

Ancient River Valley Civilizations China



Geography of China

India wasn't the only great civilization to emerge in Asia. **China** developed along the **Huang He River**, also known as **Yellow River**. Over time, the Chinese developed better ways of doing things, and became one of the world's earliest civilizations. The Chinese created a system of writing, permanent settlements and structures, forms of government, a society dependent on agriculture, and a division of labor. The Chinese also developed customs such as formal religions and traditions in family structure, food, and clothing.





World Worst Disasters| Disaster Blog| World Disaster News." World Worst Disasters| Disaster Blog| World Disaster News. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 July 2014.

The **Huang He/Yellow River** was the most important physical feature of the region. Clay dust called **loess** is blown into the river from north China from the **steppes** (flat, grassy, unforested plains) of Central Asia, which makes the river yellow. Weather patterns vary widely across China and because the river floods were unpredictable, many people and animals died. Therefore, the river was also called the "**China's Sorrow.**" The river stretches across China from more than 2,900 miles. The river flows from west to east carrying nutrient-filled loess from the mountains and steppes to the Pacific Ocean, which developed fertile soil. Only 10% of China lands are rich enough to grow crops.

Chinese Farmers



"Chinese Farms Generate More Water Pollution than Factories - Circle of Blue WaterNews." Circle of Blue WaterNews. N.p., n.d. Web. 17 June 2014.

Question: How do you think the people learned to use the river floods to their benefit? Explain.

Question: Why would people choose to settle in the China's River Valley?

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. In the southwest lay the snow-capped **Himalayan Mountains**. The melting snow created the **streams**, providing water to the **Huang He**. The Gobi Desert and Himalayan Mountains formed **natural barriers**, helping to isolate China from others, and protecting settlers in the interior of China, along the banks of the rivers.

Question: How do you think the natural barriers helped protect China from invasions?

Question: Compare natural geographical barriers of the river valley civilizations of Ancient Mesopotamia, Ancient Egypt, Ancient India, and Ancient China.

Chinese Government and Society

In early China, the village chiefs were in charge. Families lived in **clans**. A clan is a group of people who are related to each other. Overtime, these clans fought each other for control of land and power. The clan who was victorious became rulers of sections of China. These rulers became kings and established their own **dynasties**. A dynasty is when one family rules a country or region over a long period of time. The head of the family will be the ruler of the land. When that ruler died, another member of the family took power, usually the oldest son. When a new family rose to power, a new dynasty began. The **Mandate of Heaven** is what the Chinese people believed gave their rulers the right to be king. It meant that the gods had blessed that person with the right to rule.

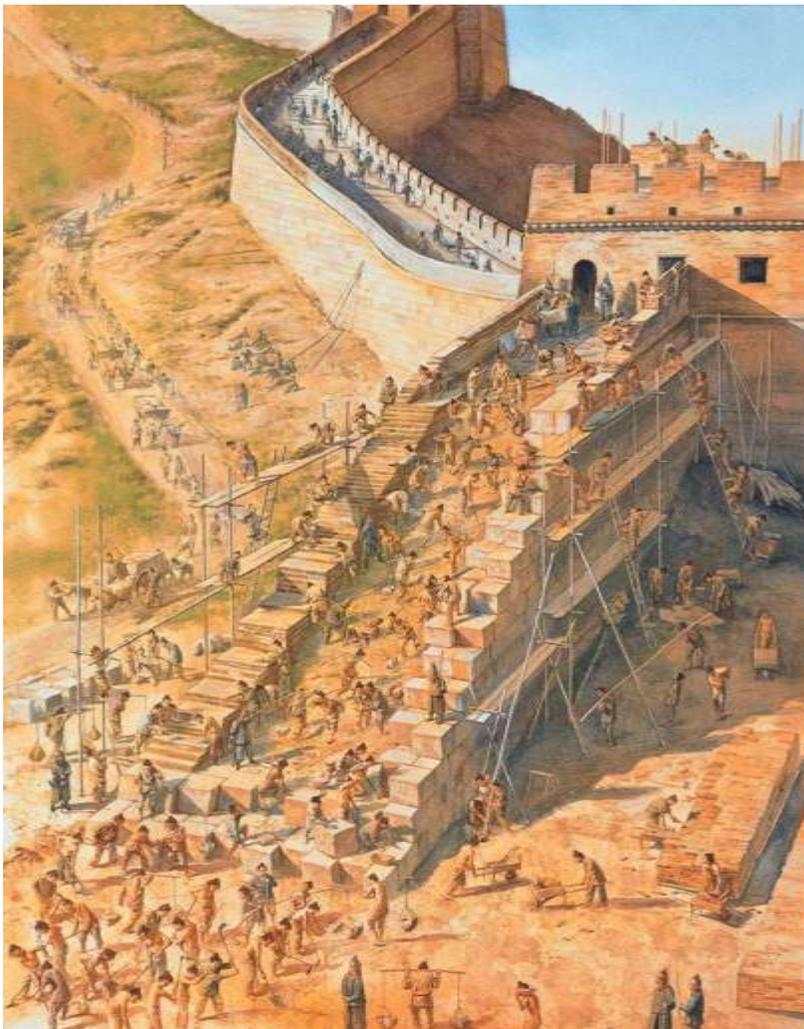
Question: For what reasons might a new dynasty take over?

Question: What are the pros and cons of a nation being ruled by a dynasty?

Qin Shi Huangdi was the first **emperor** of China. He created an army and forcefully conquered the different kingdoms, thus uniting China for the first time under the rule of one person. He was known for being excessively cruel and ruled by strict law and harsh punishment. He set out to make China more

powerful and wealthy. In order to do this, he realized that some things needed to be the same throughout the country. For example, he wanted everyone to use the same money. He also created a system of weights and measures to use. All of these things made trade easier and life simpler for the common person.

The Emperor also started building projects to improve China and others to keep it safe. He chose to unite the many small walls that had been built by previous leaders to keep invaders/barbarians from the north out of China. This was the start of the **Great Wall of China**. It was a **physical barrier** that stretched 13,000 miles long, stood 16-26 feet tall, 20 feet wide, and had guard towers placed at intervals. The manpower to build the wall came from peasants, unemployed, disgraced noblemen, and convicts. Qin also made roads and dug canals to connect the many towns, throughout his empire.



Did you know?

*During construction of the Great Wall of China, it was called the longest cemetery on Earth. More than 1 million people died of starvation and of literally being worked to death from exhaustion. Their bodies were buried within the wall itself, as to not slow the progress of construction.

*It is the longest manmade structure ever built. It was built over thousands of years.

*Legend says that a helpful dragon traced out the course for the workforce. The builders then followed the tracks.

*Parts of the Great Wall were surrounded by moats and filled with water or left as ditches.

*Nearly 1 million soldiers were sent to defend the Great Wall from barbarians and non-Chinese.

Question: What is the difference between a natural barrier and a physical barrier?

Virtual 360 Degree Tour of the Great Wall

<http://www.airpano.com/360Degree-VirtualTour.php?3D=China-Great-Wall>

China's Social Hierarchy

China's society was broken into a **social hierarchy**. The king and his family were at the top of the social order. Nobles, warriors, and government leaders also had high ranking. Farmers worked hard but had little wealth, and taxes claimed much of what they earned. However, the merchants were actually at the bottom of the social hierarchy. This was because they produced nothing on their own. Those who produced things were considered to be more important in society. The social hierarchy changed often as new dynasties become rulers.

Chinese Beliefs Affect Society

Polytheism, the belief of many gods, was practiced in the Ancient Chinese civilization. The worship of family **ancestors** (deceased family members) became a standard practice other than the worship of gods for many Chinese. During the early period of China, priests began to carve questions about the future on cattle bones and turtle shells, which were then heated to cause them to crack. The Priest believed they could "read" the cracks to predict the future. For this reason the bones were called **oracle** bones. This led to China's first writing system.

Family structure, which had been the foundation of Chinese life for centuries, was severely weakened by the **Warring States Era**. This was a time of many **civil wars**, or fighting between the people living in the same country. This fighting devastated China to the point that society needed a solution, or China's civilization may have disappeared forever. The Warring State Era influenced the development of the philosophies of China and wanted to create a peaceful society.

Confucianism

During the Warring States Era, a teacher named **Confucius** emerged and traveled throughout China. He wanted China to return to the ideas and practices from a time when people knew their proper roles in society.

Confucianism was a philosophy and an ethical code dealing with the **moral/ethical** values. Moral/ethical values are ways to do the right thing and live a good life.

What does it mean to live a moral/ethical life? Confucius felt a person's goals in life should be order, harmony, peace, and happiness on earth. The most

important principles deal with family and relationships with others in society. Confucius called this the **Five Relationships**: Parent-child, Husband-wife, Elder sibling-younger friend, and Ruler-subject.

These guidelines were adopted and used by the emperors of China at this time. Confucius' teachings became the backbone of China's society, education, and government. Each government worker had to pass a written **civil service** (government) exam that covered traditional teachings of Confucius and spiritual questions. If they passed the exam they became a government official, which brought a good salary and respect. Having more people involved in the government, created ownership and pride in China.

A Confucius belief that is still relevant today is: *"Do unto others as you would have others do unto you."*

Question: What does the above Confucius belief mean? How does it affect your everyday life?

Buddhism

During this troubled period of violence and chaos, many Chinese merchants came into contact with Buddhist missionaries traveling along trade routes and brought the teachings home to China. People took comfort in **Buddhist** teachings because it helped people to escape suffering and achieve a state of peace. The popularity of Buddhism in China is an example of **diffusion** (the spread of ideas from one culture to another.)

Confucius



Buddha



"Laozi." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, 15 June 2014. Web. 17 June 2014.

"The Ethics of Human Rights (5): China, Confucianism and Authoritarianism." *PapBlog Human Rights Etc.* N.p., n.d. Web. 16 June 2014

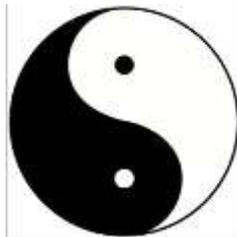
Daoism (Taoism)

Around the same time, another influential philosophy arose in China. **Daoism (also referred to as Taoism)** stressed living in harmony and balance with the Dao, the guiding force of all reality. They believed that people should be like water and simply let things flow in a natural way. Daoism regarded humans as a part of nature, not superior to any other thing. The symbol of "**Yin and Yang**" was used to represent Daoism/Taoism beliefs. **Laozi** (spelled Lao-Tse) was the most famous Daoist teacher.

Laozi/Lao-Tse



Yin-Yang:
Symbol of
Balance and Harmony



"Yin and Yang." *Ancient History Encyclopedia*. N.p., n.d. Web. 15 June 2014.

Question: What evidence was given to support that family values were important in the Ancient Chinese civilization?

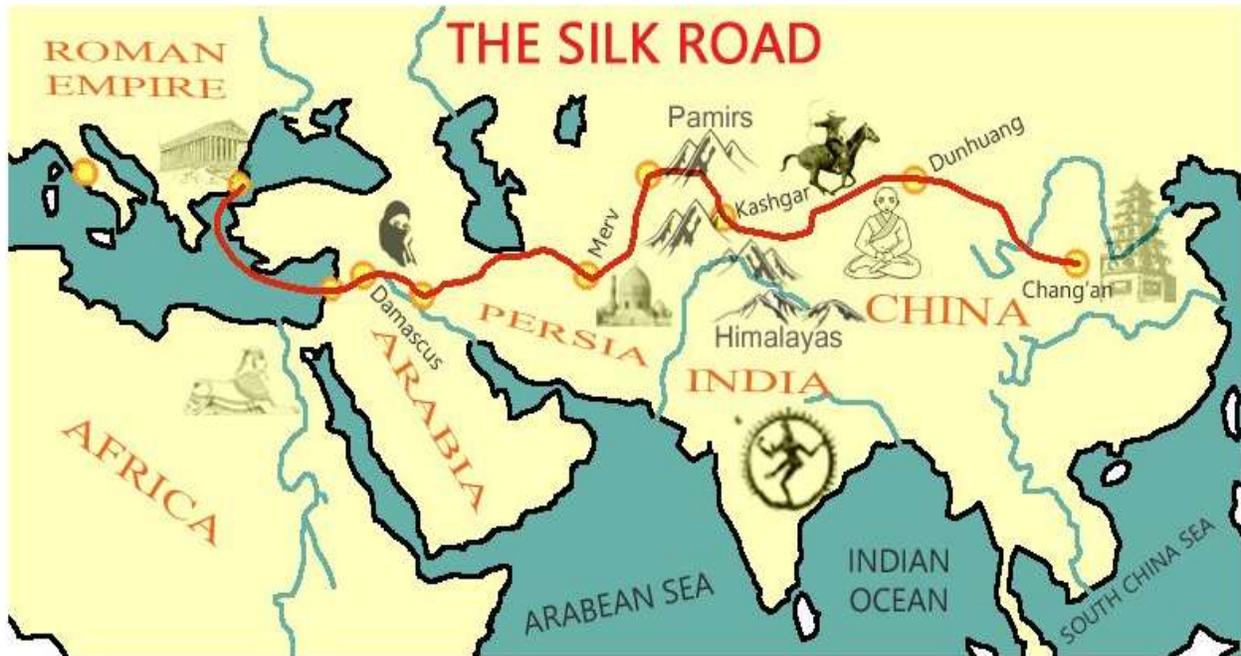
Question: What does the symbol of Daoism/Taoism represent?

Chinese Achievements

Silk was the main **export** (trade goods leaving the country) of China. The making of silk was kept a secret, so that China could charge any price they wanted for this material. Silk is made from the cocoons of the silk worm. The cocoon is patiently unwound and the silk is processed into a cloth. Items made of silk were very expensive and desired. Silk was valued throughout different regions of the world, especially in the Roman Empire. The Chinese kept their method of producing silk a secret and anyone revealing this secret was punished by death.

All of China's accomplishments were possible because of political stability, which led to improved agriculture and trade. Government support of trade

resulted in the building of roads and waterways. This stimulated trade beyond China's border, along the **Silk Road**, which became an international trade route. The Silk Road connected many cultures, empires, and economies of the Mediterranean, Central Asia, and China. This helped the flow of goods and ideas from one region to another. Cities grew along the ancient Silk Road that linked the Roman world with China.



"Modern Trading along the Old Silk Road." Gblimes.com. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 June 2014.

Question: Explain why the Silk Road was such an important accomplishment?

Question: How did the Silk Road affect China's economy and standard of living?

Writing: Do you think it was difficult to keep the origin of silk and its production process a secret? Write a brief story about a woman who is dying to tell the secret and her fear of the dire consequences.



Silk Worm and Cocoon



Silk Cloth

The “Four Great Inventions of Ancient China” were **gunpowder, paper, woodblock printing** and **the compass**. Another lasting influence that originated in China was the **seismograph** to measure the magnitude of earthquakes.



Gunpowder-was discovered by accident, when an ancient scientist mixed together ingredients trying to make gold. It was first used in fireworks and rockets.



Compass-allowed Chinese sailors to sail without using the stars to guide them. It relied on the magnetic pull of the Earth to give them precise directions.



Paper-like we use today, was first made in China. It was made from pulp of bamboo, strained, and then allowed to dry. This achievement allowed for the development of paper money.



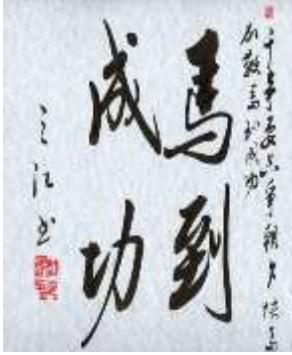
Woodblock Printing-was the first way to produce an exact copy of a document or picture. The Chinese carved wood molds, then inked them, and placed paper on top to transfer the image.



Porcelain-fine china developed only by the Chinese, using a kiln (furnace used to make ceramics). Each was hand painted by an artist and reflected China’s culture. Blue and white were commonly used.



Seismograph-this instrument was used to measure the direction of an earthquake. The Emperor would send help in the direction the ball would fall. The people depended on the Emperors help.



Calligraphy-the practice of writing letters with ink and a brush. Each letter flowed with over 2,000 characters in the Chinese alphabet. This skill took a long time to master.

China's achievements flourished during the **Tang** and **Song dynasties**. This is considered to be China's "**Golden Age**." A golden age means a period of great achievement and a peak of civilization. Art was important in Chinese civilization and could be seen in their **poetry, porcelain, painting, and calligraphy**.

Question: What current day items came about from the invention of gunpowder?

Question: Why might this era be called the "Golden Age"? Explain in detail.

China Shuts the Door!

Over time, China began to react against the growing outside influence of foreigners. Other countries were interested in gaining a foothold of the market and they wanted to learn the secrets of silk making. But China wanted to keep their culture strictly Chinese, so they entered a period of **isolationism**. Isolationism is a policy of removing a country from contact with other countries.



Questions: Based on all the reading, why do you think China moved into a period of isolationism?

Here is a **virtual field trip** of China

<http://www.thechinaguide.com/index.php?action=activity/greatWallOfChina>