

# China

## *Introduction to Ancient China*



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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*.





# Timeline of Ancient China





# Where is China?



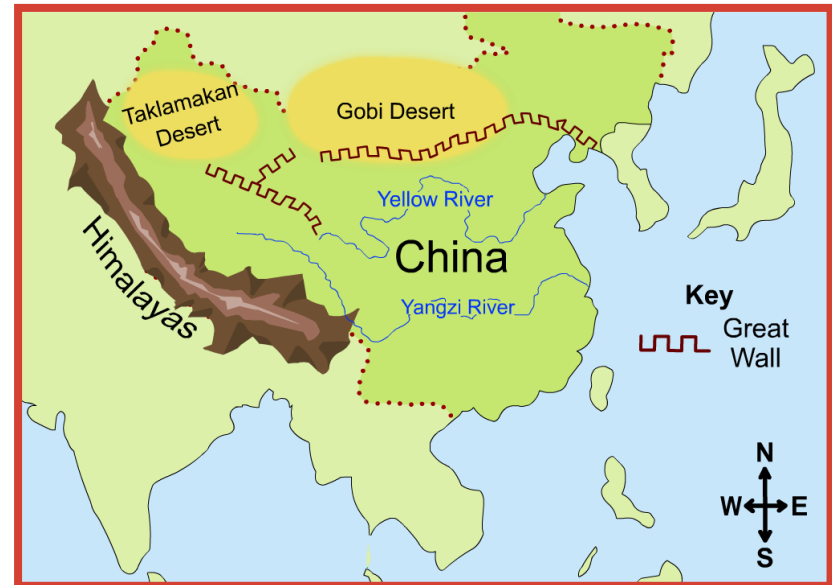


China is about the same size as the USA. As it is so large, it has a wide range of climates and many different **terrains**.

The **Himalayan** mountains are to the west. The Himalayas house some of the tallest mountains in the world.

To the north, the **Gobi** Desert and **Taklamakan** Desert are areas where it rains very little. The climate is hot and **arid**.

The deserts and the Himalayas were very difficult to cross, so most of China's population lived in the **east** of the country.



The deserts and mountains helped to isolate and protect China's northwestern borders.





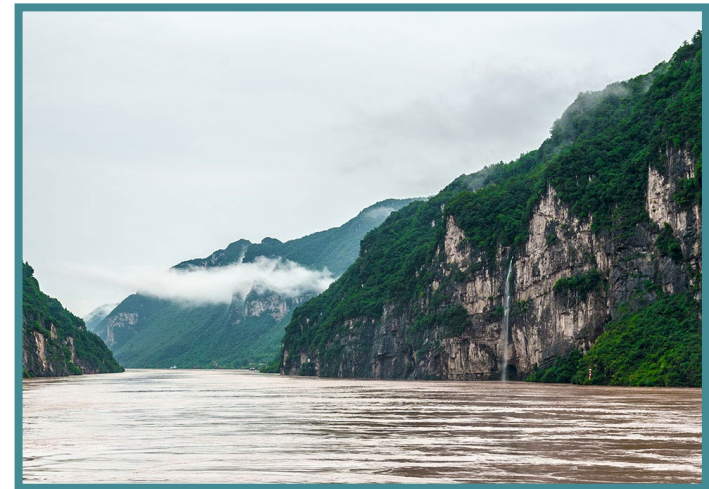
# The Yangzi River



The **Yangzi River** is the longest river in Asia and the third-longest in the world. It runs from the center of the country through to the East China Sea, spanning 6,300 km.

Evidence of human activity along the Yangzi has been found from as far back as 27,000 years ago!

The Yangzi was very important for China's development, as it **irrigated** the land. This allowed people to grow rice and other crops.



How else do you think the river was important in Ancient China?





# The Yellow River



The **Yellow River** is in northern China. It got its name because of the large amount of yellow sediment it carries.

During **monsoon season** (May–July), the Yellow River often floods, destroying nearby settlements and depositing layers of silt on the surrounding areas. Locals sometimes call it **“China’s Sorrow”** because of the damage it causes.



Modern Chinese uses the saying “when the Yellow River runs clear” to mean something is very unlikely to happen.

Why do you think this is?





Regular flooding meant that the land in China was **fertile** and good for **agriculture** (farming).

In the north, farmers grew cereal crops such as **wheat** and **millet**, which were used to make flour for noodles.

In the south, the climate was warmer and wetter, making it perfect for growing **rice**. Early in China's history, only the wealthy could afford to eat rice, but by the Zhou dynasty (around 1046 BC), it had become a common staple food.

Agricultural techniques such as **irrigation** were developed, and people caught fish and wild animals. Other animals were domesticated and used for food and materials.







# What is a dynasty?



Ancient China was ruled by **hereditary** leaders. This means that power was passed down within one family, usually from a father to his eldest son.

The period when one family ruled was called a **dynasty**.

Most historians believe that the first dynasty in China was the **Xia dynasty**, which was established around 2070 BC by the legendary Yu the Great.

However, there is very little **archaeological evidence** from this period, so not much is known about it.



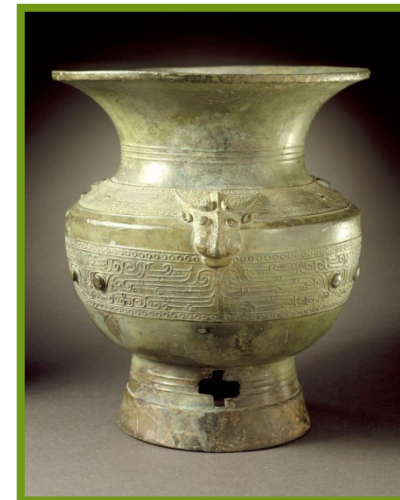


The Shang dynasty was established around **1600 BC**, after King Tang of Shang defeated the last king of the Xia dynasty.

The Shang dynasty was a period of stability and prosperity. During this time, China's society began to develop:

- a writing system
- a calendar
- bronze-casting technology
- a social structure
- religious rituals
- a stable government.

Because there is so little archaeological evidence for the Xia dynasty, some historians believe that the Shang dynasty was the first true dynasty in China.





The Shang dynasty was overthrown in around 1046 BC by King Wu of Zhou, who established the **Zhou dynasty**.

Wu was keen to strengthen his claim to rule. He adopted many of the cultural practices of the Shang dynasty in an attempt to make himself more popular with the people.

The Zhou dynasty also focused on the **Mandate of Heaven**. This was an ancient Chinese teaching that leaders were given the right to rule by the gods, as long as they governed in a fair and just way.

The Zhou dynasty is divided into two periods:

Western Zhou

c.1046 BC–771 BC

Eastern Zhou

c.771 BC–256 BC





# Western Zhou



This period is called Western Zhou as its capital, **Fenghao**, was located in western China. Fenghao was actually made up of two cities on opposite banks of the Feng River.

At first, the Zhou dynasty held control through a system of government with family members in positions of power. However, as time went on, this system weakened.

The last king of Western Zhou was **King You**. Legend has it that in order to make his queen laugh, he lit the warning beacons of the palace, causing the nearby nobles to rush to his aid. He did this several times, annoying the nobles. When there was a real invasion not long after, they refused to help, and You was killed by the invading soldiers.



Do you know of any similar stories?





By 700 BC, the Zhou line was losing its grip on power. Although they ruled for another 500 years, they had far less authority. This led to several changes in Chinese society:

- individual states began to form their own armies with military leaders who were chosen based on talent rather than wealth or status
- philosophy and the arts flourished, and important ideologies began to develop, such as Daoism, Legalism and Confucianism.

The different philosophies at this time became known as the **Hundred Schools of Thought**.





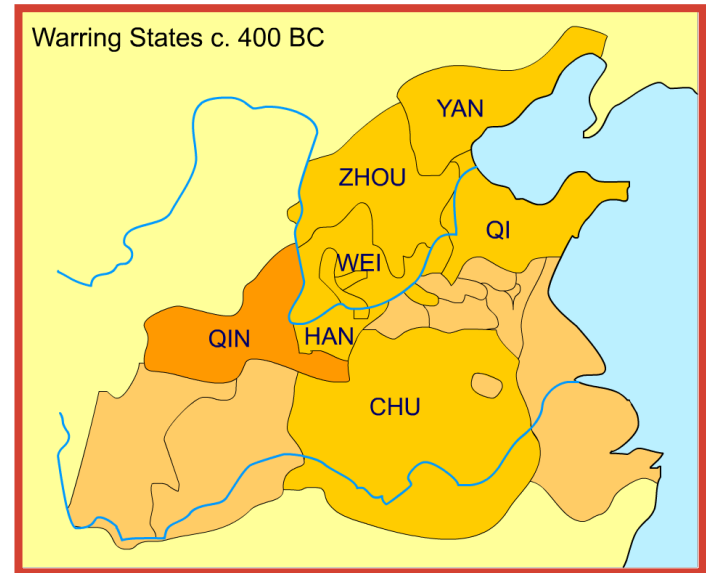
# The Warring States



From 475 BC, the different states began to fight one another in a period known as the **Warring States**.

The seven most powerful states fought for ultimate control of the country. New developments in warfare, such as iron weapons and mounted warriors, led to some of the deadliest battles in Chinese history.

Eventually, the state of **Qin** conquered all of the other states and united them. Qin, pronounced “chin”, also gave China the name by which we know it today.



**Qin Shi Huangdi** proclaimed himself the First Emperor of China when he conquered all of China in 221 BC, ending the Warring States period and founding the Qin dynasty.

To keep power, Shi Huangdi focused on defending his new country from invasion. In 221 BC, he began building work to link the smaller walls that had already been built in the north.

Eventually, these **fortifications** grew into the huge wall known today as the **Great Wall of China**. In modern China, it is a major tourist attraction, with roughly 10 million visitors each year.



**Qin Shi Huangdi** had been ruler of the state of Qin since he was a boy. While he was younger, an official ruled in his name, but once he was old enough, he **exiled** the official and ruled himself.

Shi Huangdi was a strong but ruthless emperor. Those who disagreed with his policies were often exiled or killed.



After several failed **assassination** attempts, Shi Huangdi was afraid of his own death. He offered rewards to anyone who could find the elixir of life and make him immortal.







**Qin Shi Huangdi** introduced many new laws as emperor. These laws allowed him to keep control of all of China.

However, not everyone was glad that the country was united. Shi Huangdi often had to suppress rebellions from the states he had conquered to become emperor. He became paranoid and did not trust anyone, even his own advisors.

As Shi Huangdi did not like to talk about his own death, he did not write a will. When he died in 210 BC, the country did not have a clear leader and it soon fell into **civil war**.



**Why do you think this happened?**

# Keywords

