**2. ZHOU DYNASTY (1122-221 BC)**

The Chou Dynasty (1122-221 BC) saw the full flowering of ancient civilization in China. During this period the empire was unified, a middle class arose, and iron was introduced. The sage Confucius (551-479 BC) developed the code of ethics that dominated Chinese thought and culture for the next 25 centuries (See Confucius).

The Chou conquest of the Shang was given an important meaning by later moralistic interpretations of the event. The Chou kings, whose chief deity was heaven, called themselves "Sons of Heaven," and their success in overcoming the Shang was seen as the "mandate of heaven." From this time on, Chinese rulers were called "Sons of Heaven" and the Chinese Empire, the "Celestial Empire." The transfer of power from one dynasty to the next was based on the mandate of heaven.

Chou rule in China continued for nearly nine centuries. During that time great advances were made. The long period of the Chou Dynasty is divided into two subperiods: Western (Early) and Eastern (Later) Chou, named for the locations of the capitals.

**Western (Early) Chou (1122-771 BC)**.

Western Chou territory covered most of the North China Plain. It was divided into about 200 princely domains. The Chou political system was similar to the feudal system of medieval Europe. The Chou people combined hunting and agriculture for a living. Associating the success or failure of crops with the disposition of nature, the people prayed to numerous nature gods for good harvests. One of the ruler's duties was to placate heaven and Earth for all people. Failure to do so deprived him of the right to rule. Such beliefs are still widely held today among the Chinese people. Ancestor worship also developed during the Chou period and has been important in East Asia for the last 2,000 years.

The Chou were invaded in 771 BC by a less cultured, more militaristic people from the northwest. The capital was moved east to Luoyang. From this point on, the dates are considered reliable. The manner in which the Western Chou fell followed a pattern that was repeated throughout Chinese history. People who led a nomadic, or wandering, life in the northern steppe land would invade settled agricultural communities to solve periodic food shortages.

The conflict between the nomads and settled farmers has been a continuing feature of Chinese history. Settled Chinese called the nomads "barbarians," a term applied to all peoples of non-Chinese culture up to the 20th century. From this concept an idea developed that China was the center of the

civilized world, hence the traditional name "Middle Kingdom/Country," referring to China.

**Eastern (Later) Chou (771-221 BC)**.

The Eastern Chou is also two periods. The first is Ch'un Ch'iu, the Spring and Autumn period (771-481 BC), named for a book credited to Confucius. The second is Chan-kuo, the Warring States period

(481-221 BC).

In the Spring and Autumn period, iron replaced bronze for tools and weapons. The use of iron led to an increase in agricultural output, growth of the population, and warfare among the states. By the 4th century BC the number of states had shrunk to seven. In 256 BC the princes of those states assumed the title of king, stopped paying homage to the Chou king, and continued to fight for supremacy. The strongest of the seven states was Ch'in.

The disruption caused by this prolonged warfare had a number of long-range consequences. One was the rise of a new social group, the scholars (shi). They were forerunners of the scholar-officials of the Chinese Empire, who became the most influential group in China. In the Later Chou period, however, they were a relatively small group of learned people. Often wandering from state to state in search of permanent employment, the shi worked as tutors to the children of feudal princes and as advisers to various state governments. The most famous of these scholars was Confucius.

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| **Zhou Dynasty (1100-221 BC)**The Shang dynasty gave way to another kingdom called Zhou in 1100 BC. The Zhou were once part of the Shang realm, and were located on the northwest borders near present-day Xi’an. Referred to as “barbarians” in early accounts, the Zhou seem to have conquered the Shang with a force of only 50,000, after armies of the degenerate and oppressive Shang king joined the invading forces. Early rulers included King Wen (the “Cultivated”), who helped lay the foundation for the Zhou victory, and his son King Wu (the “Martial”), who carried it out. These two rulers embodied dual aspects of Chinese leadership incorporating both civil and martial strengths that would remain relevant for centuries. Once Shang resistance was squelched by King Wu, a new order was put in place that evolved into a feudal system in which a central Zhou state developed relationships (by blood or marriage) with local lords all over the former Shang realm. Military prowess and accomplishment remained important attributes among the upper classes. Most people were farmers, and therefore serfs to various levels of local lords. There were also classes of craftsmen and traders. Duke of Zhou**Duke of Zhou**The early period of conquest and rule, called the Western Zhou, produced another exemplary leader named the Duke of Zhou. The Duke was instrumental in forming an efficient bureaucratic state and later in the Zhou period, the sage Kongzi (Confucius) held him in high regard for his proper conduct. According to the story, the Duke of Zhou was the brother of King Wu and upon Wu’s death was made regent for his son. After years of giving good advice and guidance to the future heir to the throne, the Duke of Zhou “did the right thing” and stepped aside when the young king was ready to assume power. Although he probably could have wrested the kingship for his own, the Duke of Zhou demonstrated that proper conduct (*li*) and virtue (*de*) were more important than personal ambition. By 771 BC the Western Zhou had weakened due to natural disaster and ineffective leadership, finally collapsing under pressure from combined forces of western nomads and native Chinese. A popular legend tells that the last Western Zhou King would light signal fires to entertain his favorite concubine. In something like the “boy who cried ‘wolf’” story, he lit them one too many times, and the western part of the realm was over run. Kongzi (Confucius)**Kongzi (Confucius)**Under a new king, Zhou forces reconstituted themselves in the eastern capital called Luoyang, in present day Henan province. One era of the new Eastern Zhou dynasty was known as the “Spring and Autumn” period (770-476 BC), famous for literature and rich philosophy, including the “Hundred Schools of Thought.” Confucianism, Daoism, Moism, the Yin-Yang School, and many other philosophies flourished in this period. Classic writings and compilations like the Daoist classic, the *Daodejing*, the *Analects of Confucius*, the *Book of Songs*, and Sunzi’s *Art of War* all date to this period. This was an age of cultural and philosophical development that later ages would see as the true cradle of Chinese civilization. Mengzi (Mencius)**Mengzi (Mencius)**An important idea in Chinese statecraft that had evolved early in the Zhou era was refined in this period. Thinkers such as Mencius (Mengzi) explained that under the so-called “Mandate of Heaven” only good rulers could receive the mandate (permission) of heaven to rule. If a ruler acted in accord to the will of heaven, he would then remain in power and continue to serve for the benefit of the realm. If he failed in his duty, then the mandate would be withdrawn, and another ruler would come to power. Implicit in this formula was the peasant’s right to rebel if life became too intolerable. Under this theory, the early Zhou rulers legitimized their usurping of the Shang. In later ages, the theory would be invoked many times to justify government takeovers in China. The social structure also underwent change. The Zhou kings were weak and many local states were nearly independent powers. Social mobility was also greater, and the influence of powerful families closely related by blood to the rulers declined. Changes in land tenure changed as well, with peasants paying taxes (rather than just labor) to their lords and the development of freer exchange of land. Metal coins became widespread in an economy that involved extensive and increasingly complex trade networks. Technological innovations saw the increased use of cast iron in place of bronze, allowing for advances in mass production of farm implements and weapons—resources that would come into play in the final era of the Zhou dynasty. Han Feizi**Warring States bronze weapon: *ge* with beast face pattern** This last era was known as the “Warring States” period (475-221 BC). During this time, the individual Zhou states (which had their own armies) began full-scale struggles for power to rule and strategically ate each other up. By the end, only three states (Chu, Qi, and Qin) remained out of an original total of about seventy. The winning state was Qin. Located in the northwest, near the old Zhou homeland, the Qin had experimented with the principles of Legalism (*fajia*), which were promoted by the philosopher Han Feizi (d. 233 BC). Unlike the program of Confucius, Legalism distrusted human goodness, and relied instead on bureaucratic theories of organization enforced by strict codes of rewards and punishments. With the final collapse of the Zhou feudal system, Legalist principles were implemented in the establishment of a unified empire under the leadership of China’s first emperor, Qinshi Huangdi. |