

## 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Ancient China

### Section 1: Geography and Early China

#### **CHINA'S PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY**

China is a large country with many different geographical features. China is about the same size as the United States. Some geographical features separated groups of people within China, while other features separated China from the rest of the world. These features include the Gobi Desert, which spreads over much of China's north, and rugged mountains on the western frontier.

Low-lying plains in the east form one of the world's largest farming regions. Weather patterns vary widely across China. Two great rivers flow from west to east, the Huang He, or Yellow River, and the Chang Jiang, or Yangzi River.

#### **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. Early Chinese also fished and hunted with bows and arrows. They raised pigs and sheep. Separate cultures developed along the two rivers. As populations grew, villages spread. A social order developed. The graves of the rich often contained objects made from jade.

#### **CHINA'S FIRST DYNASTIES**

Societies along the Huang He grew larger and more complex. Around 2200 BC, a legendary emperor called Yu the Great is said to have founded the Xia (SHAH) dynasty. It is believed that the first flood control channels were built during the Xia dynasty.

The first dynasty for which we have clear evidence is the Shang. It was firmly established by the 1500s BC. The Shang king and his family were at the top of the social order. Nobles and warrior leaders also had high rank. Artisans lived in groups depending on what they did for a living. Farmers worked hard but had little wealth. Taxes claimed much of what they earned. Slaves provided an important source of labor.

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. Priests carved questions about the future on cattle bones and turtle shells, which were then heated, causing them to crack. The priests believed they could "read" these cracks to predict the future.

For this reason the bones were called oracle bones. Artisans made beautiful bronze containers for cooking and religious ceremonies. They also made ornaments, knives, and axes from jade. The army developed war chariots and bronze body armor. Shang astrologers developed a calendar based on the cycles of the moon.

### Section 2: The Zhou Dynasty and New Ideas

#### **THE ZHOU DYNASTY**

The Zhou (JOH) came from the west and overthrew the Shang dynasty during the 1100s BC. Their armies defeated people in every direction. They expanded their rule south to the Chang Jiang river. The Zhou established a new political order. The king granted land to lords in return for loyalty and military assistance. Lords divided their land among lesser nobles. Peasants received a small plot of land and had to farm additional land for a noble. The social order brought by the Zhou lasted a long time, but the loyalty of the lords gradually lessened. They began to fight each other. Family structure, which had been the foundation of Chinese life for centuries, was severely weakened. By the 400s BC, China had entered an era called the Warring States period.

## **CONFUCIUS AND SOCIETY**

Toward the end of the Zhou period, a teacher named Confucius traveled through China. He taught that order in society stems from ethics, or moral values, and not laws. He wanted China to return to the ideas and practices from a time when people knew their proper roles in society. Confucianism has been a guiding force in human behavior and religious understanding in China and elsewhere through the centuries.

## **DAOISM AND LEGALISM**

Around the same time as Confucius, other influential beliefs arose in China. Daoism (DOWih-zum) stressed living in harmony with the Dao, the guiding force of all reality. Daoists believed that people should be like water and simply let things flow in a natural way. They regarded humans as just a part of nature, not superior to any other thing. Laozi was the most famous Daoist teacher.

Legalism is different than both Daoism and Confucianism. Legalists believed that society needed strict laws to keep people in line. They believed in unity, efficiency, and punishment for bad conduct. They wanted the empire to continue to expand, so they urged the state to be always prepared for war. Legalists were the first to put their ideas into practice throughout China.

### **Section 3: The Qin Dynasty**

#### **THE QIN EMPEROR'S STRONG GOVERNMENT**

The Warring States period marked a time in China when several states battled each other for power. One state, the Qin (CHIN), built a strong army that defeated the armies of the other states. In 221 BC the Qin king Ying Zheng was able to unify China. He gave himself the title Shi Huangdi (SHEE hwahng-dee), which means "first emperor."

Shi Huangdi was a follower of Legalist beliefs. He created a strong government with strict laws and severe punishments. He ordered the burning of all books that did not agree with Legalism.

Shi Huangdi took land away from the lords. He divided China into 36 military districts. He made commoners work on government building projects.

#### **A UNIFIED CHINA**

Qin rule brought other major changes to China. Under Shi Huangdi, new policies and achievements united the Chinese people. The emperor set up a uniform system of law. Rules and punishments were to be the same in all parts of the empire. He also standardized the written language. People everywhere were required to write using the same set of symbols. People from different regions could now communicate with each other in writing. This gave them a sense of shared culture and a common identity.

Shi Huangdi also set up a new monetary system. Standardized gold and copper coins became the currency for all of China. Weights and measures were also standardized. With all these changes and the unified writing system, trade became much easier. A new network of highways connected the capital to every part of the empire. Workers built canals to connect the country's rivers. Parts of the Qin irrigation system are still used today.

The completion of the Great Wall was a major Qin achievement. The Qin connected earlier pieces of the wall to form a long, unbroken structure that protected China from fierce northern nomads. Building the wall required years of labor from hundreds of thousands of soldiers and workers. Many of them died building the wall.

Although he unified China, many Chinese people hated Shi Huangdi's harsh ways. When he died in 210 BC, rebel forces formed across the country and tried to take over the government. After a period of disorder, the Qin palace was attacked and burned to the ground. Qin authority had disappeared. China fell into civil war.

#### **Section 4: The Han Dynasty**

##### **HAN DYNASTY GOVERNMENT**

Liu Bang (lee-oo bang), a peasant, led the army that won control of China after the collapse of the Qin dynasty. He earned the people's loyalty and trust. He lowered taxes for farmers and made punishments less severe. He set up a government that built on the foundation begun by the Qin. Liu Bang's successor, Wudi (WOO-dee), made Confucianism the official government policy of China. To get a government job, a person had to pass a test based on Confucian teachings. However, wealthy and influential families still controlled the government.

##### **FAMILY LIFE**

A firm social order took hold during Han rule. In the Confucian view, peasants made up the second highest class. Merchants occupied the lowest class because they merely bought and sold what others had made. However, this social division did not indicate wealth or power. Peasants were still poor and merchants were still rich.

During Wudi's reign, the family once again became the center of Chinese society. Children were taught from birth to respect their elders. Within the family, the father had absolute power. Han officials believed that if the family was strong and people obeyed the father, then people would obey the emperor, too. Chinese parents valued boys more highly than girls. Some women, however, still gained power. They could influence their sons' families. An older widow could even become the head of the family.

##### **HAN ACHIEVEMENTS**

The Han dynasty was a time of great accomplishments. Art and literature thrived, and inventors developed many useful devices. Han artists painted portraits and realistic scenes that showed everyday life. Poets developed new styles of verse. Historian Sima Qian wrote a complete history of China until the Han dynasty.

The Han Chinese invented paper. They made it by grinding plant fibers into a paste and then letting it dry in sheets. They made "books" by pasting sheets together into a long sheet that was rolled into a scroll.

Other Han innovations included the sundial and the seismograph. They developed the distinctive Chinese medical practice of acupuncture (AK-yoopunk-cher). These and other Han inventions and advances are still used today.

#### **Section 5: Han Contacts with Other Cultures**

##### **FARMING AND MANUFACTURING**

During the Han dynasty, many farming advances led to bigger harvests. Manufacturing methods improved. Master ironworkers developed the iron plow and the wheelbarrow, two devices that made farming vastly more efficient.

The centuries-old process of producing silk increased. Weavers used foot-powered looms to weave silk threads into beautiful fabric. Garments made from silk were very expensive. The Chinese were determined to keep their procedure for making silk a secret. Revealing this secret was punishable by death.

## TRADE ROUTES

When Han armies conquered lands deep in Central Asia, they learned that people even farther west wanted silk. Han leaders saw that they could make a profit by bringing silk to Central Asia and trading the cloth for strong, sturdy Central Asian horses.

The Central Asian people would take the silk to the west and trade it for products they wanted. Traders used a series of overland routes known as the Silk Road to take Chinese goods to distant buyers. Although traveling the Silk Road was difficult and risky, it was worth it. Silk was so popular in Rome, for example, that China grew wealthy just from trading with the Romans. Traders returned to China with gold, silver, precious stones, and horses.

## BUDDHISM COMES TO CHINA

Over time, the Han government became less stable. Life became violent and uncertain. In this climate, Buddhist missionaries from India began to attract attention.

Buddhism seemed to provide more hope than the traditional Chinese beliefs did. At first, Indian Buddhists had trouble explaining their religion to the Chinese. Then they used the ideas of Daoism to help describe Buddhist beliefs. Before long, Buddhism caught on in China with both the rich and poor.

Buddhism's introduction to China is an example of diffusion, the spread of ideas from one culture to another. Chinese culture adopted Buddhism and changed in response to the new faith.

Dynasties	Religions	Inventions

### Ancient China Timeline (fill out what happened on that date)

