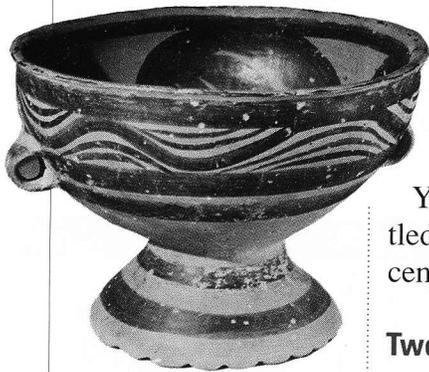


■ How did geography isolate ancient China from the rest of the world?



▲ Prehistoric Chinese pottery demonstrates both skill and artistry. This painted ceramic cup was found during the excavation of a Yangshao village.

Across Time & Space

Don't get confused if you see China's capital city of Beijing written as Peking or Peiping on older maps. Beijing is spelled according to the Pinyin system for writing Chinese in our Roman alphabet. In 1958, the Chinese officially adopted Pinyin, replacing earlier systems.

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northeastern China. Rich in minerals, it gets its name—meaning “Yellow River”—from the rich yellow dirt that it leaves behind when it overflows its banks.

Along with the minerals that enrich the soil, these floods often bring disaster. The Huang He is nicknamed “China’s Sorrow.” It has destroyed property and claimed the lives of thousands

who have been swept away in its swirling waters.

Another river, the Chang Jiang (*chahng jyahng*)—also known as the Yangzi (*YANG see*)—winds across the farmlands of central and southern China. Trace the Chang Jiang on the map. Farmers use the river’s many tributaries to send their crops easily and cheaply to Pacific ports. ■

Prehistoric Cultures

Like the other great ancient civilizations—Mesopotamia, Egypt, and India—the earliest known Chinese civilization started along a river. By about 10,000 B.C., a group of Neolithic people called the Yangshao (*yahng show*) had settled near the Huang He in north central China.

Two Neolithic Cultures

On the map, trace the Huang He from its source in the Tibetan Highlands. Follow its course as it flows north, east, and then south. At the place where it meets the Wei (*way*), the Huang He bends like an elbow and heads northeast. It’s not surprising that the Yangshao settled there. First, the two rivers provided plenty of water for people, animals and crops. Second, the rich, sandy soil was easy to farm with the simple tools that were used by Neolithic farmers.

Archaeologists have uncovered many Yangshao villages in northern China. In one village, Banpo, they have found the remains of farmhouses, many of which were built partly underground. The houses had plastered floors, and their roofs were held up by wooden posts.

By about 3000 B.C., another Neolithic culture, the Longshan, had developed in northeast China. The Longshan people were farmers too. They raised cattle, sheep, pigs, and dogs. They grew wheat and millet, two grain crops that grow well in the dry climate of northern China. They also hunted, fished, and gathered wild foods. Over time, Longshan farmers also settled in the south of China. It rained more there, and they were able to grow rice.

The Longshan people were advanced for their time. For example, they harvested silk from silkworms and used it to weave fine fabrics. They used a potter’s wheel, and they baked strong, durable pottery in kilns, or ovens. The Longshan even used simple written symbols and numbers.

In order to survive and farm the land along the river, people needed to work together on flood control and irrigation projects. Gradually, leaders arose in different places in China to organize these projects. According to Chinese legends, one of the leaders was a man named Yu, the “Great Engineer.” Legend said he founded the first great Chinese dynasty, the Xia (*SHEE ah*) around 2000 B.C.

A Legendary Dynasty

Knowledge of the Xia dynasty comes mostly from legend. There are no written records. Legend tells us the Xia ruled for nearly 300 years. The last Xia ruler, Jie (*CHEE uh*), was an evil king.

The Shang Dynasty

Trace the boundaries of the Shang dynasty on the map below. Notice that Shang China included much of the Huang He plain.

During the Shang dynasty, most people were still peasants, or poor farmers. They lived in villages and spent their lives working in the fields and struggling to control the flooding rivers. They farmed small plots of land and lived in simple houses.

Walled Cities

Archaeologists have discovered that most Shang people lived in farming villages. Some, however, lived in large walled cities. For example, one Shang city was surrounded by an earth wall 30 feet high, 65 feet thick, and four and a half miles long. With simple hand tools, it would probably have taken 10,000 workers 18 years to build such a wall. To complete it, Shang rulers must have developed complex ways of organizing people. They must also have become skillful in engineering.

Within the walls lived rulers, priests, and warriors. Their huge temples and palaces were built on raised earth terraces. Skilled craftworkers lived outside the walls in neighborhoods made up of people who practiced the same craft. Farmers lived in nearby villages.

Cheng Tang (*chahng tahng*), or Tang the Successful, defeated Jie in 1766 B.C. Tang's victory marked the beginning of a new dynasty called the Shang (*shahng*). The Shang dynasty ruled China for over 700 years, from 1766 to 1122 B.C. ■

In the Shang capital of Anyang, archaeologists have found thousands of cowrie shells like those shown on this page. Cowrie shells served as an early form of money to buy small items like tools and weapons. They were used in the 1000s B.C., before the Bronze Age brought the use of metal coins.

The Bronze Age

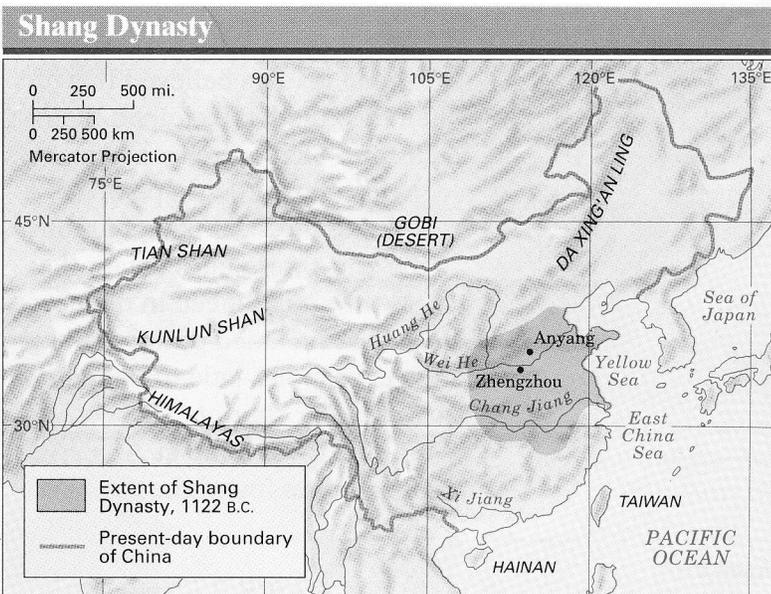
Around 1600 B.C., Shang craftworkers in the city of Yanshi (*yen shir*) made an important discovery. They learned to mix tin and copper to produce a hard and beautiful metal called bronze. This new metal was quite valuable because bronze was much stronger than tin or copper. In Anyang, archaeologists have found bronze pots, plates, ceremonial vessels,

■ What were some achievements of China's Neolithic river cultures, the Yangshao and the Longshan?

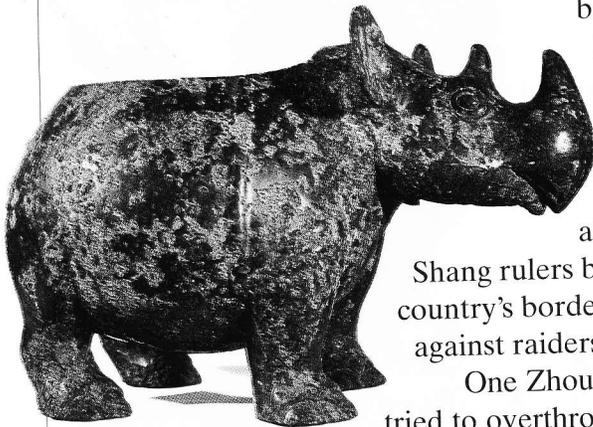


▲ Cowries are snails found in the coastal waters of the Pacific and Indian oceans. The shells shown here are life-sized.

▼ Find the Huang He on this map. Shang farmers learned to tame the wild water buffalo that roamed the river's flood plain.



The Zhou Dynasty



▲ This bronze ceremonial vessel in the shape of a rhinoceros suggests the playful side of the artisan who designed it. The vessel dates from the late Shang or early Zhou period.

► To the ancient Chinese, the imaginary dragon was king of all animals. Dragons with five claws on each foot symbolized an emperor. Nonroyal dragons had four claws.

In the Wei Valley, west of the bend in the Huang He, lived a group of people called the Zhou (*joh*). The Zhou were farmers. They also helped their Shang rulers by patrolling the country's borders, guarding them against raiders from the west.

One Zhou leader, King Wen, tried to overthrow the Shang. Eventually King Wen's son, Wu the Martial, became the leader of the Zhou. True to his name, Wu the Martial carried out his father's wishes and conquered the Shang. In 1050 B.C., Wu's forces attacked the Shang king. They burned the royal palace and set up their own dynasty. The Zhou dynasty would be the longest in China's history.

The Mandate of Heaven

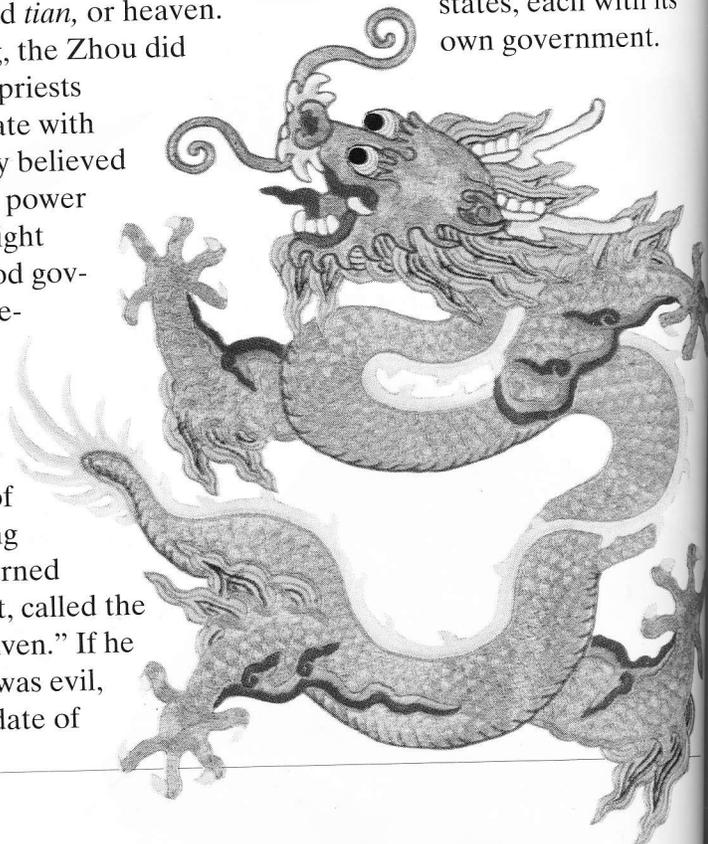
The Zhou worshiped an impersonal power called *tian*, or heaven. Unlike the Shang, the Zhou did not believe their priests could communicate with *tian*. Instead, they believed *tian* was simply a power that demanded right behavior and good government. They believed that *tian* required this especially of the king, whom they called the "son of heaven." If a king ruled well, he earned heaven's support, called the "mandate of heaven." If he ruled poorly or was evil, he lost the mandate of

heaven and was overthrown. The Zhou used this idea to justify their overthrow of the last Shang ruler.

Feudalism

Zhou kings spread their rule over China through a system called **feudalism** (*FYOOD uh lihz uhm*). Under a feudal system, nobles own the farmland, which is worked by peasants, or serfs. In feudal China, the Zhou put their relatives and even some Shang nobles in charge of the land. The serfs paid the nobles for the use of the land. In turn, the nobles paid the king a portion of what their peasants produced. The nobles also promised to send the king soldiers in times of war.

The king granted each noble complete control of his own land. The noble was like a king on his land. A noble's land consisted of a walled town and the farms around it. By about 700 B.C., there were 200 of these feudal states, each with its own government.



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As methods of farming improved, the nobles' stores of surplus grain grew. Since grain was valuable, the nobles became richer and more powerful. They grew greedy and waged wars against each other to gain even more land.

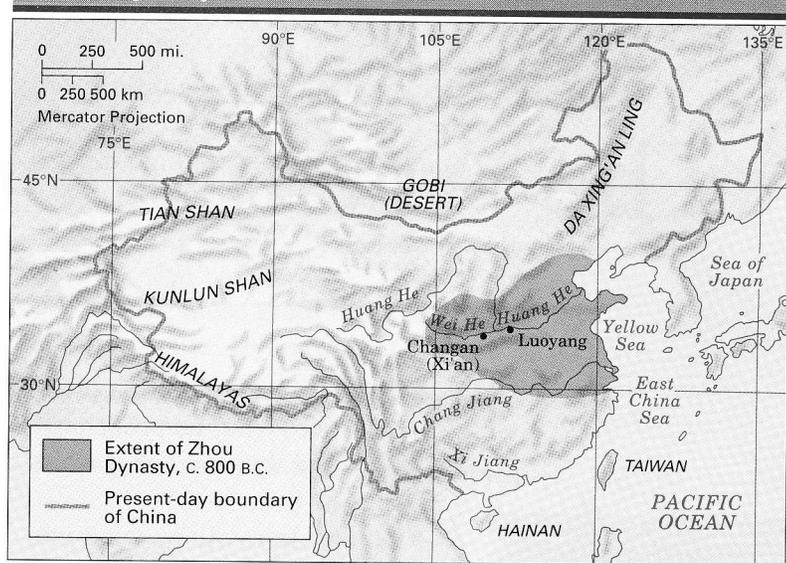
To run their powerful states and do business with neighbors, the nobles needed skilled and educated people. They needed engineers to plan and build flood control projects. They needed tax collectors to gather payments from their serfs. And because few people could read or write, they needed scholars to keep records and to advise them. In fact, men who could read and write wandered through China, offering their services to the nobles. For a fee, these wandering scholars also taught common people to read and write. The earliest surviving Chinese books were written during the Zhou period.

Wider Use of Writing

During the Zhou dynasty, as today, people in China's many regions spoke a variety of languages and dialects. **Dialects** are different forms of the same language. Thus, communication from region to region was often a problem.

To solve this problem, the Zhou built on the Shang practice of writing on oracle bones. They

Zhou Dynasty



expanded the use of writing by using bronze, wood, and bamboo for recording information. No matter how a word was pronounced in different parts of China, its written form could be understood everywhere.

In the time of the Zhou, the Chinese language had more than 3,000 written characters. At last, people from feudal states hundreds of miles apart, speaking different dialects, could communicate with each other.

Writing helped to bridge the barriers created by China's geography. Writing helped to unify the Chinese people. Finally, writing made possible the growth and spread of China's unique culture and civilization. ■

▲ *China under the Zhou dynasty was made up of feudal states ruled by powerful nobles.*

■ *In what ways were the Zhou walled cities like small countries?*

REVIEW

- 1. FOCUS** What advances were made by these ancient cultures—the Yangshao, the Longshan, the Xia, the Shang, and the Zhou?
- 2. CONNECT** How did China's Neolithic cultures resemble those of Mesopotamia and Egypt?
- 3. GEOGRAPHY** How did China's geography affect its early history? Consider both the regions within China, and China's relationship to the rest of the world.
- 4. CRITICAL THINKING** How did the Shang and Zhou religions differ? How did each religion give a special role to the king?
- 5. ACTIVITY** Imagine that you are a feudal noble. Make a chart comparing the advantages and disadvantages of your position. List the benefits on one side and the risks and responsibilities on the other side.

Chinese Writing

The brush races across the paper as your Chinese friend draws the word you see below. Can you guess what it means? It's the word for horse! Chinese writing has a long history. Look how the word for horse developed step by step.



Turtle shells were sometimes used to write on in ancient China. The writing on this shell was done around 1200 B.C. Notice that the writing uses mostly straight lines, which are easy to draw.



c. 2000 B.C.
The earliest writers scratched small pictures like this onto bones and shells.



c. 600 B.C.
In this period, writing started to look less like a picture.



c. A.D. 300
When writers began to use brushes, their lines got longer. Where are the horse's feet?

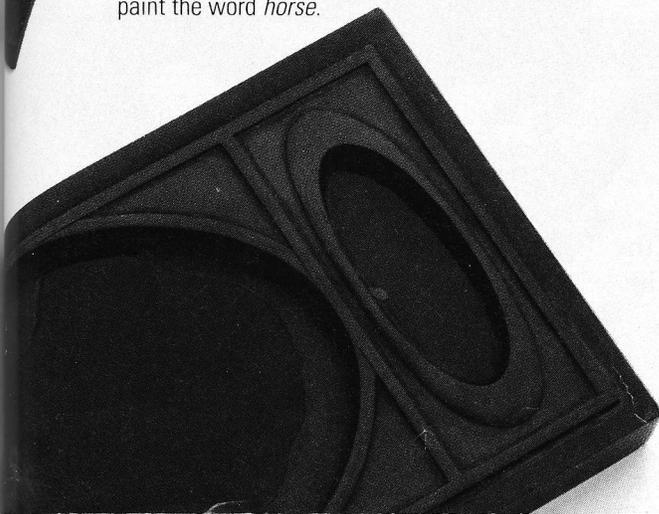


Present
Today the Chinese are trying to simplify their writing by using characters like this one.

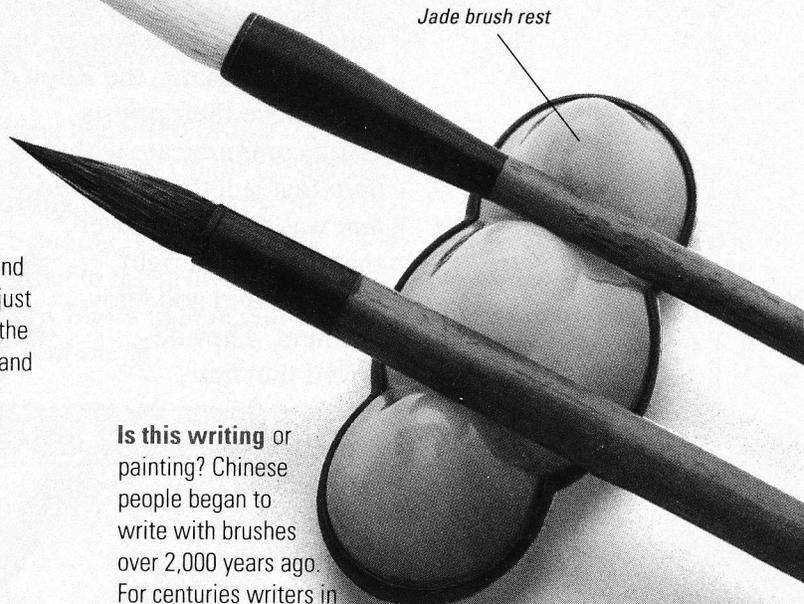
Signature seal



Take this stick of ink and grind it slowly back and forth on this ink stone. Add water until the ink is just the shade you want it, from the deepest black to the palest gray. Now you are ready to dip your brush and paint the word *horse*.



Jade brush rest



Is this writing or painting? Chinese people began to write with brushes over 2,000 years ago. For centuries writers in China have worked to make their words look as beautiful as possible. So, making a Chinese letter or poem is actually both writing and painting.



▲ *Shang craftworkers created this 14-inch-high bronze vessel in the shape of a man within a tiger's open jaws. No one knows whether the tiger is protecting the man or eating him. What do you think?*

Across Time & Space

Westerners wear black as the color of mourning when someone dies.

The Chinese wear white. These seem the opposite until you realize that both cultures are really doing the same thing—avoiding colorful clothing.

■ *How did the Shang people live, and how did their religious beliefs affect their lives?*

spears, and even chariots. These Shang pieces are skillfully decorated with complex patterns and animal faces.

Religion

The early Chinese believed in many gods. They worshiped individual gods that they believed controlled the sun, moon, stars, rivers, and mountains. They also worshiped a supreme god, Shang Di (*shahng dee*), who took a personal interest in the world and its people. They believed their priests could communicate directly with Shang Di.

Ancestor Worship

As important to the Shang as their gods were their **ancestors**—relatives who had lived before them. The Chinese believed that the wise spirits of their ancestors controlled every part of their lives. Chinese fathers, as the heads of their households, made frequent offerings to their ancestors. Even the king would make offerings to his ancestors at special religious ceremonies.

Burials

Shang leaders believed that when they died, they joined their ancestors. They were buried in deep pits dug in the shape of a cross. Like the Egyptian pharaohs, Shang kings were buried with the things they might need in the next life. These included pottery jars, bronze weapons, jade ornaments, and even war chariots.

In one royal tomb at Anyang, archaeologists found the remains

of nine guards and nine dogs that had been killed and placed around the prince's coffin. They also found the prince's chariot with its four horses and three armed warriors buried alongside.

Oracle Bones

To guide them in this world, Shang kings consulted their ancestors by means of oracle bones. An **oracle** is a prediction about the future. First, the priest would carve the king's question on an animal bone or a turtle shell. Then he would drill holes in one side of the bone and heat it. When the heated bone cracked, the priest looked at the pattern of cracks to find the oracle and answer the king's question.

Kings often asked questions about daily life—for example, whether the day's hunt would be successful. Like us, they also wanted predictions about the weather. The question on one oracle bone reads, "Will the weather be fine tomorrow?" The priest's forecast was, "This evening it will rain; tomorrow, it will be fine." Some of the bones have notes telling whether the oracle was correct. This priest was apparently a good weather forecaster. The bone notes, "In the night rain was granted; the next day it was fine."

Archaeologists have found more than 100,000 of these oracle bones. They contain the earliest known examples of Chinese writing. Readers today can recognize many of the more than 2,000 characters engraved on the 3,600-year-old bones. Read A Closer Look on page 267 to discover more about the development of Chinese writing. ■