-fifths are mountains, plateaus, and hills. In fact, the Tibetan mountain plateau is sometimes called the “Roof of the World”. Not suitable for agriculture, the mountainous terrain contributes little to China’s food output. As population growth pressed against food supply, the Chinese endured a “survival economy”. Despite the mountainous terrain, the ancient Chinese migrated, spread their culture, and maintained a degree of cultural and political unity.

III. Important Rivers

China’s first civilization emerged in the fertile plains along the Huang He (or Yellow River). As along the Nile and Indus Rivers, the fertility of the soil along the Huang He was increased by the river’s occasional overflowing of its banks. Around 4,500 B.C., farmers began growing millet (a type of Grain) in this region. Later, the farming of soybeans and the raising of chickens, dogs, and pigs was introduced. About 1,500 B.C., people from the Huang He area migrated south to the Yangtze River, where they learned to grow rice and irrigate the land. Rive cultivation soon became common along the Huang He.



The two major river systems are the Huang He (or Yellow River) and Yangtze River. The river valleys offered a mild climate, fertile soil, protection from foreign invasion, and a water highway to other parts of the region. The Huang He (or Yellow River) is often called “China’s sorrow” because of its devastating floods. Most of China’s population lives along the major river valleys. The fertile lands along the coast have allowed many Chinese to rely on farming and fishing for their livelihoods. The heavy rainfall and warm climate along the coast have promoted the cultivation of rice as a staple crop. This has led to a rapid expansion of the Chinese population. As Chinese hunters, farmers, and fisherman learned hoe to grow food, they settled down. They began building homes, farming, and developing cities.

Questions to Answer

1. How did the ancient Indians contribute to art and architecture?
2. How did ancient Indians contribute to literature
3. How did ancient Indians contribute to science and technology?
4. How did ancient Indian contribute to mathematics?