

Ancient China

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Section 1: Introduction

One Unit, Two Resources

This Premium TimeMaps Unit is based on a **sequence of maps** showing the history of Ancient China between 1500 BCE and 500 CE. This sequence is presented in **two resources**, a slide show and a series of map pages, facilitating **two approaches** to covering the topic with your students: a whole-class presentation; and individual project work, for which the institution will need a multiuser licence so that the students can access the resources for themselves.

1. Slide show

The slide show is primarily designed for use as a whole-class presentation. Commentary notes are available as an *aide memoir* for the teacher when delivering the presentation. They provide talking points on each map in the slide show.

The slide show can also be used by the students for their own project work. A students' commentary is also provided.

2. Timemaps map pages

These are designed specifically for use by students in their project work.

Each map shows Ancient China at a specific date. The maps are accompanied by information about what is happening at that date.

This combination of map and information makes it easy for students to use the map pages, though not so ideal for teachers to use as a class presentation (hence the slide show, see above).

Section 2: Using the Resources

The unit can be used in one of two ways:

1. Whole-class presentation

The **slide show** is specifically designed for teachers to use as a whole class presentation, offering a visual, panoramic overview of the topic. It can be used as an introduction to the topic, or as a wrap up, or as a stand-alone resource.

A commentary is provided to help teachers cover the key points for each slide.

In Section 3 Task 2 (below), are a series of questions (which can also be found at the end of the commentary), which can be answered by a single word or short phrase. The questions aim to reinforce the learning outcomes from the presentation, and can be used as a test or reinforcement exercise at the end of the presentation.

Another way might be to print the questions out and give them to the students, and ask the students to note down the answers as the slide show progresses. They can either submit their answers for marking, or collaborate in small groups to come up with an agreed set of answers.

2. Student-based enquiry work

Students use the maps, plus linked information, to find out for themselves about the topic. In the process, they gain knowledge and understanding of the topic, whilst at the same time developing analytical and other thinking skills.

Students can use either **map pages** or **slide show**. In the map pages, the linked information is right next to the maps; in the slide show, it is in the student commentary.

In either case the institution will need a multiuser licence.

Both slide show and map pages are built around the same series of maps, following the history of Ancient China (the slide show covers the period 1500 BCE to 500 CE, while the map pages covers 500 BCE to 500 CE. All the activities below, except task 1, deal with the period after 500 BCE, as the period before that date is covered by another Premium unit, *Early Civilizations*).

Simple forward/back navigation buttons (and in the map pages, a timeline below the maps) make it easy to move through the map sequence.

To start the sequence of map pages, click on the map of Ancient China 500 BCE.

To start the slide show, click HERE.

Teachers may wish to combine the whole-class presentation approach with the student-based approach - for examples, see Section 4.

Section 3: Activities

In this section are some suggestions to using this Premium Unit actively in the classroom. The following section (Section 4) offers some ways in which the suggested tasks can be used within a lesson.

Students can do the activities as individuals or in small groups. They will obviously need to have direct access to this Premium TimeMap unit, for which a multi-user licence is required.

Task 1. Preparatory work - Geographical Background

Students will benefit from some preliminary work to introduce Ancient China. Some suggestions are:

1. Locate China on a modern world map (which could be the Timemaps world map for East Asia in 2005 CE). Then compare it to the Timemaps map of China in 1500 BCE. Discuss the differences. Make the students aware that modern China is the direct descendant of the Shang Kingdom in 1500 BCE.

No other state has a recorded history that can be traced linking the two dates in this way.

2. Discuss China's location, noting how distant it is from other centers of ancient civilization (on the assumption that Ancient China is not the first civilization you have looked at; hopefully you have previously studied Ancient Mesopotamia, Ancient Egypt, maybe Ancient India - and you can point out the locations for Ancient Greece and Rome as well).

Steer students to an understanding that this distance meant that, of all ancient civilizations in the Eastern Hemisphere, China's was the most isolated from the others.

3. Discuss the region's geography. In particular, note:

- the two great rivers - the Yellow River and the Yangtze;
- the North China Plain, through which both rivers flow to the sea, making it highly fertile agricultural land;
- the mountain ranges (notably the Himalayas) and plateaus (Tibet) which cut China off to the west;
- the cold deserts and grasslands that border China to the north;
- the seas and oceans that border China to east and south; and
- the climate gradient from the cold north to the tropical south.

Task 2. Questions

These questions can be used with the slide show (see above; hence they also appear at the end of the slide show commentary). They can also be used in the context of student-based enquiry work, as a simple way to reinforce knowledge of the topic. If so, in place of whole class presentation, students access the slide show or map pages directly to answer the questions.

The answers are given (*in Italics*).

1. What dynasty was nominally on the throne of China in 500 BCE? (*The Zhou dynasty*)
2. Who was the influential philosopher who lived and taught about 500 BCE? (*Confucius*)
3. Which state rose to power to bring all China under its rule by 220 BCE? (*Qin*)
4. What school of thought did this state's rulers follow? (*The Legalist school*)
5. What early version of a great system of defenses did this dynasty establish? (*The Great Wall of China*)
6. Which long-lasting dynasty came to power after a period of chaos in 202 BCE? (*The Han dynasty*)
7. This dynasty adopted a particular philosophy as its official ideology - what was it? (*Confucianism*)
8. The dynasty organized a great trade route across central Asia - what is it called? (*The Silk Road*)
9. What important technological development occurred during the later stages of this dynasty's time in power? (*Paper-making*)
10. How many kingdoms did this dynasty's empire divide into when it came to an end in 220 CE? (*Three - hence the period was known as the Time of the Three Kingdoms*)
11. Non-Chinese tribes invaded China in the 4th century CE - which part of China did they occupy, the north or the south? (*North*)
12. A system of belief from outside China became popular during these years - which was this? (*Buddhism*)

Task 3. Multiple choice questions

This is a shorter alternative to Task 2.

1. Confucius was A. a famous general, B. a philosopher and teacher, C. A great king, or D. a wise minister?
2. The Qin dynasty was motivated by A. Legalist teachings, B. Confucian teachings, C. Daoist teachings, or Mohist teachings?
3. Which dynasty laid the foundations for the Great Wall of China - A. The Han, B. The Northern Zhou, c. The Wei, D. The Qin?
4. The Han dynasty were the first to organise the Silk Road. This was A. a major highway between the great cities of Changan and Loyang, B. a maritime trade route across the Indian Ocean, C. a military road built down to the far south of China, D. a great trade route across the center of Asia?
5. A new religion spread to China in late Han times. Was this A. Christianity, B. Confucianism, D. Buddhism or C. Zoroastrianism?

Task 4. Critical thinking questions

The aim of these activities is to develop analytical thinking skills, and in particular getting students to grapple with history-specific issues such as cause and consequence, and change and continuity.

General Instructions:

1. Students read the questions below, which either they or their teacher has chosen.
2. They then go through the map sequence or slideshow (in the latter case they will have to have access to a copy of the student commentary).
3. As they do this, they carefully take notes, focusing on the questions they are answering. They should bear in mind when and where events or developments happen; why they happen; and what changes as a result of them happening.
4. Students use their notes to prepare their answers. These can be in either essay form or as presentations.

(Note to teacher: suggested answers are given in italics)

Short questions:

1. What were the factors which led Qin to conquer all the other states of Ancient China?
 - *Used talented ministers, generals and officials*
 - *Applied legalistic principles / Efficient government/ militaristic state / strong army*
 - *Clever tactics*
2. Why was Qin rule so brief?
 - *Harsh government aroused opposition*
3. Why was the Han dynasty able to establish a long-lasting rule over China?
 - *In a nutshell, the Han used the effective institutions and policies of the Qin, but without their harshness – they followed Confucian teachings which called on rulers not to oppress their subjects.*
4. Why did the Han dynasty fall?
 - *An answer should mention some or all of the following: Weak emperors, factionalism, corruption, landowners exploiting and oppressing the peasants, peasant rebellion.*

Extended exercises

Complete one or more of the following activities. There are no right or wrong answers for them, but give reasons.

1. What were the long-term trends in Chinese history between 500 BCE and 500 CE?
Give instances of the interaction between them.
Include developments which went into reverse, or which faced challenges in some periods.

The following trends could be included:

- *the expansion of the Chinese civilization and people - especially from northern to southern China*

- *the rise and fall of a unified state (Qin/Han) covering all China*
- *the rise of bureaucratic government in Ancient China, and its links with Legalism and Confucianism*
- *the rise of Buddhism*

2. Trace the history of the first truly bureaucratic government in world history during this millennium of Chinese history.

An answer should include

- *its origins in the need for princes of the later Zhou period to have able officials run their states in a more centralized fashion;*
- *the rise of Qin, with its emphasis on efficient administration;*
- *the entrenchment and expansion of the bureaucracy under the Han, and its links to Confucianism;*
- *and finally bureaucracy's survival in the chaotic period after the fall of the Han.*

Section 4: Plans of Action

Here in this section are possible strategies, plans of action you might like to follow (or adapt as you see fit) for using some of these activities.

Plan A:

This plan combines the presentation approach with the student-centered enquiry approach. Do this if you are doing this topic as a major topic with the class.

1. Complete Task 1: Geographical Background.
2. Introduce the topic by presenting the slide show to the class. Use the teacher's commentary as a guide.
3. The students complete Task 4 by answering one or more of the questions given there.

They use either the map pages or the slide show (plus student commentary) to answer the question(s).

They can do this task as individuals, for their own project work. Alternatively, they can do it in small groups.

All the students or groups can be asked to do the same questions, or all to do different ones.

4. The students then write up and submit their work in essay form for marking, or prepare a presentation for showing to the class.

Plan B:

This plan will take less time than Plan A to complete.

2. Complete Task 1: Geographical Background.
3. Show the slide show to the class, using the teachers' commentary as a guide. Tell the students that there will be a test at the end.
4. Ask the questions in Task 2 to the class as a whole, with the students calling out the answers (if they remember any!).
5. Give out the questions on printed sheets (for this, use the questions as given at the end of the students' commentary). Show the class the slide show again. This time they take notes in preparation for the same test again.
6. The students write their answers on this sheet and submit for marking.

Plan C:

This should take longer than Plan B to complete, but not as long as Plan A.

1. Preliminary work: Geographical Background.

2. The students are handed copies of the questions (use the questions as given at the end of the students' commentary).
3. The students then work their way through the map pages or the slide show (if the latter, using the students' commentary), and as they do so they note down the answers to the questions.
4. The teacher then shows the slide show to the class as a whole, using the teachers commentary as a guide. In the course of this presentation they will give the students the answers to the questions.

Further reading

A list of all TimeMaps articles can be found on the Encyclopedia home page. Here is a selected list of the key articles which students should find most helpful for China:

Ancient China - an overview of Chinese civilization in ancient times

The Zhou dynasty - a survey of the history of China from c. 1100 BCE to 220 BCE, including the period of Confucius, and the rise of the Qin empire

The Qin dynasty - the rise and fall of the Qin dynasty, and the policies which caused both its success and downfall

The Han dynasty - the rise and fall of probably the most influential dynasty in Chinese imperial history, and the social, political and ideological trends which occurred

Divided China - the period of division which followed the fall of the Han dynasty, along with the social, political and religious developments which occurred.