



Early Chinese Civilizations

GUIDE TO READING

The BIG Idea

Ideas, Beliefs, and Values China developed unique philosophies, political theories, and products.

Content Vocabulary

- aristocracy (p. 86)
- Mandate of Heaven (p. 87)
- Dao (p. 87)
- filial piety (p. 89)
- pictographs (p. 90)
- ideographs (p. 90)
- Confucianism (p. 90)
- Daoism (p. 93)
- Legalism (p. 93)

Academic Vocabulary

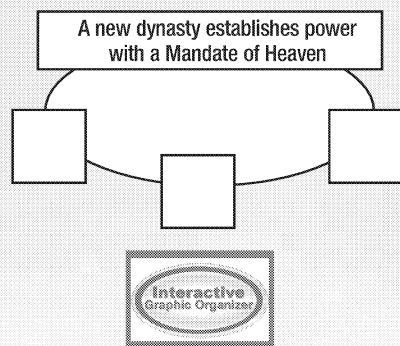
- cycle (p. 88)
- philosophy (p. 90)
- ethical (p. 90)

People and Places

- Huang He (p. 84)
- Chang Jiang (p. 84)
- Confucius (p. 90)
- Laozi (p. 93)

Reading Strategy

Classifying Information As you read this section, create a diagram like the one below that illustrates the dynastic cycle.



As in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Indus Valley, China's early civilizations followed the spread of agriculture along the river valleys. Most of the rivers in China flow east to the Pacific Ocean, which meant China's civilizations developed near the east coast. The mountains to the west and the deserts to the north further isolated China from outside influences.

The Impact of Geography

MAIN IDEA China's physical geography influenced the location of its early civilizations.

HISTORY & YOU Would you rather live near the ocean or the mountains? Learn how China's geography shaped its development.

Dating back more than six thousand years, China has one of the world's oldest cultures. China also has the largest population of any nation and is made up of more than 50 ethnic groups, speaking several languages and many dialects. The diversity of its people reflects the diversity of its land and climate.

Rivers and Mountains

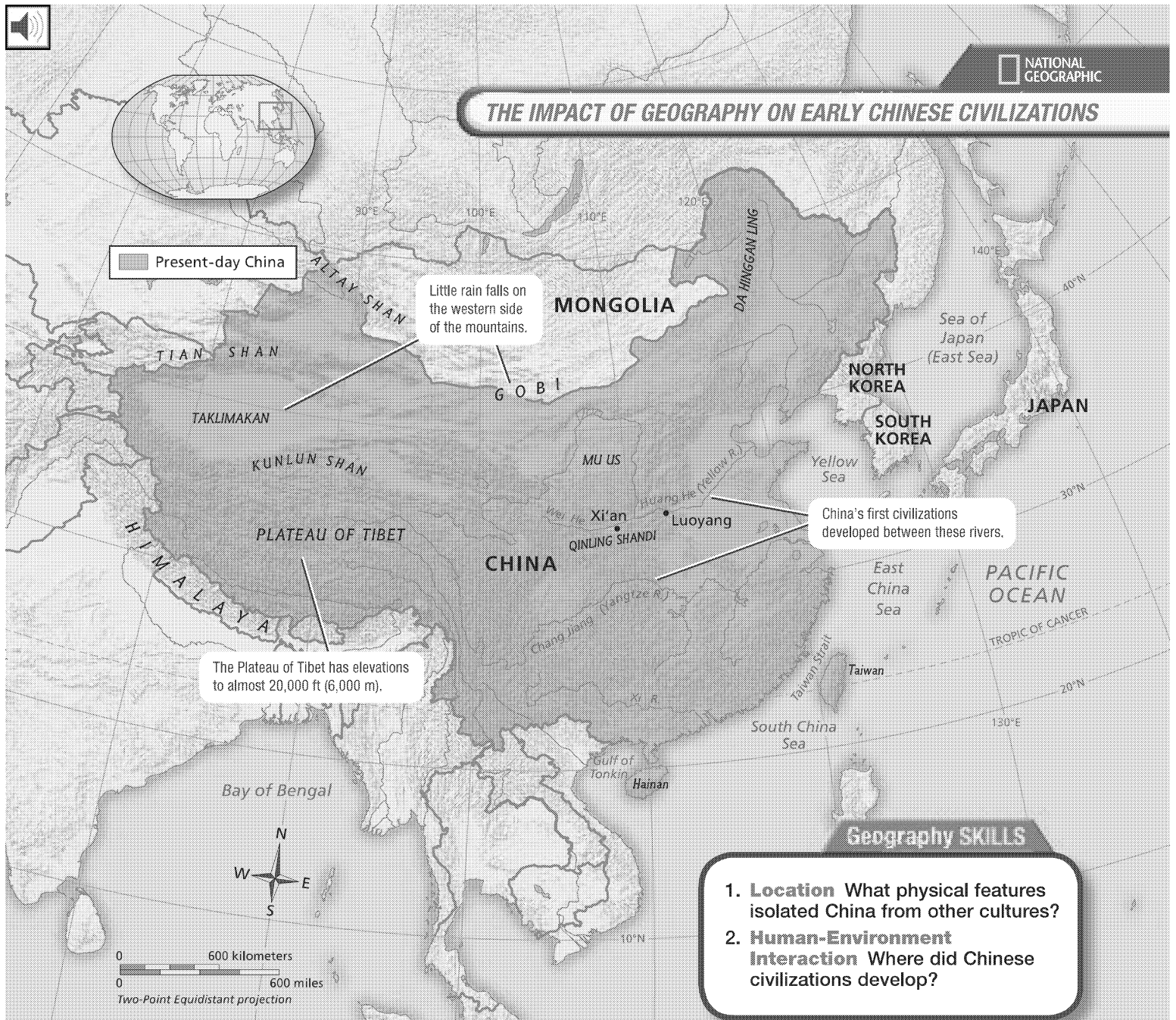
The **Huang He** (HWAHNG•HUH), or Yellow River, stretches across China for more than 2,900 miles (4,666 km), carrying its rich yellow silt all the way from Mongolia to the Pacific Ocean. The **Chang Jiang** (CHAHNG•JYAHNG), or Yangtze River, is even longer, flowing for about 3,400 miles (5,470 km) across central China before emptying into the Yellow Sea. The densely cultivated valleys of these two rivers began to emerge as one of the great food-producing areas of the ancient world.

China, however, is not just a land of fertile fields. In fact, only 10 percent of the total land area is suitable for farming, compared with 19 percent of the United States. Much of the rest of the land in China consists of mountains and deserts that ring the country on its northern and western frontiers.

This forbidding landscape is a dominant feature of Chinese life and has played an important role in Chinese history. Geographical barriers—mountains and deserts—isolated the Chinese people from peoples in other parts of Asia. In the frontier regions created by these barriers lived peoples of Mongolian, Indo-European, and Turkish backgrounds. The contacts of these groups with the Chinese were often marked by conflict. The northern frontier of China became one of the areas of conflict in Asia as Chinese armies tried to protect their precious farmlands.



THE IMPACT OF GEOGRAPHY ON EARLY CHINESE CIVILIZATIONS



Climate

China's climates vary from region to region based on the elevation and the monsoons. In winter, monsoons blowing from the mountainous regions are cold and dry. In summer, the monsoons blow from the south across the seas, bringing rain.

The dry season alternating with wet monsoons creates significant temperature differences in winter and summer. The Chang Jiang serves as a dividing line between the northern region and the southern region of the country.

In the north, winters are long and cold, but the short summers are sunny and hot. In the center of the country, along the Chang Jiang, there are four seasons, including hot summers and cold winters. The warmest temperatures year round are in the south, which has a subtropical climate with hot summers and mild winters.

✓ Reading Check **Describing** What isolated the Chinese people from peoples in other parts of Asia?



The Shang Dynasty

MAIN IDEA Oracle bones, bronzes, and excavations tell about life during the Shang dynasty.

HISTORY & YOU How do we show respect for our deceased family members? Learn about ancestor worship in Shang China.

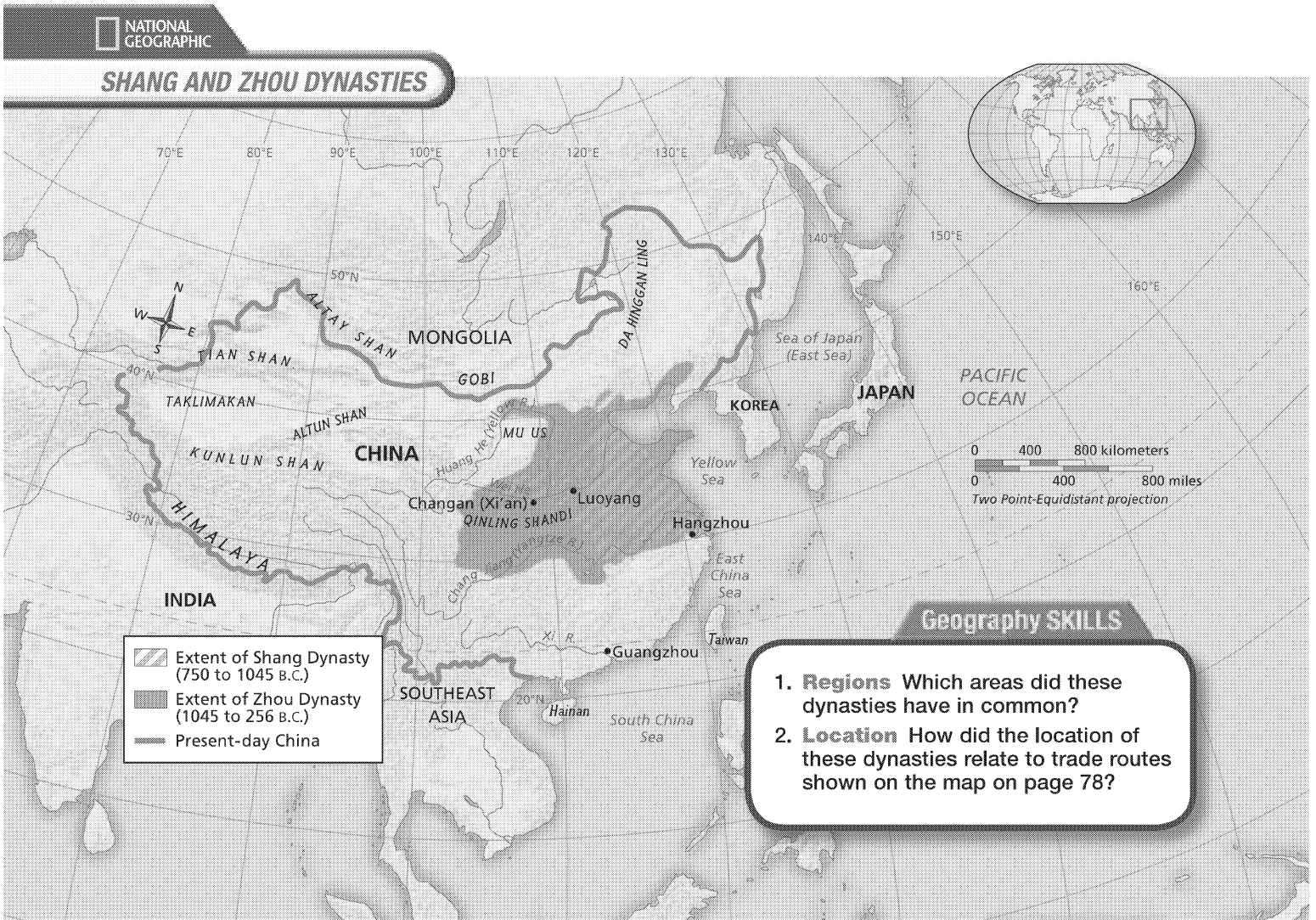
Historians of China have traditionally dated the beginning of Chinese civilization to the founding of the Xia (SHYAH) dynasty over four thousand years ago. Little is known about this dynasty, which was replaced by a second dynasty, the Shang.

China under the Shang dynasty (about 1750 to 1045 B.C.) was primarily a farming society ruled by an **aristocracy** whose major concern was war. An aristocracy is an upper class whose wealth is based on land and whose power is passed from one generation to another.

Archaeologists have found evidence of impressive cities in Shang China. Shang kings may have had five different capital cities before settling Anyang (AHN•YAHNG), just north of the Huang He in north-central China. Excavations reveal huge city walls, royal palaces, and large royal tombs.

Political and Social Structures

The Shang king ruled from the capital city Anyang. His realm was divided into territories governed by aristocratic military leaders, called warlords, but the king had the power to choose these leaders and could also remove them. The king was also responsible for defending the realm and controlled large armies, which often fought on the fringes of the kingdom. The king's importance is evident in the ritual sacrifices undertaken at his death. Like rulers in Mesopotamia and Egypt, early Chinese kings were buried in royal tombs accompanied by the corpses of their faithful servants.





The royal family occupied the top of Shang society; the aristocracy came next. The aristocrats not only waged war and served as officials but also were the chief landowners. The majority of people were peasants who farmed the aristocracy's land. In addition to the aristocrats and peasants, Shang society also included a small number of merchants and artisans, as well as slaves.

Religion and Culture

The Chinese believed in supernatural forces from which the rulers could obtain help in worldly affairs. To communicate with the gods, the priest made use of oracle bones. These were bones on which priests scratched questions asked by the rulers, such as: Will the king be victorious in battle? Will the king recover from his illness? Heated metal rods were then stuck into the bones, causing them to crack. The priests interpreted the shapes of the cracks as answers from the gods. The priests recorded the answers and stored the bones. The inscriptions on the bones are a valuable source of information about the Shang period.

Remains of human sacrifices found in royal tombs are evidence of human efforts to win the favor of the gods. The early Chinese believed in life after death. From this belief came the veneration of ancestors commonly known in the West as "ancestor worship." The practice of burning replicas—exact copies—of physical objects to accompany the dead on their journey to the next world continues to this day in many Chinese communities. The early Chinese believed it was important to treat the spirits of their ancestors well because the spirits could bring good or bad fortune to the living family members.

The Shang are perhaps best remembered for the mastery of bronze casting. Bronze vessels, used in ceremonies, have been found in tombs throughout the Shang kingdom. More than ten thousand bronze objects survive and are among the most admired creations of Chinese art.

✓ Reading Check **Identifying** How did the Shang rulers communicate with the gods?

The Zhou Dynasty

MAIN IDEA The concept of the Mandate of Heaven began with the Zhou dynasty.

HISTORY & YOU What are your government's responsibilities? Read about the Chinese theory of effective government.

According to legend, the last of the Shang rulers was a wicked tyrant who swam in "ponds of wine" and ordered the writing of music that "ruined the morale of the nation." This led the ruler of the state of Zhou (JOH) to revolt against the Shang and establish a new dynasty. The Zhou dynasty, the longest-lasting dynasty in Chinese history, ruled for almost eight hundred years (1045 to 256 B.C.)

Political Structure

The Zhou dynasty continued the political system of the rulers it had overthrown. At the head of the government was the Zhou king, who was served by an increasingly large and complex bureaucracy. The Zhou dynasty continued the Shang practice of dividing the kingdom into territories governed by officials. The officials of these territories were members of the aristocracy. They were appointed by the king and were subject to his authority. Like the Shang rulers, the Zhou king was in charge of defense and commanded armies throughout the country.

The Zhou dynasty claimed that it ruled China because it possessed the **Mandate of Heaven**. It was believed that Heaven—which was an impersonal law of nature—kept order in the universe through the Zhou king. The king was the link between Heaven and Earth. Thus, the king ruled by a mandate, or authority to command, from Heaven. The concept of the heavenly mandate became a basic principle of Chinese government.

The Mandate of Heaven, however, was double-edged. The king, who was chosen to rule because of his talent and virtue, was then responsible for ruling the people with goodness and efficiency. The king was expected to rule according to the proper "Way," called the **Dao** (DOW). It was his duty to keep the gods pleased. This would



protect the people from natural disaster or a bad harvest. If the king failed to rule effectively, he could be overthrown and replaced by a new ruler.

This theory has political side effects. It sets forth a “right of revolution” to overthrow a corrupt ruler. It also makes clear that the king, though serving as a representative of Heaven, is not a divine being himself. In practice, each founder of a new dynasty would say he had earned the Mandate of Heaven. Who could disprove it except by overthrowing the king? The saying, “He who wins is the king; he who loses is the rebel,” sums up this view.

The Mandate of Heaven was closely tied to the pattern of dynastic **cycles**. From the beginning of Chinese history to A.D. 1912,

China was ruled by a series of dynasties, which all went through a cycle of change. A new dynasty established its power, ruled successfully for many years, and then began to decline. The government lost power, giving rise to rebellions or invasion. When a new dynasty took over, the cycle began again.

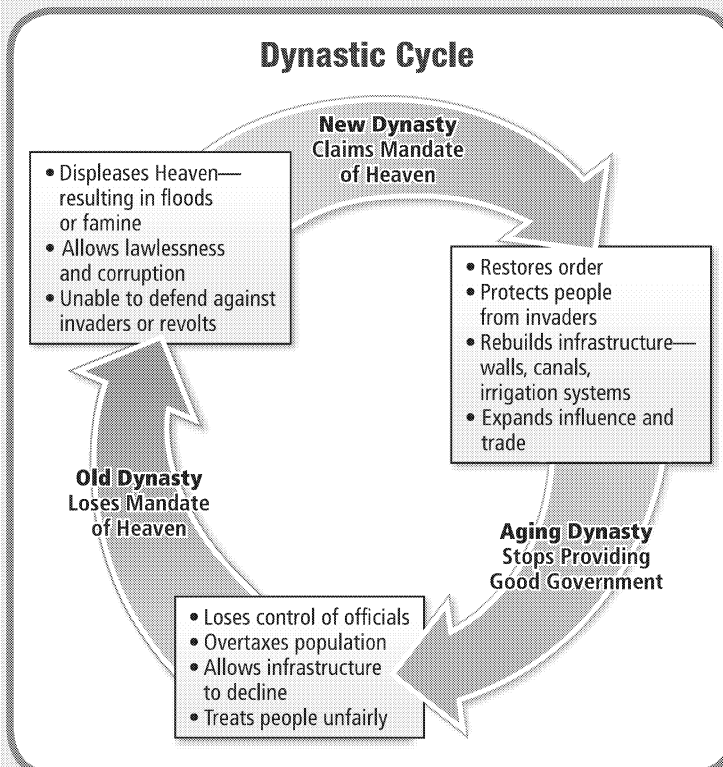
The Fall of the Zhou Dynasty

After almost eight hundred years, the Zhou dynasty collapsed. For centuries, the dynasty ruled wisely and efficiently, but later Zhou rule declined intellectually and morally. The Zhou kingdom had been divided into several small territories, some of which evolved into powerful states that challenged

INFOGRAPHICS PRIMARY SOURCE

Dynastic Cycles and the Mandate of Heaven

When the Zhou overthrew the Shang dynasty, they explained their right to rule as a Mandate of Heaven. Dynasties that abused their power lost the Mandate of Heaven. The Mandate passed to another family who overthrew the old dynasty and established a new one.



Early Dynasties of China

DYNASTY	DATES	ACCOMPLISHMENTS
Shang	1750–1045 B.C.	First dynasty, writing, ancestor worship, bronze
Zhou	1045–256 B.C.	Classical arts, silk discovered, Daoism and Confucianism
Qin	221–206 B.C.	China united, measurements and writing standardized
Han	202 B.C.–A.D. 220	Silk Road, civil service, paper invented, Buddhism

Analyzing VISUALS

1. **Recognizing Bias** Why did the Zhou dynasty develop the concept of the Mandate of Heaven?
2. **Theorizing** Why do you think each of the dynasties came to an end?



the Zhou ruler. In 403 B.C., civil war broke out, beginning an age known in Chinese history as the Period of the Warring States.

By this time, warfare had also changed in China. Iron weapons, more powerful than bronze weapons, came into use. Foot soldiers, or infantry, and soldiers on horseback, or cavalry, made their appearance. The cavalry was armed with the powerful crossbow, a Chinese invention of the seventh century B.C. Eventually, one of the warring states—the Qin (CHIHN)—took control. The Qin created a new dynasty in 221 B.C.

Social Structure

During the Zhou dynasty, the basic features of Chinese economic and social life began to take shape. The Zhou continued the pattern of land ownership that had existed under the Shang. The peasants worked on lands owned by their lord. Each peasant family farmed an outer plot for its own use and then joined with other families to work the inner one for their lord.

A class of artisans and merchants lived in walled towns under the direct control of the local lord. Merchants did not operate freely but were considered the property of the local lord. There was also a slave class.

Trade in this period involved the exchange of local products that were used on an everyday basis. Eventually, trade increased to include goods brought in from distant regions. Among these goods were salt, iron, cloth, and various luxury items.

Few social institutions have been as closely identified with China as the family. As in most agricultural societies, in ancient China the family served as the basic economic and social unit. However, the family there took on an almost sacred quality as a symbol of the entire social order. What explains the importance of the family in ancient China?

Certainly, the need to work together on the land was a significant factor. The Zhou continued the pattern of land ownership that had existed under the Shang. The peasants worked on lands owned by their lord, but they also had land of their own,

which they farmed for their own use. In ancient times, farming required the work of many people. Children were essential to the family because they worked in the fields. Later, sons were expected to take over the physical labor on the family plots and provide for their parents.

At the heart of the concept of family in China was the idea of **filial piety**. *Filial* refers to a son or daughter. *Filial piety*, then, refers to the duty of members of the family to subordinate their needs and desires to those of the male head of the family. More broadly, the term describes a system in which every family member had his or her place. This concept is important in Confucianism, as you will see later in this section.

Male supremacy was a key element in the social system of China, as it was in the other civilizations of the time. The male was responsible for providing food for his family. In ancient China, men worked the fields and were the warriors, scholars, and government ministers. Women raised the children and worked in the home.

Although women did not hold positions of authority, some did influence politics. This was especially true at the royal court, where female members of the royal family played a part in court affairs. These activities were clearly looked down upon by males, as this Chinese poem indicates:

PRIMARY SOURCE

"A clever man builds a city,
A clever woman lays one low;
With all her qualifications, that clever woman
is but an ill-omened bird."

—Herbert A. Giles, *A History of Chinese Literature*

Zhou Accomplishments

The period from the sixth to the third centuries B.C. was an age of significant economic growth and technological change, especially in farming. For thousands of years, farmers had depended on rainfall to water crops such as rice and millet. By the sixth century B.C., irrigation was in wide use. Large-scale water projects were set in motion to control the flow of rivers and spread water evenly to the fields.



Changes in farming methods also increased food production. By the mid-sixth century B.C., the use of iron led to the development of iron plowshares to plow land that had not been farmed previously. This increased the land available for growing crops. Because of advances in farming tools and practices, China's population rose as high as fifty million people during the late Zhou period.

Improved farming methods were also a major factor in encouraging the growth of trade and manufacturing. One of the most important items of trade in ancient China was silk. Chinese silk fragments from the period have been found throughout central Asia and as far away as Athens, Greece—clear indications of a far-reaching trade network.

Perhaps the most important cultural contribution of ancient China to later Chinese society was the creation and development of the Chinese written language. By Shang times, the Chinese had developed a simple script that is the ancestor of the highly complex written language of today.

Like many other ancient languages, it was primarily pictographic and ideographic in form. **Pictographs** are picture symbols, or characters, which represent an object. For example, the Chinese characters for mountain 山, sun 日, and moon 月 were meant to represent the objects themselves. **Ideographs** are characters that combine two or more pictographs to represent an idea. For example, the word *east* 東 symbolizes the sun coming up behind the trees.

There was a sound associated with each Chinese character when a speaker read it aloud. In other cultures, people eventually stopped using pictographs and ideographs and adopted phonetic symbols representing speech sounds, such as the Roman alphabet. The Chinese, too, eventually began to attach phonetic meaning to some of their symbols. However, although the Chinese language has evolved continuously over a period of four thousand years, it has never entirely abandoned its original format.

✓ Reading Check **Describing** What is the pattern of dynastic cycles?

Chinese Philosophy

MAIN IDEA Chinese philosophers emphasized stability and order in society.

HISTORY & YOU What does our society value? Learn how Chinese philosophy influenced societal values.

Between 500 and 200 B.C., toward the end of the Zhou dynasty, three major schools of thought about the nature of human beings and the universe emerged in China—Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism. While Hindus and Buddhists focused on freeing the human soul from the cycle of rebirth, Chinese philosophers were more concerned about the material world and creating a stable society.

Confucianism

Confucius was known to the Chinese as the First Teacher. *Confucius* is the westernized form of Kongfuzi [KUNG•FOO•DZUH], meaning “Master Kung,” as he was called by his followers. Confucius was born in 551 B.C. He hoped to get a job as a political adviser, but he had little success in finding a patron.

Upset by the violence and moral decay of his era, Confucius traveled around China in an attempt to persuade political leaders to follow his ideas. Few listened at the time, but a faithful band of followers revered him as a great teacher, recorded his sayings in the *Analects*, and spread his message. Until the twentieth century, almost every Chinese pupil studied his sayings, making **Confucianism**, or the system of Confucian ideas, an important part of Chinese culture.

Confucius lived in a chaotic time characterized by unceasing warfare and mass executions of men, women, and children by beheading. China was faced with restoring order. Confucius provided a set of ideas that eventually became widely accepted.

Confucius's interest in **philosophy** was political and **ethical**, not spiritual. He believed that it was useless to speculate on spiritual questions. It was better to assume that there was an order in the universe. If



humans would act in harmony with the universe, their own affairs would prosper.

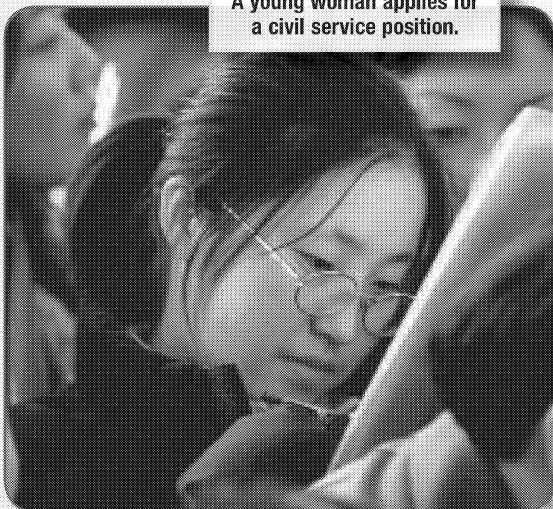
Two elements stand out in the Confucian view of the Dao (Way): duty and humanity. The concept of duty meant that people had to subordinate their own interests to the broader needs of the family and the community. Everyone should be governed by the Five Constant Relationships: parent and child, husband and wife, older sibling and younger sibling, older friend and younger friend, and ruler and subject. Each person had a duty to the other. Parents should be loving, and children should revere their parents. Husbands should ful-

fill their duties, and wives should be obedient. The elder sibling should be kind, and the younger sibling respectful. The older friend should be considerate, and the younger friend deferential. Rulers should be benevolent, and subjects loyal. Showing the importance of family, Confucius said: "The duty of children to their parents is the foundation from which all virtues spring." The Confucian concept of duty is often expressed in the form of a "work ethic." If each individual worked hard to fulfill his or her duties, then the affairs of society as a whole would prosper as well.

TURNING POINT

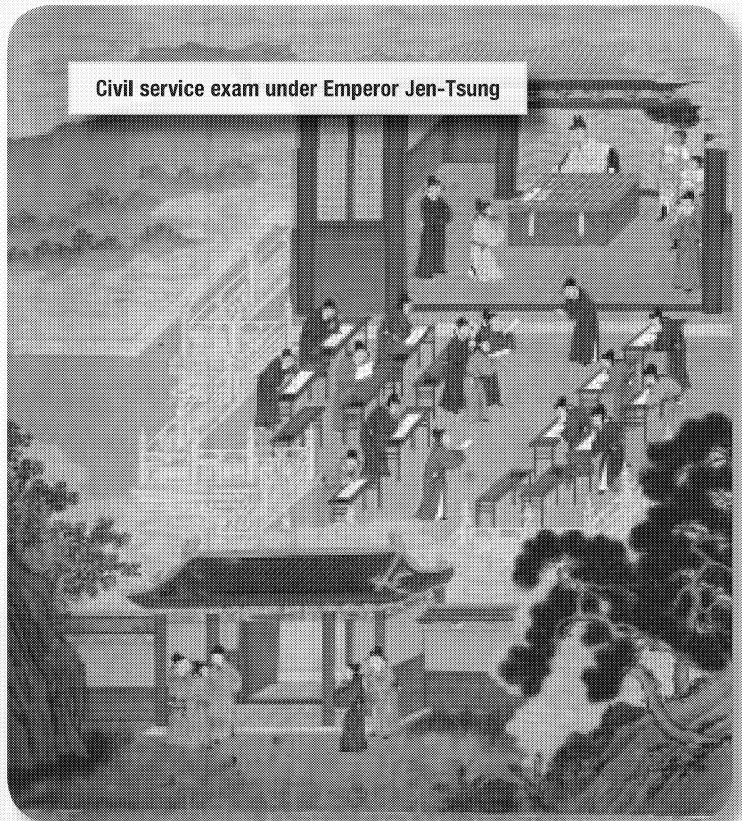
Confucius equated education with public service and virtue. He taught that rulers should be devoted to the welfare of the people and that government officials should earn their positions through education and talent—merit. Merit-based civil service became official during the Qin dynasty and later included written examinations. Although there were periods of corruption in the 1300-year history of the exams, testing made it possible for any male adult, regardless of social status or wealth, to become a high-ranking public official. Eventually, the Chinese civil service influenced the development of European and American systems.

A young woman applies for a civil service position.



THE RULE OF MERIT

Civil service exam under Emperor Jen-Tsung



CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

1. **Making Inferences** What are some differences between ancient and modern civil service exams?
2. **Drawing Conclusions** Is the civil service still important in China today?



As Confucius stated, “If there is righteousness in the heart, there will be beauty in the character. If there is beauty in the character, there will be harmony in the home. If there be harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation. If there be order in the nation, there will be peace in the world.”

Above all, the ruler must set a good example. If the king followed the path of goodness, then subjects would respect him, and society would prosper. Confucius said, “Let the ruler be filial and kind to all people; then they will be faithful to him. Let him advance the good and teach the incompetent; then they will eagerly seek to be virtuous.”

The second key element in the Confucian view of the Dao is humanity—compassion and empathy for others. Confucius said, “Do not do unto others what you would not wish done to yourself.” Confucius urged people to “measure the feelings of others by one’s own,” for “within the four seas all men are brothers.” After his death in 479 B.C., his message spread widely throughout China.

Confucius was a harsh critic of his own times. He stressed a return to the values of the Golden Age of the early Zhou dynasty. Confucius saw it as an age of perfection. “When the Great Way was practiced, the world was shared by all alike.”

Confucius, however, was not just living in the past. Many of his key ideas looked forward. Perhaps his most significant political idea was that the government service should not be limited to those of noble birth but should be open to all men of superior talent. This concept of rule by merit was not popular with the aristocrats who held political offices based on their noble birth. Although Confucius’s ideas did not have much effect in his lifetime, they opened the door to a new idea of statecraft that would later be put into widespread use.

Daoism

Daoism was a system of ideas based on the teachings of **Laozi** (LOW•DZUH). According to tradition, Laozi, or the Old Master, lived around the same time period as Confucius.

CONNECTING TO THE UNITED STATES

CIVIL SERVICE REFORM

By 1881, the number of people who wanted presidential appointments to jobs had gotten out of hand. That year a disappointed office seeker shot President Garfield. Public anger over Garfield’s assassination led to the passage of the Civil Service Act of 1883. Civil service reform made competitive examination, not politics, the basis for filling federal jobs. In 1978, President James Carter established the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, which administers a nationwide merit system for federal employees including recruitment, examination, and training programs.

Assassination attempt on President James Garfield



1. **Contrasting** What is the difference between the Chinese and the American reasons for adopting civil service examinations?
2. **Making Inferences** Why was it difficult to pass civil service reform laws?