

Ancient China

Chapter 7.1

Key Vocabulary

Dynastic cycle

Dynasty

Filial piety

Isolate

Oracle bone

The Geography of Ancient China

At about 240 years of age, the United States may seem like an old civilization, but it's young compared to China. The Chinese civilization has continued for more than 5,000 years. China's geography helped set the stage for the early development of its civilization.

MAIN IDEA

China's deserts, mountains, and rivers helped shape its civilization.

- NATURAL BARRIERS
- MAJOR RIVERS
- REVIEW & ASSESS

NATURAL BARRIERS

In the beginning of its growth, natural barriers somewhat **isolated**, or cut off, China's civilization from much of the rest of the world. As a result, ancient China developed differently from other early civilizations, with relatively little outside cultural influence. This early isolation helped unify Chinese culture and allowed China to establish a firm foundation for its civilization.

Some of China's natural barriers included vast deserts. The Gobi to the north and the Taklimakan (tah-kluh-muh-KAHN) to the west discouraged invaders and peaceful immigrants alike. The Himalaya, Tian Shan, and Pamir mountain ranges formed a significant obstacle in the west. The waters of the Pacific Ocean, Yellow Sea, and East China Sea on China's east coast separated the region from its nearest neighbors, Japan and Korea.

ANCIENT CHINA, 1300–600 B.C.

MAJOR RIVERS

Like the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and India, China's civilization arose along fertile river valleys. It developed on the land between China's two great rivers: the **Huang He** (hwahng huh) and the **Chang Jiang** (chahng jyahng).

The 3,395-mile-long Huang He lies in northern China. It is also called the Yellow River because of its high concentration of yellow silt, or fine, fertile soil. The river deposits this silt along its floodplains, creating good farmland. However, the Huang He is unpredictable. Its course, or the direction in which a river flows, has changed many times. Throughout China's history, heavy rains have also caused the river to flood—with deadly results.

At about 4,000 miles long, the Chang Jiang, or Yangtze, in central China is the third longest river in the world. Like the Huang He, the Chang Jiang carries fertile yellow silt. Unlike the Huang He, the Chang Jiang maintains a relatively predictable course. For thousands of years, the river helped unify China by serving as a useful transportation and trade network within its borders.

The area between the two rivers, called the North China Plain, is the birthplace of Chinese civilization. In Chapter 2, you read about the Yangshao culture, which developed along the Huang He. Another important culture in the area was the Longshan, which developed around 3200 B.C. Other advanced Chinese cultures arose in other river valleys. These cultures include the Liangzhu (lyahng-jew) and the Hongshan. Archaeologists have uncovered beautifully carved jade objects from these cultures in other parts of China. All of these ancient cultures contributed to the development of China's unique civilization and to the rise of its earliest rulers: the Shang and the Zhou.

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Shang and Zhou Dynasties

According to Chinese tradition, a ruler named Yu learned to control the floodwaters of the Huang He and established China's first dynasty, the Xia (shee-AH). But no archaeological evidence of this dynasty has ever been found. The first dynasty for which evidence does exist is the Shang.

MAIN IDEA

The Shang and Zhou dynasties developed many cultural behaviors and beliefs that have become part of Chinese civilization.

- CHINA'S FIRST DYNASTY
- THE DYNASTIC CYCLE
- REVIEW & ASSESS

CHINA'S FIRST DYNASTY

The **Shang** dynasty emerged along the banks of the Huang He around 1600 B.C.A **dynasty** is a line of rulers from the same family. The Shang developed many cultural behaviors and beliefs that rulers would continue throughout much of Chinese civilization. They established an ordered society with the king at the top, warlords coming next, and farmers at the bottom. The farmers helped advance agriculture in China and grew crops such as millet, wheat, and rice.

The Shang also developed a system of writing using about 3,000 characters. These characters became the basis for modern Chinese writing. They first appeared on **oracle bones**, which are animal bones used to consult the many gods the Shang people worshipped. Priests carved a question on a bone and then heated it. They believed that the pattern of cracks that resulted revealed the gods' answer.

In addition to their gods, the Shang people worshipped the spirits of their dead ancestors. The Shang believed these spirits influenced everything from the king's health to farmers' harvests. To keep the spirits happy, priests conducted special ceremonies, often using beautifully decorated bronze vessels. Shang craftspeople were among the most skilled metalworkers at that time. They also built elaborate tombs for the dead.

THE DYNASTIC CYCLE

In time, the Shang dynasty began to weaken. Around 1045 B.C., the **Zhou** (joh) overthrew the Shang and became China's longest ruling dynasty, lasting about 800 years. The rise of the Zhou also marked the beginning of China's classical period, a time of great social and cultural advances that lasted for about 2,000 years. The Zhou adopted many of the Shang's cultural practices, including ancestor worship and the use of oracle bones. However, the Zhou also developed a concept, known as the **Mandate of Heaven**, to be a guiding force for rulers. They believed that a king could rule only as long as the gods believed he was worthy. The mandate led to a pattern in the rise and fall of dynasties in China called the **dynastic cycle**.

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During the first 200 years or so of their rule, the Zhou established a strong central government. However, during the last 500 years of the dynasty, the Zhou divided their lands among local lords. Eventually the ruling lords grew too powerful and independent. They fought among themselves and disobeyed the Zhou kings. By 475 B.C., China had descended into a time of constant war called the **Warring States** period. In 256 B.C., the last Zhou king was finally overthrown.

Day 3

Chinese Philosophies

“What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others.” Sound familiar? You may have heard this saying before—or another version of it. It’s a simple but powerful guide for moral behavior, and it was written 2,500 years ago by a man called Confucius.

MAIN IDEA

Chinese philosophers developed important ideas on how society should be organized.

- CONFUCIANISM
- DAOISM AND LEGALISM
- REVIEW & ASSESS

Critical Viewing Followers write comments and questions to Confucius on notes that bear his image. What do the notes suggest about the lasting influence of Confucius?

CONFUCIANISM

As you’ve read, China began to fall into disorder during the Zhou dynasty. By the time Confucius was born in 551 B.C., China was already experiencing unrest. A teacher and government official, Confucius believed that Chinese society was breaking down as a result of the constant conflict. In an effort to restore order, he taught that people should respect authority and one another.

Confucius’ teachings formed the basis of a belief system known as **Confucianism**. His teachings focused on the duties and responsibilities in the following five relationships: father and son, older brother and younger brother, husband and wife, friend and friend, and ruler and subject. Confucius also promoted education, family unity, and **filial piety**, or the respect children owe their parents and ancestors.

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Confucius died believing he had failed to restore order to society. Yet after his death, his students collected his teachings in a book called the *Analects*, and Confucian ideas spread. In time Confucius' teachings became required reading for all government officials. Today Confucianism influences millions of people. The philosophy has been a unifying force in Chinese culture and civilization.

DAOIST YIN-AND-YANG SYMBOL

This symbol is often used in Daoism to show how seemingly opposite forces form a whole. Daoists believe that everything contains aspects of both yin and yang. The symbol shows some of the aspects of each force.

DAOISM AND LEGALISM

Another thinker called Laozi (low-dzuh) is believed to have lived around the same time as Confucius. He founded a belief system called **Daoism**, which emphasizes living in harmony with nature and the *Dao*. *Dao* means "the Way" and is believed to be the driving force behind everything that exists. Daoists seek order and balance in their lives by merging, or blending, with nature "like drops of water in a stream."

In contrast with both Confucianism and Daoism, **Legalism** emphasizes order through strong government and strictly enforced laws. Legalism developed after 400 B.C. This philosophy does not have a founder, but Han Feizi (fay-zee) set down its ideas around 260 B.C. He maintained that people were naturally bad and needed to be controlled through the threat of harsh punishment. As you will see, a Chinese dynasty would arise that would govern according to this philosophy.

Day 4

DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTION

Contrasting Belief Systems

- INTRODUCTION
- DOCUMENT ONE
- DOCUMENT TWO
- **DOCUMENT THREE**
- SYNTHESIZE & WRITE

You've seen that the suffering caused by weak government and conflict in China led many to think about the best ways to ensure an orderly and peaceful society. As a result, China produced some of the world's greatest philosophical thinkers and writers. Their ideas were so powerful that they not only shaped the future of China for 2,000 years but also continue to influence world thinking today.

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Children dressed in traditional clothing perform in China during a celebration of Confucius' birthday.

DOCUMENT ONE

Primary Source: Philosophical Teaching
from *Analects of Confucius*, translated by Simon Leys

The *Analects*, a collection of Confucius' ideas, sayings, and stories, was probably recorded by many people over many years. In this passage from the *Analects*, a lord asks Confucius (often referred to as "the Master") how to govern his people.

Lord Ji Kang asked: "What should I do in order to make the people respectful, loyal, and zealous [enthusiastic]?" The Master said: "Approach them with dignity and they will be respectful. Be yourself a good son and a kind father, and they will be loyal. Raise the good and train the incompetent [those unable to do a good job], and they will be zealous."

CONSTRUCTED RESPONSE What details in the passage support the idea that Confucius believed rulers had to set a good example for their people?

DOCUMENT TWO

Primary Source: Philosophical Teaching
from *Dao de Jing*, translated by Stephen Mitchell

The *Dao de Jing* is a key text of Daoism. In general, it stresses inaction over action and silence over words. This passage explains the power of the Dao.

The Dao never does anything, yet through it all things are done. If powerful men and women could center themselves in it, the whole world would be transformed by itself, in its natural rhythms. People would be content with their simple, everyday lives, in harmony, and free of desire.

CONSTRUCTED RESPONSE According to the passage, how can powerful people live peaceful, happy lives?

DOCUMENT THREE

Primary Source: Philosophical Teaching
from *Han Feizi: Basic Writings*, translated by Burton Watson

Han Feizi lived from 280 to 233 B.C. He did not believe Confucianism was the answer to the chaos brought about in China during the Warring States period. In this passage from a collection of his writings, Han Feizi describes the role of rulers.

Discard wisdom, forswear [reject] ability, so that your subordinates [those beneath you] cannot guess what you are about. Stick to your objectives and examine the

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results to see how they match; take hold of the handles of government carefully and grip them tightly. Destroy all hope, smash all intention of wresting [taking] them [the handles of government] from you; allow no man to covet [desire] them.

CONSTRUCTED RESPONSE What does the passage suggest about the kind of ruler and government Legalism supported?

VOCABULARY PRACTICE

KEY VOCABULARY

- **dynastic cycle** *n.* the pattern of the rise and fall of dynasties in ancient and early China
- **dynasty** (DY-nuh-stee) *n.* a series of rulers from the same family
- **filial piety** (FIHL-ee-uhl PYE-uh-tee) *n.* the belief that children owe their parents and ancestors respect
- **isolate** (EYE-soh-layt) *v.* to cut off from the rest of the world
- **oracle bone** (OHR-uh-kuhl) *n.* an animal bone used to consult with the many gods worshipped by the Shang people

I READ, I KNOW, AND SO

Complete the graphic organizers below. Write down the sentence in which the Key Vocabulary word appears in Section 1. Then write down what else you read about the word. Finally, draw a conclusion about the word based on what you have learned.

I Read		
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; margin: 0 auto; width: 80%;">dynastic cycle</div>	
I Know		And So

I Read		
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; margin: 0 auto; width: 80%;">dynasty</div>	
I Know		And So



I Read

filial piety

I Know

And So

I Read

isolate

I Know

And So

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oracle bone

I Know

And So