



Ancient Chinese Civilization

Dynasties, the Mandate of
Heaven, the Silk Road

Four Thousand Years of Civilization

- Chinese civilization extends backwards in history in an unbroken chain for nearly four thousand years. Throughout this time, the Chinese people have been instrumental in developing new technologies and advancing human knowledge.



Dynasties

- The Chinese have been ruled by a succession of dynasties (families that pass the right to rule the nation from one generation to the next).



Prehistory

- Before China developed the ability to write down their history, stories were passed down orally from one generation to the next. The story of the Xia Dynasty is such a case. For decades historians have believed that the Xia Dynasty was just legend. Then in 1959 evidence was found that showed that this dynasty may not have just been legend, but may have really existed. The truth about whether or not the Xia Dynasty really existed is still being debated.



Xia Dynasty

- The Xia family would have ruled China from around 2100 B.C.E. until around 1800 B.C.E. They are believed to have been Aryans, who migrated into the area, and who were able to conquer the local peoples using their superior weaponry and technology.



The Shang Dynasty

- Like the Xia Dynasty, the Shang Dynasty was once thought to be only a myth or legend. It is now considered by all historians as a true dynasty. Because many historians do not consider the Xia Dynasty a true dynasty, the Shang Dynasty is often called the first true Chinese dynasty.



Shang Rule: 1500 – 1100 B.C.E.

- The Shang Dynasty ruled China from around 1500 B.C.E. until 1100 B.C.E. During this 400 year period of history, Chinese tradition states that thirty separate kings ruled from a succession of seven different capitals.



Invention of Writing

- One of the most important contributions made during the period that the Shang Dynasty ruled China was the invention of writing. The earliest written records found in China come from this time period.

	oracle bone jǐguwen	greater seal dazhuan	lesser seal xiaozhuan	clerkly script lishu	standard script kaishu	running script xingshu	cursive script caoshu	modern simplified jiantizi
rén (*nin) human								
nǚ (*nrāʔ) woman								
ěr (*nhaʔ) ear								
mǎ (*mrāʔ) horse								
yú (*ŋha) fish								
shān (*srān) mountain								
rì (*nit) sun								
yuè (*ŋot) moon								
yǔ (*wɦaʔ) rain								
yún (*wan) cloud								

The Zhou Dynasty

- The Zhou family was able to defeat and overthrow the last Shang Dynasty king in 1028 B.C.E. They claimed that the Shang Dynasty had lost the mandate of heaven due to their poor governing. The Zhou Dynasty would become the longest lasting dynasty in Chinese history, lasting over 800 years.



Zhou Expansion

- The Zhou set up a new economy, rearranging the affairs of the kingdom. As they did so, the borders of their kingdom swelled, and they were able to maintain control over the people they conquered effectively.



Zhou Regional Rulers

- Zhou kings assigned nobleman, who were usually members of the royal family, to serve as regional rulers. These nobleman owned the land, and were given absolute authority over it. The peasants could not own land, but instead worked the land for the noblemen.



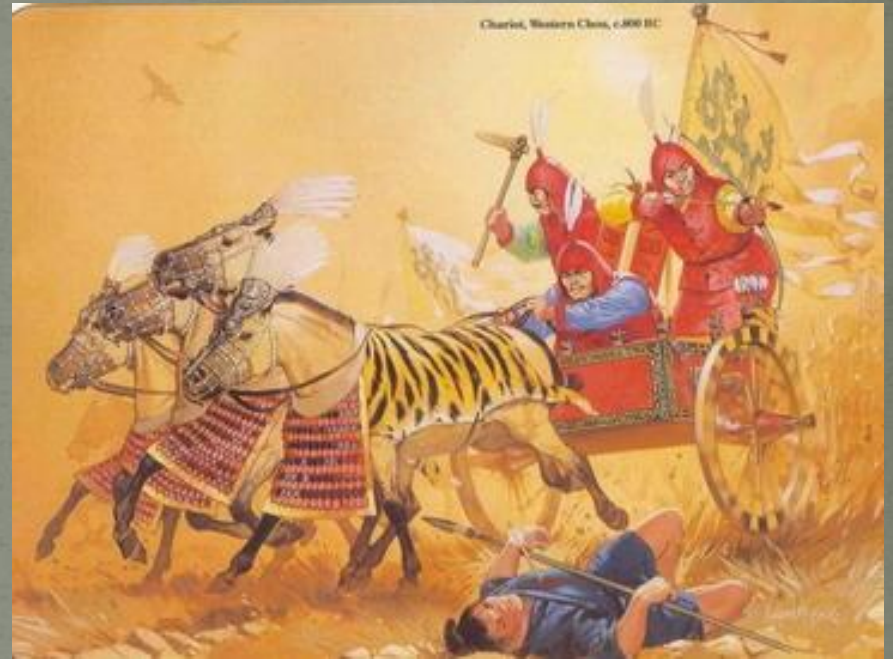
Noblemen Grew in Power

- This form of government worked well for several hundred years. However, overtime the king slowly became less powerful, while the nobleman grew in power.



Zhou Dynasty Overthrown

- In 771 B.C. while fighting against a rebellion, the Zhou armies suffered a terrible defeat. As a result, the Zhou Dynasty lost even more power to the noblemen. They managed to hang on to power for another 500 years. Then in 256 B.C.E. the Zhou Dynasty was finally overthrown.



The Qin Dynasty

- By 221 B.C.E. a man by the name of Qin had overthrown all remaining members of the Zhou Dynasty, and all other opposition, allowing him to place himself as the ruler of China.



“China”: Derivative of “Qin”

- The Qin Dynasty would only last about 11 years. Yet during these short years, this dynasty would make changes that would effect the history of China for thousands of years. So influential was Qin, that the name of the nation, China, is a derivative of his name.



Qin Shihuangdi

- In order to show his importance and power, Qin added a new name to his own. He began calling himself Qin Shihuangdi, which means Qin, the first emperor of China.



Centralization of Authority

- Qin Shihuangdi again reorganized the affairs of China. Instead of a system of nobleman, Qin wanted everything to be under his direct authority and control.



Written Laws

- He established a strict set of written laws that were recognized throughout China, and setup military control in each region of China so that local nobleman could not rebel against the emperor.



*All people are subject to me,
Every field harvest, and
Everyone can have enough food.*

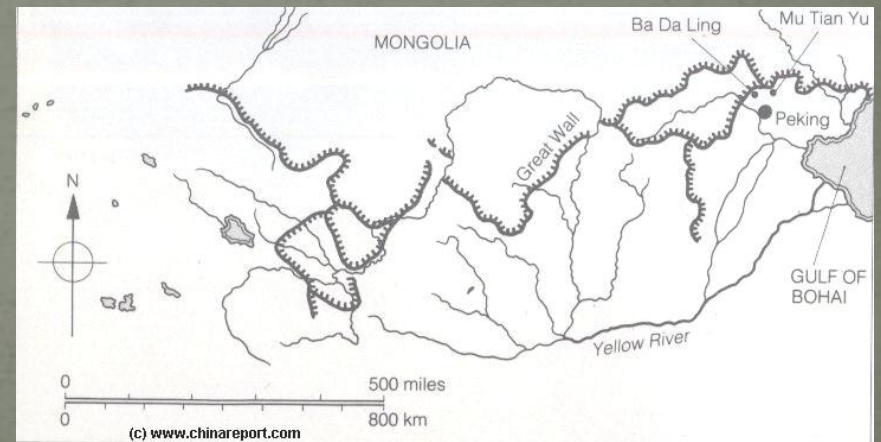
Qin Building Projects

- To make China the most glorious nation on Earth, Qin needed labor. He used the peasants, forcing them to work under slave conditions, so that he could build roads, bridges, canals, buildings, and his most famous building project of all, the Great Wall of China.



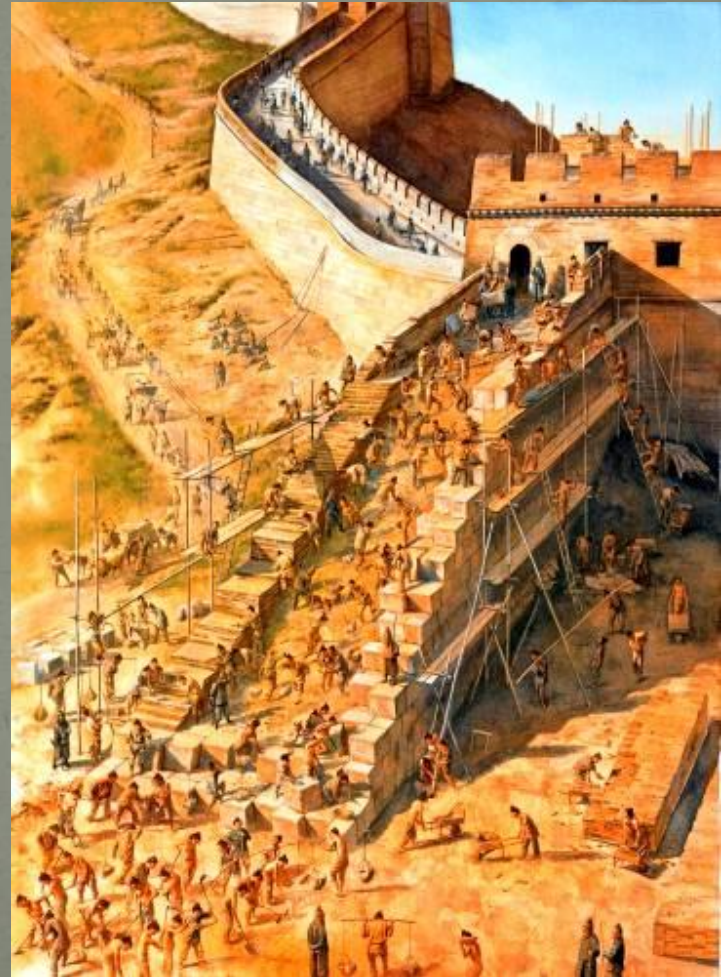
The Great Wall of China

- Early emperors had built walls in the northern territories to protect their nation against attack from outside forces. These walls were spread across the landscape, and not connected. Qin ordered his people to connect the existing walls together, and to expand them, eventually covering a distance of over 4000 miles.



Peasant Labor

- Over 300,000 peasants were forced to help build the Great Wall of China. Many of them died during the construction. After working for several years, the Great Wall of China was completed, and still stands today as one of the great building projects in human history.



The Han Dynasty

- In the year 207 B.C. a new dynasty began to rule China. This dynasty was led by a peasant whose name was Liu Bang. Liu Bang had grown tired of the brutal leadership of the Qin Dynasty. Many other people also were tired of the Qin



Peace thru war and plunder.

Mandate of Heaven

- Liu Bang proclaimed that the Qin had lost the mandate of heaven, or the right to rule the nation. He was able to overthrow them, and establish himself as the new emperor of China, and the first emperor of the Han Dynasty.



Four Hundred Year Rule

- The Han Dynasty would rule China for the next 400 years. During this time period they would be one of the wealthiest and most powerful nations on Earth. Their achievements would only be surpassed by the Roman Empire.



Isolated from Rest of the World

- Because of its location amidst high mountains and surrounded on many sides by water, China was isolated from much of the rest of the world. As their civilization flourished and their wealth increased, they were largely unaware of what advancements were taking place in the nations around them.



Chinese Exploration

- In 139 B.C.E., a Han emperor by the name of Wudi sent out one of his generals, Zhang Qian, to explore other nations. This general and his army marched throughout distant regions visiting other civilizations and nomadic tribes.



Attacked by Nomadic Tribes

- The armies of Zhang Qian were viewed as a threat by many of these nomadic tribes, as a result, these tribes attacked and destroyed many of Zhang Qian's men. Zhang Qian himself was captured and kept in bondage for a period of 10 years. After 13 years, Zhang Qian was finally able to return to the emperor and report.



Wudi Aspires to Trade with West

- He told Wudi about stories he had heard from the nomadic tribes of a great civilization to the West that equaled the glory of China. This was the first time Wudi had heard anything of any other civilizations. Wudi was a smart and wise ruler, who saw the potential for trade between the two cultures.



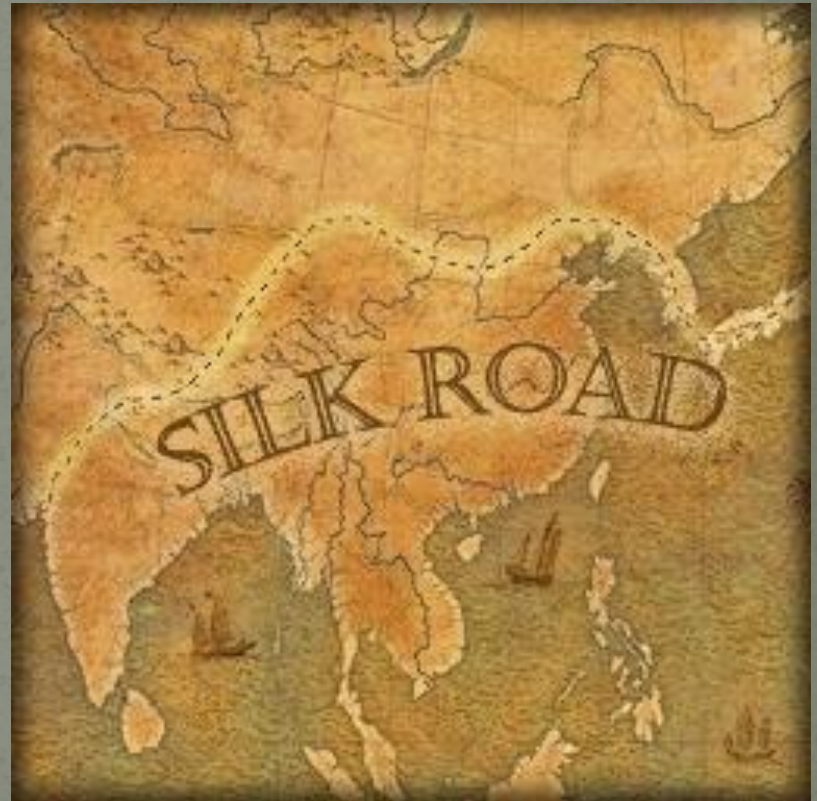
The Silk Road

- In order to make trade possible, Emperor Wudi began to develop what has been called in modern times, the silk road. Following this route merchant traders took silk from China to the West, and brought glass, linen, and gold back to China.

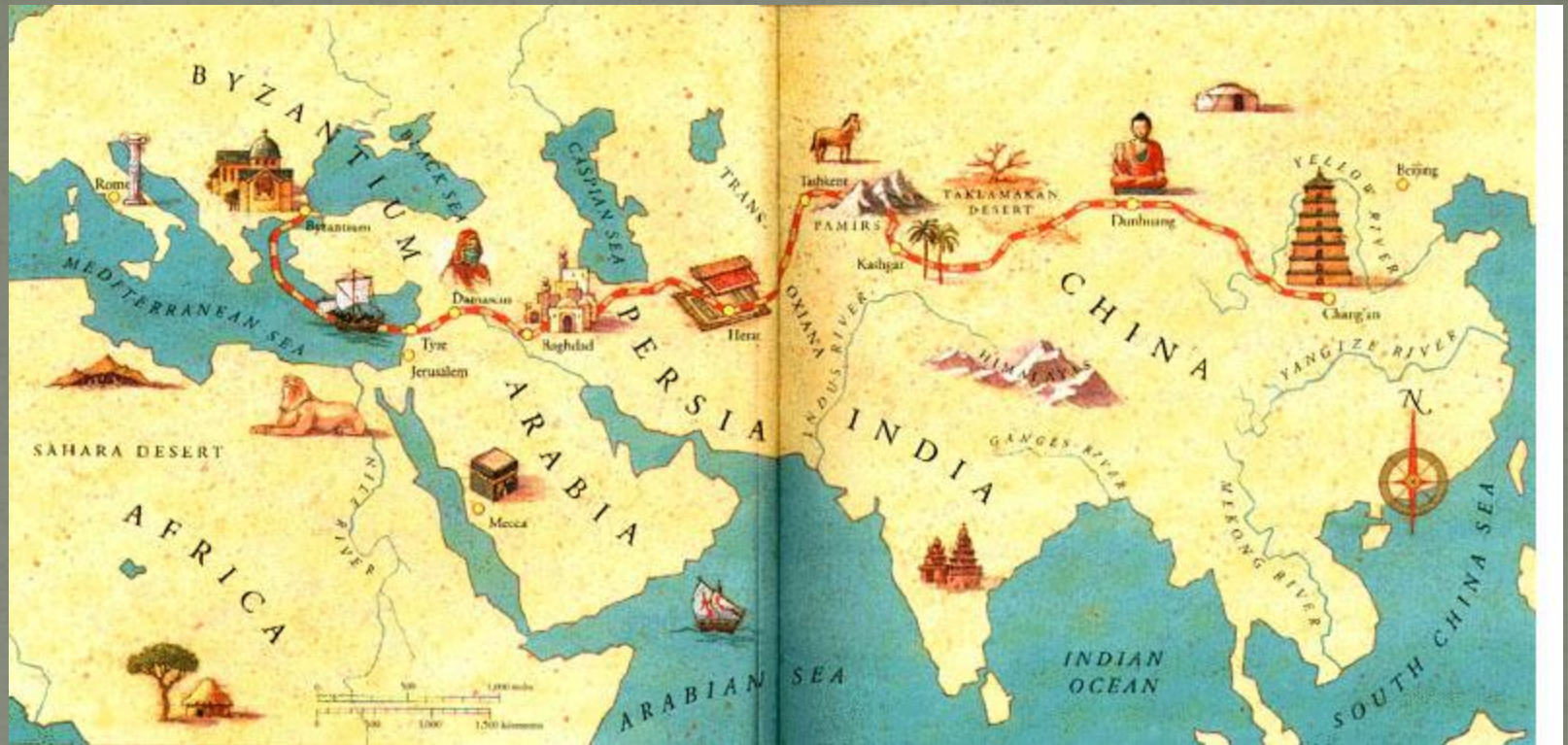


Trails, Roads, Bridges

- The silk road consisted of trails, roads, bridges, and pathways that stretched across nearly 5000 miles of land and water. The silk road is not one long road, but rather many smaller roads and pathways that were connected, and worn by the use of thousands of travelers over a period of hundreds of years.



Expansion of Trade



- The silk road would become instrumental in the development and expansion of trade, and the accumulation of wealth in both China and Rome, as well as in Egypt and other nations.

Pax Sinica

- During the rule of the Han emperors, China enjoyed a 400 year period of peace and prosperity. During this time, the Han emperors established a strong central government that was designed to help the people, and protect them.



Food Reserves

- One such innovation was the storage of food. During times of plenty, Han emperors would have great amounts of food put up into storage. Then during difficult times, they would sell these food stores, helping to stabilize food prices.



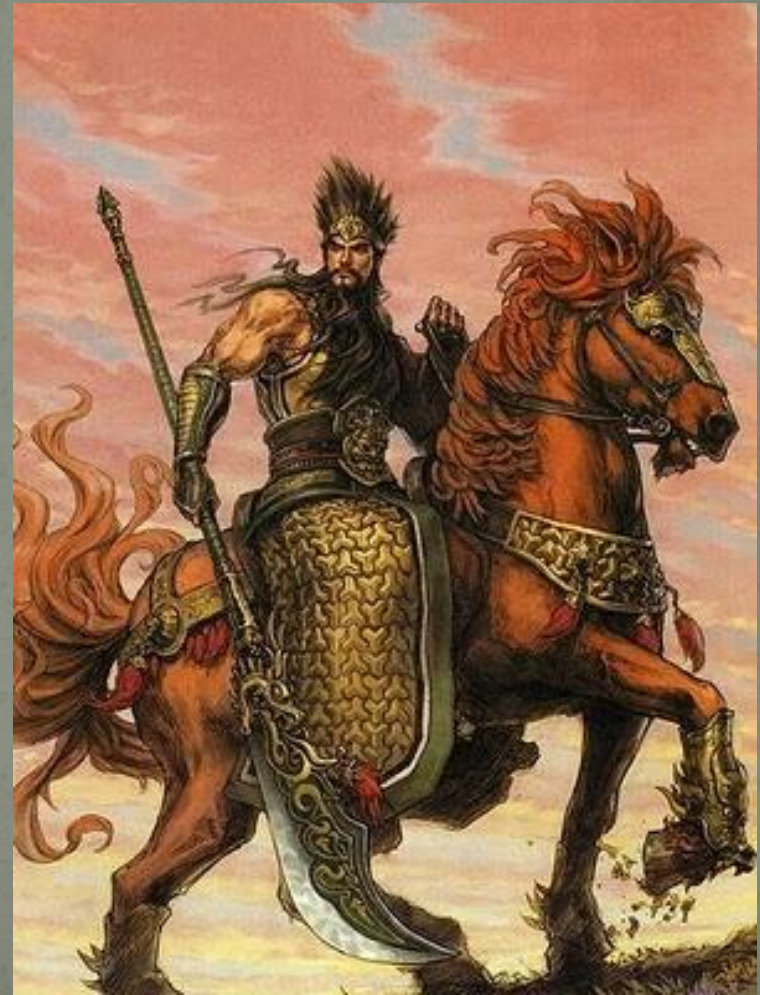
Merit-Based Appointments

- The Han also abolished the practice of giving powerful government positions to members of the royal family. Emperor Wudi instituted a series of written exams. Anyone could take the tests. Those who received the highest scores were given posts in the government.



The End of the Han Dynasty

- By C.E. 220 the Han Dynasty had fallen into a weakened state. Warriors from competing areas began fighting one another, throwing China into a period of civil war that would last for many years.



Enduring Contributions

- Even though the Han Dynasty had ended, many of the contributions made by this dynasty would become interwoven into Chinese culture, and would endure through the ages to modern times.



Religion In China

- The religious history of China is complex, and has evolved over the centuries. Deeply interwoven into their beliefs is the worship of their ancestors. The Chinese believed that the spirits of their ancestors were watching over them, and that they could be called upon during difficult times.



Confucianism

- In 551 B.C.E. a man by the name of Kongzi was born to a poor family in the province of Shandong. Kongzi is known in the western world as Confucius.



The Teacher

- Confucius saw many problems in the world and wanted to correct them. When his attempts to become an advisor to a number of different government officials failed, he became a teacher.



Peace and Order

- The most important things to Confucius were peace, and order. He felt that everyone had a proper role in society, and that if people were willing to accept their role, and fulfill it, that peace and harmony would abound.



Respect for Elders

- In order to help people accept their roles in society, and establish order, Confucius outlined how individuals should treat one another. The most important of these ethics outlined the responsibilities of children to respect and listen to their parents, and other elders.



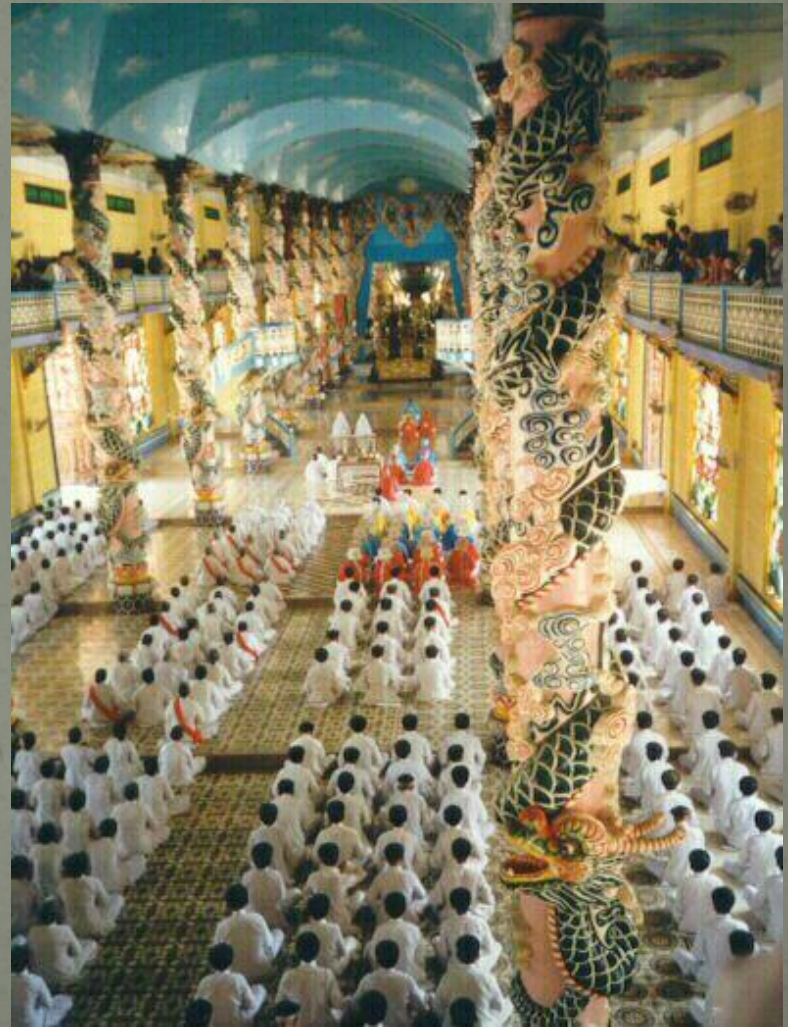
Ethics

- He also laid out ethics for how subjects should follow rulers, for how rulers should treat subjects, how husbands and wives should treat one another, and how friends should treat each other.



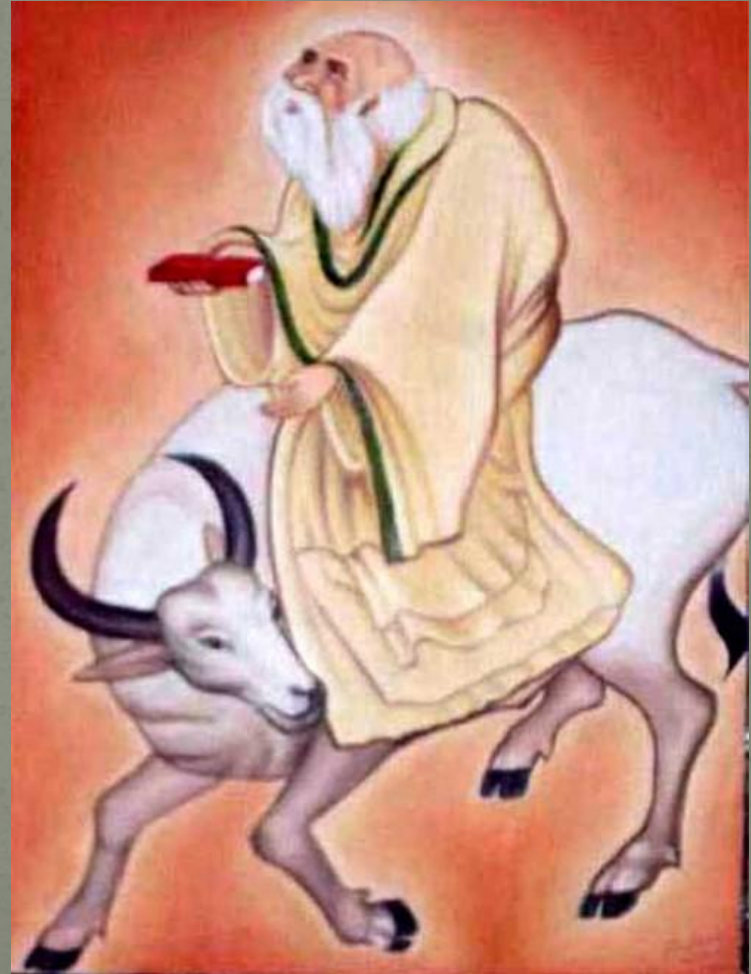
Teachings Accepted by Emperor

- During his own lifetime Confucius' teachings were not widely accepted. However, within a hundred years, they were being used by the emperor to help him rule, and eventually became a widely followed religion. Confucianism would remain a powerful force in Chinese history.



Daoism

- A contemporary of Confucius was a teacher named Laozi. Most of what we know about Laozi is so heavily mixed with legend, that it is difficult to know what is true, and what is myth.



Reject Material Things

- Laozi taught that a force known as the Dao permeated all living things. He told his followers that the most important thing an individual could do is to reject the world, and their desires for worldly possessions and power, and commune with nature, bringing ones self into a state of oneness with the Dao.



Relate to Nature

- Many individuals in China practices both Confucianism and Daoism. Confucianism taught them how to behave towards one another, while Daoism taught them how to behave towards the natural world, and with themselves personally.



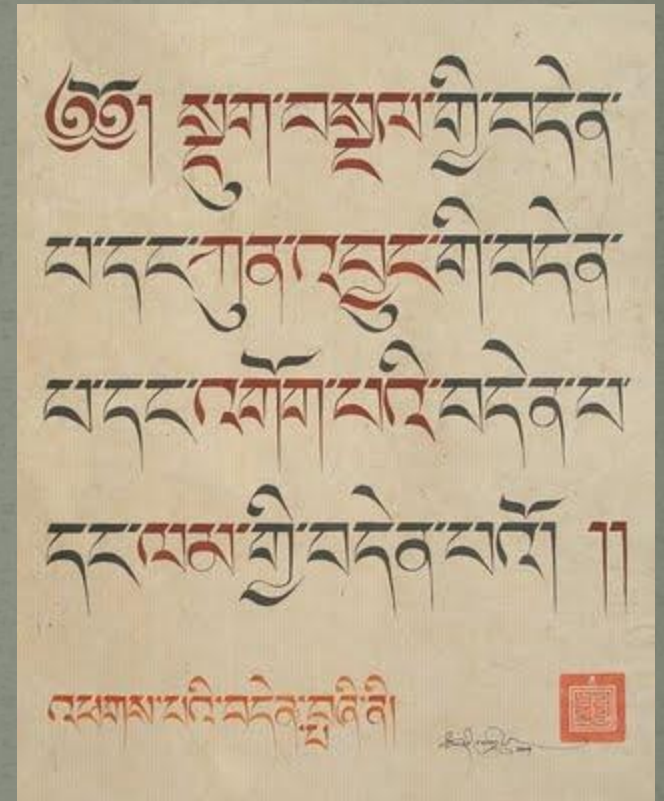
Buddhism Arrives in China

- Buddhism was founded by an Indian prince, who called himself the Buddha. The Buddha or “Enlightened One” taught his people about Four Noble Truths, and an Eightfold Path. He also taught the people to use meditation.



The Four Noble Truths

- Suffering is part of human life.
- Suffering is caused by people's desires for pleasure and material things. (This results in an endless cycle of rebirths or reincarnation.)
- Overcoming desires during lifetime eventually brings end to this cycle and suffering.
- Desires can be overcome by following the Eightfold Path.



The Eightfold Path

- In order to eliminate their desires for worldly things, and thus end the cycle of rebirths, the Buddha taught his people to follow eight principals:

- Know the truth
- Resist evil
- Say nothing hurtful
- Respect life
- Free the mind from evil
- Work in service to others
- Resist evil
- Practice meditation



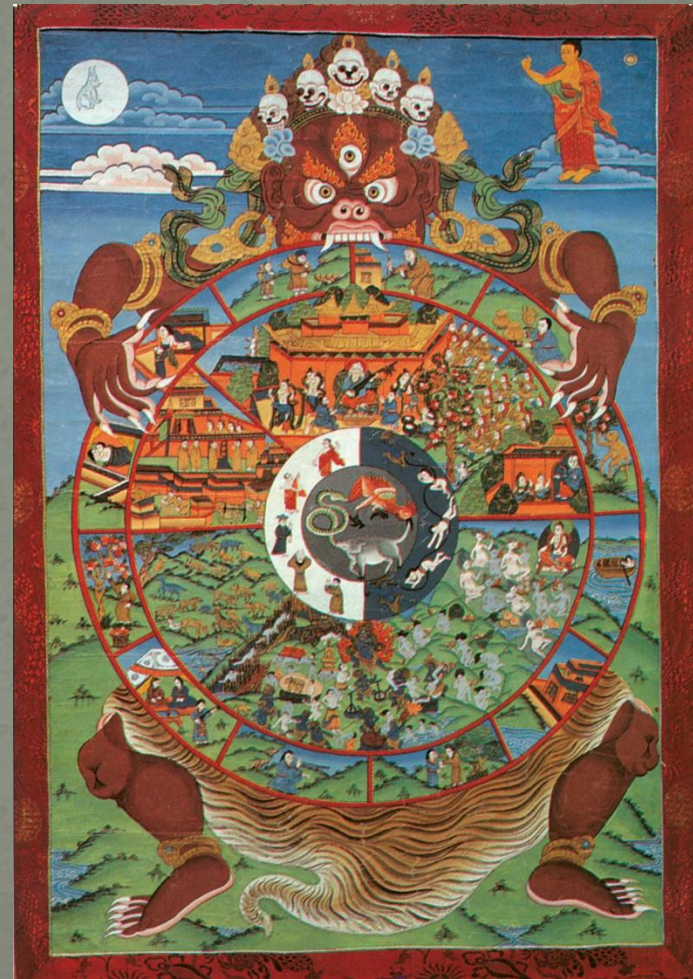
Nirvana

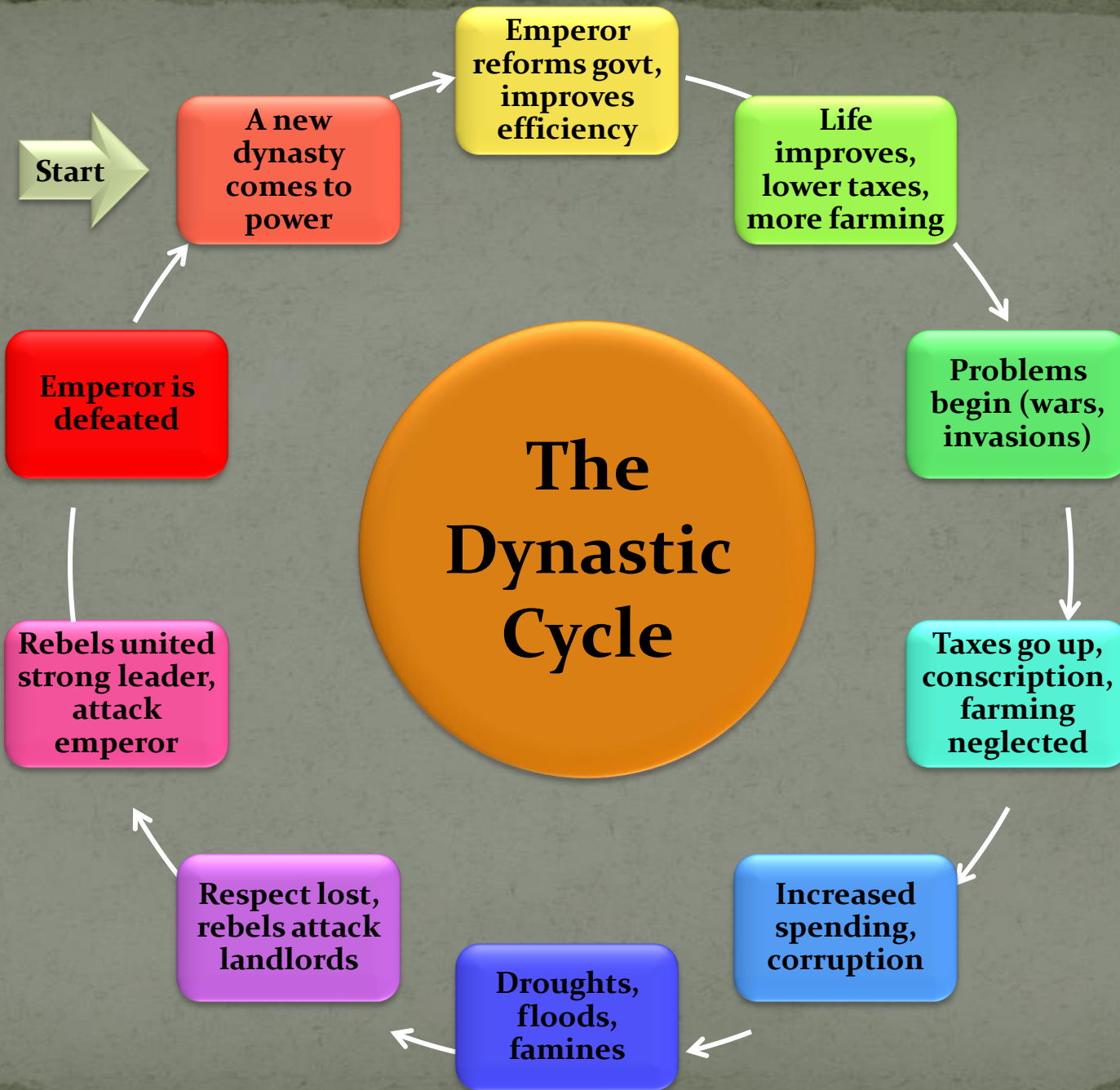
- By following the eightfold path, and avoiding evil extremes, the Buddha taught that an individual could achieve nirvana. He taught that nirvana, which in their language meant to blow out a candle, was a state of non-existence.



In Harmony with Universe

- Nirvana was not a place, like heaven, but rather an actual state of non-existence. When someone reached nirvana, their soul was in harmony with the universe, and they would cease to exist.





Chinese Dynasties and Their Achievements

Dynasties	Notable Rulers	Achievements
Xia Dynasty 2100-1800 B.C.E.	Aryans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Migrated into the area and conquered the local peoples Developed superior weaponry and technology
Shang Dynasty 1500-1100 B.C.E.	Thirty separate kings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ruled from a succession of seven different capitals. Invention of writing
Zhou Dynasty 1122-256 B.C.E.	Kings + Noblemen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expansion Regional rulers
Qin Dynasty 221-206 B.C.E.	Qin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centralization of authority Written laws Building projects (Great Wall of China)
Han Dynasty	Han Wudi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 400 year rule Exploration (Zhang Qian) Expansion of trade Silk Road Pax Sinica Food reserves Merit-based appointments



Chinese Philosophies/Religions

Philosophy/ Religion	Founders	Characteristics
Confucianism	Confucius (Kongzi)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Peace and order• Respect for elders• Ethical human relationships
Daoism	Laozi	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reject material things• Commune with nature• Become one with Dao (force within all things)
Buddhism	Budda	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Four Noble Truths• Eightfold path• Nirvana• Harmony with the universe

