

Early Civilizations in India and China (2500 B.C.-184 B.C.)

Ancient India

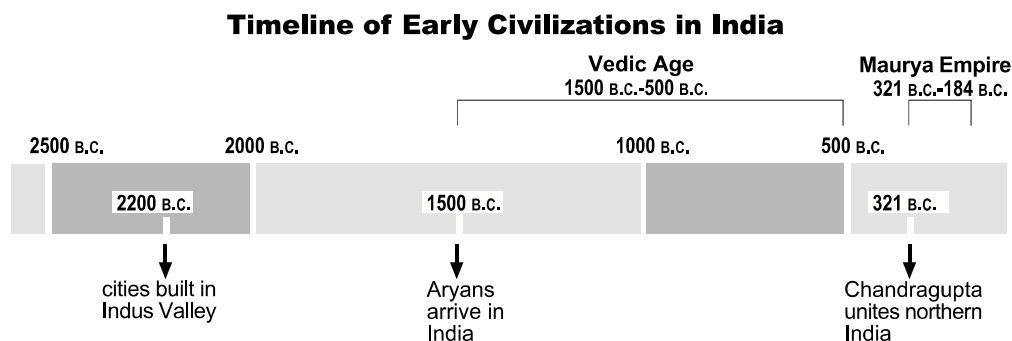
India is called a **subcontinent** because it is so large and is isolated from the rest of Asia by natural barriers. It is shaped like a triangle and extends south into the Indian Ocean. The Arabian Sea is on its West Coast and the Bay of Bengal on its East Coast. India lies north of the equator, but the lower region falls within the tropical zone and has a warm tropical climate.



In the north, the Himalayan Mountains and the Hindu Kush Mountains surround India. However, throughout its history, it has been invaded by other civilizations that reached India by going through the Khyber Pass in the Hindu Kush Mountains. The Indus River and the Ganges River flow from these mountains across the northern plains of India. The Indus River flows southwest to the Arabian Sea, and the Ganges River flows southeast to the Bay of Bengal. These two great rivers water this fertile region. The Indus Plain attracted many invaders to India. Many of them came into India through the northwest mountain passes.

South of the plains is a region known as the *Deccan*, which forms most of India's peninsula. The Deccan is a plateau that includes mountain ranges, tropical forests, and rocky soil. The many mountain ranges have isolated population groups from one another throughout India's history.

Life in India also depends on the seasonal winds known as the **monsoons**. These seasonal winds blow consistently over India. The summer monsoons from June to October come from the southwest and bring moisture from the Indian Ocean and provide India with much needed rainfall that waters the farmers' fields. If summer monsoons are late or do not contain enough moisture, they can cause crop failures that lead to famine.



Early Indus Valley Civilization (2500 B.C.-1500 B.C.)

The Nile River in Egypt and the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in Mesopotamia provided the ideal environment for early civilizations to develop and prosper. The first Indian civilization began in the Indus River valley. Two important cities developed along the Indus River by 2200 B.C.: Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. These ancient cities were among the most modern in the ancient world. They had paved streets, brick houses, and public buildings. Most homes were large, with some standing two stories



high. They had indoor bathrooms and sewer systems. City dwellers included artisans and city workers. Many skilled craftsmen made pottery and jewelry, and built furniture. Ancient Indians were the first people to make cotton cloth. Outside the city, most people were farmers. They used irrigation to bring water to their fields during the dry season. They raised a variety of crops including grain, fruit, and cotton. The ancient Indians **domesticated** many animals, including elephants, sheep, goats, cats, and dogs. Merchants and traders sailed along the coast and traded with such far away places as Sumer in Mesopotamia.

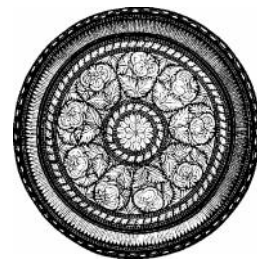
A Mystery in History

Much of what we know of the early Indian civilizations comes from the work of archeologists. Many clay tablets with *pictograms* or picture symbols have been found on clay seals, but archeologists have not been able to **decipher** this ancient language. About 1500 B.C., the Indus River Valley civilization suddenly ended. There could be many reasons for their disappearance. Some historians think that a natural disaster like a flood or an earthquake may have weakened the Indus Valley cities. Other historians believe that the Aryans conquered and killed many of the people or drove them away.

Indus Valley People Contributions to Civilization

Arts and Crafts, Metalworking, and Measuring

The people of the Indus Valley developed many techniques similar to those developed in the Middle East. They used the potter's wheel to shape cups and other pottery and then decorated, glazed, and baked them. Smiths worked with copper and bronze to make ornaments, fishhooks, and spears. Indus Valley artisans decorated wooden furniture with inlays of bone, shell, and ivory.



Indian plate

The artisans and merchants of Harappa developed a uniform system of weights and measures. They used balance scales with weights of varying size to ensure fair trade practices. They measured with a ruler precisely marked .264 inches or about .66 centimeters.

The Aryan Invasions (2000 B.C.-600 B.C.)

Kingdoms of the Ganges

Aryans were light-skinned people from central Asia who crossed the mountain passes of northwestern India and invaded the Indus plain. The Aryans were a nomadic, warlike people. They had bronze weapons and horse-drawn chariots. The Aryans were much more powerful than the Dravidians who lived in the Indus Valley. They soon conquered the dark-skinned Dravidians, enslaved them, and drove many of them to the south. Eventually the Aryans controlled all the fertile plains of northern India. In the Ganges Valley, they settled and developed India's second great civilization.

The Vedic Age (1500 B.C.–500 B.C.)

The Aryan period is called the *Vedic Age*. During this time Indian civilization began to develop important customs and traditions. All that is known about the Aryan history and culture of this thousand-year period comes from the *sacred literature* known as the Vedas. The Vedas are four collections of prayers and rituals. The most important part of the collection is the Rig-Veda. The Rig-Veda contains many hymns and poems devoted to the Aryan gods. The Aryans had no writing system, so priests memorized and recited the Vedas for thousands of years before they were written down.

Examples of Sanskrit Writing

इ मं क्रं थं ल

The Aryan hymns and poems were in the Aryan language, an early form of **Sanskrit**. Sanskrit is the oldest literary language of the Indo-European family of languages. Even English is closely related to Sanskrit.

Comparing Languages

Sanskrit	mās	matar	nava	nakt	nās	trayas
English	month	mother	new	night	nose	three
German	monat	mutter	neu	nacht	nase	drei
Persian	māh	mādar	nau	shab	bini	se
Spanish	mes	madre	nuevo	noche	nariz	tres
Swedish	månad	moder	ny	natt	näsa	tre

Aryan Society and Religion

The Vedas tell us that Aryans divided people by occupation. This division was the beginning of the **caste** or class system. Under this system, Aryan society was divided into several separate groups by occupation. The three basic groups were *Brahmins* or priests; the *Kshatriyas* or warriors; and the *Vaisyas* or farmers, merchants, and artisans. The class that particular Aryans belonged to was determined by who their parents were. This, in return, also determined their role in society.

Non-Aryans, mostly Dravidians workers and laborers, made up a fourth and lowest class known as the *Shudras*. To prevent intermarriage and maintain their superiority, the Aryans put the Dravidians into a separate and inferior class. There was also a classless element, the outcasts or *untouchables*, who performed the lowest tasks. For the lowest-ranked outcasts, life was harsh and restricted. They were outside the caste system for such reasons as being foreign born, committing a crime, breaking cultural rules, or being non-Hindu. These class divisions among the Aryans grew more complex throughout time.

The Aryans were **polytheistic**. They worshipped nature gods and goddesses. The Brahmins, or priests, offered sacrifices of food, rituals, and prayers to their gods. They believed that their gods would give them good health, victory in war, and wealth. The Aryan religion began to change. The Aryan religion gradually changed into Hinduism, which became the major religion in India. Unlike most major religions, Hinduism has no single founder and no single sacred text. Hinduism grew out of the combination of beliefs of the diverse groups of people who settled in India.



Aryan Government

As their civilization advanced, the Aryans gave up their nomadic ways and formed independent states that were ruled by *rajahs* or chiefs. A rajah was the most skilled warrior and elected to this position by a council of warriors. These independent states eventually became small kingdoms with *self-governing* farming villages. Aryans eventually interacted with the people that they conquered as they migrated further into the Ganges basin. By 500 B.C., a new Indian civilization was created. There were many rival kingdoms, but they shared many common Aryan and Dravidians cultural traditions.

Aryan Contributions to Civilization

Language, Literature, Government, and Religion

Aryan language and literature; ideas about government, law, social classes; and religious traditions had far-reaching effects on India's future. Their ideas and religious traditions became strong influences in Indian life.

The Maurya Empire (321 B.C.–184 B.C.)

Chandragupta Maurya

The Maurya were an Indian family that created India's first great empire. Their kingdom included most of northern and central India.

Chandragupta Maurya established a *centralized* government with a well-organized **bureaucracy**. Government officials loyal to the emperor collected taxes, supervised the building of roads and harbors, and managed the government-controlled factories. Chandragupta's rule was harsh. He used a powerful army and a network of spies to control his huge empire.

Asoka

Asoka, Chandragupta's grandson, continued the Mauryan conquest of India. His armies migrated southward, fighting a bloody war to conquer the Deccan region of India. His conquests continued until he controlled more than two-thirds of India. Sickened by the killing of 100,000 people during his bloody conquests, Asoka turned his back on further conquests. He rejected war and violence. He vowed to rule by moral example. Asoka had become a **devout convert** to a new religion known as *Buddhism*, which taught nonviolence. Asoka had written on stone pillars and large rocks his new beliefs and sent missionaries out to spread his new faith. He



Buddhism taught the following:

- suffering is brought on by peoples' desires, and suffering can be ended and complete happiness found by ending all desires
- treat all living things with loving kindness
- reject the caste system and treat everyone, women and men, rich and poor, with respect

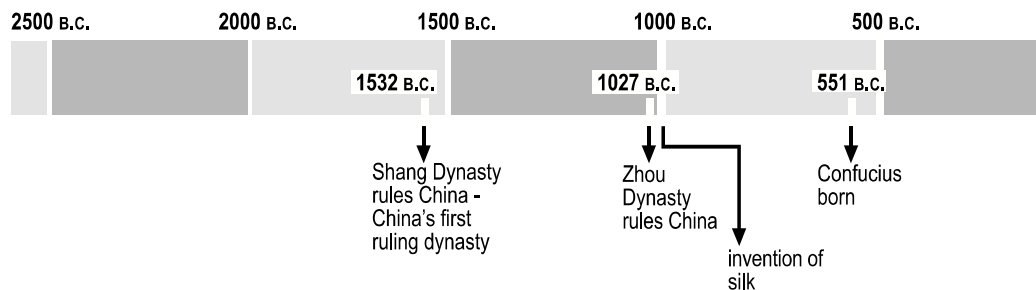
restricted the killing of animals and encouraged others to become vegetarians. As a **benevolent** emperor, he followed a code of conduct that emphasized truth, justice, and religious tolerance. Asoka's rule brought peace and prosperity to India. He was considered to be one of the greatest rulers in the world. After his death, the Maurya Empire declined. Five centuries of invasions, wars, and disorder followed.

At about A.D. 320, northern India was again united under one ruler, Chandra Gupta I. (He was no relation to the long-dead Chandragupta Maurya.) He and his successors brought a Golden Age to India. Science and learning thrived during the Gupta Period. The Gupta Empire would rule India during the 4th and 5th centuries A.D.

Ancient China

China is a huge country in eastern Asia. Although India and China share a border, the ancient Chinese had very little contact with the Indian civilization. China was isolated from the rest of Asia by mountains in the south and west, the Gobi Desert in the north, and the Yellow Sea in the northeast. The ancient Chinese believed their country was the center of the civilized world. They called their homeland the Middle Kingdom. Early Chinese civilizations developed along the Yellow River Valley, which is also called the *Huang He River Valley*. The Huang He River, like the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in Mesopotamia, deposits soil along its banks. The Huang He River got its name from the **loess**, or fine windblown yellow soil, that settles to the river bottom and gives it a yellow color. Although this rich soil was suitable for farming, the many floods caused such destruction that China's Huang He River came to be called *China's Sorrow*.

Timeline of Early Civilizations in China



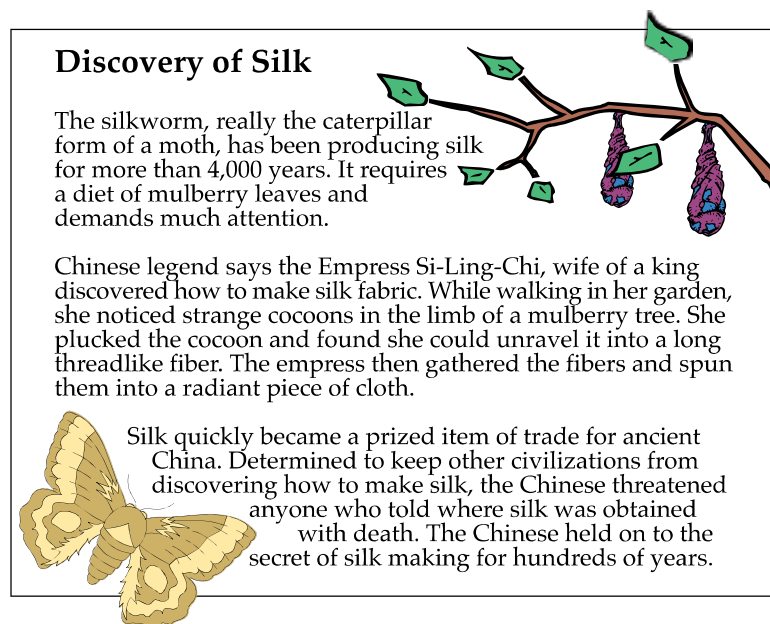
Shang Dynasty (1532 B.C.-1027 B.C.)

China's first **dynasty** or ruling family was called the Shang. The Shang rulers set up their empire in the Huang He Valley. Their walled capital city at Anyang had public buildings, shops, and areas for food storage. Unlike other ancient cities found in the Indus Valley or Fertile Crescent, Anyang was built mainly of wood. At the center was a palace and a temple. Earthen walls protected the city from invasion.

Shang Society

Under the Shang dynasty, society in China was controlled by a small upper class. The royal family and the warrior nobles were considered the highest social classes. Shang kings were both political and religious

leaders. They were believed to have the power to communicate with the gods. The nobility and other people of high birth lived in large timber or stone houses in the city. The noble families owned all the land. They governed the villages and sent tribute to the Shang king in exchange for local control of their territories. The lower classes—peasant farmers, artisans, and slaves—made up most of the population. They lived outside the city in farming villages. Farmers did not have plows. They used only digging sticks and hoes to cultivate their land. Their chief crops were millet (a type of grain), rice, barley, wheat, and vegetables. They also raised silkworms and used the threads to make beautiful silk cloth. Life for the lower classes was harsh, as it was for many peasants in ancient civilizations. Long hours were spent working on the nobles' lands or repairing irrigation dikes.



Shang Religion

The Shang worshipped many gods and nature spirits. The Shang people believed that the gods controlled all things. They believed that prayer to one's ancestors was essential to influencing the gods. The Chinese called upon the spirits of their ancestors to bring good fortune to their family. Sacrifices and food offerings were made to honor one's ancestors' spirits. Writing was developed for religious use. Priests wrote questions to the gods on **oracle bones** made of animal bones and tortoise shells. These

bones were heated until they cracked. The shape and position of the cracks determined the gods' answer. The writings on the oracle bones are the oldest examples of Chinese writing.

The Decline of the Shang Dynasty

The Shang dynasty lasted for about 500 years. Over the course of time, the dynasty grew weak because it lacked strong leaders. Little by little, powerful nobles gained control of Shang territories. Eventually the Shang dynasty was overthrown by a dynasty known as the *Zhou* (joe). The Zhou was a group of wandering herders from northwest China. They overthrew the last Shang king and eventually adopted much of Shang culture.

Shang Contributions to Civilization

Writing, Arts and Crafts, and Astronomy

Chinese civilization during this early period was very advanced. The Shang Dynasty developed a system of writing that used thousands of picture symbols or "pictograms" to represent objects and ideas. The Shang produced beautiful pottery made from porcelain. They learned to weave silk cloth from the threads of silkworms and made finely embroidered silk shoes. Shang artists became famous for their bronze work. They used bronze to make small or large, artistically designed objects used for religious practices. Weapons and massive cauldrons weighing almost a ton were also made of bronze. Modern admirers say that the skills of the Shang bronzesmiths have never been surpassed. The Shang also used a wheeled, horse-drawn chariot in warfare.



*Chinese
bronze vase*

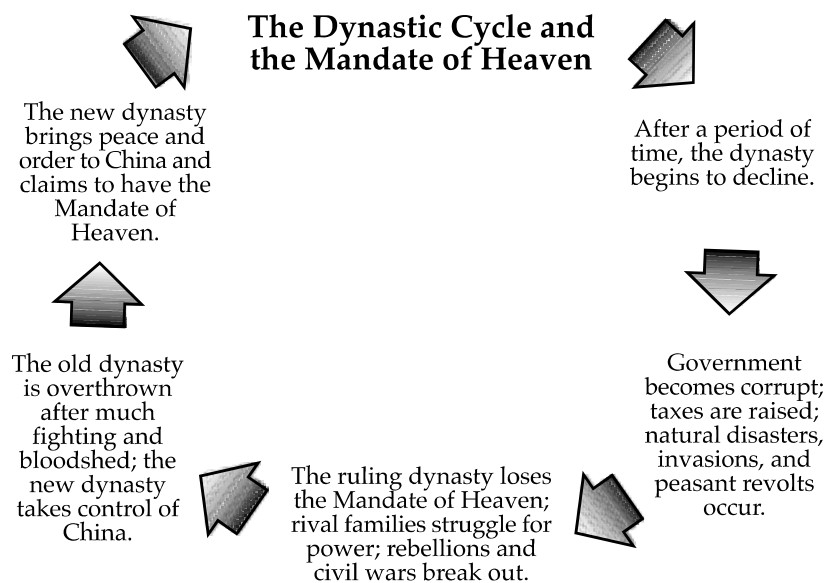
Chinese astronomers recorded all of the eclipses of the sun and moon. They also devised a 12-month calendar with 365 days and correctly identified the first day of each of the four seasons. Shang astronomers also kept records of rainfall and drought to predict the weather.

Zhou Dynasty (1027 B.C.-256 B.C.)

New Ideas about Government—The Mandate of Heaven

The Zhou royal family conquered the Shang dynasty and established their own ruling family, or dynasty, that lasted more than 800 years. The Zhou rulers developed a new **philosophy** known as the *Mandate of Heaven*. The Zhou rulers called themselves *Sons of Heaven* and claimed to rule by the Mandate of Heaven. The Mandate of Heaven meant that China's ruling families received their power to rule from the gods. A dynasty could rule only as long as it kept the mandate. The Zhou claimed that the Shang dynasty lost the Mandate of Heaven because they governed poorly.

Every dynasty in China began when a powerful ruler defeated the last king of the old dynasty. The Chinese people believed that they had the right to overthrow their ruler if he did not rule wisely. The Mandate of Heaven became an important part of Chinese philosophy about government. Natural disasters and rebellions were thought to be signs that the gods were unhappy with a king's rule. Historians describe the pattern of the rise, decline, overthrow, and replacement of dynasties as the *dynastic cycle*.



Feudalism and the Time of the Warring States

To control their newly conquered land, the Zhou kings set up a system known as **feudalism**. The Zhou's empire was not a single kingdom. It was a collection of large estates. Under feudalism, land is subdivided and given to the nobility to use. (In later centuries, feudalism also developed in Europe and Japan.) In return, the nobles who are granted the land owe loyalty and military service to the king. They must also promise to protect the people who live on their land. The Zhou king and the feudal nobles promised to help one another during times of war and peace. Zhou kings had great power and ruled China for about 250 years of the 800 years, after which the feudal lords exercised the real power and profited from the lands worked by peasants within their area.

Over the course of time, local feudal nobles grew stronger than the king. As their towns grew into cities and their territories expanded, the political power of the Zhou kings declined. By 771 B.C. feudal nobles had the real power in China. Zhou kings soon became powerless to control the noble families. Powerful warlords constantly fought among themselves for wealth and territory. This period of time in Zhou history came to be known as the *Years of the Warring States*. The Zhou dynasty became weak from the constant warfare. After many years of war among rival families, they were eventually conquered and ruled by a new dynasty known as the *Qin* (see Unit 9).



Zhou Contributions to Civilization

The First Books

The Chinese made important achievements during the Zhou dynasty. Under the Zhou, the Chinese made the first books, which were constructed of bound, thin strips of wood or bamboo. They carefully drew characters on the surface with a brush and ink. The earliest books, included histories and religious works. The *I Ching* or *Book of Changes* is a handbook for diviners and is still used today by people who want to tell the future. The *Book of Songs* describes the lives of farming people, praises kings, and

describes court ceremonies. The book also includes tender or sad love songs with one describing a young woman's complaints to her family about forcing her into a marriage she does not want.

Silkmaking

During this period, the Chinese also built and improved roads. China's cities became the center of trade and merchants used metal coins as a way to trade for goods. The production of silk and other goods increased. The Chinese cultivated silkworms and the mulberry trees on which they fed. They made silk from the cocoons of the silkworm and wove the silk threads into smooth cloth that was colored with brilliant dyes. Silk became China's most valuable export and this led to an increase in foreign trade. The trade route that eventually linked China and the Middle East became known as the *Silk Road*. The Chinese kept the process of silkmaking a secret to protect this profitable trade.

Metalwork and Messengers on Horseback

Other developments included the use of iron in making tools and weapons. Helpful to the Chinese farmer were the invention of the iron plow and the development of irrigation and flood control systems. The Zhou dynasty continued making bronze ceremonial vessels, weapons, and armor. Metalsmiths also cast sets of large bronze bells to use in religious services.

Nomadic tribes in the north taught the Zhou how to domesticate and ride the horse. Soldiers rode on horseback instead of driving war chariots. Messengers on horseback could carry news throughout the empire faster than runners.

Chinese Philosophies

Confucianism: Confucius (551 B.C.-479 B.C.)

Confucius was born during a time when the Zhou dynasty was experiencing constant fighting among the Chinese warlords. He was born to a noble but poor family and grew up to be a scholar, teacher, philosopher, and adviser to political leaders. Confucius believed that

social order, harmony, and good government would improve Chinese society. He also taught the concept known as **filial piety**, respect for one's parents and family ancestors. Confucius put filial piety above all other duties, even loyalty to the state.

His ethical code of conduct emphasized five basic relationships: ruler to subject; father to son; husband to wife; older brother to younger brother; and friend to friend. A code of conduct regulated each of these relationships. Rulers should rule wisely and fairly. Subjects should show respect for the law and loyalty to their leaders. Children should show respect for their parents and elders. In the first four relationships, the superior person was considered worthy of obedience and respect. In addition, the superior person was expected to set an example of moral and ethical conduct. Just as a father was responsible for the misdeeds of his children, so also was a ruler responsible for the actions of his officials.

Confucius tried to teach his students how to become good public officials. He believed that education could transform a humbly born person into a gentleman. Confucian virtues of honesty, politeness, generosity, and loyalty were taught to those preparing for government service. Confucius' values became part of Chinese culture, and his ideas had an important influence on Chinese history for centuries.

Confucius



Confucius was a Chinese philosopher whose ideas had great influence on the people of China. He wanted to improve society and achieve good government. Although no books written by Confucius have been found, his sayings and teachings were recorded by his students. The following three sayings are attributed to Confucius.

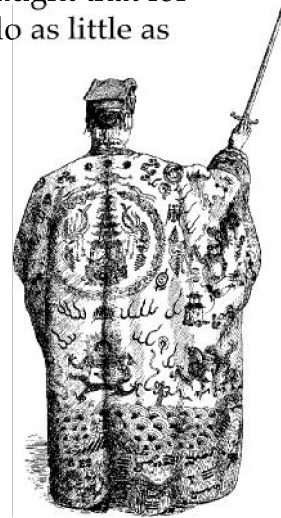
- ✳ *When you have faults, do not fear to abandon them.*
- ✳ *For everyone called to the government of nations and empires, [he must] show himself as a father of the common people.*
- ✳ *What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.*

Like two other influential thinkers who lived about the same time, Gautama Buddha in India and Socrates in Greece, Confucius did not write down his ideas. After his death, students collected his sayings in the Confucian *Analects*. Confucianism never became a religion, as Buddhism did, but Chinese rulers would base their government on the ideas of Confucius and choose scholars of Confucius as officials. The Confucian emphasis on filial piety helped preserve, or keep, traditional customs such as respect for ancestors.

Daoism: Laozi (6th Century B.C.)

Laozi was another great philosopher and teacher. He taught that for society to achieve happiness, the government should do as little as possible and leave people alone. Laws, he believed could not improve conditions. People should be allowed to conduct their own affairs. Living passively and accepting your lot in life would lead to peace of mind. He is credited with writing *The Way of Virtue*, a book that had great influence in Chinese life.

Laozi believed that a universal force known as the *Dao*, meaning the *way of nature*, brought harmony to one's life. He believed that a universal force guided all things and that people should live as simply as possible in harmony with nature. This philosophy became known as *Daoism* and later became a polytheistic religion. Daoists had no interest in bringing order to human affairs; they sought to live in harmony with nature.



Daoist priest
from behind

Legalism: Hanfeizi (3rd Century B.C.)

Out of the teachings of another Chinese philosopher, Hanfeizi, who died in 233 B.C., came a very different school of thought. Hanfeizi believed that the nature of man is evil, and goodness must be acquired. He insisted that the only way to achieve order was through strict laws and harsh punishments. Hanfeizi's teachings were known as *Legalism*.

Legalists urged government leaders to use harsh rule as a means of ending social disorder and restoring peace and harmony. A powerful government could maintain social order. They taught that rulers should reward the

obedient and severely punish the disobedient. Punishment was the best means to maintain social order. Followers of Legalism also wanted to control what they believed to be dangerous ideas. Legalists wanted to strictly control the ideas of writers and thinkers, especially if they were critical of the government. These ideas were the official policy used by the dynasty that replaced the Zhou, the Qin dynasty (see Unit 9). Its ruler brought an end to the disorder that plagued the Zhou dynasty.



Review

India, a subcontinent in Asia was isolated from the rest of the world because of its natural barriers. Mountains, plateaus, and seas surround India. Ancient people were able to migrate into India through the Khyber Pass of the Hindu-Kush Mountains. In the Indus River Valley, the first ancient civilization developed. Two important cities prospered. They were called Mohenjo Daro and Harappa. This advanced civilization had paved streets, sewer systems, and two-story homes.

Most of what historians know about this civilization comes from information gathered by archeologists. No one has been able to decipher their ancient language. About 1500 B.C. the Indus Valley civilization suddenly vanished. It is believed that a natural disaster or invasions from the north drove them away.

A wandering nomadic tribe known as the Aryans invaded India and drove the native inhabitants south. They conquered the darker-skinned Dravidians, a more advanced Indian civilization, and eventually settled in the Ganges Valley. Most of what has been learned about the Aryans comes from their sacred literature known as the Vedas. The Aryans introduced Indian civilization to a new religion which is believed to be the



Buddha

foundation of the Hindu faith. The Aryan society was based on a person's occupation and the class of his or her parents. In the beginning, the Aryans did not mingle with the darker-skinned Dravidians culture. However, over the course of time, Aryan and Dravidian traditions blended to form a new Indian civilization.


Chandragupta Maurya created India's first great empire. Asoka, his grandson, tired of killing and conquest, converted to a new religion known as Buddhism. This new religion taught its followers to practice nonviolence and a code of moral conduct.

Asoka helped to spread his religion throughout India and the rest of Asia.

China, another region of Asia that was isolated from the rest of the world by natural barriers, also developed an advanced civilization in the Huang He or Yellow River Valley. China's first ruling family or dynasty was known as the Shang dynasty. The Shang dynasty lasted for about 500 years. Its civilization worshipped many gods and prayed to the spirits of

their ancestors. The Shang are best known for their ability to weave silk cloth with threads from the silkworm and their bronze work.

The Zhou Dynasty introduced the idea of the Mandate of Heaven to Chinese culture. They believed that their power to rule came from the gods. Ruling dynasties would be overthrown when they lost the Mandate of Heaven. The rise and fall of the ruling families of China was called the dynastic cycle. The Zhou dynasty lasted for 800 years. Throughout this time many nobles fought each other to gain more wealth and territory.



Early Chinese Dynasties		
DYNASTY	LEADERS	CONTRIBUTIONS
Shang 1523-1027 B.C.	first historic family to rule	system of writing; porcelain pottery; silk cloth; bronze work in artwork; wheeled, horse-drawn chariots; and a 12-month calendar with 365 days
Zhou 1027-256 B.C.	powerful war lords ruled the longest in Chinese history	first bound books; improved roads; brilliant dyes on silk products; iron tools and weapons; and domesticated horses

The Chinese philosopher Confucius wanted to bring stability and order back to China. His teachings emphasized respect for authority and one's parents. He claimed that government leaders must set an example of moral and ethical conduct, and he taught a moral and social philosophy and code of behavior based on peace, order, humanity, wisdom, courage, and fidelity. His teachings and ideas soon became part of Chinese culture and showed people how to behave.

Laozi was also a philosopher and teacher. His ideas differed from that of Confucius. He taught that people must not depend on the government to change their lives. Instead, Laozi recommended that people live in harmony with nature and accept their lot in life. Laozi is the founder of Daoism. Daoism influenced peoples' view of the natural world and later became a religion with gods, goddesses, and magical practices.

The philosophy of Legalism by Hanfeizi offered ways in which to restore peace and harmony to China based on harsh rules and strict punishments. Legalists wanted to control the spread of ideas in China. Especially those ideas that might be critical of the government. Their followers believed that strict punishment for the disobedient and rewards for the obedient would be the best means to maintain social order.