

Theme 1 Traces of Boundaries: Mapping One's Place in the World

How many different uses can you think of for maps? We use road maps to find our way to other places. Physical maps show different landforms and elevations as well as the location of rivers and other bodies of water. Historic maps help us understand political boundaries and the movement of people, goods, and ideas. Military leaders need maps as they plan their campaigns, and tourists need maps in order to figure out interesting places to visit. Many maps show both natural and man-made features. They often reflect values of the people who create them and define their place in the world.

Maps, such as the one from the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) were used for military and political purposes and show how China viewed itself in relation to the rest of the world. Many maps depict smaller territories. In China ownership of a map indicated sovereignty over the land it depicted. In fact, if there was a dispute over territory, the possessor of the map was correct.

Traces of Boundaries uses the Ming map to introduce students to the diversity of China's natural and man-made features, as well as the relative population of its various areas. Students can identify various features on the map and infer possible reasons for the differences in settlement patterns. The background essay, "**Understanding the Geography of China: An Assemblage of Pieces,**" offers information about China's actual and possible interactions between geography and lifestyle. Two lessons follow. Using the Chinese map as a model, the first activity, **Mapping Perceptions**, asks students to identify a map's key elements, such as kinds of features, symbols of man-made objects, scale, and orientation and then to apply what they have learned by creating a map of their own neighborhood. The second activity, **Building an Empire**, invites students to study specific information about China's regional differences by creating a map of the nation, region by region.

Map of Imperial Territories



Map of Imperial Territories

Originally drawn during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), Jiaqing period (1522–1566), dated 1526; postscript by Yang Ziqi (1458–1513).

Modern copy of original made in 1983.

Hanging scroll, ink, color, and white pigment on two widths of silk stitched together, 160.2 x 182.6 cm.

Introductory Questions

- What natural features are depicted on this map?
- What man-made features are depicted?
- What symbols are used? What might different symbols stand for?
- By studying this map, can you determine what defines China's borders?
- Which are natural, which are man-made?
- Which parts of the imperial territories in this map seem to be most densely populated?
- Which parts are most sparsely populated?
- What might be the reasons for certain places being less populated than others?
- Who might have used this map and for what purpose?