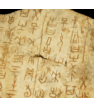


Life after the Shang Dynasty



Image from: Getty Images/Photo 12



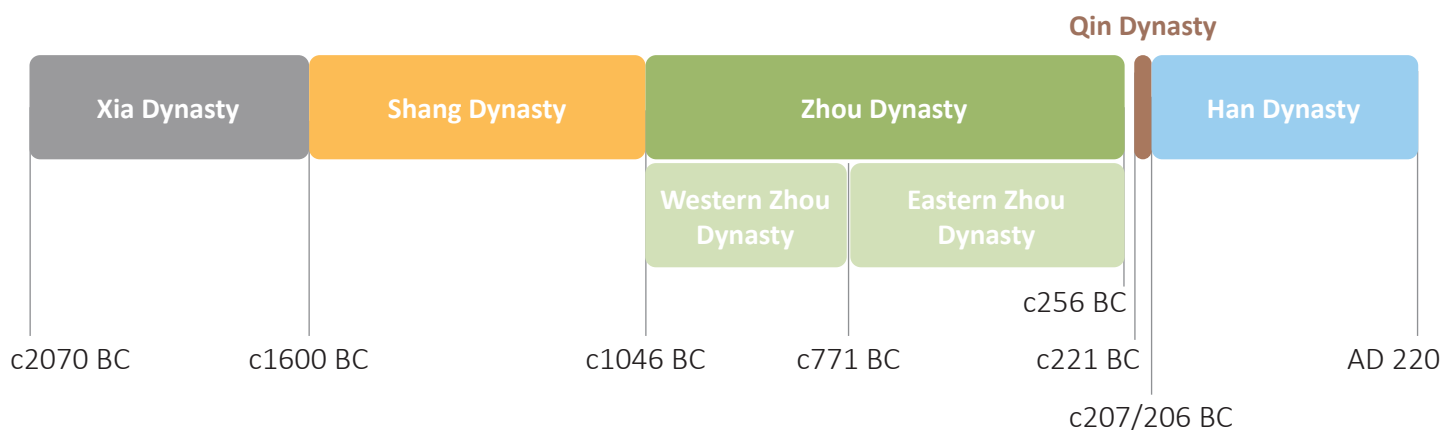


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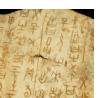
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Ancient China timeline



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Zhou Dynasty

The Zhou Dynasty ruled ancient China c1046–c256 BC. They were the longest reigning dynasty in China. Their rule lasted for around 790 years. The Zhou Dynasty was split into two halves: the Western Zhou Dynasty, c1046–c771 BC, and the Eastern Zhou Dynasty, c771–c256 BC.

Founding of the Zhou Dynasty

The Zhou clan were a group of people who lived to the west of the Shang state for many years. However, c1050 BC, the Zhou clan's ruler, Wenwang, declared war on the ruler of the Shang Dynasty, *Di Xin*.

Several years of fighting took place between the Zhou and Shang clans. Wenwang was captured and imprisoned by *Di Xin* for three years, but he was eventually allowed to return home.

After Wenwang died, his son, Wuwang, overthrew *Di Xin* and led the Zhou clan and an alliance of eight other states to victory. Wuwang founded the Zhou Dynasty and became the first ruler in 1046 BC.



Wenwang

Image from: Wikimedia Commons/public domain

Western Zhou Dynasty (c1046–c771 BC)

During the period of the Western Zhou Dynasty, rulers lived in a capital city called Haojing, in western China. This was a feudal age, when lords ruled over states. Lords served and honoured the Zhou Dynasty's king in exchange for land and power. This arrangement was called the *fengjian* system. King Wuwang and his brother, the Duke of Zhou, shared out territory between their relatives and the descendants of the defeated Shang Dynasty. They also gave territory to wealthy people, who became lords if they agreed to recognise King Wuwang as their leader and provide men to fight for him. The lords controlled their territories and the people who lived there. However, the king still had absolute power over his kingdom. This period was mostly a time of unity and peaceful rule.

Eastern Zhou Dynasty (c771–c256 BC)

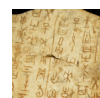
The period from c771 BC is known as the Eastern Zhou Dynasty because the rulers lived in Luoyang, a capital city in the east of China. The Eastern Zhou Dynasty was a time of unrest. It is often divided into the Spring and Autumn Period (c771–c476 BC) and the Warring States Period (c475–c221 BC).

Spring and Autumn Period

The feudal system fell apart when small feudal states started to fight against each other, because the lords who controlled them wanted more power and land. The Zhou Dynasty's ruler, King Youwang, was assassinated and the small feudal states joined together to form seven large states, or kingdoms. They were called Han, Wei, Zhao, Yue, Chu, Qi and Qin. The kingdoms continually quarrelled.

Warring States Period

The seven kingdoms fought each other for complete control of ancient China. The kingdom of Zhou was conquered c256 BC, and this event marked the end of the Zhou Dynasty's rule. The Warring States Period ended when one of the smaller kingdoms, called Qin, succeeded in conquering the others, c221 BC.



Life during the Zhou Dynasty's rule

States

States included more than one city, with many villages near or surrounding the cities. Each state had a capital city, which was built in a strategic location near hostile lands. Tall defensive walls surrounded each city and groups of warriors protected them. Smaller cities and villages existed near the capital.

Hierarchy and power

At first, the king had the most power in the Zhou Dynasty. However, this changed after King Youwang's assassination and the formation of larger states or kingdoms. Then, the ruler of the state or kingdom had the most power. Below the ruler were nobles, then warriors, then craftspeople and then peasants, such as farmers. Slaves were at the bottom of the hierarchy.

Homes

Rulers and wealthy families lived in large houses or palaces built on raised earthen platforms. The walls were made from brick or wattle and daub, and clay tiles formed the roof. The ruler made laws about how elaborate people's homes could be. Poor families lived in small houses made from packed earth with thatched roofs. Earth, straw, reeds and bamboo were freely available for them to use.

Education

Schools existed in the Zhou Dynasty. Sons of the upper classes attended advanced schools in the cities. They learned about rituals, music, archery, charioteering, writing and mathematics. Girls studied separately from boys and learned how to be good homemakers. The lower classes attended basic schools in their villages. Men and women from the villages attended school after their work in the fields. They learned about loyalty, kindness, wisdom and how to behave in good and moral ways.

Beliefs

The Zhou Dynasty carried out divination ceremonies and offered gifts and sacrifices to please their deities and ancestors. However, the Zhou Dynasty replaced Shangdi and instead worshipped heaven, which they called *tian*. They believed that *tian* was where Shangdi and the other deities lived. They worshipped *tian* because they believed that heaven had power over all the deities and human beings. The Mandate of Heaven was a central belief in the Zhou Dynasty. It said there could only be one ruler of China at a time, and only a person who behaved in good and moral ways could rule. They also believed that *tian* would cause a bad ruler to lose power.

Metalworking

Up until c600 BC, the Zhou Dynasty continued to use bronze to make a range of objects, such as weaponry, bells and ritual vessels. This part of the Zhou Dynasty was known as the late Bronze Age. Zhou Dynasty bronzes became more refined, and many were inscribed with messages to ancestors. The Bronze Age ended when the Zhou Dynasty began using iron, c600 BC.

Achievements

Other achievements of the Zhou Dynasty include irrigation systems; ox-drawn ploughs; road and canal systems; coinage; chopsticks; crossbows and horseback riding in warfare; highly decorative pottery, paintings and silk and jade items; the development of Chinese writing and the study of philosophy, including Confucianism.



Bronze bell, or *zhong*, c850–771 BC

Image from: Wikimedia Commons/Public domain



Confucianism

Confucius

Confucius (c551–c479 BC) was a philosopher who lived during the Spring and Autumn Period of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty. He believed that people should have virtue and good character. This would lead to a peaceful and happy life. Confucius based his ideas on ancient religious traditions, even though Confucianism is more of a philosophy than a religion.

Main ideas in Confucianism

The golden rule of Confucianism is, 'Do not do to others what you would not want others to do to you'. This golden rule is a feature of many philosophies and religions, including Christianity and Buddhism.

Filial piety means devotion to the family. This could include the worship of ancestors, children listening to parents or people following the orders of their emperor and the government.

Ren means humanity, and is achieved when people treat others with love, respect and benevolence. Confucius believed that all people could have *ren*, but that immaturity and outside influences could get in the way. The word **junzi** is used to describe a person whose *ren* makes them an excellent moral example. Confucius taught that a good education would help people to develop a virtuous character.

Li means proper conduct. Confucius believed that people should act correctly in all aspects of life to live in peace and harmony with others. *Li* can include making sacrifices to ancestors, respecting the authority of people in government, following rules of behaviour and having good manners. For leaders or rulers, *li* means that they should rule intelligently and fairly.

Zhongyong means to take the middle ground, rather than go to extremes. For example, people should not be too close to or too distant from their friends. The principle of *zhongyong* includes doing things in moderation, being honest and behaving respectably. To achieve *zhongyong*, people need to be aware of their own thoughts and actions, be understanding and tolerant of others and act sincerely.

Zhengming means that the right names and titles are used for different people. Confucius believed that a person's behaviour should fit their name. He described five relationships in life where people have specific names:

- ruler to subject
- parent to child
- husband to wife
- elder brother to younger brother
- friend to friend

The person on the left had a responsibility to the person on the right, and their behaviour should live up to their name. For example, a ruler should lead their people wisely, and a subject should do as their ruler asks. A parent should teach and guide a child, and a child should respect their parents. Confucius believed that there would be peace and harmony if people acted according to their name. If people were given false names, or if they did not live up to their name, society would fall into chaos.



Confucius

Image from: Wikimedia Commons/Public domain



Emperor Qin Shi Huang

After uniting the seven states under one ruler and ending the Warring States Period, King Zhao Zheng of the Qin Dynasty changed his name to Qin Shi Huang and became the first emperor to rule over all of China. Emperor Qin Shi Huang wanted the new Qin Dynasty to last for thousands of years. Even though the Qin Dynasty only lasted for 14 years, the changes made by Emperor Qin Shi Huang, and the system of empire that he introduced, lasted for over 2000 years.

Qin Dynasty's lasting legacies

The name China

The Chinese name for China is *Zhong Guo*, which means 'middle kingdom'. The western name, 'China', came from the ancient Sanskrit name for the Qin Dynasty, *Cina*.

Government structure

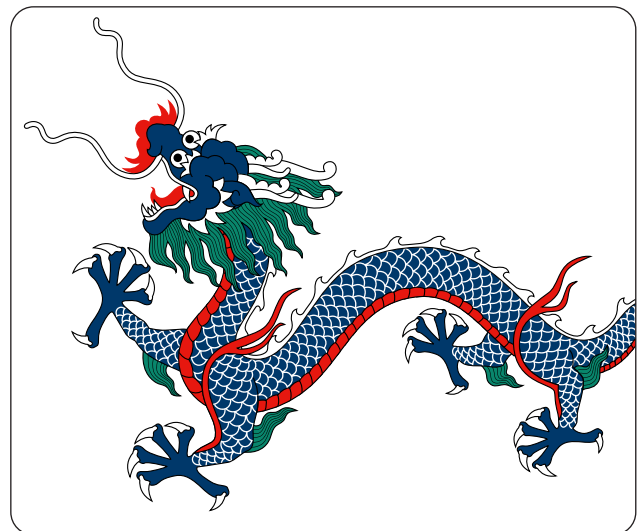
Emperor Qin Shi Huang united the people of China by removing the feudal system and dividing China into 36 areas. A governor, a military commander and an imperial inspector supervised each area and reported directly to the emperor. The emperor also issued a new currency, so that there was only one system of money throughout China. Weights and measures were standardised, and all Chinese writing was made uniform across the country. The emperor's actions meant that the people no longer identified themselves as coming from separate regions or tribes and created a united, national identity. These government and infrastructure changes were a lasting legacy of Emperor Qin Shi Huang and lasted for thousands of years.

Chinese dragon

The dragon had been associated with rulers in ancient China for many generations. Dragons were seen as good, caring creatures, representing crucial rains and water sources. As the supreme creature from heaven, it became a perfect match for the most important person in the country, so Emperor Qin Shi Huang took the dragon as his symbol. He wore a full-length coat decorated with nine dragons. His throne and his palace were also decorated with carved dragons. The dragon became the symbol of imperial China, representing the strength and power of the emperor. This symbol remained for many dynasties and, even today, the dragon is a central part of Chinese culture.



Emperor Qin Shi Huang



Chinese dragon



Great Wall of China

Emperor Qin Shi Huang started to construct the Great Wall of China to defend the north from frequent Mongolian invasions and to stop citizens from leaving China. Separate sections of wall and guard towers had already been built on the Chinese border by different groups during the Warring States Period. However, the emperor joined all of the pieces of wall together to make a strong defensive barrier. The Great Wall of China has been rebuilt and modified since the Qin Dynasty's reign but has endured for over 2000 years. It is still a major tourist attraction in northern China today.



Section of the Great Wall of China

Terracotta Army

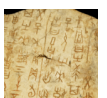
Emperor Qin Shi Huang ordered over 70,000 men to build an army of 8000 soldiers from terracotta clay to guard him in the afterlife. The Terracotta Army consisted of foot soldiers, chariots with horses, archers, servants, officials and entertainers, and each individual was unique. The army was originally brightly painted and stood near the necropolis where Emperor Qin Shi Huang's body was placed in 210 BC. The Terracotta Army shows us a picture of the military organisation and power that enabled Emperor Qin Shi Huang to unite the warring states and create the foundations for modern China.



Terracotta Army

Legalism

Emperor Qin Shi Huang was a cruel and oppressive ruler, whose philosophy of legalism was the opposite of the ancient, yet popular, ideas of Confucianism. Legalists believed that people were naturally selfish and short sighted, so they couldn't be trusted to create a peaceful society. They insisted that all human activity should increase the power of the emperor and people should be totally obedient to authority. If anyone disobeyed, they were harshly punished. To promote legalism and to destroy knowledge about Confucianism and Chinese history, the emperor ordered that learned scholars should be executed and their books burned. Only books about farming, medicine, the oracles and the Qin Dynasty were saved. Even though historians believe that important texts were lost, older scholars had memorised important historical works. During the Han Dynasty, legalism disappeared, and Confucianism was followed once again.



Han Dynasty government

After the harsh rule of the Qin Dynasty, the Han Dynasty's imperial family wanted to find a better way to rule. To this end, they developed the civil service, which was a hierarchy of government officials who worked together to rule the country fairly.

Confucianism

The Han Dynasty's rulers wanted to increase the nation's wealth, expand their empire, glorify the emperor and keep control of the people. However, their belief in Confucianism affected the ways in which they achieved these objectives. Confucius believed that anyone with power should lead by example instead of by punishment. He also taught that nobility was gained by virtuous, honest behaviour and should not be passed down from father to son. The Han Dynasty's civil service was based on these principles.



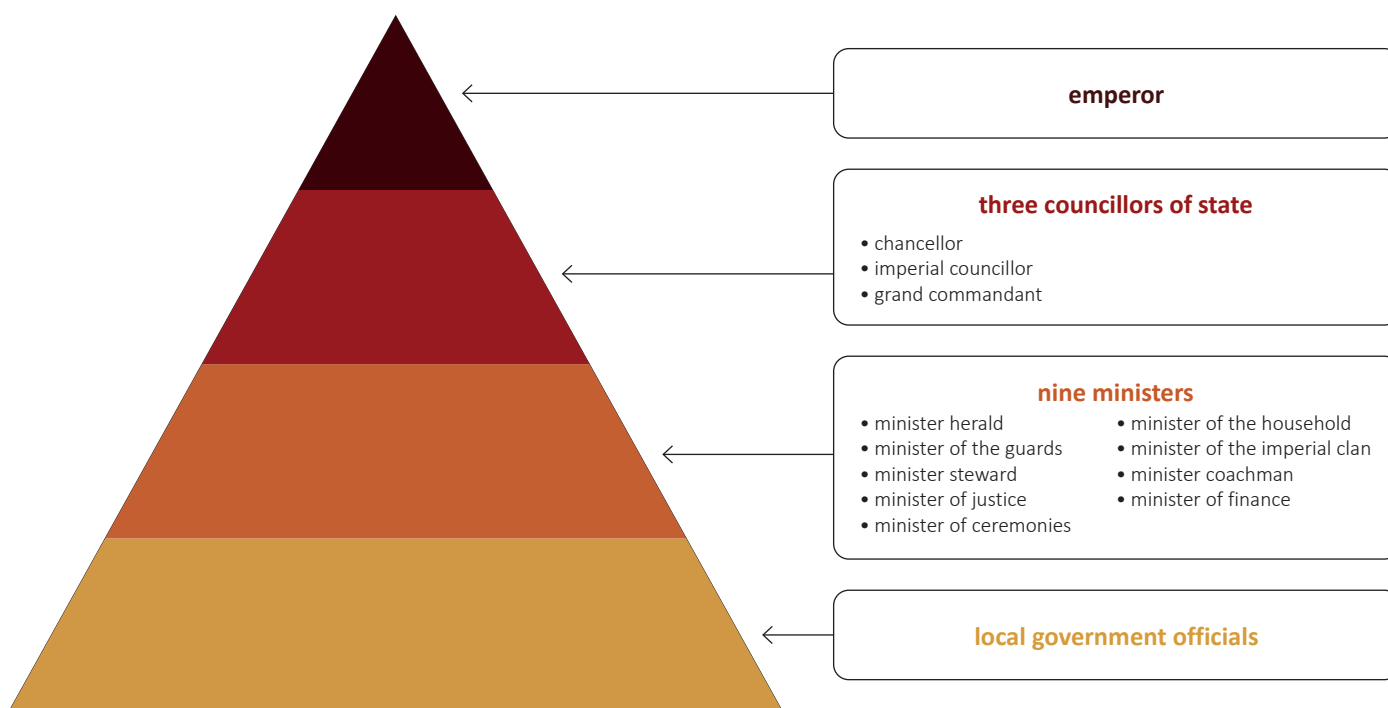
Image from: Getty Images/Photo 12

Han Dynasty emperor with officials

Recruitment and rewards

There was a thorough recruitment process for people who wanted to work in the civil service, with candidates being tested for intelligence and honesty. Any man, rich or poor, could become a clerk, but women could not apply. The clerks could then progress through 12 pay grades until they became a senior minister. They could also be rewarded with tax cuts, gifts of gold or orders of honour.

Han Dynasty civil service hierarchy



Role of the emperor

The emperor was at the top of the civil service hierarchy. His main role was to write edicts. He sent these edicts to all officials in central and local government and provided any information about new laws or punishments. The emperor also selected government officials, who he presented with orders of honour. There were 20 orders of honour, and the highest allowed a senior official to become a member of the nobility.

Three councillors of state

Below the emperor in the hierarchy were three councillors of state, who each led one of the three branches of government. The chancellor was in charge of the civil service and was the most important official after the emperor. There were sometimes two co-chancellors, who made sure that the chancellor was honest. The imperial councillor was in charge of the censorate, an agency that checked government officials' work and uncovered dishonesty and corruption. The grand commandant led the military.

Nine ministers

Below the three councillors of state were nine ministers. Each minister was responsible for a government agency. These agencies covered finance and justice to security, religious ceremonies and the emperor's family. Each minister had a group of staff who worked in their department.

Local government

The Han Empire was split into different areas, or provinces. Each province had a governor and a military commander, who settled arguments and recruited workers for the military or for building projects. The provinces were either divided into kingdoms, which were led by kings, or commanderies, which were led by the central government. Each commandery was split into 10–20 counties, and counties were divided into districts. Local officials collected taxes and carried out censuses to find out who lived in the district and who owned land.

Inner court

Even though the Han Dynasty's system of government was designed to stop dishonesty and corruption, the emperor was still able to show favouritism. For example, the emperor had two sources of advice: the outer court and the inner court. The outer court was the civil service and the inner court included the emperor's family and friends. The emperor's inner court could be very influential, and occasionally the emperor would make a member of his inner court the supreme commander, which made them more powerful than the chancellor.

Nobility

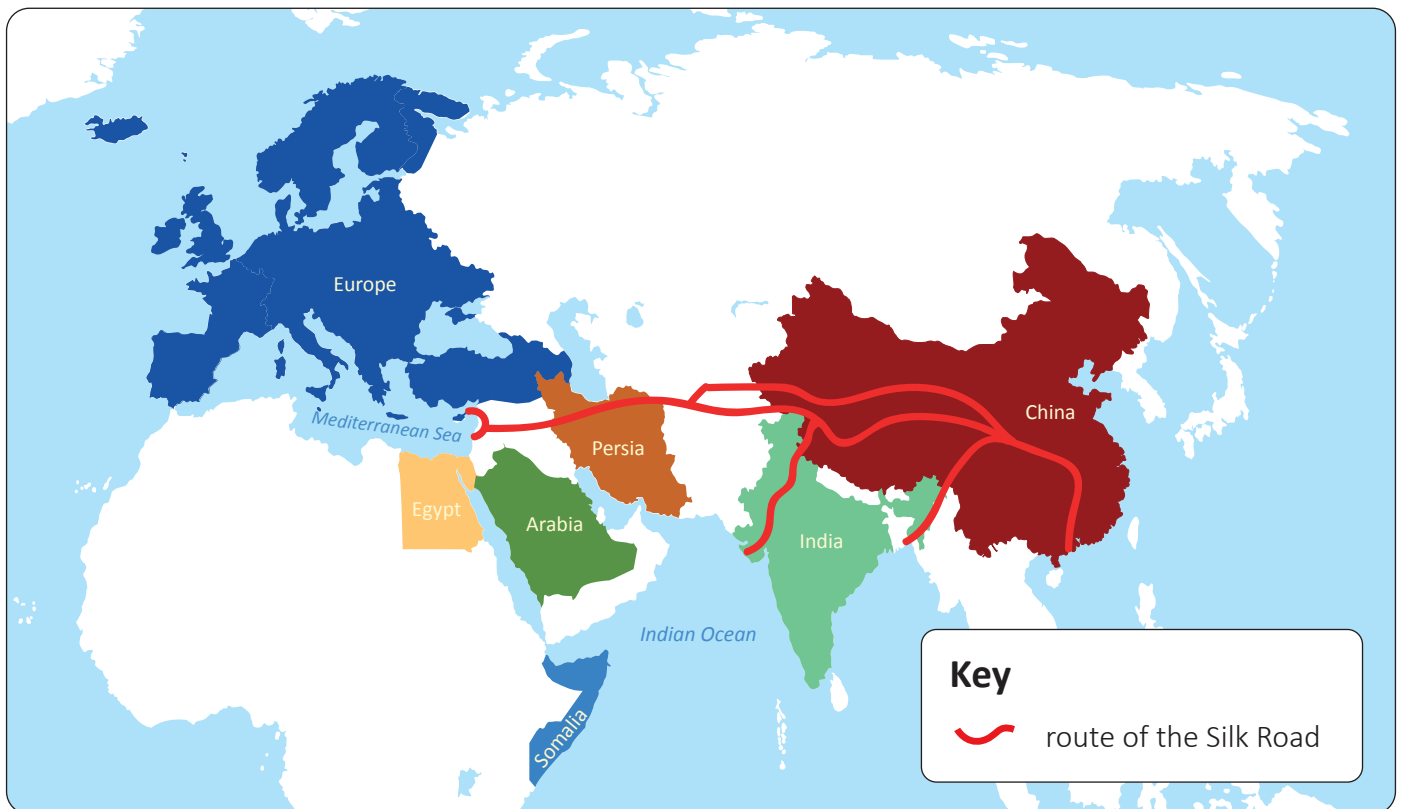
The nobility, the people with the highest rank in society, did not have a role in the civil service. However, they did receive a portion of the taxes collected by the local officials, so they were extremely wealthy. The nobility often became more powerful than the government officials, which threatened the civil service's purpose of providing fair treatment for all citizens.

Legacy

The civil service continued in China for nearly 2000 years. After the last emperor, Emperor Puyi, abdicated the throne in 1912, the system of government changed. However, China reinstated the civil service examinations in 1993, and in 2017, 1.5 million people sat the exam in the hope of gaining one of the 33,000 civil service jobs available.



Silk Road



What was the Silk Road?

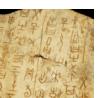
The Silk Road was a network of trade routes connecting China in the east with Europe in the west. It was established during the Han Dynasty and used for trade from c130 BC until 1453. The Silk Road changed China's economy, because it opened trade links between different civilisations. During the earlier Shang Dynasty, trade had mainly happened up and down the rivers in China and rarely with other countries. The Silk Road introduced the world to Chinese fabrics, objects and culture, and it also brought goods into China that the Han Dynasty people had never seen before.



Silk Road

How did the Silk Road start?

The Silk Road started because nomadic tribes were regularly attacking the Han Dynasty's northern border. A Han Dynasty emperor, Emperor Wu, sent a young officer, Zhang Qian, to the west to find allies and better horses to help his army to stop these raids. Zhang Qian traded silk for stronger and faster horses in the west, which helped the Han Dynasty to stop the border attacks. This success inspired Emperor Wu to travel further west to find what else they could gain through trade. The Silk Road officially started to enable trade with the west in 130 BC.



What was traded on the Silk Road?

The goods traded from China to the west included silk, tea, dyes, jade, spices, bronze, medicine, perfumes, ivory, rice, porcelain tableware, paper and gunpowder. Goods traded from the west to China included horses, saddles, grapevines, dogs, animal furs, honey, fruits, glassware, woollen textiles, gold, silver, camels, slaves and weapons. At the time of the Han Dynasty in China, the Roman Empire was expanding around the Mediterranean Sea. Chinese silk became a popular luxury fabric in ancient Rome and was in high demand. Rome and China were a long way apart but began regular trade along the Silk Road.

How were goods transported along the Silk Road?

Traders used camels to transport goods along the Silk Road. Camels could survive the harsh conditions in the deserts, and could carry up to 225kg of goods at a time. Most traders only travelled small sections of the 6400km road, and goods were traded between different people until they reached their destination. Towns were built along the Silk Road, with roadside inns where travellers could stay to recover from their journeys. Some traders also travelled by ship across the Indian Ocean to new ports along the trading routes.



Illustration of camels on the Silk Road, 1375

What other effects did the Silk Road have?

Along with the goods traded along the Silk Road, cultural exchanges also took place. The art, religion, philosophy, science and language of different civilisations were allowed to mix. Buddhist and Christian ideas came to China along the land and sea routes of the Silk Road. However, disease could also accompany the merchants. In the second century AD, a terrible plague killed 10% of the Roman Empire's population, and the Black Death arrived in Europe in the 12th century. Historians think that, on both occasions, the plague started in the east and travelled with the traders along the Silk Road.



Victims of the Black Death in Europe, 12th century

Legacy of the Silk Road

The Silk Road was used by traders for over 1500 years. In 1453, the Ottoman Empire closed the Silk Road, which stopped trade between the east and west. This meant that the western traders had to find other routes to the east, and they began trying new sea routes. European explorers travelled to places that they had never visited. This was the start of the Age of Exploration. It led to the European exploration of distant lands, such as the Americas, and the beginning of the modern world.



Painting of western explorers, 1492



Glossary

abdicate	When a ruler gives up their throne willingly so that another monarch or government can rule instead.
agency	A group who provides a service or performs a specific job on behalf of the government, a person or another group.
benevolence	The quality of being kind.
census	An official survey by the government to find out the population and wealth of the country or state, as well as the age of the people and what jobs they do.
commandery	A district under the control of a section of the military or government.
corrupt	When a person or government tries to make things better for themselves and not for the people through bad actions.
Di	An honorific title given to kings in the Shang Dynasty.
edict	An official order issued by someone in authority.
favouritism	Treating certain people better than others because you like them more.
feudal system	A system of rule where land is given to local leaders by a king or emperor.
finances	The amount of money that a person, group or government has.
produce	Goods, crops or items created by a person or group.
province	A part of a country that is governed by a group of governors who serve the ruler.
recruit	To take on a person or people into a group or army.
territory	The land that is a part of a state, kingdom or empire.
wattle and daub	The traditional method of building walls from interwoven sticks (wattle) bound with clay, mud, straw or dung (daub).

