

Ancient China



GOBI DESERT



0 200 400 miles
0 200 400 kilometers

Yellow River

Huang He

North China Plain

Anyang

Yellow Sea

Ch'ang-an (Xi'an)

Luoyang

Zhengzhou

Yangtze River

Chang Jiang

East China Sea

Xi Jiang

Tropic of Cancer

PACIFIC OCEAN

South China Sea

Bay of Bengal



100°E

120°E

20°N

Geography Shapes Ancient China



▲ Shang Bronze Drinking Vessel

The Shang were famous for their excellent bronzework.

Connect to What You Know What makes the area you live in a good place for people to live? Think about how the geographic features of your area have affected life there.

Geographic Features of China

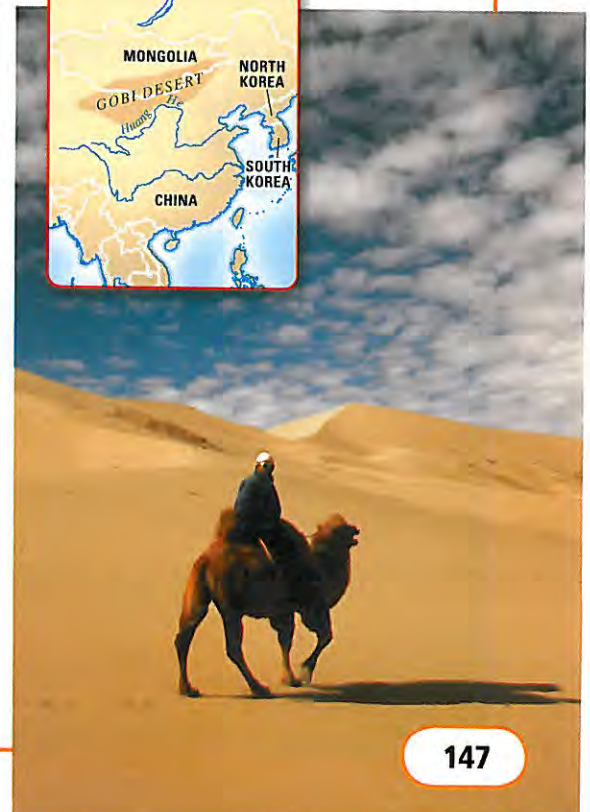
▼ **KEY QUESTION** What effect did the physical features of China have on its early development?

The river valley pattern you studied in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Indus Valley was repeated in China. China's civilization developed because two rivers brought water and silt that made farming possible. Cities grew along the banks of the rivers.

Isolated by Barriers Located on the eastern side of Asia, China lies about the same distance north of the equator as the United States. China's lands are bordered on the east by the Yellow Sea, the East China Sea, and the Pacific Ocean. Deserts edge the northern and western lands. To the north is the Gobi (GOH•bee) Desert, and to the west lies the Taklimakan (TAH•kluh•muh•KAHN) Desert. The Pamir, Tian Shan, and Himalaya (HIHM•uh•LAY•uh) mountain ranges form a tight curve marking the western border.

Unlike the regions of the Nile and Fertile Crescent, where civilizations often interacted, China was geographically isolated. The huge mountain chains, vast deserts, and large expanses of water acted as barriers between China and other lands. This made the spread of ideas and goods to China difficult. As a result, Chinese civilization developed along very distinct lines. There were fewer outside influences to shape China's culture.

Gobi Desert One of the largest deserts in the world, the Gobi covers more land than Texas and California combined. **What two countries share the Gobi Desert?** ▼



Two River Systems Two major rivers flow toward the Pacific Ocean. The Chang Jiang (chahng jyahng), or the Yangtze River, is found in central China. The Huang He (hwahng huh) to the north is also known as the Yellow River.

In ancient times, most Chinese farming was done in the very rich land between the Chang Jiang and Huang He. Their floodwaters deposit yellowish silt that makes fertile soil. This land, called the North China Plain, has always been the center of Chinese civilization.

A Varied Climate China has a varied climate, much like the United States. Western China is dry like the western United States. Because it is mostly deserts and mountains, it is sparsely populated and has little usable farmland. Northeast China has seasons like New England, with cold winters and warm summers. In contrast, the southeast is like the southern region of the United States, with mild winters and hot, rainy summers. These different climates allow China to produce a variety of crops. Rice is grown in the moist south, while wheat, soybeans, and millet are grown in the drier north lands.

The Shang Dynasty

KEY QUESTION How did the Chinese language develop?

Around 2000 B.C., farming settlements along the Huang He began to grow into cities. An early civilization began there, and Chinese culture today evolved from that ancient beginning. Historians consider China to be the oldest continuous civilization in the world.

Shang Kings About 1766 B.C., Shang family kings began to control some cities. They set up a **dynasty**, a family or group that rules for several generations. The kings were responsible for religious activities. They claimed to rule with the gods' permission. Shang kings controlled the central portion of the North China Plain; their relatives ruled distant areas. The Shang used chariots to defend themselves against the **nomads** who lived to the north and west. They made war with nomadic people like the Zhou (joh).







Shang Families In Shang culture, respect for one's parents and ancestors was important. Family was closely tied to religion. The Chinese believed that the spirits of their ancestors could bring good fortune. Families paid respect to the father's ancestors by sacrificing animals in their honor. Men ruled within the family.

Developing Language The Shang kings claimed to be able to influence the gods. They received messages from the gods through **oracle bones**. These were animal bones on which Shang royal priests scratched questions to the gods. Next, they touched the bones with heated rods to crack them and interpreted the cracks. They scratched the answers on the bones. The scratches were an early form of writing.

Like other ancient peoples, the Shang developed their system of writing with **pictographs**, simple drawings that represent words or ideas. As you can see in the chart at right, the pictographs are similar to the modern Chinese characters. The Chinese system of writing used a huge number of symbols. To be barely able to read and write, a person had to know at least 1,500 characters. An educated person needed to know at least 10,000 characters.

One advantage of the Chinese writing system is that you can read Chinese without being able to speak it. People all over China could learn the written language, even if their spoken languages were different. The system helped unify a large, varied land.

SUMMARIZE Explain how the Chinese language developed.

Chinese Writing	
Ancient	Modern
field	
	
water	
	
OX	
	

The Qin and the Han

Connect to What You Know At the end of the Zhou period, several states were still at war. As you recall, the Chinese believed in the Mandate of Heaven. According to that belief, wars and other troubles were signs that the ruling dynasty had lost heaven's favor. The Chinese believed they needed a new ruler.

The Qin Unified China

KEY QUESTION How did the Qin Dynasty unify China?

The new ruler of China came from the state of **Qin** (chihn). Some scholars think the name of China may have come from this word. The new emperor took the name **Shi Huangdi** (shee hwahng•dee). He would unify and expand China.

A Legalistic Ruler In 221 B.C., Qin ruler Shi Huangdi began ending internal battles between warring states. He then conquered rival states and drove out nomadic invaders. China grew larger than it had been under the Zhou.

Shi Huangdi believed in Legalism and its way of running the country. He tried to wipe out Confucianism. He had 460 critics and Confucianists killed. He also ordered the burning of books that contained ideas he disliked.

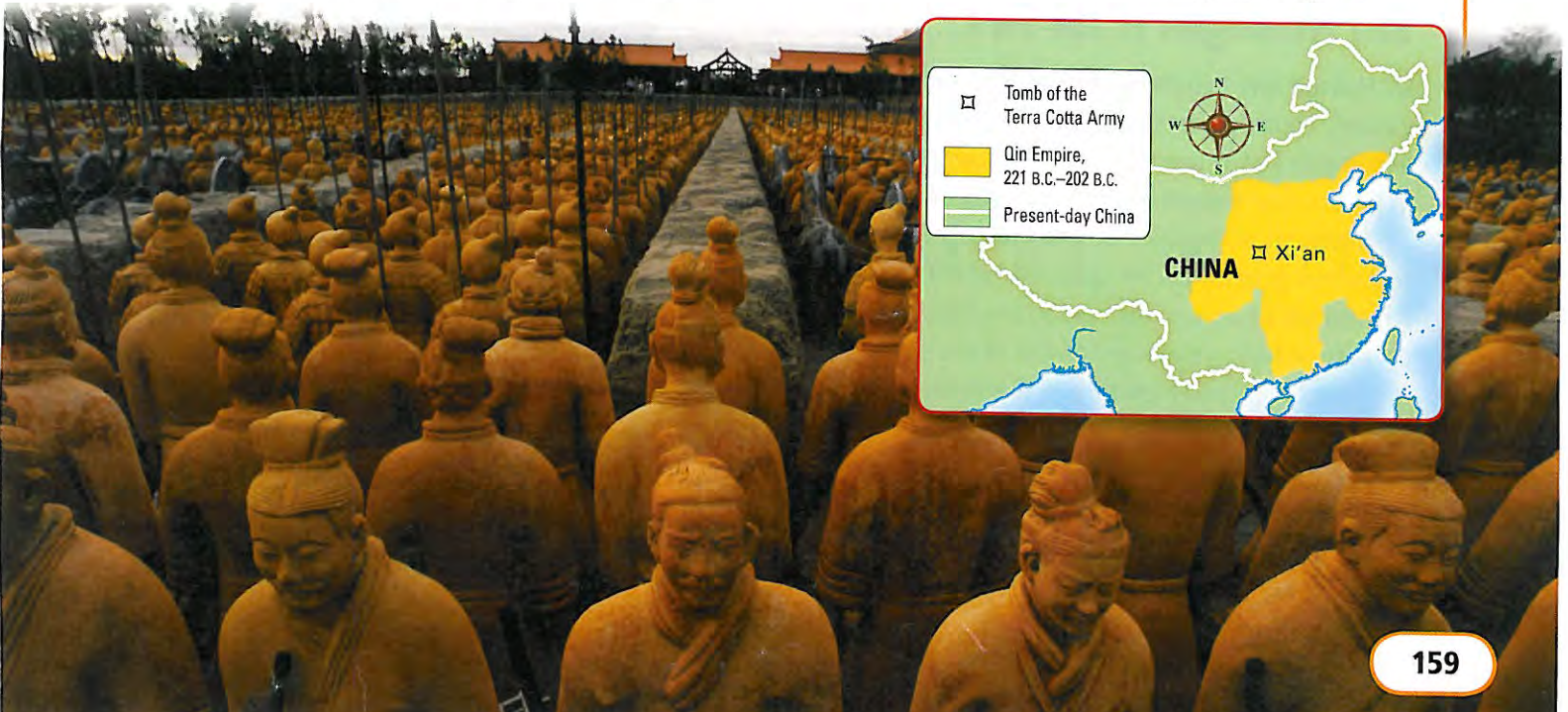


▲ Jade Funeral Suit

This suit is made up of 2,498 jade pieces. The Chinese believed jade would preserve dead bodies for the afterlife.

Terra Cotta Army

Thousands of clay soldiers were buried at the tomb of Shi Huangdi. ▼




Uniting China Shi Huangdi wanted a strong central government. To gain control, he tried to weaken China's noble families. He took the nobles' land and forced them to live at the capital so he could watch them. These actions strengthened the emperor's power.

Shi Huangdi set out to unite China under his control. To link the lands together, he built highways and irrigation projects. He forced peasants to work on these projects and set high taxes to pay for them. He also set government standards for weights, measures, coins, and writing, which made it easier to do business everywhere in China.

The Great Wall Shi Huangdi wanted a long wall along China's northern borders to keep out nomadic invaders. He planned the **Great Wall**, which linked together smaller walls built during the Time of the Warring States. The earliest walls were built of earth. Later, stone and brick were used.

Shi Huangdi forced hundreds of thousands of peasants and criminals to build the Great Wall. Many workers died from hard labor. The deaths caused great resentment among the people. Later dynasties rebuilt and extended the Great Wall many times.

The Qin Dynasty Ends Shi Huangdi died in 210 B.C. He was buried in an elaborate tomb. An army of soldiers made of **terra cotta**, or baked clay, was buried nearby to guard his tomb. Archaeologists discovered the soldiers in 1974.

 **SUMMARIZE** Explain how the Qin Dynasty unified China.

History Makers

Shi Huangdi (c. 259–210 B.C.)

Shi Huangdi was determined to unify and strengthen China. He viciously opposed enemies of China and enemies of his rule. His armies attacked invaders north of the Huang He and as far south as present-day Vietnam. His military victories doubled China's size.

A follower of Legalism, Shi Huangdi believed in a powerful, centralized government. He uprooted 120,000 noble families, forced them to move to the capital, and took their land. He forced peasants to build a highway network of more than 4,000 miles to connect the country. He tried to silence his critics by ordering "useless" books burned, as shown at right. Shi Huangdi unified China but sacrificed his people's freedom in doing so.

CRITICAL THINKING

Summarize How did Shi Huangdi unify China?



The Legacy of Ancient China



Connect to What You Know Trade formed a part of Chinese life. Despite the geographic barriers that separated China from the lands to the west, trade caused Chinese contacts with other lands to increase.

Chinese Coin Coins like this one, from the Han Dynasty, were used throughout the eastern part of central Asia until the A.D. 600s. **Along what trade routes might these coins have spread?** ▲

The Silk Roads

▼ **KEY QUESTION** Why were the Silk Roads important to Chinese civilization?

During the time of the Han Dynasty, only the Chinese knew how to make silk. It was much desired as a **luxury** fabric both by the Chinese and by people outside of China. Chinese silk was important in opening trading routes to the west.

A Trans-Eurasian Link Overland trade routes were called **Silk Roads** because traders carried silk and other goods on caravan trails. The trails stretched westward from China through central Asia to Mesopotamia and Europe, covering about 5,000 miles of territory. (See the map on pages 166–167.) Because these trails stretched across two continents, Europe and Asia, they were called **trans-Eurasian**. China was part of a huge global trade network.

Embroidered Silk Tapestry This Chinese tapestry shows the Buddha preaching at a site called Vulture Peak. ▼

By 100 B.C., the Silk Roads were well established. Traders made fortunes carrying goods back and forth across the harsh terrain in camel caravans. The trip could take several years. Cities along the Silk Roads provided food, water, and shelter, as well as goods for trade. Goods leaving China included silk, paper, jade, and pottery. Exchange goods coming from the west included sesame seeds and oil, metals, and precious stones. One trade item the Chinese especially valued was Central Asian horses.



Chinese Inventions and Discoveries


 **KEY QUESTION** In which aspects of Chinese life did the Han make great advances?

China had a large and growing population to feed. The Chinese considered farming the most important and honored profession. Because agriculture was so significant in China, many new agricultural inventions came about during this period.

Agricultural Improvements Chinese inventions made life easier for farmers and made more grain available for trade. For example, the Chinese perfected a plow that was more efficient because it had two blades. The improved plow, along with better iron farm tools, helped increase crop production. Another technological advance was a collar harness for horses. This invention allowed horses to pull much heavier loads than did the harness being used in Europe at the time. The Chinese also invented the wheelbarrow, which made it easier for farmers to move heavy loads by hand. The Chinese began to use water mills, which used river power to grind grain. In a land of mostly farmers, these inventions were valuable.

Paper In A.D. 105, paper was invented in China. Before that time, books were made of costly silk. The inexpensive paper was made from a mixture of old rags, mulberry tree bark, and fibers from the hemp plant. Inexpensive paper made books available in a country that placed a high value on learning. The invention of paper also affected the Chinese government. Previously, all government documents had been recorded on strips of wood. Using paper for record keeping was much more convenient. Paper was an important invention for a bureaucratic government that kept many records.

Silk Silk is beautiful and long lasting. It can be dyed brilliant colors. For about 3,000 years, only the Chinese knew the secret to making silk. Because it was rare, it became an excellent trade product. Silk allowed the Chinese to get silver and gold from lands to the west of China. At one time, one pound of silk was worth one pound of gold. Getting gold and silver was important to China because the country did not have rich deposits of either mineral.

 **CATEGORIZE** List the aspects of Chinese life in which the Han made the greatest advances.



CONNECT to Today

▲ **Silk** A modern-day silk vendor sells his goods at the ancient Silk Roads market at Kashgar in China.

Vocabulary

TERMS & NAMES

oracle bones animal bones or shells used by the Shang kings to communicate with the gods

pictographs pictures or drawings that represent words or ideas

dynastic cycle pattern of the rise and fall of dynasties

Mandate of Heaven ancient Chinese belief that a good ruler had the gods' approval

BACKGROUND VOCABULARY

favor support or approval

REVIEW

dynasty family or group that rules for several generations

nomads members of a group of people who have no set home but move from place to place



Visual Vocabulary oracle bone

Vocabulary

TERMS & NAMES

philosophy logical study of basic truths about knowledge, values, and the world

Legalism belief that a powerful, efficient government and a strict legal system are the keys to social order

Confucianism (kuhn•FYOO•shuh•nihz•uhm) belief system based on the teachings of Confucius, a Chinese scholar

filial piety respect for one's parents and ancestors, an important teaching of Confucianism

Daoism (DOW•IHZ•uhm) Chinese belief system said to have begun with Laozi, a philosopher in the 500s B.C., based on the idea of natural order in the world

harmony agreement in feeling

BACKGROUND VOCABULARY

conduct how someone acts; behavior

complement to work well with

▶ Vocabulary

TERMS & NAMES

Qin (chihn) state of ancient China

Shi Huangdi (shee hwahng•dee) Chinese ruler who came to power in 221 B.C. and unified and expanded China by ending internal battles and conquering rival states

Great Wall wall built by Shi Huangdi to link smaller walls and keep invaders out of China

Han Dynasty Chinese dynasty begun in 202 B.C. by Liu Bang, who reunified China

bureaucracy (byu•RAHK•ruh•see) system of departments and agencies that carry out the work of a government

BACKGROUND VOCABULARY

terra cotta baked clay

assimilate to adopt the cultural or social traditions of a group



Visual Vocabulary

Shi Huangdi

Silk Roads overland trade routes along which silk and other Chinese goods passed to Mesopotamia and Europe

trans-Eurasian involving the continents of Europe and Asia

cultural diffusion spread of cultural practices and customs to other areas of the world