

Geography of China

Read the following article and follow the directions at the bottom of the paper.

As you read with ancient India, the Himalayan Mountain range, or the “Roof of the World,” forms a large barrier around the subcontinent. The Himalayas also play a major role in the civilization of ancient China, for it is in the Himalayas that the source of the Yellow River (Huang He River) begins. The Yellow River is the major source of fresh water and soil for the people of ancient China.

The Yellow River is approximately 3,000 miles long from its source in the Himalayas to where it empties in the Yellow Sea. As the Yellow River nears the Gobi Desert, the river picks up soil. This soil is similar to the silt from the Nile and Indus. It is called loess (pronounced “less”). The Loess is Yellow in color, and this is what gives the Yellow river its nickname. The Yellow River is the muddiest river in the world.

For thousands of years, the people of ancient China depended upon the Yellow River flooding and depositing this loess. It is an excellent soil to grow crops in, and farming flourished along the banks of the Yellow River. The Yellow River Valley was a very fertile region for agriculture.

The Chinese also call the Yellow River “China’s Sorrow.” The Yellow River is very dangerous. Flooding is a common problem, and can cause more problems than in Egypt or Mesopotamia. The floods were very unpredictable, and could wash away entire villages, drowning thousands of people. Crops would be washed away as well. If a village survived the actual floods, crops were lost and a famine would result. This is when people starve and die due to a lack of food.

The Chinese used methods of irrigation similar to Egyptians and Mesopotamians. Dikes, also called levees, were walls built along the bank of the river. When the river flooded, these walls would help to keep the river from washing away crops and homes. They were successful most of the time, but when the levee breaks, deadly flooding resulted again. The Yellow River was a much more dangerous river than the Nile and Indus Rivers.

In some areas, the land was too hilly to expect flood waters to deposit fertile loess. So farmers adapted to their landscape. Since crops do not grow well on hills, they would cut “steps into the hillside called “terraces.” This greatly improved the amount of available farmland, and they did not have to worry about flood waters washing away crops.

China’s main crop was rice. Rice needs to grow in 6-8 inches of water. The large amounts of water china received from rains and floods made growing rice very easy. Millet, a type of grain, was also grown. Fruits and vegetables were common crops for farmers too. Due to their advanced methods of irrigation, farmers were able to produce large surpluses of rice and millet. Even today, almost 40% of the world’s supply of rice still comes from China.

China, like India, was isolated from the rest of the world due to its surrounding geography. The Gobi Desert to the north and the Himalayas to the southwest blocked off China from the remainder of Asia. Mountain passes were common, but rarely used. China was so isolated for a time, they did not even know other civilizations like India and Egypt even existed. They called themselves the “Middle Kingdom” because they thought they were the center of the world!

Assignment Directions:

After you have read through the article one time, grab two highlighters and read through it again. As you read highlight all the things that are new to you (aspects of China that are something you don’t recognize in the other civilizations) in one color. In a different color, highlight all the things that you read that sound familiar to what you learned with Egypt, Mesopotamia, and India. Use the T-chart on the back of this paper and identify all the characteristics of China that are similar to Egypt (E), Mesopotamia (M), or India (I). Also include all the information that is unique to China.

China Geography T-Chart

Name: _____

Unique to China	Similar to Egypt, Meso, or India