

China

Ancient Chinese Culture



Introduction to Ancient China

Ancient Chinese Beliefs

**Ancient Chinese Technology
and Trade**

Ancient Chinese Culture

Thematic Icons



Economics



Geography



Historical concepts



Government

Icons



Flash activity (these activities are not editable)



Teacher notes included in the Notes page

For more instructions, see the *User Guide*.



A clear social structure developed in China during the **Shang** and **Zhou** dynasties.

The king and his family sat at the top, followed by the lords and warriors.

Artisans (skilled craftsmen) made up the middle level of society. During the Shang period they settled in groups depending on the types of crafts they did.

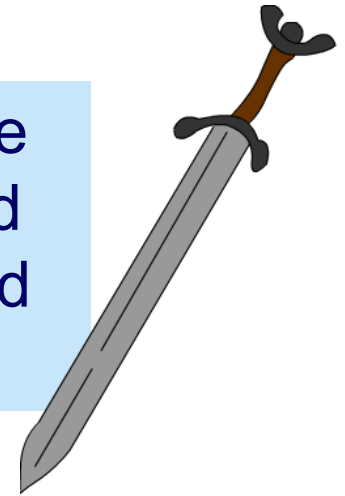
Peasant farmers sat at the bottom of the social structure. Slaves were also an important source of labor.





Ancient Chinese kings were the head of a ruling family, called a **dynasty**. The position was **hereditary**. Titles were passed down through families, most often from father to son.

Kings were assisted by nobles, or lords, who were granted land in return for their loyalty. They rented land out to peasants, collected taxes and provided soldiers when they were needed.



Over time these nobles increased their power and became less loyal to the king. They began to challenge his authority.

What might be the consequence of nobles increasing their power?





By 475 BC the lords had rejected the king's authority and had started to fight amongst themselves for control of China in a period known as the **Warring States Period** (475–221 BC).

In 221 BC, the leader of the **Qin** state, Ying Zheng, united the country and became **Qin Shi Huangdi**, the first **Emperor**.

Shi Huangdi enforced **Legalism**, which promoted strict laws and harsh punishments. He maintained tight control of his government and the governors who oversaw administrative districts. He also standardized the coinage, laws and writing.





Punishments were severe in Ancient China. The **Five Punishments** was the collective name given to the various penalties that could be enforced.

The five punishments at this time were:

- tattooing the face/forehead
- cutting off the nose
- amputation of one or both feet
- castration
- death.

Punishments for women included grinding grain, the squeezing of fingers between sticks, beatings with wooden staves, forced suicide and solitary confinement.

What type of crime do you think each of these was punishment for?

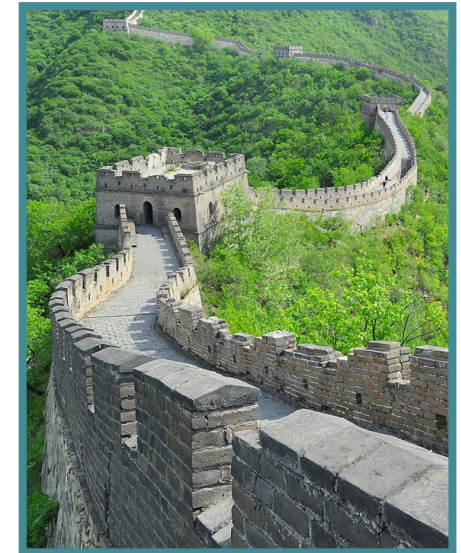




The majority of people in Ancient China were farmers. They worked long days and earned little money.

Most of their labor was done by hand and they did not even own their own land.

Slavery was also common. Many worked in the fields alongside the farmers or as domestic servants. Under the Shang dynasty, slaves were sacrificed after the death of a king or wealthy lord to serve him in the afterlife.



Slaves might also be part of government building projects such as the **Great Wall** and the **Terracotta Army**.

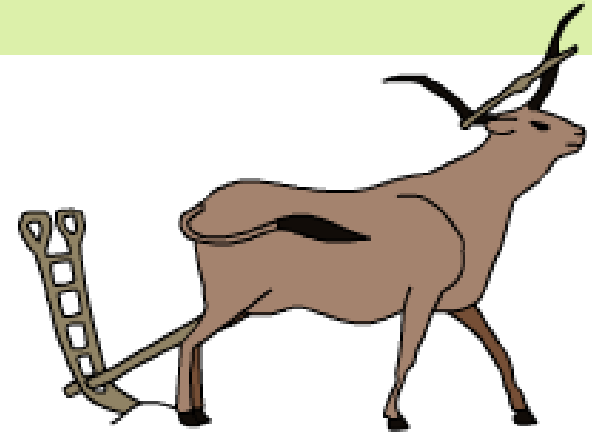


What do you think conditions were like for slaves?



Family was very important and children often lived with their parents and grandparents. Children were expected to respect their parents and **ancestors** were worshiped after their death. The eldest male was the head of the household and everyone else was expected to obey him.

Only boys who could afford it went to school. Girls were taught household chores and poorer boys were expected to work in the fields.



Boys were often valued more than girls and would remain living in the household once they were married. Girls would move to the homes of their husband's family.



Ancient Chinese society was **patriarchal** (male-dominated). Women had a **subservient** role. A woman's primary role was domestic, although poorer women were required to help in the fields.

Women were expected to obey. Upon marriage, a girl's obedience shifted from her father to her husband and then to her eldest son if she was widowed.

Marriages were arranged and a woman was expected to show loyalty to her husband's family and practices over her own.



A woman could gain respect and importance by bearing sons or by being the oldest living member of her family.



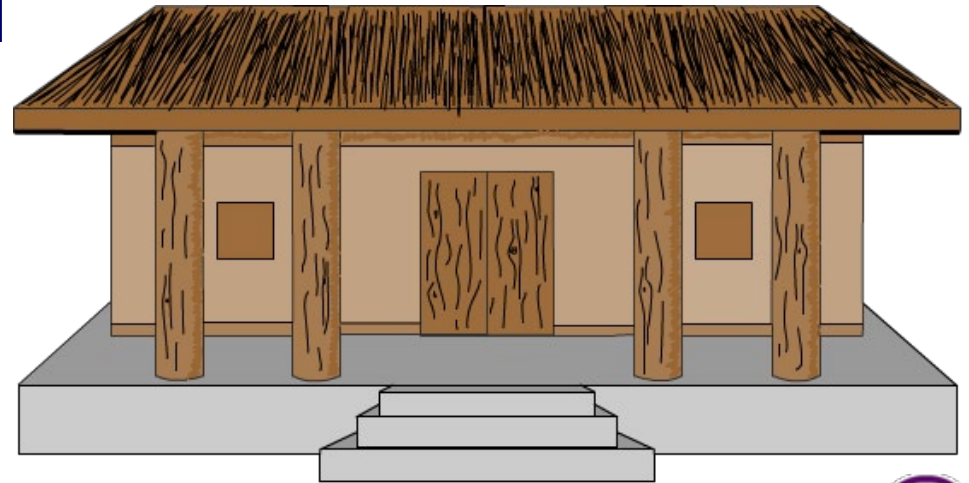
With the exception of the palaces, temples and homes for the very rich, there was not much difference in housing between the rich and poor in Ancient China.

The key features of a Chinese house were:

- timber framework
- south-facing
- rectangular shape
- columns holding up the roof.

Houses might extend around a courtyard and the rich had high walls to prevent others from looking in.

All homes had a shrine for ancestral worship.





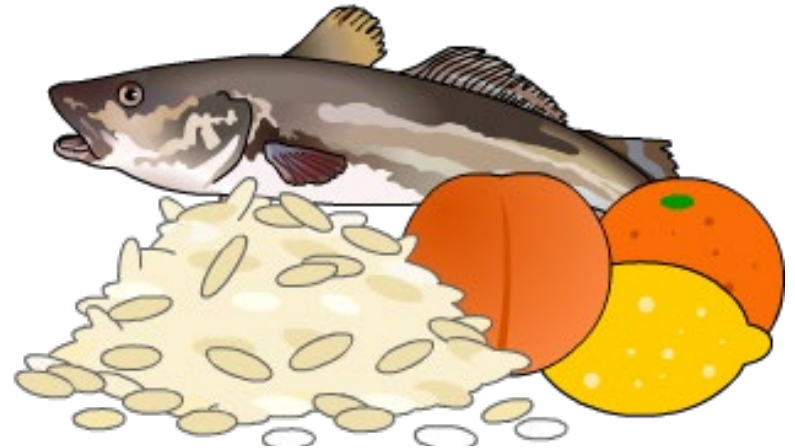
Architecture



Rice has been farmed in China for many thousands of years and was the staple crop in the south. However, it was too cold and dry to grow rice in the north, so instead **millet** and **wheat** dominated crop production. As well as providing carbohydrates, wine could be made from rice and millet.

The Ancient Chinese also ate fruit and vegetables including oranges, lemons and plums.

Available meats included chicken, pork, ducks and fish.



However, meat and fruit were expensive and so were less common in poorer households.



There were many rules about what people could and could not wear. Restrictions included certain styles and colors.

The majority of the population wore clothing made from **hemp** in the form of **tunics**. Women's tunics were long, whilst men's would come to the knee. Hemp was a rough material but it was fine for working in the fields.

In contrast, royalty and the nobility wore clothing made from **silk**. Clothing generally consisted of either a blouse and long skirt, or a long gown. Some characteristics included crossed collars, sashes and wide sleeves.



Why do you think silk was restricted?

In Ancient China it was considered disrespectful to cut hair, which was thought to come from ancestors. As such, both men and women had long hair.

Men would typically tie their hair in a bun and may wear a hat. Rich women would decorate their hair with combs and hair pins. Poorer women would simply tie their hair with twine or something similar.



Jewelry, like the combs in a woman's hair, would show the status of a person. For men, an important piece of jewelry was their belt buckle.







The earliest known Chinese writing was discovered on **oracle** (or dragon) **bones** from the Shang dynasty by Wang Yirong in 1899. Paper was not invented until 100 BC.

Chinese script is **ideographic**. This means that symbols are used to express words or ideas. There were over 2000 characters in the Shang writing system.



The characters used in China today have developed from the original Shang symbols.

Oracle bone inscription	Simplified modern Chinese	Meaning
	王	King
	雨	Rain



During his rule, Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi ordered the burning of all books that did not fit with his policies. Much of the work that survived comes from the Zhou dynasty.

These texts were largely religious or philosophical and included those now referred to as the **Four Books** and the **Five Classics**. Today, these are considered an early authority on **Confucianism**. Some poetry and songs also survived.

Perhaps the oldest work we know of is the *I Ching* on **divination**.

Sun Tzu's famous **Art of War** was written sometime around 500 BC.



Arts and crafts flourished in Ancient China. Some examples of the arts practiced in China included:

- painting
- music
- embroidery
- **calligraphy.**

Artisans also used a variety of materials to produce goods, including:

- jade
- bronze
- clay.

They produced jewelry, musical instruments, food vessels and much more.



Can you name any other famous Chinese materials?



The Chinese calendar is used to establish the dates of key festivals, such as the **Chinese New Year**. The calendar is **lunisolar** (determined by the activities of the sun and moon).



Evidence for a calendar can be found from the Shang dynasty. However, legend suggests it was created during the reign of Emperor Huangdi, the “**Yellow Emperor**” at the start of the third millennium BC. The Yellow Emperor is considered the instigator of Chinese culture.

A normal Chinese year is made up of 12 months, whilst a leap year has 13 months. Each month is 29–30 days.

How does the Chinese calendar differ from the calendar used in the Western world?

Chinese New Year (or Spring Festival) can be dated back at least as far as the Shang dynasty. It falls on the second new moon after winter solstice.

Legend says that a monster, **Nian** (year), would terrorise villages when he ran out of food toward the end of winter. Nian feared fire, noise and the colour red, so the villagers chased him away using red lanterns and firecrackers.



Chinese New Year celebrates the defeat of Nian. It is the most important festival in the Chinese calendar.



The Ancient Chinese enjoyed a number of entertainment activities despite their busy lives.

Music was used both for entertainment purposes and as part of rituals. Ancient Chinese instruments included bamboo flutes and pipes, drums and bronze bells.



The Chinese are credited with the invention of the board game **Go** (Weiqi) which is still played today.



Sports included archery, sword fighting and wrestling. These had the added benefit of providing military training.

Why was this a benefit?

Keywords

