

The Tibetan Plateau is cold and dry. Summer temperatures average only 45 degrees Fahrenheit. Winters average 18 degrees. The annual precipitation is only 10 inches.

19.3 The Tibet-Qinghai Plateau

The southwestern part of Outer China is dominated by the high Tibet-Qinghai Plateau. Also known as the Tibetan Plateau, this area is often called the "Roof of the World." Its average elevation is more than two miles (13,500 feet) above sea level. It is a very large area, covering almost a quarter of the land in China.

The Tibetan Plateau is a rocky land surrounded by towering mountains. The Himalayas are on the southern edge of the plateau. The tallest mountain in the world, Mount Everest, is part of this mountain range. Its peak is more than five miles (29,000 feet) high.

Since the Tibetan Plateau is so high, the climate is very cold. The air is thin and dry. Snow falls even in the summer.

Two of China's major rivers begin in this area, the Huang He (Yellow River) and the Chang Jiang (Yangtze River). In spite of the rivers, the plateau is rather dry. The natural vegetation consists of sparse scrubs and grasses. Antelopes and yaks, a type of ox, roam the area. Sometimes they are hunted by wolves and wildcats.

For the people of ancient times, the Tibetan Plateau was a challenging place to live. It was too cold and dry to grow crops. But the grasses did provide food for yaks and other livestock. The cold, rocky plateau and the high mountains made travel through this area to Inner China very difficult.

19.4 The Northwestern Deserts

The northwestern part of Outer China is known for its great deserts, including the Taklimakan and Gobi Deserts. The deserts are harsh places to live and difficult for travelers to cross. The climate varies from sizzling hot in the summer to below freezing in winter. The only places to grow crops or raise animals such as sheep are the **oases**, where water can be found. In ancient times, shelters made of mud were sometimes built near oases.

The Taklimakan Desert

The Taklimakan Desert is about 105,000 square miles. It is considered one of the most dangerous deserts in the world. In fact, its name means, "Once you go in, you will not come out." The desert's huge sand dunes shift and change as the wind blows the sand around. Sandstorms arise with stunning speed. Legend says that two armies and 300 cities are buried 600 feet beneath the sand dunes.

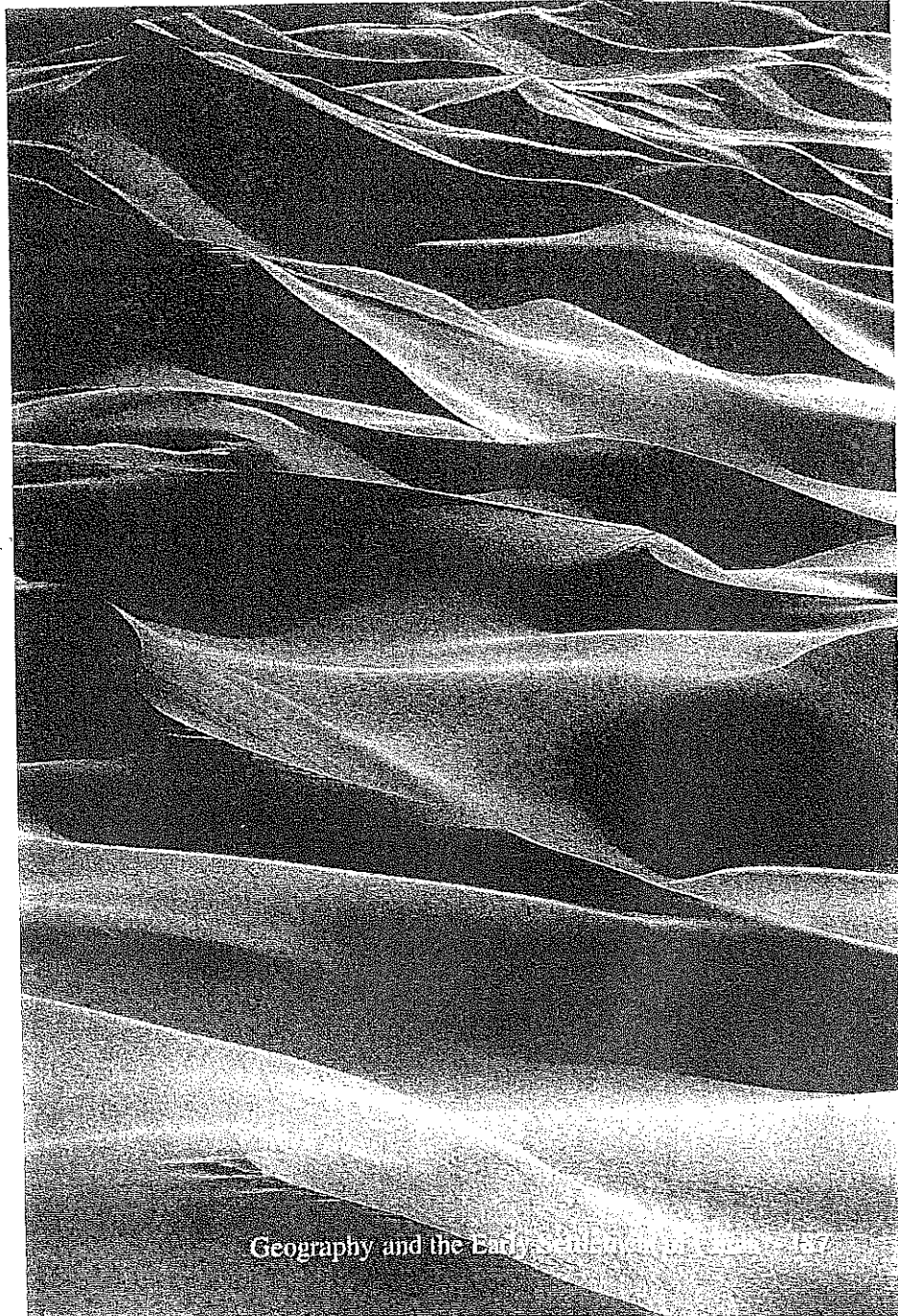
As you might expect, the desert is too dry to have much vegetation. Bushes, weeds, and trees grow only near oases and along rivers.

The Gobi Desert

Stretching over 500,000 square miles, the Gobi Desert is one of the world's largest deserts. It covers part of China and present-day Mongolia. Unlike the Taklimakan Desert, the Gobi has very few sand dunes. Most of the desert is stony. Its surface is made up of small pebbles and tiny bits of sand. Vegetation is sparse. Plants tend to be small and widely spaced.

oasis a place where water can be found in a desert

Temperatures vary greatly in the Northwestern Deserts. Summer temperatures can be 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Winter temperatures might be a chilly 15 degrees. The annual precipitation is about 5 inches.



19.6 The North China Plain

The North China Plain is a flat region of grassland in Inner China. Temperatures range from very warm in the summer to quite cold in the winter.

This region is sometimes called the “Land of the Yellow Earth” because the ground is covered by yellow limestone **silt**. The silt comes from the Gobi Desert. It is carried by the wind to the North China Plain. The river that runs through the plain is also full of yellow silt. The silt gives the river its name, Huang He (Yellow River).

The Huang He is one of the longest rivers in the world. It may also be the world’s muddiest river. The mud makes it look more like soup than river water. The river starts in the high western mountains and winds its way down to the eastern plains. The silt it carries helps fertilize the surrounding lands, making the North China Plain a good place to settle down and grow crops.

While the Huang He helps farmers, it has also been the source of many disasters for the Chinese. In the past 3,000 years, the river is said to have flooded more than 1,500 times, causing much damage and loss of life.

silt fine particles of rock

The North China Plain, near the Huang He, is grassy, fertile land. In the summer, the average temperature is 82 degrees Fahrenheit. In the winter, the average temperature is 28 degrees. The annual precipitation is about 23 inches.

