**Hundred Schools of Thought Reading**

The Hundred Schools of Thought (Chinese: 諸子百家/诸子百家; pinyin: zhūzǐ bǎijiā; Wade-Giles: chu-tzu pai-chia; literally "all philosophers hundred schools") is the name given to philosophers and schools that flourished from 770 to 221 B.C.E., an era of great cultural and intellectual expansion in China. Even though this period was characterized by chaos and bloody battles, it is also known as the Golden Age of Chinese philosophy because a variety of thoughts and ideas were freely developed and discussed.

The intellectual society of this era was characterized by ***itinerant*** (traveling) scholars, who were often employed by various state rulers as advisers on the methods of government, war, and diplomacy. The thoughts and ideas of this period have greatly influenced lifestyles and social consciousness in East Asian countries through the present day.

During the Zhou Dynasty (or Chou dynasty, 周朝, 1050 to 256 B.C.E.), China moved into the Iron Age and developed from a tribal society to a land-based feudal social structure and economy. People began to actively seek practical solutions to their difficulties, rather than relying simply on prayers to their ancestors. The Chou came to believe that a person could earn Heaven’s rewards by acting in a virtuous manner, and could thereby control his destiny (ming). This was the philosophical base from which the Hundred Schools of Thought emerged from the sixth to the third century B.C.E.

These time periods, though characterized by disunity and civil strife, were an era of exceptional prosperity and cultural development, the "golden age" of China. Regional warlords constantly competed to build stronger and more efficient armies, and to increase the production of their lands in order to collect more taxes. These developments required large numbers of skilled, literate officials and therefore spurred the spread of education throughout the country. The use of coinage stimulated the growth of commerce, and the use of iron made better weapons and farm implements available. Great public works such as dams, irrigation projects, and canals were carried out, and massive walls were built around cities and along the northern frontier.

During this period, so many different philosophies developed that it is often referred to as the age of the Hundred Schools of Thought (諸子百家/诸子百家). Many of the great classical texts, on which Chinese thought was to be based for the next two and one-half millennia, were written. The intellectual society of this era was characterized by traveling scholars, who were often employed by various state rulers as advisers on the methods of government, war, and diplomacy.

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