

The Development of Ancient China

Geographic Factors

1. In ancient times, China was virtually isolated from the surrounding world by natural barriers:

- Gobi Desert
 - Tibetan mountain plateau
 - Pacific ocean
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- Little affected by outside cultures.

2. Topography:

1/5 coastal and river plains

4/5 mountains, plateaus and hills;

Not suitable for agriculture;

*Population growth pressed against food supply – survival economy;

** Despite mountainous terrain, Chinese migrated, spread their culture and maintained a degree of cultural and political unity.

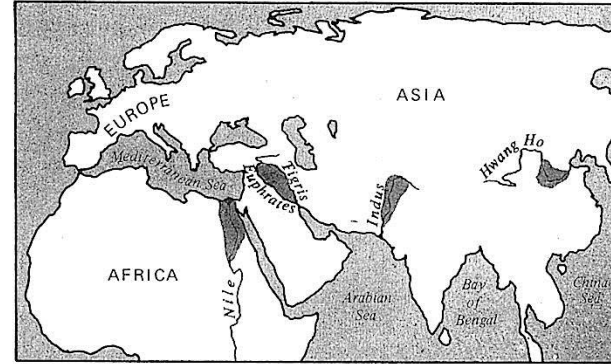


Ancient China: Geographic Factors

Geographic Factors cont.

3. Important Rivers: Yangtze and Hwang Ho(Yellow River).

- flow several thousand miles eastward from Tibetan highlands;
- Both empty into Pacific Ocean;
- Drain China's heavily populated fertile plains;
- Yellow River-devastating floods; "China's Sorrow."



The Early River Valley Civilizations

Early Dynasties

1. Shang Dynasty(1750-1122 B.C.):
 - Farming society ruled by aristocratic warrior class;
 - Evidence of impressive cities; capital at Anyang; huge city walls, royal palaces and large royal tombs;
 - Fu Hao-influential wife of Shang King Wu Ding(13th century B.C.); commanded armies

Political and Social Structures

- Shang kings ruled with help of a bureaucracy; realm divided into territories governed by warlords, chosen by king;
- King controlled large armies often fighting on frontiers;
- Chinese kings buried with corpses of their faithful retainers in the royal tombs;
- Believed in supernatural forces beyond power of human beings;
- Communicate with these forces through **oracle bones**; questions asked by rulers scratched onto bones, cracks made by heating interpreted by priests;

Oracle Bones



Social Structures

- King and royal family;
- Aristocratic families(chief landowners, officials of govt., military commanders);
- Peasants-great majority of people; did not own their own farms, worked lands of aristocratic class;
- Small number of merchants and artisans;
- slaves

Religion and Culture under the Shang

- Clear sense of life in the hereafter;
- Veneration of ancestors;
- Practice of burning replicas of physical objects to accompany the departed on their journey;
- Spirits of family ancestors could bring good or evil fortune to the living members of the family; important to treat them well;
- Believed divine forces existed in objects of nature; spirit worship has survived to present day;
- One superior god-Shang Di;

Mastery of the art of bronze-casting

- For weapons
- Artistically for production of ritual and luxury vessels;
- Ritual: ceremonial instruments for preparing and serving food and drink in the ancestral rites;
- Luxury-decoration at court
- More than ten thousand survive today

