



Ancient China From Neolithic Culture to Zhou Dynasty

1.What Neolithic cultures emerged in ancient China?

Ans: In China, Neolithic cultures emerged around the eighth millennium B.C., and were primarily characterized by the production of stone tools, pottery, textiles, houses, burials, and jade objects. Archaeological research, to date, has led to the identification of some sixty Neolithic cultures, most of which are named after the archaeological site where they were first identified. Attempts at mapping Neolithic China have typically grouped the various archeological cultures by geographic location in relation to the courses of the Yellow River in the north and the Yangzi River in the south. Some scholars also group Neolithic culture sites into two broad cultural complexes: the Yangshao cultures in central and western China, and the Longshan cultures in eastern and southeastern China.

In northwest China the principal crop was millet and in the southeast and south it was rice. The pig was the main domestic animal, taking the place of the goat or sheep of the Middle East. They also had dogs & cattle.

2.What was the first territorial state in China?

Ans: The Chinese Bronze Age had begun by 1700 B.C. in the kingdom of the Shang dynasty along the banks of the Yellow River in northern China. At times the Shang kings ruled even larger areas.

Contrary to common notions about the Chinese, the Bronze Age Chinese did not drink tea or eat rice. Both these commodities came from the south and were not popular in the rest of China until hundreds of years later. Instead the ordinary people consumed cereals, breads and cakes of millet and barley and drank beer. Members of the royal court could afford to vary their diet with meat and wine.

The Bronze Age Chinese held extraordinarily different ideas about kingship and religion from Medieval Europe. They believed the king's right to rule was based

on his good relations with the spirits of his ancestors who controlled the destiny of the domain. The king continually posed questions to his ancestors about policy. He did this by instructing his scribe to write the question on an "oracle bone" — that is, an animal shoulder blade or the breast bone of a turtle. A priest then held a hot rod to the bone until it cracked and interpreted the pattern of the cracks for the answer.

It was also the king's duty to please the great forces of nature — the sun and rain gods — who controlled the outcome of the harvest. So that these gods and his ancestor spirits would look favorably on his kingdom, the king made regular sacrifices of wine and cereals, which were placed in elaborate bronze vessels and heated over the fires on the temple altar. During the Shang dynasty bronze vessels were the symbol of royalty, just as the gold crown became the symbol of royalty in Europe.

At times the Shang kings make animal and human sacrifices as well; and when the king and powerful members of the royal court died, it was not unusual that their wives, servants, bodyguards, horses and dogs were killed and buried with them. During the Zhou Dynasty people gradually turned away from this custom and substituted clay figures for real people and animals.

3. Why was ancestor worshipping practiced in ancient China?

Ans: Ancestor worship is a religious practice based on the belief that deceased family members have a continued existence, that the spirits of deceased ancestors will look after the family, take an interest in the affairs of the world, and possess the ability to influence the fortune of the living.

Unity of the group is reinforced through ancestor veneration, offering of various kinds help to keep the ancestors happy in the spiritual world, who, in return, will bless the family.

Ancestor worshipping is not asking for favours, but to fulfil one's filial duties. The act is a way to respect, honour and look after ancestors in their afterlives guaranteeing the ancestors' well-being and positive disposition towards the living, as well as possibly seeking the ancestors' wisdom, guidance or assistance for their living descendants.

One has to pay respect and homage to the ancestors, honor the deeds and memories of the deceased, since the ancestors are the ones having brought the descendants into the world, nourished them and having prepared the conditions under which the descendants grew up, hence ancestor veneration is a pay back of spiritual debts.

Ancestor worship is a family affair, it is held in homes and temples and consists of offering joss stick, serving as communication and greetings to the deceased, prayers and offering items before tablets.

In homes, the shrines can be a shelf on the wall, a table or an altar like architectural structure, integrated in the structure of the house or even an entire room, depending on the financial status of the family.

The shrine will show a tablet with the ancestor's name inscribed on it, as well as a picture or photograph. Most likely, the patrilineal ancestors and their wives will be honored. The shrine will have an incense stick holder, at times with a Golden Flower, and plates for food offerings, some might feature glasses or a set of tea cups for quenching the ancestors' thirst. Some shrines show symbolic objects or objects honored by the deceased. Flowers offerings, most likely fresh ones or sometimes in form of a garland, can be found as well.

Small offerings are always placed throughout the year to honor deceased family members.

4.What is 'Oracle Bone'?

Ans: **Oracle bones** are pieces of shell or **bone**, typically from ox scapulae or turtle shells due to their flat surfaces. **They were used** in as a form of divination in ancient China, mainly during the late Shang dynasty.

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5.How did the Zhou rulers justify their takeover of power from the Shang Dynasty?

Ans: The Zhou Dynasty ruled Ancient China from 1045 BC to 256 BC. It was the longest ruling dynasty in the history of China.

According to written accounts, the king of the Zhou tribe who was called Zhou Wu attacked the last king of the Shang Dynasty and became the first Zhou emperor.

The Zhou Dynasty came to an end during the Warring States period in 256 BCE, when the army of the state of Qin captured the city of Chengzhou and the last Zhou ruler, King Nan, was killed.

Confucius was an influential Chinese philosopher, teacher and political figure known for his popular aphorisms and for his models of social interaction. He lived during in the Zhou Dynasty.

6. Why is the Zhou period known as a 'golden age' in ancient Chinese history?

Ans: The Eastern Zhou lasted from around 770 to 256 B.C.: 520 years. It was the time when China REALLY began to blossom: all the greatest philosophers like Confucius, lived in this era, which was known for its prosperity and its accomplishments. Iron became very common, and revolutionized the way people lived. Wars became much less common through this period: about 30 states were condensed to only 3 main states and a few minor ones. The Zhou kingdom became very wealthy after the "spring and autumn" portion of the period was over. So, it became known as the "golden age" of Chinese history: the first huge flowering of culture, philosophy and great wealth for the country. In a more trivial sense it was also called the "golden age" because gold was first discovered in a big way in China during this time, and the emperor made good use of it to enhance his glory.

7. What were the achievements of the Zhou dynasty?

Ans: Zhou learned how to use iron instead of Bronze. Iron became the backbone of their economy. Iron strengthened their army and weapons. They obtained horses, formed Cavalry, chariots. Population and cities grew. They built roads and canals for transportation and communication. They improved the irrigation and flood control system. They further developed the system of writing. They also began to use coins and use chopsticks.

Other Important Questions:

Mandate of Heaven: The "Mandate of Heaven" is an ancient Chinese philosophical concept, which originated during the Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 BCE). The Mandate determines whether an emperor of China is sufficiently virtuous to rule; if he does not fulfill his obligations as emperor, then he loses the Mandate and thus the right to be emperor.

There are four principles to the Mandate:

- 1) Heaven grants the emperor the right to rule,
- 2) Since there is only one Heaven, there can only be one emperor at any given time,
- 3) The emperor's virtue determines his right to rule, and, 4) No one dynasty has a permanent right to rule.

Signs that a particular ruler had lost the Mandate of Heaven included peasant uprisings, invasions by foreign troops, drought, famine, floods and earthquakes. Of course, drought or floods often led to famine, which in turn caused peasant uprisings, so these factors were often interrelated. The Zhou created the **Mandate of Heaven**. They used this **Mandate** to justify their overthrow of the Shang, and their subsequent rule.