

## Lesson Two - Shang and Zhou Dynasties

**6.31** Locate & describe the origins of Chinese civilization in the Huang-He Valley during the Shang Dynasty.

**6.33** Analyze the structure of the Zhou Dynasty and the emergence of Taoism, Confucianism, and Legalism.

### China's Earliest Civilizations

#### The Shang Dynasty

The Shang **dynasty** emerged along the Huang He. They built their own empire and went on to conquer others. The Shang dynasty was the first Chinese dynasty for which there are both written records and archaeological evidence of their existence. Legend has it that a dynasty called the Xia dynasty was the first dynasty in China, but there is no physical archaeological evidence of its existence.

The exact dates of the Shang dynasty are in dispute, but it probably emerged between 1760 to 1520 BCE and fell sometime between 1122 to 1030 BCE. The Shang society developed a calendar and writing. They also used musical instruments and created artwork from bronze, marble, and jade. Their artistic creations, especially those made from jade, are very well known and valuable today.

One of the most important innovations of the Shang dynasty was the development of Chinese writing. The Chinese used symbols called pictographs and wrote on bones and shells. The Shang used writing for many purposes, including record keeping, but people are most fascinated by the use of writing on oracle bones. People in the Shang dynasty wrote questions on bones or tortoise shells that they wanted to ask their dead ancestors and deities. People asked about what crops to grow, when to hunt, and whether warfare would be successful. These bones and shells were then burned, and someone would interpret the cracks in the bones as the "answers" to their questions. Archaeologists have found more than 100,000 of these bones. They have also identified more than 3,000 pictographs in the language of the Shang that would go on to become the foundation of the Chinese written language.

#### Answer the following questions using the article.

Near what river did the Shang dynasty develop?

Why is the Shang Dynasty considered the first Chinese dynasty and not the Xia?

  

List some of the accomplishments of the Shang Dynasty.

  

What are oracle bones? Describe how they are used.

  

How is the writing of the Shang Dynasty relevant to modern day China?

  

#### Watch, "Shang Dynasty"

Where was the Shang Dynasty?

  

How long did they rule?

  

How did China's geography both help and hurt its development?

  

Who was Wu Ding?

What was the purpose of oracle bones?


What metal did the Shang use to their advantage?


Why happened to the Shang Dynasty?


## The Zhou Dynasty Forms

The history of [China](#) can be divided into the different dynasties that ruled the land. A [dynasty](#) is a series of leaders from one family. Many of these dynasties had significant impacts on the life and culture of the Chinese people as well as the surrounding region.

The [Zhou dynasty](#) (jō dynasty) is the longest-ruling dynasty in China's history. Around 1046 BCE, Zhou tribes from western China conquered the Shang dynasty, their neighbor to the east, and established their own ruling dynasty. The Zhou dynasty later gradually lost control over the kingdom, which eventually collapsed into warring states around 256 BCE.

### Mandate of Heaven

The [Mandate of Heaven](#) is an idea held in China since the Zhou dynasty, which lasted from 1046 to 256 BCE. According to this way of thinking, the Zhou had been given the right to rule by Heaven. All of the dynasties following the Zhou adopted this concept, which was also supported by the philosopher and teacher [Confucius](#). The [Mandate](#) differed slightly from the divine right of kings that would appear later in Europe. The Chinese people believed the Mandate was granted because of the virtue, or moral and ethical behavior, of the ruler, not because of his heredity. As a result, the right to rule did not have to remain with one family. The ancient Chinese believed dynasties would lose the Mandate of Heaven if the rulers did not behave virtuously.

### Feudalism in China

To maintain order throughout their kingdom, the Zhou followed a feudal model. In this system, members of the nobility were given land in return for their loyalty and service to the [emperor](#). The system of [feudalism](#) the Zhou established involved three classes of society: nobles, commoners, and slaves. Many nobles were feudal lords who were given control over a city, its soldiers, and the city's surrounding area. In return, the feudal lords promised to serve the Zhou emperor and provided the services of their armies if needed.

Commoners, or peasants, also lived in the feudal states. They farmed the land of their lord and also their own land. In return for their service, the lords gave them protection. Cities were growing, and the barter system was being replaced by money. All of these factors helped the development of a merchant class in feudal [China](#).

The size and power of these feudal states varied greatly and helped the emperors maintain control over the vast empire. However, many lords became powerful and independent of the central government. The independence of these states hindered the unity of the [Zhou dynasty](#).

### Warring States Period

The feudal system granted lords the authority to rule outlying areas. This meant that the Zhou rulers did not have direct authority over their kingdom. The feudal lords grew richer and more powerful under this system. As the lords gained more strength, they began to ignore the wishes of the emperors and central government. Feudal lords began to fight with each other for control over [China](#).

In addition to the internal fighting, China faced constant threats from the nomadic groups to the north. These groups would occasionally attack Chinese states in search of resources. These attacks also weakened the [dynasty](#). In fact, in 771 BCE, the conflicts in China forced the Zhou to move their capital from Xi'an further east to Luoyang to better

protect it from invasion.

By 600 BCE, the Iron Age began in China and iron weapons became widely used. This change in technology was one of many factors in the decline of the **Zhou dynasty** because iron produced better weapons and made it easier for people to fight against the feudal lords. By the 700s BCE, the political situation in China had become chaotic as the feudal states continued to fight each other. Eventually, the strongest seven feudal states engaged in a power struggle that lasted from 475–221 BCE, as the Zhou rulers could no longer hold their kingdom together. This time of fighting between these states is called the **Warring States period**. Eventually, the state of **Qin** defeated all other rivals and established China's first empire.

**Answer the following questions using the article.**

What was the Zhou Dynasty?


What is the Mandate of Heaven?


Describe feudalism as a form of government.


Describe the role of the following in the feudal system of government.

Nobles -

--

Commoners -

--

How did the feudal system of government both help and hurt the Zhou Dynasty?

Help -

--

Hurt -

--

Who was responsible for the internal fighting within China during the Zhou Dynasty?


How did the production of iron contribute to the decline of the Zhou Dynasty?


What was the Warring States Period?


Which state eventually became China's first empire?

- A.) Shang
- B.) Zhou
- C.) Shu
- D.) Qin

**Watch, "Zhou Dynasty"**

Where was the Zhou Dynasty? How did it compare to the Shang Dynasty?


How long did they rule?


Why would leaders use the Mandate of Heaven to rule?


Draw a diagram that shows how feudalism worked within the Zhou Dynasty. Include the classes and the purpose of each

King -
Lords -
Soldiers -
Peasants -

Fill in the chart about the philosophers that emerged during the Zhou Dynasty.

Name of Philosophy	Founder of Philosophy	Description of philosophy

How did the Zhou Dynasty come to an end?

--

**Activity**

Use the boxes below to draw a cartoon that accurately represents each term.

Oracle Bones	
Mandate of Heaven	
Feudalism	
Warring States Period	