

Ancient and Classical China

Part I: Ancient China

This unit will explore ancient through classical Chinese civilization. During this period China developed a unique dynastic governing system, produced impressive architectural and artistic forms, and saw a moment in history that produced two of the world's greatest philosophers. Watch the following video as an introduction to this unit and answer the questions that correspond to this clip in the activity document. The video runs about 15 minutes.

The Shang Dynasty

The first major civilization in China began about 3,500 years ago along the Yellow River (Huang He). While the Chinese were late to develop the characteristics of a civilization, their civilization outlasted all of the others and continued into the twentieth century. What gave the Chinese civilization its endurance and its unity? Geography was an important factor in this longevity. Chinese civilization grew up in the valleys of two rivers, the Yellow or Huang He and the Yangtze. These rivers watered a wide plain that represented the heartland of China. The plain provides a well protected and stable region as it is bordered on the North, South, and West by mountains, which prevented invasions and disruptions.

Throughout China's long history, its political boundaries have expanded and contracted depending on the strength or weakness of its ruling families. Yet China remained a center of civilization with all that the word implies - cities, writing, organized government and religion, specialized crafts, and more. In the Chinese view, only barbarians (people who are not civilized) lived outside China's borders. Because the Chinese saw their country as the center of the civilized world, their own name for China was the Middle Kingdom.



A map of Shang China taken from <http://china.chinaa2z.com/china/html/history.html>

The culture that developed in China had strong bonds that made for unity. From earliest times, the group seems to have been more important than the individual. Above all, people's lives were governed by their duties to two important authorities - their family and their king or emperor. The most important virtue in Chinese society was respect for one's parents. Everyone's role in the family was fixed from birth to death. The elderly had the most power and the youth practically none. The oldest male in the family was in charge and made all decisions. Children were expected to obey their parents and grandparents without question. Women in Chinese society were treated as inferiors and were expected to obey their fathers, husbands, and their sons without questions. All marriages were arranged between 13 and 16 years of age and brides could only improve their status by bearing sons. Daughters were not valued in Chinese society.

In early Chinese society, the family was also closely linked to religion. The spirits of family ancestors were believed to have power to bring good fortune or misfortune to living members of the family. The Chinese did not regard these spirits as mighty gods. They were more like troublesome or helpful neighbors that demanded attention. Every family member paid respect and offered sacrifices in their ancestors' honor. Only sons could carry on the traditional religious duties, which is one reason why sons were valued more than daughters.



Shang Porcelain taken from Wikimedia Commons

Early Chinese Government under the Shang

After the family, people owed obedience and respect to the ruler of China or the Middle Kingdom. The ruler was viewed as a super grandfather who had supreme responsibility for the welfare of the Chinese people. The Chinese people believed that royal authority came from heaven. A just ruler had divine approval, known as the Mandate of Heaven. A wicked or foolish king could lose the Mandate of Heaven, which could bring flood, famine, or other calamities. The people of China saw this as an opportunity to seize power through civil war and transfer the power of government to a new noble family. The transfer of power in China was rarely achieved without bloodshed. The pattern of strength, decline, and civil war (replacement) is called the dynastic cycle.

Chinese history is marked by a succession of dynasties until dynastic rule was finally overthrown in the early 1900s. The first historic family to rule the Middle Kingdom were the Shang (shahng) kings who ruled from 1500 to 1027 B.C. The last Shang king was overthrown by the Chou family that presided over the longest dynasty in Chinese history, 1021 to 221 B.C. The first evidence of civilization developed in China during the Shang Dynasty along the Yellow River (Huang He). This river, like the Nile and the Indus, deposited rich soil for farming through annual floods. Unlike the Nile, however, the Yellow River is fearfully unpredictable. The river has been known to devour entire villages killing millions of people. Those who live near the river have named it China's sorrow. Despite the risk, Chinese farmers lived along the river for the rich farmland.



The Mandate of Heaven taken from <https://jspivey.wikispaces.com/file/view/mandateofheaven.jpg/71476687/mandateofheaven.jpg>

Early Cities of the Shang Dynasty

China's first cities emerged in the Yellow (Huang He) River around 2,000 B.C. Among the oldest and most important was Anyang (ahn-yahng), which was one of the early capitals of the Shang Dynasty. Unlike the cities of the Indus River Valley and Mesopotamia, Chinese cities were constructed primarily of wood. The city stood in a forest clearing. Nobles lived in large, rectangular wooden houses with thatched roofs. Average families lived in little cone-shaped huts or pit houses.

Social classes in Shang China

Chinese society was organized through a rigid class system. Warrior nobles owned land and served the Shang King through military or government service. These warriors were skilled and fought with horses, chariots, and the bow and arrow. Nobles governed the cities and villages of the Shang Dynasty. The peasants or lower class tilled the soil for their Noble overlords. During the Shang Dynasty, farmers did not have plows, only having wooden digging sticks and hoes and sickles made of stone. The soil was so rich, though, that it yielded two crops a year of millet, rice, and wheat. A third class within Chinese society was the artisan class. Artisans lived outside the cities in smaller houses than those of the nobles but better than the peasants.

Crafts and a System of Writing developed during the Shang Dynasty

Bronze work was the leading craft in which Shang artisans excelled. Beautiful bronze objects were used in religious rituals and were also symbols of royal power. Some of these objects were small and graceful, such as bronze bells. Others were massive cauldrons, weighing at least a ton. Some scholars argue that the skill of the Shang bronze smiths have never been surpassed. During this same period, the Chinese also learned to draw the fine threads from a silkworm's cocoon and weave them into a light, beautiful fabric. Nobles prided themselves on their finely embroidered silk shoes, which they esteemed as symbols of their civilization. Barbarians, after all, did not wear shoes of any type.

The earliest evidence of Chinese writing comes from Shang times. At Anyang and other Shang cities, archaeologists have found hundreds of animal bones with written symbols scratched on them. These strange objects are known as oracle bones because priests used them to foretell the future. The writing on the oracle bones showed that people 3,500 years ago were part of the same cultural tradition that continues in China today. Some of the characters are very similar to those in a modern Chinese newspaper.

Each character in the Chinese system of writing represents an idea and not a sound. Please remember that we found that Egyptian, Sumarian, and Phoenician symbols represented sounds from their language. The Chinese system was very different in that there is little connection between spoken Chinese and their written language. One could actually read the language without being able to speak a word of it. An example that might help you understand how the ancient Chinese language would be a mathematical equation. An Englishmen, Frenchmen, and German would be able to read $2 + 2 = 4$ but each would state it differently within their own language.

The ancient Chinese system of writing had one great advantage over western systems of writing. People in all parts of China could learn them same system of writing even if their spoken languages were different. The Chinese written language helped to unify a large and diverse land. The disadvantage of the Chinese language was that it required a person to memorize 1,000 to 40,000 different characters, which often prevented peasants and lower classes from learning to write.



Ancient Chinese Oracle Bone with Chinese Pictographs taken from Wikimedia Commons



Please take this brief quiz to check your understanding of Ancient Chinese Civilization.

Part II: Classical China

The Chou Dynasty

The Chou Dynasty ruled from 1027 to 221 and was divided into two distinct periods. During the first 300 years, the Chou ruled a dynasty consisting of both western and eastern lands. They wielded their power through local war lords with all final decisions made by the emperor. The hallmark of the Chou Dynasty, like the Shang, was an ordered society. After 771 B.C., the Chou Dynasty entered a period of crisis prompted by barbarian invasions from the north and west. These foreign people sacked the major cities and murdered the king. Members of the royal family escaped the city of Loyang and reestablished a kingdom along the Yellow River. The Chou never reestablished control over China and only pretended to rule. The local warlords fought among themselves for power and territory and the king was helpless to stop the chaos. This period is referred to as "the time of warring states."

Two Great Writers Explore Social Order

Confucius

During this time of bloodshed, traditional values collapsed and the order and harmony of Chinese civilization were replaced with chaos and arrogance. The question of how to save traditional Chinese civilization was examined during the period by leading Chinese scholars. One of China's leading scholars was K'ung Fu-tzu (Master King), better known today as Confucius. He was born in 551 B.C., five years after the birth of Siddhartha Guatama, and led a scholarly life of studying history, music, and moral character. Confucius argued that Chinese society needed to be reordered to restore Chinese culture.

Confucius believed that political, family and social relationships should be governed by respect and courtesy or ethical conduct. Subjects must abide by these laws or principles in their daily life to allow society to flourish and grow. The relationship of the family was central to Confucius' social system. Respect for elders and parents was the key element. Confucius served briefly as a government minister but spent most of his life teaching his principles for life. The only written record of his work was collected by his students and is called the *Analects*.

Impact of Confucianism in forming the social order of Classical China

- Belief that humans are good, not bad
- Respect for elders
- Code of politeness (still used in Chinese society today)
- Emphasis on education
- Ancestor worship

As Confucianism evolved, the stress on tradition and respect for ancestors greatly influenced Chinese civilization for about 2,000 years. The writings of Confucius were used by government officials and as school textbooks. His ideas would help to stabilize Chinese society but prevented it from innovating and looking outward. Chinese civilization would continue to look to the past for guidance.



An early engraving of Confucius taken from Wikimedia Commons

LaoTzu and Taoism

Lao Tzu argued that the natural order was more important than social order. He believed that if humans followed the Tao (Dow) or natural force, the chaos would end and peace would govern human society. He believed that it was man's ego or selfishness that brought about crime, rebellions and war. The Tao ran through all of nature and man needed to only look to a stream, animals, or the clouds to discover the natural order of things. His ideas challenged those of Confucius. Confucius argued that man needed to look within to find order (relationships among man), while Lao Tzu argued that man needed to look to nature. Followers of Lao Tzu created

separate communities and developed a magical polytheistic religion. Lao tzu and his followers believed that government should play only a small role in the average person's life. Their ideas and teachings would greatly influence Chinese civilization.

Impact of Taoism in forming Chinese culture and values

- Humility
- Simple life and inner peace
- Harmony with nature

Unlike other areas studied, the Chinese saw no problem with mingling their belief systems. While universally accepting Confucianism, many Chinese also practiced Daoism and Buddhism. Concepts like **yin and yang** that represented the principle of opposites and their role in nature and society was derived from both Confucianism and Taoism. Please remember Buddhism spread throughout China along trade routes like the Silk Road (See Han Dynasty below for more).



Lao Tzu taken from Wikimedia Commons

The Qin and Han Dynasties

A young ruler named Qin Shi Huangdi (chin shir hwahng-tee), whose name meant "First Emperor," came to power in 256 B.C. when his armies destroyed those of the Chou Dynasty. He took power from the Chou and established his own empire by 221 B.C. The title Huangdi was the first time a Chinese ruler had been referred to as an emperor. This tradition began with Qin Shi Huangdi and was continued by all later Chinese Dynasties. Rulers of China would no longer be referred to as kings but instead as emperors.

A Summary of Qin Shi Huangdi Achievements

- Ended petty wars among local warlords
- Conquered the barbarians to the south of his kingdom
- Protected his northern border from invasion by starting construction of the Great Wall of China
- Provided effective leadership establishing the form of government that would be used in China for 2,000 years

He provided stability for China by using his army to crush enemies as far south as Vietnam and north of the Yellow River. He ended the wars among China's noble families by requiring that all noble families (120,000) live in his capital city under his watchful eye and then reorganized China's ancient provinces creating 36 new administrative districts. He allowed no criticism of his rule burning most of the great literary works of the Chou Dynasty, including many on Confucius and his ideas. Qin Shi Huangdi's policies were secretly condemned and resented by most noble families.



An engraving of Qin Shi Huangdi taken from www2.hawaii.edu/~kjolly/151/images/images/HUANGDI.jpg

A Building Campaign to Strengthen China

The peasants of China also hated their new emperor for his ambitious building program. To unite his empire, he ordered the construction of a network of highways built by peasant work gangs. He also sought to protect his northern border by connecting a series of small walls to prevent the war horses of his northern invaders from entering his empire. Pushing wheelbarrows (a Chinese invention) about million peasants collected, hauled, and dumped millions of tons of stone, dirt, and rubble to construct what we know today as the Great Wall of China. **The Great Wall** was designed to stretch from the coast of China to the plain of Tibet forcing any force invading China to

have to move far to the west. The average height of the wall is 25 feet and it stretches 1,400 miles twisting like a dragon's tail across the Chinese countryside. The peasants were forced to work by law. If one refused to work, they were killed by the emperor's supervisors. Most complied with the law but died anyway of starvation, exhaustion, and the freezing winter winds. It is believed that thousands of Chinese bones lie within the walls as filler.

The End of the Qin Dynasty

The Qin Dynasty was short-lived. Qin Shih Huangdi's son was overthrown during a peasant rebellion. One of the leaders of this rebellion from the land of Han marched triumphantly into the capital city and ended the Qin Dynasty in 202 B.C. and started a new dynasty called the Han.



The Great Wall of China taken from Wikimedia Commons

The Han Dynasty

The Chinese consider the Han Dynasty as a time of glory, unity, and peace. There were several reasons for the high reputation of the Han.

1. The Emperor revoked the harsh and repressive policies of the Qin Emperors.
2. The Han ruled during a time when there were few barbarian invasions.
3. It was a time when the writings of Confucius were embraced and received widespread influence.

The most powerful of the Han emperors was Wu-ti (140 BC to 87 BC). Wu-ti was known for his foreign conquest. During his reign he defeated a Hun invasion from the north and extended the boundaries of China into what is today Vietnam. The Chinese army was extended close to 2,000 miles from the Chinese capital. Wu-ti also encouraged learning and the expansion of Chinese culture. Scholars discovered the great works of Chinese history, philosophy, and literature. The Qin had attempted to destroy these works but scholars had hidden these works and reintroduced them during the Han dynasty.

The Civil Service

Wu-ti created a system to ensure that his government officials were trained in the teachings of Confucius and the other great works of China. These officials would constitute China's civil service. Chinese seeking to serve in government would have to be a part of the Civil

Service. To achieve this goal, the Chinese would have to attend university and pass a series of rigorous examinations.

The Great Silk Road

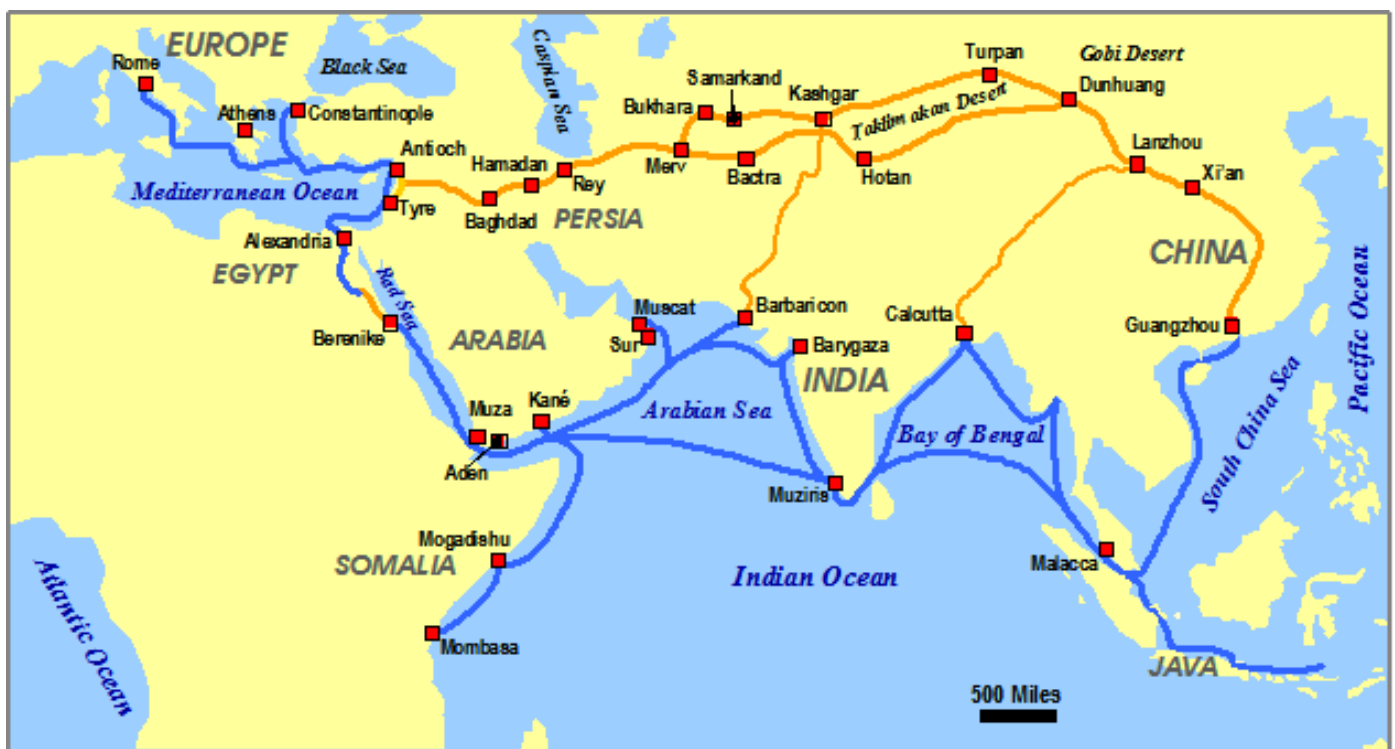
The expansion of China to the west during Wu-ti's reign encouraged the growth of overland trade. According to legend, Wu-ti sent a trusted Chinese official in search of a fresh supply of horses for his armies. Traveling far beyond the Great Wall, the official brought back reports that stunned Wu-ti. Far to the west, he had discovered foreigners (Persians) who were almost as civilized as the Chinese.

It was silk that first linked China with Persia and the rest of the civilized world. Camel caravans carried bundles of silk over a rocky, mountainous route that led past Tibet, across the Tala Makan desert, and into central Asia. This route was known as the Great Silk Road. After a journey of 4,000 miles, Chinese silk reached the great markets of Syria and Asia Minor at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. By that time, the silk had changed hands many times, each time for a higher price.

The End of the Han Dynasty

During the final years of the Han Dynasty, China suffered from famine, drought, a rise in the number of bandits, and high taxes. These problems led to many rebellions among the peasants that led to the final overthrow of the Han emperors. During these final years, Buddhism became increasingly popular in China. Buddhism came to China through traders along the great Silk Road and through trading vessels sailing the Indian Ocean.

In the villages of China, Buddhists monks taught that the Buddha had been a merciful god who came to earth to save human souls. Of course, Siddhartha Guatama had never claimed to be a god. Yet people in India and China were carving statues of him bowing before them. In the final days of the Han Dynasty, people turned to Buddhism for comfort.



A map of the Silk Road taken from <http://www.iro.umontreal.ca/~vaucher/Genealogy/Documents/Asia/images/silkroad.gif>



Please take this brief quiz on Classical China to assess your understanding of the key elements.

The Accomplishments of Ancient and Classical Chinese Civilization

- Developed early civilizations along the the Yellow or Huang He and the Yangtze Rivers
- Developed a society that stressed respect for authority and the importance of family
- Developed a political system of dynasties that ruled through the Mandate of Heaven
- Society was organized around a rigid class system: nobles, artisans and peasants
- The Chinese developed an early form of paper.
- The Chinese developed industries that produced bronze, porcelain and silk
- The chaos of the Chou Dynasty produced Confucius and Lao Tzu who sought to different paths to stability.
- The Qin Dynasty created an extensive network of roads and constructed the Great Wall of China.
- The Han Dynasty reached out to Southwest Asia through the Silk Road and saw the introduction of new ideas like Buddhism



A Han Horse Sculpture taken from Wikimedia Commons

Activity: The Great Wall of China



Overview:

The Great Wall of China was started by the first emperor of China, Qin Shi Huangdi. The wall was designed to connect existing fortifications and defend against northern barbarians. It was built of pounded earth originally and did not take on its current brick form until the Ming Dynasty during the 16th and 17th centuries. Follow the directions below to watch an

interesting and interactive presentation on the history of the Great Wall.

Task:

1. Click here to be re-directed to the Great Wall of China presentation. When prompted, please login with the following **username: studentvhs**. *You do not need to enter anything in the password cell.*
2. Once logged in, watch the presentation from start to finish. Be sure to follow all of the links and interact with all parts of the presentation. During the presentation, it is recommended that you take notes as you will need to construct a response to the following question at the conclusion of the presentation:
 - *It is said that the history of the Great Wall is the history of the people of China. Explain what the history of the Great Wall teaches you about the political, social, and economic history of the Chinese people.*
3. Once you complete the presentation, take the quiz and e-mail it to me at julie.faith@pwcsvhs.desire2learn.com.
4. After reviewing the presentation and completing the quiz, download this document (right click and save as) and respond to the essay prompt using the information that you learned during the presentation. *A grading rubric is located in the document, too.*
5. Once you have completed your essay, proofread it and submit it to the dropbox "Great Wall of China Essay" in Desire2Learn.