

Ancient Civilizations of Asia—China

Section 1



MAIN IDEAS

1. Chinese civilization began along two rivers.
2. The Shang dynasty was the first known dynasty to rule China.
3. The Zhou and Qin dynasties changed Chinese society and made great advances.

Key Terms and Places

Chang Jiang a river in China

Huang He a river in China

mandate of heaven the idea that heaven chose China's ruler and gave him or her power

Xi'an present name of the capital city of the Qin dynasty

Great Wall a barrier that linked earlier walls that stood near China's northern border

Section Summary

CHINESE CIVILIZATION BEGINS

Like other ancient peoples, people in China first settled along rivers. By 7000 BC farmers grew rice in the **Chang Jiang** Valley. Along the **Huang He**, they grew millet and wheat. Some villages along the Huang He grew into large towns. Many artifacts were left in these towns, including pottery and tools. As Chinese culture became more advanced, people started to use potter's wheels and dig wells for water. Population continued to grow and villages spread into northern and southeastern China.

Where did the Chinese first grow rice?

SHANG DYNASTY

Societies along the Huang He grew larger and more complex. The first dynasty for which we have clear evidence is the Shang. It was firmly established by the 1500s BC. The Shang made many advances, including China's first writing system. The Chinese symbols that are used today are based on those of the Shang period.

Which dynasty provided the basis for China's writing system?

Section 1, continued

Shang artisans made beautiful bronze containers for cooking and religious ceremonies. They also made ornaments, knives, and axes from jade. Shang astrologers developed a calendar based on the cycles of the moon.

ZHOU AND QIN DYNASTIES

The Zhou overthrew the Shang dynasty during the 1100s BC. The Zhou believed in the **mandate of heaven**, or the idea that they had been chosen by heaven to rule China. A new political order was established under the Zhou, with the emperor granting lands to lords in return for loyalty and military assistance. Peasants were below the lords, and owned little land. In 771 BC, the emperor was overthrown and China broke apart into many kingdoms, entering an era called the Warring States period.

The Warring States period ended when one state, the Qin, defeated the other states. In 221 BC the Qin king was able to unify China. He gave himself the title Shi Huangdi, which means “first emperor.”

Shi Huangdi greatly expanded the size of China. He took land away from the lords and forced noble families to move to his capital, present-day **Xi’an**. Qin rule brought other changes to China. Shi Huangdi set up a uniform system of law. He also standardized the written language, and a new monetary system. The completion of the **Great Wall** was a major Qin achievement. The Qin built the wall to protect China from northern invaders.

Although Shi Huangdi unified China, no strong rulers took his place. China began to break apart once again within a few years of his death.

Who was at the top of the Zhou political system? Who was at the bottom?

List three ways that Shi Huangdi unified China.

CHALLENGE ACTIVITY

Critical Thinking: Drawing Inferences Using library or online resources, study examples of ancient Chinese writing. Use some of these symbols to illustrate something you have learned about China.