

## The Far East: China

### Civilization Develops Along Chinese Rivers

Along with Mesopotamia, ancient Egypt, and the Indus Valley, ancient China was one of the world's earliest civilizations. The Chinese civilization developed on the banks of major rivers. The fertile land beside rivers provided rich soil for farming and hunting and water for drinking, irrigating crops, and fishing. The civilization of ancient China developed along the Huang He (Hwang Ho), or Yellow River. The Huang He is the second-longest river in China. It flows east from the Tibetan highlands to the Yellow Sea in north China, with a length of about 3,000 miles. Villages also developed along the Chang Jiang (Yangtze), the longest river in China.

The **Huang He** is sometimes called the Yellow River because of the color of the yellow mud it carries. Like the Nile, each year the Huang He overflows its banks, and when the flood water recedes, fertile mud is left behind. Crops grow well in this fertile soil, so it is not surprising that by around 5000 B.C., agricultural villages began to spring up along this river.

### The Xia (Hsia) Dynasty

The Chinese civilization began about 8000 years ago and still exists today. Since China's history is so long, space does not permit us to consider anything but the beginning of this intriguing civilization. The **Xia (Hsia) Dynasty** is considered to be the first dynasty of kings to rule China. The Xia Dynasty lasted from around 2205 to 1766 B.C. During this period, the Chinese civilization developed in a manner similar to the civilizations in the Near East. The Chinese built irrigation canals to water their crops, they made bronze, harvested silk, used the potter's wheel, and the soldiers used chariots.

### The Shang Dynasty

The Xia Dynasty was eventually replaced with the **Shang Dynasty**. The Shang Dynasty lasted from about 1766 to 1122 B.C. During this period, cities were carefully planned, and the people were divided into social ranks that ranged from royalty and nobles to slaves. While most people during this dynasty were farmers, craftsmen became more popular. Bronze-casting was developed at about this time.

### Silk and the Trade Routes

During the ten major dynasties that followed the Shang Dynasty, trade flourished. Trade routes between Asia and the West were established, and silk became the main export of China. **Silk** is a very thin cloth made from cocoons spun by silkworms. The trade routes to West Asia and Europe became known as the **Silk Roads**. Other countries wanted to make silk for themselves, but the Chinese kept their methods of producing this cloth a secret until the fourth century A.D.

### Chinese Religion

In ancient China, there were many gods, such as the earth god, the rain god, and the river god, but there was one god that was revered above all others. This was **Shang Ti**, "the Ruler Above."

#### CHINESE CIVILIZATION AT A GLANCE

**WHERE:** Valleys of the Huang He and Chang Jiang Rivers in Asia

**WHEN:** Beginning about 5000 B.C.

#### ACHIEVEMENTS:

- Discovered and cultivated silk
- Built the Great Wall of China
- Invented gunpowder, rockets, magnetic compass, book printing, paper money, porcelain, and many more
- Two great teachers lived in China—Confucius and Lao-tzu



Preparing Newly Woven Silk

The Chinese made sacrifices to the gods to ensure good crops, success in battle, and good fortune. While the poor could only present food and wine to the gods in their temples, the rich sacrificed animals. On special occasions, such as the death of a king, humans were sacrificed. The humans who were sacrificed were often prisoners of war or slaves.

The ancient Chinese believed that when a person died, he or she went to live with Shang Ti. They believed their dead ancestors had powers to help them make wise decisions or to punish them. Therefore, the Chinese worshipped their ancestors. To please their ancestors, the Chinese built temples. They held many celebrations to honor their ancestors.

### Chinese Philosophers

Perhaps as great as the technological contributions the Chinese made to the world were the philosophical contributions made by two great teachers who lived in China. One was **Confucius**, who lived from 551 B.C. to 479 B.C. Among other things, Confucius taught politeness, sincerity, unselfishness, respect for laws, and hard work. His beliefs have been written down, and his philosophy has become a religion called **Confucianism**.

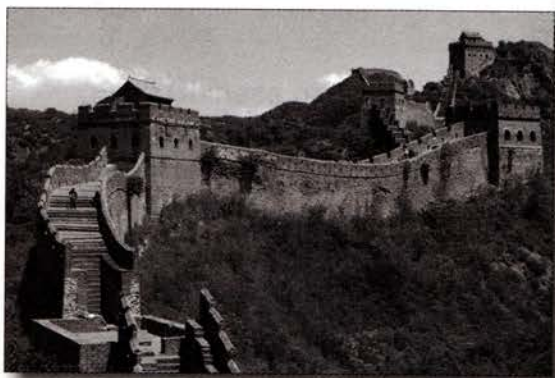
Another philosopher who lived about the same time as Confucius was **Lao-tzu**. His beliefs were quite different from Confucius. Confucius thought people should improve society, but Lao-tzu taught that people should withdraw from society. He believed that people should live very simple lives in harmony with nature. He thought people should not try to be famous or rich but to be happy with what they had. He also thought people should sit quietly and meditate. His philosophy is called **Taoism** and comes from the word "tao," which means "way."



Confucius

### The Great Wall of China

One of the great achievements of the ancient Chinese Civilization was the construction of the **Great Wall of China**. It was built to keep out invaders. It consists of two stone walls that average about ten feet apart and run parallel to each other.



The Great Wall of China

The area between the walls is filled with earth and lined with stone, forming a road. The wall, which ran along the border between China and the territories in the north, is about 30 feet high and 1,500 miles long. Many separate walls were built over 2,000 years. It began as an earthen wall supported by planks. It was built in segments by different states and each was only a few miles long. In about 221 B.C., **Shi Huang Ti**, the first emperor of China, had these walls linked into one long wall. The stone wall as we know it today began during the **Ming Dynasty**, which lasted from A.D. 1368 to 1644. This wall was strong, over

4,500 miles long, and was patrolled by 100,000 soldiers. However, over the years, parts of the wall have been taken down and used to build other structures.

### Chinese Inventions

The Chinese invented many things. Some of these include the magnetic compass, crossbow, matches, movable type, paper money, acupuncture, propeller, gunpowder, porcelain, umbrella, paper, wheelbarrow, seismograph, kite, cast iron, abacus, rocket, brandy, whiskey, the game of chess, and many others.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Knowledge Check

#### Matching

- |                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| _____ 1. Huang He            | a. river that flows from the Tibetan Highlands to the Yellow Sea; also called the Yellow River    |
| _____ 2. silk                | b. religion developed by the philosopher Confucius  |
| _____ 3. Silk Roads          | c. a very thin cloth made from cocoons spun by worms  |
| _____ 4. Shang Ti            | d. the first emperor of China   |
| _____ 5. Confucianism        | e. trade routes from China to West Asia and Europe  |
| _____ 6. Taoism              | f. the most important Chinese god; "the Ruler Above"  |
| _____ 7. Great Wall of China | g. built to keep out invaders; built over a period of 2000 years; over 4,500 miles at its longest |
| _____ 8. Shi Huang Ti        | h. philosophy developed by Lao-tzu  |

#### Multiple Choice

9. During which period was the Great Wall of China strengthened into a stone wall that was over 4,500 miles long?
- |                       |                  |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| a. Xia (Hsia) Dynasty | b. Shang Dynasty |
| c. Ming Dynasty       | d. Chin Dynasty  |
10. Which Chinese philosopher taught that people should withdraw from society and live very simple lives in harmony with nature?
- |                 |             |
|-----------------|-------------|
| a. Shi Huang Ti | b. Lao-tzu  |
| c. Confucius    | d. Shang Ti |
11. Which item was NOT something invented by the Chinese?
- |               |             |
|---------------|-------------|
| a. microscope | b. crossbow |
| c. gunpowder  | d. paper    |

#### Constructed Response

12. Why did the ancient Chinese worship their ancestors? Use details from the reading selection to help support your answer.

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