

China's Geography

E.Q. How did China's geography influence its relationship with the rest of the world?

China's geographic features played a huge role in the development of civilizations within China and also in China's relationships with the rest of the world. Like early civilizations in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and India, the first civilizations in China began in river valleys.

The Huang He (HWAHNG HUH) or Yellow River flows across China for more than 2,900 miles. It gets its name from the rich yellow soil it carries. South of the Yellow River is the Chang Jiang (CHAHNG JYAHNG) River or the Yangtze River. The Yangtze River is even longer than the Yellow River. It flows for about 3,400 miles east across central China where it empties into the Pacific Ocean. It was in the valleys of these two rivers that the Chinese built their first civilizations.

Although China has rich soil along its rivers, only a little more than one-tenth of its land can be farmed. This is because mountains and deserts cover most of the land. The towering Himalaya Mountains close off China to the southwest. The smaller ranges of the Kunlun and the Tien Shan help to form China's western border. The Kunlun Mountains are north of the Himalaya. The Tien Shan are north of the Kunlun Shan.

China is also home to two deserts. The Taklamakan Desert is located along China's western border. It is located between the Kunlun and Tien Shan mountain ranges. The Talkamakan Desert also known as the "Sea of Death" is the world's second largest desert. It offers poisonous snakes, frequent sand storms, extremely hot daytime temperatures, freezing nighttime temperatures, and intense water shortages. The Gobi Desert is a vast, cold, and rocky desert. It is one of the driest places on Earth. It is located in the north and spreads east.

China is bordered on the east by the Pacific Ocean. These geographic features have shaped much of China's history. They served as a "wall" around the Chinese, separating them from most of the rest of the world. This isolation allowed the Chinese to develop a unique way of life that lasted into modern times.

E.Q. How did China's rivers affect early Chinese civilizations?

Like the rivers of other early civilizations, the Yellow and Yangtze Rivers flooded the surrounding land and the people had learned to build dykes (dams) to control the river. A flood is an overflowing of water by large amounts. The rivers flooded yearly and were usually very consistent. During this yearly and consistent flooding, the rivers brought a **gift** to the Chinese people. When they flooded, they left behind rich soil called loess to the river valleys. As a result, farmers could grow large amounts of food on very small amounts of land. However, every few years, the floods of the rivers, especially the Yellow River, were very destructive and were considered a **curse**. There was so much water that the dikes could not hold back the river. The river roared out of the dykes and over the land. During these times thousands of people and farm animals drowned. Houses, tools, and crops were destroyed. The Chinese began to call the Yellow River the "river of sorrows".

Yu the Great was ordered by the King of the time to figure out how to control the flood. The story goes that he spent 13 years studying the Yellow River and its flood patterns. He learned to control the river by using irrigation. Unlike the people before him who built dykes and dams, Yu decided to build irrigation channels and canals to control the flood waters. When his system of canals and channels worked at controlling the floods, the people thought that he was chosen by the gods and made him their ruler.