

Summary: Ancient China

Foundations of Chinese Civilization

The Chinese have built a civilization that has lasted longer than any other in the world. In 5000 B.C., Chinese lived in the fertile Huang He river valley. In the 1700s B.C., invaders called the Shang entered their valley. These invaders built the first permanent, organized civilization. Since the Shang takeover, China has mostly been ruled by dynasties. The founder of the Ming dynasty brought China under one rule. Later, his grandson rebuilt the capital and renamed it Beijing. He also built a palace complex called the Forbidden City. The city got this name because only the rulers and a few officials could enter it. In 1664, the Manchus invaded China, creating the Qing dynasty. This lasted until 1911.

Achievements of the Dynasties

China has given the world some important inventions, such as paper, pottery called porcelain, and silk cloth. The process of making silk was a very profitable industry. Caravans carried the precious cloth to Europe and Southwest Asia along a route called the Silk Road. Other traders carried porcelain, tea, and spices. Travelers on the Silk Road faced danger from robbers, bad weather, lack of water, and sickness.

The Chinese developed a form of writing during the Shang Dynasty. The Great Wall and the Grand Canal were important feats of construction.

Religion and Philosophy

Today, the Chinese belief system includes elements of three important religions. Confucius taught that moral character was important. He said that individuals should be responsible for their society. He also believed that rulers should treat their people with care and kindness. Confucius' ideas guided the Chinese bureaucracy, in which different departments ran different parts of the government.

Lao Tzu developed Taoism. He believed in a force that guided the universe, which he named Tao, or "way of nature." Buddhism made its way from India to China in the A.D. 200s. Buddhism teaches people how to escape from suffering.

Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

dynasty *noun*, a family of rulers

bureaucracy *noun*, the administration of a government through departments, called bureaus

After You Read

REVIEW What are some important achievements of the Ming Dynasty?

Underline phrases that tell what achievements were made by the Ming Dynasty.

REVIEW If the Silk Road was so dangerous, why did the Chinese continue to use it? Circle the hazards travelers faced on the Silk Road. Underline the reasons this road was important.

REVIEW What do you think of Confucius's opinion of how a successful ruler should act? Draw a box around sentences that describe the beliefs of Confucius.