



Ancient China

MAIN IDEA

The ancient Chinese developed a civilization that has lasted longer than any other on Earth.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

China's very long and relatively stable existence has helped it to become one of the most powerful countries in the world.

TERMS & NAMES

dynasty

Genghis Khan

Kublai Khan

Confucius

bureaucracy

Taoism

Lao Tzu

DATELINE

THE IMPERIAL PALACE, CHINA, 2700 B.C.—Our 14-year-old Empress Si Ling-chi has made an amazing discovery. While walking in the palace gardens, she noticed that caterpillars, which just a few days before were eating mulberry tree leaves, had spun themselves into cocoons. These cocoons hung from branches, within easy reach of our empress, who plucked one and took it home to examine. When she dropped it into boiling water, it unraveled into a tangle of threads.

The empress immediately sent her maids to gather more cocoons. Soon she had enough thread for weaving, and she produced a shining fabric she called silk. Plans are now underway to begin manufacturing huge quantities of this wondrous fabric.



Human-Environment Interaction • Many Chinese women will work to twist the thin silk strands together to make thread thick enough for weaving. ▲

Foundations of Chinese Civilization

Silk is just one of the many inventions for which the ancient Chinese are known. 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 (shahng), entered their valley. These invaders established China's first permanent, organized civilization.



For most of China's history since the Shang takeover, the country was ruled by **dynasties**, or families of rulers. Dynasties rose and fell in succession—some lasting only 15 years, others continuing for hundreds of years. Look at the chart to the right to learn the names and dates of each dynasty.

The Dynasties of China

Dynasty	Dates
Shang	1700s–1122 B.C.
Zhou	1122–221 B.C.
Qin	221–206 B.C.
Han	206 B.C.–A.D. 220
Sui	A.D. 581–618
Tang	A.D. 618–907
Song	A.D. 960–1279
Yuan	A.D. 1279–1368
Ming	A.D. 1368–1644
Qing	A.D. 1644–1911

SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting a Chart

1. Which dynasty ruled China in A.D. 1?
2. Which was the last dynasty to rule China?

Mongol Rule In the A.D. 1200s, China's greatest fear came to pass—foreign invaders conquered China. In 1211, the Mongols invaded China. They were led by **Genghis Khan** and later by his grandson **Kublai Khan**. In 1279, Kublai Khan conquered China's Song (sung) Dynasty. In its place, he founded the Yuan Dynasty. He also established a capital at Ta-tu.

The Ming Dynasty Warfare eventually broke out among the Mongol leaders, weakening the Yuan Dynasty significantly. The dynasty that took over was called the Ming. Because of his great military success, Ming founder Zhu Yuanzhang (joo yoo•ahn•jang) was called the Hongwu emperor—meaning “vast military power.” In his battles, he won from the Mongols the Yunnan province. With this piece of land in his charge, he unified the region that is China today.

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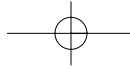
A. Making Inferences How might life in China have changed when foreigners took over?

Strange ?? but TRUE

The Tomb of Shih Huang-ti In 1974, farmers near Xi'an (shee•ahn) made a spectacular discovery. While digging a new well, their shovels hit some broken bits of pottery. Digging deeper, they found not water but a headless clay body. What they had uncovered was the tomb of China's Qin emperor Shih Huang-ti (shur•hwahng•dee)—filled with an army of about 8,000 life-sized clay soldiers and horses (shown at right).

The foot soldiers, charioteers, and archers were buried 22 centuries ago to guard the emperor in death just as his real soldiers had in life. Although the soldiers' heads and bodies are all similar, their eyes, ears, noses, lips, and hairstyles vary. Among the 8,000 soldiers, no two faces are the same.





When the Hongwu emperor died, one of his grandsons took power, naming himself the Yongle emperor—meaning “eternal contentment.” He is famous for rebuilding the Yuan capital, which he renamed Beijing (bay•jing). He ordered a huge palace complex to be constructed in the capital. This was called the Forbidden City because only the emperor, his family, and some of his officials could enter it.



The Ming Dynasty came to an end in 1644 at the hands of invaders from northeastern China, called the Manchu (MAN•choo). These attackers established China’s last dynasty, the Qing (ching), which ruled China until 1911.

Location •
The Forbidden City is the largest complex of buildings of its age in the world. ▲

Religion and Philosophy

China’s dynasties are known for particular achievements—some military, some artistic, some technological, and some spiritual. Several of the world’s most influential philosophies and religions arose during the thousands of years of Chinese history.

Confucianism Toward the end of the Zhou Dynasty, a man named Kongfuzi—later called **Confucius** (kuhn•FYOO•shuhs) by Europeans—developed a new philosophy. Confucius taught the importance of moral character and of individuals taking responsibility for the state of their society. He also taught that a ruler, like a good father, should take care of his people and be kind to them.

A VOICE FROM CHINA

If you are personally upright, things get done without any orders being given. If you are not personally upright, no one will obey even if you do give orders.

Confucius

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B. Forming and Supporting

Opinions

What do you think of

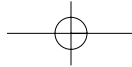
Confucius’

opinion of how a

successful ruler

should behave?

The teachings of Confucius were not widely known during his lifetime. Only after his death did his students succeed in spreading his philosophy.



The Impact of Confucianism 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 appointed officials that staff the bureaus are called bureaucrats. The Han called their bureaucracy the civil service and staffed it with scholars of Confucianism. The civil service gave the government capable officials and contributed to the stability of the culture.

Taoism The Zhou period also gave rise to **Taoism** (DOW·IHZ·uhm). This philosophy was developed in the 500s B.C. by **Lao Tzu** (low dzuh), who wrote the main Taoist book—the *Tao-te Ching* (DOW·day CHING). Lao Tzu described a force that guides the universe, though it cannot be seen or named. He called this force the *Tao*, which means “way of nature.” The greatest achievement for any person, in Taoist belief, is to find harmony with the Tao and, therefore, with nature.

Vocabulary

scholar:
specialist in a
given subject

Connections to Technology

Gunpowder One Chinese invention had an explosive impact on the world—gunpowder. The Chinese had invented the first gunpowder, called black powder, by A.D. 1000. They used it originally not in guns (which were invented in Southwest Asia in the 1300s), but in fireworks used in warfare.

By the 1300s, people in the West were using gunpowder to power weapons, such as guns and the medieval Belgian cannon shown below. By the 1600s, Europeans also began using it for more peaceful tasks like mining and road construction.



Buddhism in China During the A.D. 200s, while the Han Dynasty was beginning to collapse, 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 in China. The Chinese belief system today includes elements of all three philosophies.

Achievements of the 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 the civilizations of Asia and, through trade, Europe.

Silk The ancient Chinese were able to keep the secret of how to manufacture silk from foreigners for centuries, although others did eventually learn the Chinese method.



Culture •
This statue
shows Taoism's
founder, Lao
Tzu. ▲



As long as no one else understood the process, however, China earned all the profits of the silk trade. Caravans carried the precious fabric for thousands of miles to cities in Europe and Southwest Asia, along a trade route named for the fabric—the Silk Road.

The Silk Road The first records of travel and trade along the Silk Road date to the Han Dynasty, around 114 B.C. On the map below, you can see the route of the 4,000-mile long Silk Road. Along it, the Chinese carried not only silk but also much-desired items such as porcelain, tea, incense, and spices. Travelers on the Silk Road faced many natural hazards—extreme heat, lack of water, sandstorms in the desert, and blizzards and altitude sickness in the mountains. Also, robbers lurked on the trade routes. Nevertheless, the Silk Road stayed in use until sea routes to Asia proved safer and until the Ming Dynasty decided to limit foreign trade.

Movement • Porcelain was an important trade item that the Chinese carried along the Silk Road. ▼



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C. Clarifying If the Silk Road was so dangerous, why did the Chinese continue to use it?

Vocabulary

kiln:
high-temperature oven used to bake clay until it hardens

Porcelain People often refer to fine pottery as china. The term actually refers to porcelain, a delicate but strong type of ceramic that the Chinese made from a kind of clay called kaolin (KAY•uh•lin). When fired in a kiln, the clay changes into a hard, glassy substance. As with silk, the Chinese kept the method for producing porcelain secret for many years after its invention during the Tang Dynasty.

The Route of the Ancient Silk Road



GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting a Map

- 1. Location •** What city was at the easternmost point of the Silk Road?
- 2. Movement •** How did goods travel to Rome from western points on the Silk Road?



Culture • Chinese characters like these are drawn with brushes dipped in ink. ▲

Writing During the Shang Dynasty, the Chinese developed a written language. As in cuneiform, the Chinese system at first used pictograms to represent objects or ideas. Later, they simplified the pictograms 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 compound graphs—two or more characters used together. Both the Japanese and Koreans use Chinese characters in their writing systems.

The Great Builders The ancient Chinese built large construction projects like the Great Wall. Many emperors ordered the building of canals. The most important of these was the Grand Canal, which allowed grain from fertile river valleys to be carried more easily to the cities. Construction began on the first segment of the canal in the 600s B.C. Today, it extends for more than 1,000 miles to connect the northern city of Beijing with the southern city of Hangzhou (hahng-joh).



The Longest Wall Stretching for about 4,000 miles across northern China, the Great Wall is the world's longest structure. Construction began in the 600s B.C. with a number of fortified walls to keep out invaders. Later, a series of emperors ordered the walls to be connected. In the 1400s, damaged sections were rebuilt and new portions were added, giving the Great Wall its present form.

Building the Great Wall required the labor of thousands of workers using pounded earth, bricks, and stones. When the wall was finished, over a million soldiers stood guard in its watchtowers. Today, tourists from around the world come to see the Great Wall, which symbolizes China's long history. (See photograph on pages 456–457.)

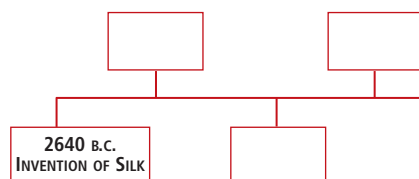
SECTION 2 ASSESSMENT

Terms & Names

1. Identify: (a) dynasty (b) Genghis Khan (c) Kublai Khan (d) Confucius
(e) bureaucracy (f) Taoism (g) Lao Tzu

Taking Notes

2. Make a time line like the one below to show the dates of Chinese inventions.



Main Ideas

3. (a) How did the Chinese incorporate Confucianism into their government?
(b) Why did the Chinese try to keep their process for making silk secret?
(c) In the Chinese writing system, what do characters stand for?

Critical Thinking

4. Drawing Conclusions

More than just goods for trade traveled along the Silk Road. What else did the Silk Road bring to the people living along it?

Think About

- ♦ the different cultures that existed along the Silk Road
- ♦ the people and ideas that traveled along the Silk Road

ACTIVITY -OPTION-

Imagine you lived in ancient China. Write a **journal entry** describing your experience with one of the religions that developed in China.