Geography of China

Geography matters in today’s world. Geography mattered even more in ancient times. Today, people can easily fly or drive wherever they need to go. The Internet, shipping companies, boats, trucks, and planes all make it easy to send goods around the world. In ancient times, getting around wasn’t quite so easy. This was especially true in ancient China! Ancient China was separated from the rest of the world because of its geography. Deserts and mountains created this separation. The isolation changed the way ancient China developed.

China is split into two main sections: Outer China and Inner China. Most of ancient Chinese history took place within Inner China. However, it is important to understand the geography of Outer China, too. The geography of Outer China kept China isolated for many years! There were two large deserts in the north and west of Outer China. These two deserts were the Gobi Desert and the Taklamakan Desert. Southern China is bordered by the highest mountain range in the world: the Himalayan Mountains. To the north of the mountains is the world’s largest plateau: the Tibet-Qinghai Plateau. It is almost impossible to live on this plateau because it is so cold all year round. North of the plateau is the Taklamakan Desert, and north of the desert is the Turfan Depression. The depression is a very low area of land. The Gobi Desert is located in the eastern part of Outer China. The Northeastern Plain sits to the east of the desert. This plain has low hills, short summers, and long winters. As you can see, there were not very many places in Outer China that were easy to live in!

**FAST FACT:** The Mongols were a group of people who lived in the Gobi Desert. They were enemies of the Chinese and attacked them for many years. Finally, the Chinese built the Great Wall of China to keep their enemies away.

Inner China was a much better place to live than Outer China. Inner China is covered with hills, valleys, plains, and rivers. It can be split into two main areas: the North China Plain and the Chang Jiang Basins. The North China Plain is a large area of grasslands. It has a major river running through it. The river made the soil perfect for farmers to grow crops. The Chang Jiang Basins are south of the North China Plain. The basins are covered in wet coastal plains. Like the North China Plain, the basins have a major river running through them. The basins have a warm and wet climate. The area was perfect for growing many crops, like rice.

**FAST FACT:** Today, both Outer China and Inner China make up the country of China. China is currently the third largest country in the world.

Geography isolated ancient China, but geography wasn’t all trouble for the Chinese. It was helpful in some ways. Snow that melted from the mountains in western China made the two major rivers that flowed through Inner China. The Yellow River runs through northern China. It flows from west to east across the North China Plain. It is sometimes called the “cradle of the Chinese civilization” because the first Chinese people lived there. The Yellow River created rich soil for growing grain and raising cattle. It is also called the Huang He River. The Yangtze River is the other major river in China. It is located in southern China. It flows from west to east through the Chang Jiang Basins. Farmers who lived near this river could grow rice...
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very easily. The Yellow and the Yangtze River helped the Chinese civilization survive and expand. The rivers created fertile soil and provided many natural resources for the Chinese people.

**FAST FACT:** Unfortunately, the Yangtze River was very wide and hard to cross. It split China in half. In addition to separating China, the rivers also flooded often. The Huang He River is sometimes called “China’s Sorrow.” Its floods have caused a lot of damage throughout history.

**FAST FACT:** The Pacific Ocean, the Yellow Sea, and the East China Sea are all located to the east of China.

The first Chinese people settled by the major rivers in China. They farmed the rich soil, hunted, and caught fish from the rivers for food. Many other ancient civilizations explored the land around them and traded with other groups of people. The Chinese did not do any of those things. Their geography kept them isolated. For many years, the Chinese knew hardly anything about other civilizations. The geography of the land they lived on, like mountain ranges and deserts, kept the Chinese separate from the rest of the ancient world for a long time. Because of this, the Chinese developed in very different ways from the other civilizations.