

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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## **General Introduction to Ancient China**

### **China's Geography**

China's geography divides this vast country into many separate areas. For example, the southwestern part of China includes the Himalayas, the highest mountains in the world. The massive Gobi desert lies in the north. These and other landforms kept China isolated from the rest of the world for thousands of years. They also made travel and communication difficult within China. Although mountains and deserts divided China, rivers help link many areas within the country. For example, farmers used rivers to send crops to ports on the Pacific Ocean.

How did geography isolate ancient China from the rest of the world?

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### **Prehistoric Cultures**

By 10,000 B.C.E., a group of Neolithic people called the Yangshao had settled in north central China. They chose a place where one of China's major rivers, the Huang He, meets another river, the Wei. Archaeologists have discovered remains of Yangshao houses. They had plastered floors, and their roofs were held up by wooden posts.

A second Neolithic culture, the Lungshan, began in northeast China about 3,000 B.C.E. The Lungshan harvested silk from silkworms, wove fabric, made pottery, and used simple written symbols. In order to farm near the river, they had to work together on flood control and irrigation projects.

What were some achievements of China's Neolithic river cultures, the Yangshao and the Lungshan?

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## **The Shang Dynasty**

The Shang dynasty ruled China for over 700 years. During this time, most Shang people lived in farming villages, worked in the fields, and tried to control the flooding rivers. Rulers, priests, and warriors lived in cities surrounded by huge earth walls. Skilled craftsmen lived in neighborhoods outside the walls. In 1600 B.C.E., Shang craftsmen discovered how to make bronze, a strong metal made by mixing tin and copper. The Shang believed that the spirits of their ancestors controlled their lives. Shang kings used oracle bones to ask their ancestors questions about the future. The questions carved on these animal bones are the earliest known examples of Chinese writing.

How did the Shang people live, and how did their religious beliefs affect their lives?

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## **The Zhou Dynasty**

The Zhou were farmers who lived in the Wei valley. In 1122 B.C.E., the Zhou overthrew the Shang. This began the Zhou dynasty, the longest dynasty in China's history. Zhou kings ruled China under a system called feudalism. Under the feudal systems, nobles owned the land. A noble's land consisted of a walled town and the farms around it. Peasants paid the nobles so they could farm the land. In turn, the nobles paid the king and sent soldiers to help him in times of war.

During the Zhou period, teachers taught the people to read and write using pictures, or characters, to stand for words. So even though people across China spoke different dialects, they could communicate with each other through writing.

In what ways were the Zhou walled cities like small countries?

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## **An Age of Change**

Over time, Chinese nobles and their armies gained power. In 771 B.C.E., powerful nobles invaded the Zhou capital, drove out its leaders, and became China's rulers. This was a time of unrest and great confusion.

Many great thinkers wanted to restore order to Chinese society. They tried to persuade the Chinese people and their rulers to accept their teachings and their view of how China should be ruled. One of the greatest thinkers of this time was Confucius. Even today, Chinese people follow his teachings.

Why did the Zhou kings lose their power, and who controlled China after them?

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## **Confucius the Teacher**

Confucius lived from 551 B.C.E. to 479 B.C.E. His family belonged to the nobility, although they were poor. Confucius studied hard and became one of the world's most successful teachers. His ideas, a code of behavior, are known as Confucianism. Here are some of his basic teachings:

- ❖ Kindness and goodness are very important.
- ❖ The foundation for every relationship, especially in families, should be sincerity, loyalty, and respect.
- ❖ If rulers are wise and good, then the people will also be wise and good.
- ❖ Government officials must earn their positions through education.

One hundred years after Confucius died, a follower, Mencius, spread the ideas of Confucianism throughout the country.

What are some basic teachings of Confucianism?

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## Opponents of Confucianism

In the last days of the Zhou dynasty, scholars, or educated people, argued about how the people should behave and how rulers should behave and how rulers should govern. Not all scholars supported the ideas and teachings of Confucianism. For example, one group, the Moists, believed that equal love for all people would bring peace. They believed that men of learning should be the rulers, not just guides for the rulers. Another group, the Legalists, believed that people were bad and needed to have strict laws and harsh punishments. They believed that rulers needed to forget the past and be powerful, rather than just good. A third group, the Daoists, believed that people should live a simple, thoughtful life in harmony with nature. They had little interest in politics or government.

In what ways did each of these groups – Moists, Legalists, and Daoists – disagree with Confucius?

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## Two Schools of Chinese Thought

	<b>Confucianism</b>	<b>Legalism</b>
<b>Goal</b>	Virtuous conduct, peaceful society	All power in the hands of the ruler
<b>Government</b>	Rule by good example	Rule by law, including rewards and punishments
<b>Emphasis</b>	The past	The present

## The Qin Dynasty

The feudal state of Qin defeated the last Zhou ruler in 256 B.C.E. Twenty-five years later, the king of Qin led his state to victory over all other rulers and named himself Qin Shihuangdi – “first emperor of Qin”. Qin Shihuangdi set out to bring all the warring states together. He divided his empire into 36 areas, called provinces, and divided each province into districts. Qin Shihuangdi appointed a governor and a defender for each province. They reported directly to him. Qin also set up a system of rewards and punishments. As a result, the emperor strengthened his control and had the power to make great changes in his empire.

What did Qin Shihuangdi hope to accomplish by appointing governors to rule the provinces?

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## **The Legacy of Qin**

To strengthen his control and unify his empire, Qin Shihuangdi made many changes to the Chinese systems. His new system would be used in China for centuries. It included the following changes:

- ❖ He set up a bureaucracy in which workers are appointed and trained for their jobs.
- ❖ He headed the bureaucracy and appointed three officials to hold the highest government and military positions.
- ❖ He made all measurements and money the same across the empire.
- ❖ He standardized the written characters so everyone could communicate.
- ❖ He took land away from the nobles, enabling any man to own land.
- ❖ He ordered the censorship of ideas and the burning of books that did not agree with him.
- ❖ He built the Great Wall of China to keep the peasants in and enemy invaders out.

What are three things that Qin Shihuangdi standardized, and how did each change affect China?

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## **Revival of Confucianism**

As a legalist, Qin Shihuangdi ruled harshly, and a few years after his death, the soldiers and peasants overthrew the Qin dynasty. This marked the beginning of the creative and scientific Han dynasty, whose rulers were in power from 206 B.C.E. to C.E. 220. Confucianism became popular again as the Han dynasty combined a strong ruler and strict law ideas of Legalism with the Confucian ideas of ruling with good example and not with punishment. Although the ideas of Legalism and Confucianism may seem opposite, the rulers of the Han dynasty understood Yin and Yang, the idea that opposites depend on each other, and that like day and night, opposites take turns.

How did the Han and Qin governments differ?

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### **Daily Life in the Empire**

Much like today, most of the Han Chinese people were farmers. Han farmers worked the fields together and lived in mud houses arranged in villages. Wealthy farmers had strong oxen to pull their carts and iron-tipped plows, and they watered their fields using simple machines. Poor farmers had no oxen, used wooden hand tools, and watered their fields by carrying buckets of water. Farmers in the north ate wheat and millet, while farmers in the south ate rice. They cooked their meals in a boxlike stove or steamed it over boiling water.

Rich and poor lived in the cities, which were centers of government, education, trade, and entertainment. The poor lived in houses that were close together. The rich lived in huge houses that were decorated with rugs and draperies.

How were the lives of China's wealthy farmers different from the lives of poor farmers?

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### **Achievements of the Han Dynasty**

The Han dynasty marked the beginning of expansion and creativity. Emperor Wudi's armies expanded the empire by capturing lands to the south and crossing the Great Wall to the north. In 139 B.C.E., Wudi sent out the explorer Zhang Qian. He returned 10 years later with tales of Western riches and wonder. It was China's first hint that a civilized world lay beyond its borders, and it was the beginning of the trade route known as the Silk Road.

Han rulers kept their lands closed to outsiders. To do this, they used middlemen from neighboring countries to do their trading with other countries. They kept their achievements secret, such as the inventions of the seismograph, paper, and the medical practice of acupuncture. During the Han dynasty, Chinese engineers developed salt mining, and Chinese artisans worked with bronze and gold and they glazed pottery. Han dynasty writers wrote books on mathematics, medicine, poetry, history, and assembled the first Chinese dictionary.

What were some of China's greatest achievements under the Han dynasty?

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### **Important Vocabulary**

- 1.) Oracle
- 2.) Ancestors
- 3.) Feudalism
- 4.) Dialects
- 5.) Confucianism
- 6.) Nobility
- 7.) Provinces
- 8.) Bureaucracy
- 9.) Censorship
- 10.) Middlemen
- 11.) Seismograph