Geography of China—A Factor in the Chinese Worldview?
Comparing China and the United States
## Comparing the U.S. and China

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>China</strong></th>
<th><strong>United States</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td>3.7 million square miles</td>
<td>3.6 million square miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main physical barrier</td>
<td>Himalayas</td>
<td>Rockies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main River</td>
<td>Yangtze / East-West</td>
<td>Mississippi / North – South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>East Coast</td>
<td>East Coast</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Topography
Percentages of different land forms in China

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Percentage in total area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Land area (million sq. km)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By landform (million sq. km)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountains</td>
<td>33.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plateaus</td>
<td>26.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basins</td>
<td>18.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plains</td>
<td>11.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hills</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

China-Hiking.com
Mountains and Deserts
Patterns of Rainfall

Map of China showing rainfall patterns.

Legend:
- Yellow: 0-100 millimeters (0-4 inches)
- Light green: 100-300 millimeters (4-12 inches)
- Dark green: 300-600 millimeters (12-24 inches)
- Blue: 600-1000 millimeters (24-40 inches)
- Dark blue: 1000-1500 millimeters (40-60 inches)

Cities marked include Beijing, Harbin, Shenyang, and Shanghai.

Scale: 0 to 500 kilometers (0 to 500 miles).
Wheat and rice cultivation in China
Demographics
Population Percentages Globally

- China: 23%
- India: 18%
- Europe: 15%
- Latin America: 10%
- United States: 5%
- Africa: 5%
- Russia: 3%
- All Others: 3%

Legend:
- Red: China
- Yellow: India
- Green: Europe
- Black: Latin America
- Blue: United States
- Orange: Africa
- Brown: Russia
- Pink: All Others
Population Density
Major Ethnic groups in China
Importance of Rivers

The Four Old-World River Valley Cultures

- Egypt: The Nile
- Mesopotamia: Tigris & Euphrates
- India: Indus & Ganges
- Shang China: Yellow R. (Yangzi)
Population Growth

Settlements began to develop along the Yellow and Yangzi Rivers

• This created a need for recognized authorities who could maintain order, resolve disputes, and organize public works projects
Small dynasties followed that extended their control over progressively larger regions

Dynasty: A sequence of powerful leaders in the same family
Agriculture in China in Historical terms
Crops

Initially, millet was the main crop (especially in the north)
Sometime thereafter, the Chinese began cultivating rice (especially in the south where the Yangzi River is less prone than the Yellow River to devastating floods)

- Extensive rice production would require developing a complex irrigation system (made possible by the centralizing authority of the Shang and Zhou Dynasties)
In China, millet is eaten without milk or sugar, frequently with beans, sweet potato, and/or various types of squash.
Two Key Rivers
The Huang River valley has a fertile yellow soil called loess – Huang means “yellow” in Chinese.

Loess Plateau, China  Huang He (Yellow) River
Loess is an extremely fine and powder-like soil that gradually builds up in the river bed, raising the river bed and forcing the water out of its established path.
Loess soil is extremely fertile and easy to work

- Even before the introduction of metal tools, cultivators with wooden instruments could generate large harvests
The Huang is prone to terrible floods and is nicknamed “China’s Sorrow”
The Yangzi (Yangtze) River
The Yangtze, Yangzi or Cháng Jiāng is the longest river in Asia, and the third longest in the world.

It flows for 6,418 kilometres (3,988 miles) from the glaciers on the Tibetan Plateau in Qinghai eastward across southwest, central and eastern China before emptying into the East China Sea at Shanghai.

The Yangtze river basin is home to one-third of the PRC's population.
The Middle Country—A Psychology/Worldview
China’s Geographic/Historical Isolation

Mountains and deserts isolated China, resulting in a distinctive culture and identity
Zhongguo is a Mandarin name of China, literally translating as "Middle Kingdom". (Chinese: 中国, Zhōngguó).
An Eighteenth Century Chinese 'wheelmap' of the world.
Source: J. Brooman, *Imperial China*
Through the course of Chinese imperial history, the Chinese world view underwent several major changes.

During the Han dynasty, the Chinese view of the world centered on Han ethnic culture, which graded and organized other peoples according to how much they accepted Han culture.

Two gentlemen engrossed in conversation while two others look on, a Chinese painting on a ceramic tile from a tomb near Luoyang, Henan province, dated to the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220 AD)
The Han people were wary of what they saw as their less civilized, barbaric neighbors, especially the northern nomads.

The project of constructing the Great Wall, which began as early as the fifth century B.C., suggested that the Han people had been long aware of the nomadic threat from the north.

But following the Confucian teaching, Han rulers were also supposed to cultivate morals and virtue among barbarians.
Thus culture was used by Han Chinese to set up relations with non-Han peoples, for example, to protect Han people (Ex. The Great Wall), but also to bring higher, Han culture to them when possible.

But beyond culture the Chinese worldview included a political or power relationship where China stood at the center and other peoples at the periphery. This was most often expressed by the term zhongguo *(Middle Kingdom or Country)* and tianxia (“under Heaven” setting up a geography which ordered Chinese power versus other peoples), two important concepts in forming the Chinese worldview.
The problem with the idea of China as the highest of cultures was challenged when the country came to be controlled by non-Han peoples.

The Han Chinese looked to make their conquerors more Chinese, to *sinicize* them. But this meant letting go of the idea that only Han Chinese people could experience the excellence of Han culture. On the other hand this allowed Han Chinese people to accept non-Han dynasties as part of Chinese civilization.
The idea of center-periphery did continue to influence the Chinese worldview, however and kept zhongguo as the center of the world right through the last dynasty in Chinese history—the Qing Dynasty.
But by the beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, the Qing Dynasty rulers were not prepared to deal with the appearance of the Western world in Asia. They simply refused to acknowledge this new and foreign force – a threat to the traditional Chinese Worldview.

For one hundred years the idea of zhongguo and the idea of center-periphery was erased. It was only in 1949 with the Chinese Revolution and the removal of European-North American influence in China that the idea of an assertive zhongguo would resurface.