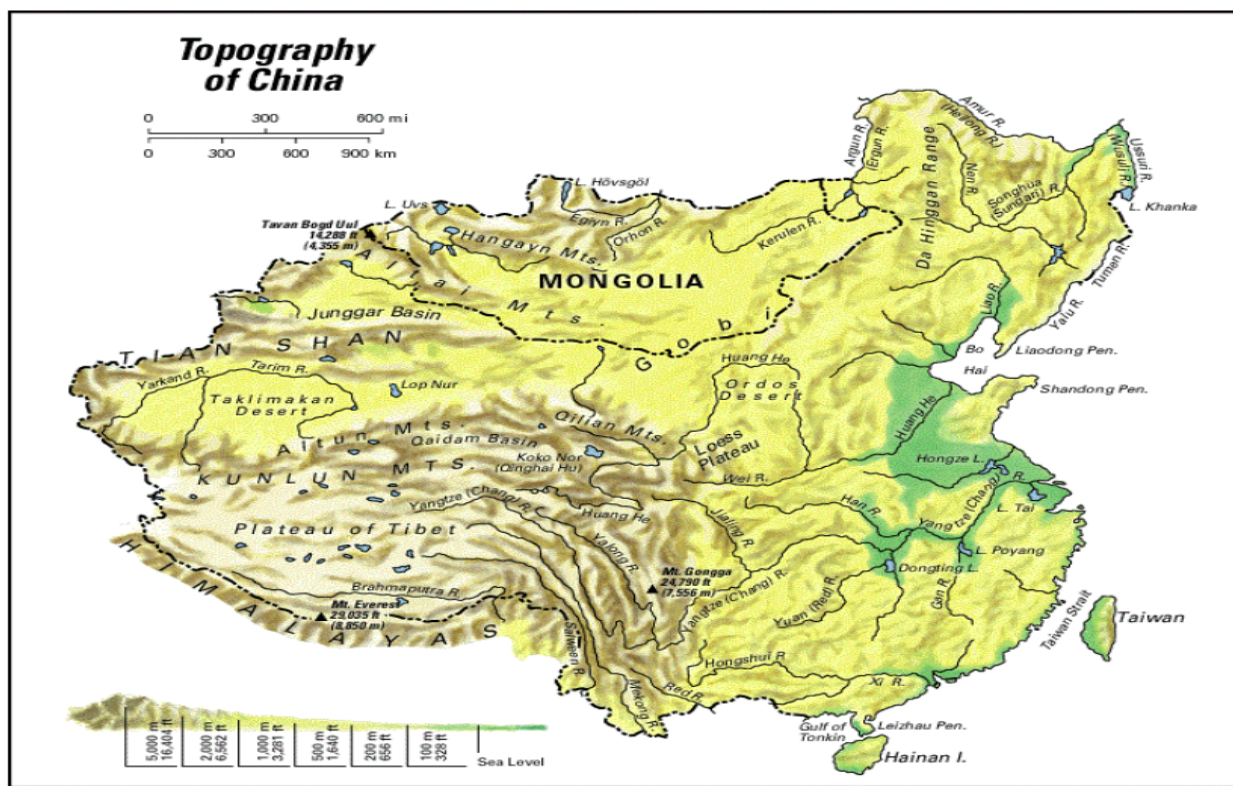


world across these limited access areas (as it is attempting now). However, this notwithstanding, China's geographical position gives it a distinct advantage. Sitting atop the age old trade route, it enjoys a unique position of connecting energy rich CAR to the Pacific Ocean. Geography provides China the unique opportunity of becoming both a continental and maritime power

China's Physical Topography

China stretches some 5,026 kilometres (3,123 miles) across the East Asian landmass. Its landscape is diverse with snow-capped mountains and deep river valleys, broad basins and high plateaus, rolling plains interspersed with terraced hills, sandy dunes and low-latitude glaciers and other landforms present in myriad variations.

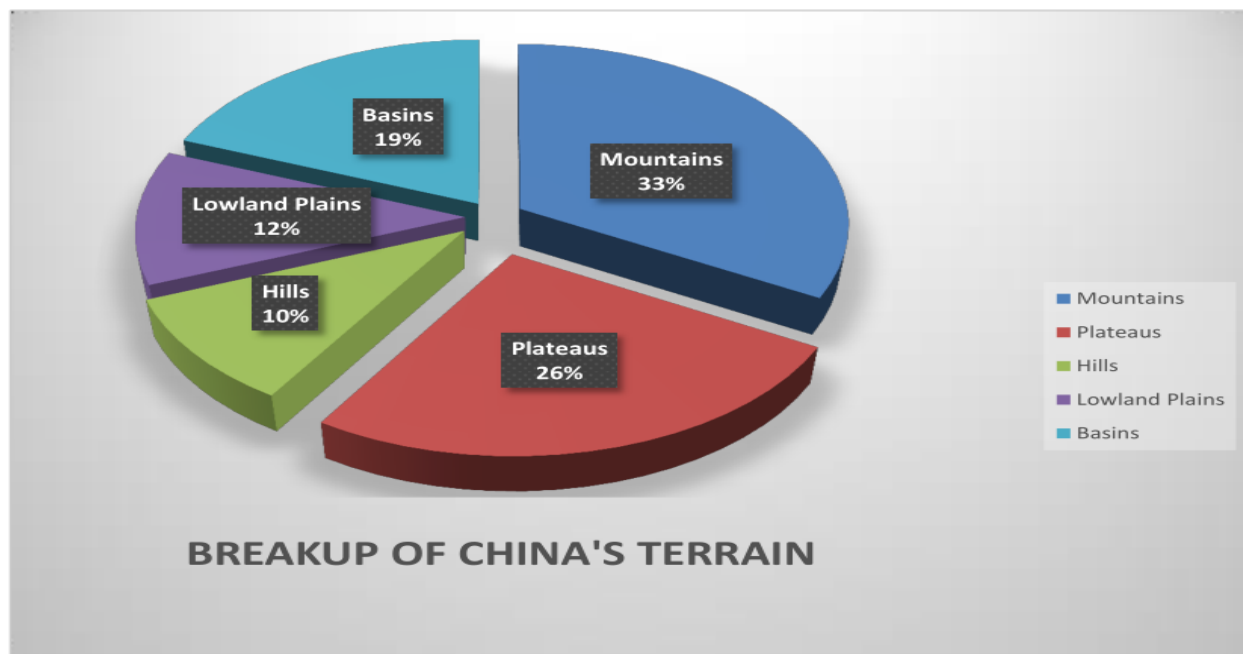
Topography of China



In general, the land is high in the west and descends to the east coast. Mountains (33%) plateaus (26%) and hills (10%) accounts for nearly 70% of the country's land surface. Most of the country's arable and population are based in lowland plains (12%) and basins (19%) though some of the greatest basins are filledwith deserts. The



country's rugged terrain presents problems for the construction of overland transportation infrastructure and requires extensive terracing to sustain agriculture but is conducive to the development of forestry, mineral and hydropower resources and tourism.



Traditionally, the Chinese population centered on the Chinese central plain and oriented itself toward its own enormous inland market, developing as an imperial power whose center laid in the middle and lower reaches of the yellow River on the northern plains. More recently, the long coastline have been used extensively for export-oriented trade, making a power shift, with the coastline provinces becoming the leading economic center⁸.

Major Physical Macro Regions. The physical topography of China can be divided into three physical macro-regions namely, South-western (SW) region (Tibetan highlands), North-western (NW) region (Xinjiang – Inner Mongolia) and Eastern China (Subdivided into the North-Eastern plain, North plain, and Southern plain).

⁸http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_China accessed on 24 May 2012



China's Topographical Regions

SW Region. Located in TAR & Qinghai region, it has an average height between 13000 to 16000 feet and popularly known as the 'roof of the world'. Consists mainly of cold lofty areas with plateaus and inland lakes. This vast inhospitable and thinly populated area can further be divided into two main regions:-

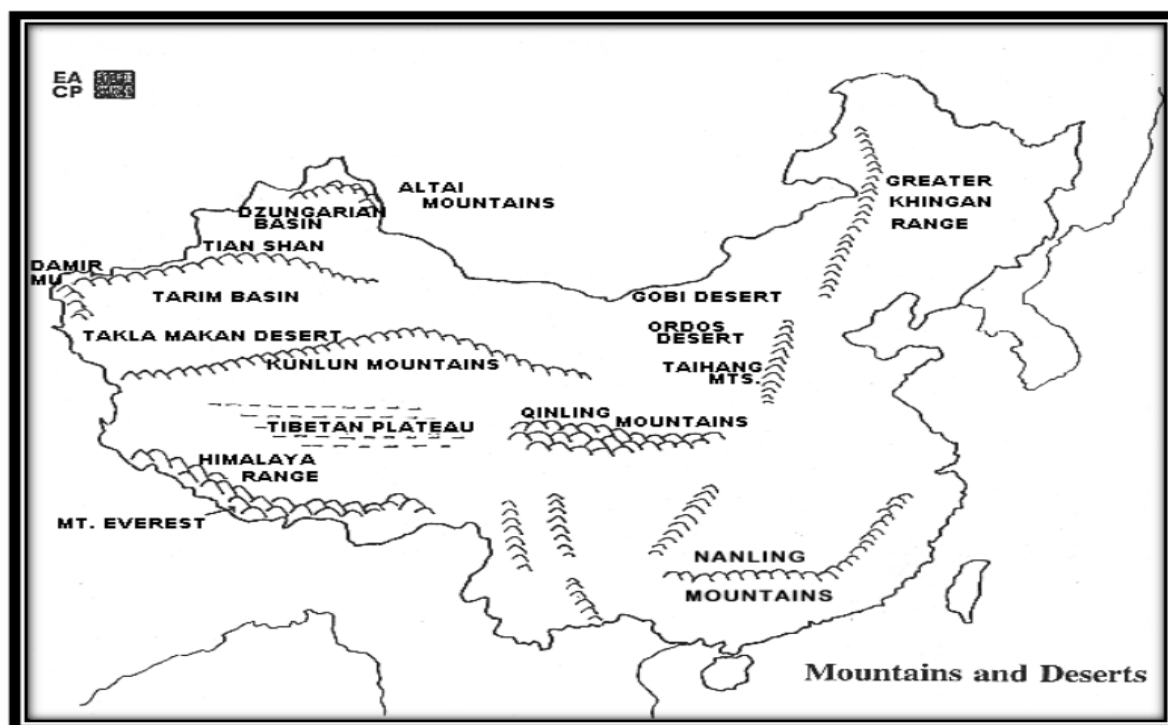
- (a) **Yunnan – Guizhou Plateau.** Consists of mountains ranging from 10000-13000 feet, and lies in the Northern part of Yunnan and western part of Guizhou provinces. This area is characterized by deep valleys of limestone and underground rivers.
- (b) **Tibetan Plateau.** Occupies Quarter of Chinese mainland with the heights varying from 13000 to 16000 feet. To the North of this rugged terrain lies Kunlun mountain ranges and to the South 'The Mighty Himalayas'. This plateau is origin of many great rivers including Yangtze, Brahmaputra, Salween, Indus, Hwang He, Irrawaddy and Mekong. Gravel, salt sakes, sandy and salt deserts and salt wastes dominate this area.

NW Region. Including Tian Shan and Kun Lun mountain ranges with heights ranging from 3000 to 6000 feet it is also intermingled with basins including Mongolian Plateau, Tarim Basin and Loess Basin. This area of China is mainly arid, eroded by winds and forms inland drainage basin. Some of the features of this area are as follows:-

(a) **Tarim Basin.** Between great Kunlun ranges (also known as the Pamirs of the west) to the South and Tien Shan (celestial mountains) to the North lies Tarim Basin with the average elevation of about 3000 feet. A number of rivers rise from these mountain ranges and loose themselves in the Taklimakan desert, one of the world's most barren deserts, situated in this basin. Lop Nor, the Chinese Nuclear blast sites lie in this area.

(b) **Dzungarian Basin.** To the North of Tien Shan mountains lies the Dzungarian Basin. It consists of plain deserts with elevation of about 1500 feet sloping to the South-West. Most parts of this basin are covered with Barchans i.e. crescent shaped moving sand dunes.

(c) **Tien Shan Mountains.** This massive mountain range forms the North-West boundary of China with Kazakhstan. With an average height of 13000 to 15000 feet, the western most part is covered with glaciers and is source of river systems with vast drainage area. Lower slopes are characterised by large alpine meadows and some of China's best grazing grounds.



Schematic Representation of Mountains and Deserts in China⁹

⁹ Source: Asia for Educators, Columbia University, 2009, <http://afe.easia.columbia.edu>