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ENGLISH STUDIES SERIES 11

G. M. R. BIDDULPH

Geography

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Three and a Half Million Square Miles

China is the world’s third largest country, with an area of 3,657,765 square miles. While China is big, much of it is useless. Mountains, steep hills, and cold plateaus greatly restrict usable land. Plains and rolling basins cover less than 50 per cent of the country, and two-thirds of this percentage is arid. Barely 15 per cent is potentially usable for agriculture. China’s 500 million live in a country which is impressively on the map but which is not so good in reality.

China shares the summit of Mt. Everest, 29,028 feet, with Nepal, and also includes the world’s second lowest elevation, the Turfan Depression at —928 feet. Within this six-mile range in altitude there are many types of land surface: desert sand dunes,1 alpine glaciers, broad alluvial plains,2 and precipitous canyons. Loess3 hills and limestone karst4 are uniquely developed. The chief types of topography not represented are the souvenirs of continental glaciation and active volcanoes.

From the interior highlands flow three of the world’s longest rivers, the Yangtze, Hwang, and Amur. Other large areas have no drainage to the sea, since evaporation exceeds precipitation and the few streams wither as they flow towards the centre of their basins.

Where is China? To the Chinese, the answer is simple; it is “here,” and the proper name for the country is the Central, or Middle, Kingdom. To outsiders, China is “somewhere else”; perhaps it is no more than a large yellow spot on the map. Europe looked eastward and spoke of the Far East. With equal appropriateness Americans might term China the Near West.

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1. *dune*: low ridge of sand, usually brought by the wind.
2. *alluvial plains*: plains or flat surfaces formed by fine material, e.g. silt or sand, brought down by rivers and streams.
3. *Loess* (German): deposits of fine yellowish dust; Loess develops into soil good for wheat and sugar-beets.

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By ship Shanghai lies 18 days west of San Francisco, but by plane it is only as many hours away. When one looks at a globe, however, it becomes clear that the shortest route to China from Europe or North America does not lie east or west, but northward.

China has traditionally dominated eastern Asia; she may come to lead in the western Pacific. Perhaps this sentence summarizes her space potential. Within a radius of 2,000 miles from Shanghai, China holds possibilities of continuing leadership. In the area surrounded by India, the Soviet Union, Australia, and the United States, China’s leadership is threatened only by Japan.

It appears to a geographer that for many decades to come, the world will be dominated by the North Atlantic area. The leadership once held by the Mediterranean and then by Europe has shifted to the countries around this ocean. The Pacific Basin will surely grow in importance, but it does not appear probable that it can catch up with the Atlantic. If this suggests that China is not likely to lead the world, it need not mean that China cannot have a great future in her own area.

China is like a huge oasis.5 On all sides she is surrounded by the most perfect of physical barriers. To the east and south lies the widest of the oceans. To the west is the highest of all plateaus. To the north lie nearly a thousand miles of desert. China has had trouble with some of her immediate neighbours, all of whom she regarded as barbarians, but no invasion from outside eastern Asia has occurred until modern times. Foreign commerce before the twentieth century was negligible.

In so far as classical China had a front door, it was the westernmost gateway of the Great Wall, poetically named the Jade Gate, since through it passed caravans bringing jade6 to China. Here entered Marco Polo and the first Europeans; out from this gateway passed Chinese pilgrims in quest of Buddhism. Shanghai was merely a fishing village; it and the other coastal cities were China’s backdoors.

With the arrival of the Europeans who came by sea, China has had to make an about-face. Shanghai, Tientsin, Dairen, and Canton are the new front doors. In the space of a century China has been obliged to reorient her life, to adjust the think-

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5. *oasis*: place in a desert where water makes permanent vegetation grow.
THREE AND A HALF MILLION SQUARE MILES

Inning of millions of people, the economy of millions of square miles, and the tradition of thousands of years. The ocean, rather than the interior frontiers, has dominated her foreign relations during the past century. China's current interest in the Soviet Union thus represents something of another reversal, one which is not in keeping with the modern emphasis on maritime contacts.

Mainland China borders the sea for 3,300 miles. On her landward side, the frontier extends for 9,300 miles, of which 3,050 faces the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and 2,400 borders the Mongolian People's Republic.

Transit facilities across the land and sea boundaries differ notably. China has some twenty-five seaports, not all fully modern, which are capable in all of caring for hundreds of steamships in a day. Across the land frontiers there are only a few areas with railways, each of them off-center. Two lines lead to Indochina. Three lines cross into Korea. The Soviet Union is reached over either end of the old Chinese Eastern Railway, built as a short cut across Manchuria for the Trans-Siberian Railway, and there will be another link with the completion of the line through Sinkiang. A new railway across Mongolia provides a short cut to Siberia. Not a single paved highway crosses the border, and the total of usable automobile roads scarcely exceeds a dozen. The capacity for overseas commerce is a thousand times greater than that for overland trade.

Land of the 500 Million by GEORGE B. CRESSEY

TEST PAPER

Decide whether the following statements are true or false, according to the text. Write your answers on a separate sheet. If you do not know, do not try to guess, but put a question mark. Then compare your answers with those on page 144.

1. About 66 per cent of China is arid.
2. Excessive evaporation prevents the flow to the sea of rivers in large areas.
3. In South-East Asia China is threatened only by Japan.
4. The shortest route to China from Europe is over the North Pole.
5. The author thinks it unlikely that China will dominate the world in the near future.
6. China has not been invaded until modern times.
7. The eastern and southern seaboard in the old days was China's back door.
8. During the past century China has had to make her back doors into her front doors.
9. Her interest in the Soviet Union is an example of the general trend of China's new orientation.
10. China's seaports are not modernised and cannot compete with the railways and roads of her western frontiers.

LEXICAL SIMPLIFICATIONS

4. restrict: limit; prevent from increasing
5. rolling basin: undulating hollow or concave land-areas
6. barely: scarcely; hardly
7. potentially usable: has the possibility of being used
8. impressive: making an impression or mark on the mind of the viewer
9. in reality: really; from a practical point of view
10. includes (China's territory) has inside it
11. depression: low-lying area
12. range: difference between maximum and minimum
13. precipitous canyons: deep, narrow valleys with very steep (precipitous) sides formed by rivers
14. uniquely: in a unique way; unlike examples elsewhere
15. souvenirs of: (here) what has been left behind by; relics of
16. exceeds: is greater than
17. precipitation: moisture deposited on earth's surface
18. wither: dry up; become exhausted (usually used of plants)
19. outsiders: (here) people not living in China
20. appropriateness: suitability; what is fitting or proper
21. as many: i.e. 18
22. globe: spherical representation of the earth
23. route: path; way
24. traditionally: by custom or opinion handed down from forefathers
25. dominated: had greatest influence on; been in a commanding position with regard to
26. space potential: possible expansion; possible field or zone of influence
27. radius: straight line drawn from the centre of a circle to its circumference (edge); (here) within a circle of radius 2,000 miles with its centre at Shanghai, i.e. anywhere within 2,000 miles of Shanghai

44

45
THREE AND A HALF MILLION SQUARE MILES

38 threatened: menaced; endangered (this refers to China’s leadership)
40 decades: periods of ten years
42 to come: in the future
43 shifted: moved
45 catch up with: reach; come level with; equal
49 physical barriers: natural phenomena (e.g. mountains, oceans) preventing or barring access or way
52 had trouble with: quarrelled with; been enemies with; had political difficulties with
53 immediate neighbours: countries nearest to (China)
55 barbarians: uncivilized people
55 negligible: very small; not large enough to be counted
56 classical: ancient
58 caravans: companies of merchants travelling together for safety
60 in quest of: searching for; seeking
63 With the arrival of: when . . . arrived
64 about-face: turn in the opposite direction
66 reorient her life: turn herself in another direction; alter her way of life to fit the new circumstances
69 foreign relations: foreign policy; contacts with foreigners
71 presents something of another reversal: is, to a certain extent, the sign of yet another about-face (i.e. back to the west)
72 not in keeping with: not in harmony with; does not conform or fit in with
74 borders the sea: has a sea coast
75 landward side: the side which has frontiers with other countries (not the sea)
78 Transit facilities: means of crossing
80 some: about; approximately
80 caring for: (here) handling; providing docking facilities for
82 off-centre: lacking connections with the centre
85 short cut: nearest route (avoiding long detours)
86 with the completion of the line . . . : when the line has been completed
86 paced highway: main road with a smooth hard surface (e.g. of asphalt)

STRUCTURAL SIMPLIFICATIONS

45–47 ‘If this suggests . . . in her own area.’
1 This may suggest that China is not likely to lead the world. (This, here, refers to the whole of the previous sentence.)
2 But it does not necessarily mean that China cannot have a great future in her own area.

56–59 ‘In so far as classical China . . . jade to China.’
1 If classical China had a front door, it was on the west.
2 This door was the westernmost gateway of the Great Wall.
3 This was poetically named the Jade Gate.
4 The name, Jade Gate, came from the caravans carrying jade into China.

59–60 ‘Here entered Marco Polo . . . in quest of Buddhism.’
Note the inversion of the usual order, which is Subject—Verb—Adverbial. In these sentences, to emphasise here and gateway, the order Adverbial—Verb—Subject is found.
Here entered Marco Polo instead of Marco Polo entered here, etc.

65–68 ‘In the space of a century . . . thousands of years.’
In the space of a century China has been obliged to do the following:
a reorient her life
b adjust the thinking of millions of people
c adjust the economy of millions of square miles
d adjust the tradition of thousands of years.

70–73 ‘China’s current interest . . . on maritime contacts.’
1 China’s current interest in the Soviet Union thus represents something of another reversal.
2 This reversal (turning towards the west again) is not in keeping with the modern emphasis on maritime contacts.

74–77 ‘On her landward side . . . Mongolian People’s Republic.’
Note: faces and borders (singular) have the notional subject a frontier of . . . miles

83–87 ‘The Soviet Union . . . through Sinkiang.’
1 The Soviet Union is reached over either end of the old Chinese Eastern Railway.
2 This railway was built as a short cut across Manchuria for the Trans-Siberian Railway.
3 There will be another link (with the Soviet Union) with the completion of the line through Sinkiang.

EXERCISES

I Substitute another word or phrase for the words or phrases printed in italics. The resulting sentence should have a similar meaning. It may be necessary to alter the sentence slightly.

a While China is big, most of it is useless.
b Barely 15 per cent is potentially usable for agriculture.
c China shares the summit of Mt Everest with Nepal.
d The chief types of topography not represented are the souvenirs of continental glaciation and active volcanoes.
The few streams wither as they flow towards the centres of their basins.
When we look at a globe, however, it becomes clear that the shortest route to China lies northward.
On all sides China is surrounded by the most perfect of physical barriers.

II
Re-write the following sentences to contain one main clause and one subordinate clause:

a With the arrival of the Europeans, China had to make an about-face.

b By ship Shanghai lies 18 days west of San Francisco.

c Perhaps this sentence summarizes her space potential.

d In the space of a century China has been obliged to reorient her life.

e Across the land frontier there are only a few areas with railways, each of them off-centre.

f A new railway across Mongolia provides a short cut to Siberia.

g The capacity for overseas commerce is a thousand times greater than that for overland traffic.

III
List the countries which have a common frontier with China and describe, as far as you are able, the physical nature of some of these frontiers and the means of communication available.

IV
Summarize the passage in about 325 words.

V
Describe in your own words any important economic changes that have occurred in your country during the last 25 years.