

Ancient China

古代中国

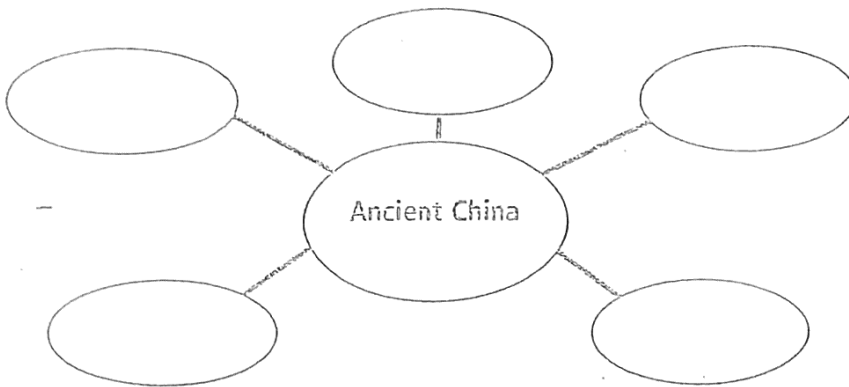
BEFORE YOU READ

In the last section, you read about the physical geography of East Asia, Australia, and the Pacific Islands.

In this section, you will read about Ancient China.

AS YOU READ

Copy this web to take notes about ancient China.



TERMS & NAMES

dynasty family of rulers

Genghis Khan Mongol leader who invaded China in A.D. 1200s

Kublai Khan leader of China who founded the Yuan Dynasty in 1279

Confucius Chinese philosopher who taught the importance of moral character and individual responsibility

bureaucracy the administration of a government through departments called bureaus

Taoism a Chinese philosophy based on the importance of finding harmony with nature

Lao Tzu a Chinese philosopher who founded Taoism in the 500s B.C.

Foundations of Chinese Civilization (pages 681–683)

When was China's early culture established?

Over the course of thousands of years, the Chinese have built the longest-lasting culture in the world. As early as 5000 B.C., Chinese people lived in the fertile river valley of the Huang He. Sometime in the 1700s B.C., their lives changed drastically when invaders, called the Shang, entered their valley. These invaders established China's first permanent, organized civilization.

For most of China's history since the Shang take-over, the country was ruled by **dynasties**, or families of rulers. Some lasted only 15 years, others continued for hundreds of years.

In 1211, the Mongols invaded China, led by **Genghis Khan** and later by his grandson **Kublai Khan**. In 1279, Kublai Khan conquered China's Song Dynasty and founded the Yuan Dynasty. He established its capital at Ta-tu.

Warfare eventually broke out among the Mongols, weakening the Yuan Dynasty. The Ming dynasty took over. Ming founder, Zhu

Yuanzhang, was called the Hongwu emperor—meaning “vast military achievement.” He won the Yunnan province and unified the region that is China today.

When the Hongwu emperor died, one of his grandsons took power, naming himself the Yongle emperor—meaning “eternal contentment.” He rebuilt the Yuan capital, which he named Beijing. He ordered a huge palace to be built in the capital. This was called the Forbidden City because only the emperor, his family, and some officials could enter it.

The Ming Dynasty came to an end in 1644 at the hands of invaders from northeastern China, called the Manchus. These attackers established China's last dynasty, the Qing, which ruled China until 1911.

1. What is a dynasty and when did China's last dynasty end?

Religion and Philosophy

(pages 683–684)

Which religions and philosophies came about during the reign of the Chinese dynasties?

China's dynasties are known for their military, technological, artistic, and spiritual achievements. Some of the world's most influential philosophies and religions arose in China.

Towards the end of the Zhou Dynasty, a man named Kongfuzi—later called Confucius by Europeans—developed a new philosophy. Confucius taught the importance of moral character and of individual responsibility. He also taught that a ruler should treat his people with care and kindness. After he died, his students succeeded in spreading his philosophy.

In 121 B.C., the Han emperor Wudi established Confucianism as the official philosophy guiding the Chinese bureaucracy. Bureaucracy is the administration of a government through departments, called bureaus. The officials that staff the bureaus are called bureaucrats. The Han called their bureaucracy the civil service and staffed it with scholars of Confucianism.

The Zhou period also gave rise to Taoism, a philosophy developed in the 500s B.C. by Lao Tzu. He wrote the main Taoist book—the *Tao-te Ching*. Lao Tzu described the force that guides the universe as the Tao, which means “way of nature.” The greatest achievement for any person, in Taoist belief, is to find harmony with the Tao and with nature.

During the A.D. 200s, Buddhism made its way to China through traders from India and other areas in Asia. During the Tang Dynasty, Buddhist teachings of how to escape suffering appealed to many Chinese. However, Buddhism did not replace Confucianism or Taoism. The Chinese belief system today includes elements of all three philosophies.

2. What are some major ideas of Confucianism?

Achievements of the Dynasties

(pages 684–685)

What were some achievements of the Chinese dynasties?

China has also given the world some important inventions. Around 2700 B.C., the Chinese invented silk cloth and a new system of writing. In the first two centuries A.D., the Chinese invented paper and a type of pottery called porcelain. In the A.D. 1200s, Chinese navigators began using the compass. These inventions helped shape Asia and Europe.

The ancient Chinese kept the secret of how to manufacture silk for centuries, and earned all the profits of the silk trade. Caravans carried the precious fabric to Europe and Southwest Asia, along a trade route named the *Silk Road*.

The first records of travel and trade along the 4,000 mile route date to the Han Dynasty, around 114 B.C. Along it, the Chinese carried silk, porcelain, tea, incense, and spices. Travelers on the Silk Road faced danger from robbers, harsh weather, sickness, and lack of water. Nevertheless, it stayed in use until sea routes to Asia proved safer and until the Ming Dynasty decided to limit foreign trade.

During the Shang Dynasty, the Chinese developed a written language. As in *cuneiform*, the Chinese system used pictograms to represent objects or ideas. Later, pictographs were simplified into symbols, called characters, that do not look exactly like what they represent. About 50,000 characters exist in the Chinese written language. Most words are made up of two or more characters. Both the Japanese and Koreans use Chinese characters in their writing systems.

The ancient Chinese had large construction projects like the Great Wall. The Grand Canal, built in the 600s B.C., is more than 1,000 miles long and connects Beijing with Hangzhou.

3. What was the Silk Road used for?
