



**CHINA OVERVIEW:  
A BRIEF HISTORY  
OF CHINESE  
DYNASTIES**

# GEOGRAPHY OF CHINA

- Larger than the United States
- Climate varies
  - North
    - Temperate and cold
  - South
    - Subtropical
    - Erosion
    - Floods and droughts
- Important rivers
  - Hwang ho (Yellow River) – north
  - Yangtze River – central China
- Enclosed by high mountains, hot deserts, wide oceans



# ANCIENT HISTORY

- By 4000 BCE
  - Village settlements along Hwang ho River
  - Farming, stone tools, weapons (bow and arrow), animal domestication, pottery
- Circa 1500 BCE
  - Picture writing (oldest writing in existence)
  - Now circa 40,000 characters



# WHAT ARE DYNASTIES?

- A **dynasty** is a series of rulers from the same family.
- Historically, royal rule was descended from father to son.

## **DYNASTIC CYCLE**

1. Emperor comes to power and gains the Mandate of Heaven.
2. Upward rise (wealth and population increase) to peak.
3. Downward spiral (natural disasters, corruption, etc.).
4. Emperor loses the Mandate of Heaven.
5. Civil war until a new emperor, with the Mandate of Heaven, comes to power.

## **MANDATE OF HEAVEN** – Described by philosopher **Mencius**

- Belief that the emperor was chosen by heaven to rule.



# XIA (A.K.A. HSIA) DYNASTY

(CA. 2070-CA. 1600 BCE)

- China's first dynasty
- Founded by Yu
- Built roads and irrigation projects



# SHANG DYNASTY

(CA. 1600-1046 BCE)

- Writing began
- Developed bronze, glazed pottery, and silk industries



# ZHOU (A.K.A. CHOU) DYNASTY

(1045-256 BCE)

- Invaded China from the northwest
- Set up a loose central government
- Feudal power held by strong nobles
  
- Philosophers
  - Confucius
  - Mencius (his follower)



# QIN (A.K.A. CHIN) DYNASTY

(221-206 BCE)

- Military dictatorship centralized China
- Emperor Shih Huang Ti
  - Destroyed nobles' feudal power
  - System of taxation
  - Established weights and measures
  - Great Wall (1500 miles)





# HAN DYNASTY

(206-220 CE)

- Conquerors
- Empire – central Asia to China Sea, Indochina to Korea
- Trade
  - Chinese fruits, silks, and spices in Rome (1<sup>st</sup> century CE)
  - Buddhism came from India
- Civil service system
- First paper made



# TANG DYNASTY

(618-906 CE)

- 400 years of warfare between Han and Tang dynasties
- Tang reunited China
- T'ai Tsung
  - Emperor in 627 CE
  - Education and government reforms
- Extended boundaries
- Alliances and peace treaties with neighbors
- Industry and trade
  - Jade porcelain, and silks to Arabia, India, Japan, and Persia



# SONG (A.K.A. SUNG) DYNASTY

(960-1279)

- Disorder between Tang and Sung dynasties
- Culture superior to that of medieval Europe
- Powerful only in southern China



# MONGOL RULE

(1259-1368)

- Central Asian nomads
- Genghis Khan
  - Conquered Asia, including China
- Kublai Khan
  - Grandson of Genghis
  - Visited by Marco Polo (Venetian)
- Ruled for circa 100 years
  - Capital – Peking (Beijing)
- Trade with Europe begun



# MING DYNASTY

(1368-1644)

- Overthrew Mongols
- Chinese natives
- Beautified Peking (Beijing)
- Encouraged trade with Europe
- Gave Europeans:
  - Gunpowder
  - Jade
  - Playing cards
  - Porcelain
  - Silk
  - Tea



# QING DYNASTY (MANCHU RULE)

(1644-1912)

- Manchurians conquered China, Indochina, Korea, Mongolia, Tibet, eastern Turkestan
- China prospered
- Western pressure brought about Manchu overthrow in 1912
- Ended with birth of Chinese Republic



# PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

- **Late Zhou (Chou) period (1100-256 BCE)**
  - Suffering produced influential philosophers
- **Lao-Tse (6<sup>th</sup> century BCE)**
  - Men should be left alone to work out their own lives with the fewest possible laws of government
  - Men should make their own lives simple and desire nothing, but should submit to all that comes in life
  - Taoism



# CONFUCIUS

(551-479 BCE)

- Considered China's greatest philosopher
- Ethics – correct way to live
- Human nature – good
- Men should be kind, tolerant, and love their elders and ancestors (filial piety)
- Golden rule: “Do not do to others what you would not have others do to you.”
- *Analects*
- Confucianism – code of behavior and religion
  - Education, good manners, right morals, respect for others, love of tradition, obedience to one's parents





# CULTURE

- Literature, poetry, history, philosophy
- Tang dynasty – poet Li Po
  - Printing invented – books produced cheaply in great numbers
  - Paper – 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE
- “China” or “Chinaware”
  - Known for glazed pottery and porcelain
- Music
- Paintings



# SCIENCE

- 1000-1500 CE – civilization superior to that of medieval Europe
- Paper and ink
  - “India” ink really Chinese ink
- Movable type
  - Movable blocks with cut-out raised characters
- Compass
- Gunpowder
  - Originally for firecrackers
- Silk manufacturing
- Irrigation and farming techniques

