

# Ancient China

## Slideshow Commentary

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# Introduction

This activity can be used as a stand-alone exercise, as an introduction to this topic in world history; or as a wrap up/reinforcement exercise.

The slideshow can also be used by students in their project work. For this they will need to access the resource themselves, as well as the student commentary (or a printout of it). This will require a multi-user licence.

For each slide, this commentary mostly follows the same formula:

**1. Slide number and date**

**2. Introductory paragraph (in bold)**

This seeks to encapsulate in a sentence or two what's going on in the map. These are in bold.

**3. Bullet points**

One or more bullet points, giving very brief points of interest in the map, or in the period it covers.

**4. Additional note(s)**

For most slides there are additional notes. These give more in-depth support to the bullet points. Much of the information these contain may be superfluous to your needs, especially if you are covering the topic quickly. However, we have included it so that it is there for you if you want it.

We suggest that, prior to using the Presentation with your class, you go through these additional notes and highlight any you wish to use.

Sometimes there are notes in italics - these are simply hints and tips for teachers. They don't occur very often.

*A suggestion:*

To keep your students more engaged (and, by the way, if your students are not engaged or benefitting from these maps, then let us know and we'll refund your money!), why not start each new map with a question, such as, "How is this map different from the previous one?"

# Commentary

When using the Sideshow in class it might be helpful to print these notes out.

## Slide 1: 1500 BCE

**By this date, a kingdom ruled by kings of the Shang dynasty covers a large area of northern China. Chinese civilization has emerged into the light of history.**

- Farming has been practiced in China for many thousands of years (note 1).
- Over time, the population has grown, more and more villages have appeared, some villages have become towns, and kingdoms began to form. By this date, a kingdom ruled by the Shang dynasty covers much of northern China (note 2).
- This state has a Bronze Age civilization with large cities, writing and advanced metalwork (note 3).

### Additional Notes

#### **1. Early farming cultures in China**

Farming first arose in China in about 7000 BCE. Most modern scholars believe that it developed here independently from other parts of the world.

To the north, in the Yellow River region, the people grew millet (though in more modern times they have changed to growing wheat). In the Yangtze River region, to the south, agriculture was, and still is, based on rice.

As in other parts of the world, growing crops at first provided only a part of the people's diet. Hunting animals, gathering edible plants and fishing made up the rest.

As time went by, farming became more and more important. Agricultural techniques improved. Irrigation came into use, and animals such as pigs and sheep were domesticated. By this date, almost all people farm full time for a living.

#### **2. The first dynasty in Chinese history**

There may very well have been a dynasty called the Xia before the Shang. However, at the time of the Shang dynasty, writing had been developed (see below), and therefore it was the first of all the many Chinese dynasties for which there are historical records (scholars apply the term "history" to periods from which historical written records have come down to us. Periods before this are regarded as existing in "pre-history").

#### **3. Bronze Age culture**

Real cities, with tens of thousands of inhabitants, have appeared in northern China by this time. The Shang kingdom is a well-organized state with a highly advanced Bronze Age culture, and a fully developed writing system.

### *Early Chinese writing*

The Shang's writing system is the ancestor of today's Chinese script. It was almost certainly used in government and trade, and written on bamboo paper, or in some case silk. The only examples which have survived down to modern times, however, were oracles (predictions of the outcome of military campaigns and other events) carved on animal bones and turtle shells.

### *Beautiful bronze work*

Shang craft workers made some of the most beautiful bronze vessels ever produced. These were presumably used for ceremonial purposes. They also produced high quality bronze armour, weapons and chariots.

## **Slide 2: 1000 BCE**

**The Shang dynasty has been replaced by the Zhou dynasty. The Zhou kings have expanded their territory over a larger and larger area of northern China.**

- The Shang dynasty was replaced by the Zhou dynasty in about 1046 BCE (note 1).
- To help them govern their growing kingdom, the Zhou rulers divided it into many fiefs, each under its own local lord (note 2).

### Additional Notes

#### **1. Change in dynasty**

Before they seized the throne, the ancestors of the Zhou had been chieftains of a territory viewed as being semi-"barbarian" by the Shang court.

Despite this, when the change from the Shang to Zhou dynasty occurred, civilization and society in the kingdom continued on much as it had done under the Shang. There was no sharp decline in the level of Chinese culture.

#### **2. Fiefs**

To help them govern their growing kingdom, the Zhou rulers divided it into many small areas called fiefs.

A "fief" is a term used by historians to refer to a local area under its own lord. In the Zhou's case, the kings allocated fiefs to their numerous relatives and loyal followers.

The lords demonstrated their loyalty to the king by sending soldiers to help him with his wars, by paying him tribute, and by going to the royal palace from time to time to repeat their vows of loyalty to him.

## Slide 3: 750 BCE

**Over time, the Zhou kings lost their authority over the local lords. Gradually, their kingdom broke into numerous smaller states.**

- At first the local lords were loyal to the Zhou kings, but over time they became less so. This led to the authority of the Zhou kings growing weaker and weaker (note 1).
- With no strong kings to keep them in check, the lords fell to fighting amongst themselves. Some grew stronger and stronger, until they had effectively become princes of independent states (note 2).
- During these centuries, nomadic tribes from the steppes of central Asia were migrating down into areas neighboring the Chinese homelands (note 3).

### Additional Notes

#### **1. From local lords to independent princes**

The original fief-holders were close relatives or loyal followers of the early Zhou kings. However, they were succeeded by their sons, grandsons, great grandsons and so on. As each generation passed, the local lords' ties to the Zhou kings became weaker and weaker.

Later Chinese historians told the following story, one of the most famous tales in China. It tells how matters came to a head:

*A particular Zhou king ignored his duties in governing his kingdom, and instead led a life of pleasure and idleness in his palace. He was besotted by a young lady, and to amuse her he would send urgent messages to the local lords to come to his aid in turning back a raid of non-Chinese nomads.*

*When these lords arrived with their men, all kitted out for war, they would find no enemies to fight but a highly amused king and his young lady, laughing at them.*

*One time, though, a raid really did occur, but when the king sounded the alarm, none of the local lords came to his rescue. They assumed that this was yet another hoax. The palace was burnt to the ground, the king and his lady were killed.*

After that, the story goes, no Zhou king was able to exert much authority over the lords again.

This story was based on a real event which took place in 771 BCE, when a group of "barbarians" and Chinese rebels sacked the Zhou capital, Haojing.

It was probably highly embroidered. It probably seeks to explain a much longer and more gradual process, lasting several generations, by which the local lords came increasingly to shrug off the authority of the Zhou kings.

#### **2. Warfare spreads throughout the kingdom**

It has often been the case, in many different times and places throughout history, that when there has been a weak king on the throne - or even worse, a series of weak kings - the powerful lords have fallen to fighting amongst themselves.

Such was the situation in China in this period. And as is also the case in troubled times, the strong became stronger and the weak became weaker. Small fiefs were gobbled up by large fiefs, which grew in size until they effectively became states in their own right.

Their lords - or princes, as we should now call them - still paid lip service to the Zhou kings as their overlords, but they behaved like independent rulers.

This was a time of great upheaval, which, as we shall see in the next slide, had a huge impact on Chinese society and culture.

### **3. The “Barbarians”**

The story told in note 1, above, refers to Barbarian raiders. These had recently arrived in the region of northern China, from the steppes of central Asia.

The steppes were vast grasslands stretching for thousands of mile from west to east. The peoples who lived here had developed a nomadic lifestyle based on grazing their herds of sheep and goats across large distances. They had, fairly recently, mastered the art of riding horses to a high degree.

The grasslands rolled eastward to border the homelands of the Chinese people (who were not nomadic horsemen but peasants tied to their farms), About this time nomadic tribes such as the Qiang were moving into these borderlands.

With their skills as horsemen, they were able to mount sudden raids deep into Chinese territory, and as suddenly vanish back into the grasslands with their booty (often including captives).

Of all China’s enemies, the steppe nomads would be the most dreaded, right into modern times.

## **Slide 4: 481 BCE**

**In the absence of strong kings, there has been continuous warfare within China.**

- The process which we saw beginning in the previous slide has continued. The princes of the different states have continually fought with one another. The more powerful have grabbed territory from the weaker. Smaller states have vanished, and strong ones grown larger.
- The Zhou dynasty continues to sit on its throne, but its kings only have effective control over a small territory around their capital. The rest of China is covered by a number of independent states, with their own armies.

## **Slide 5: 360 BCE**

**The warfare between the states has continued. In fact it has intensified. Only the strongest have survived. By this date China is covered by a comparatively small number of large and powerful states.**

- Their rulers are taking the title of king, to signify that they are truly independent rulers, with a status equal to that of the Zhou king (note 1).
- In this period of instability and change, old beliefs are losing their hold, and new ideas are coming to the fore (note 2).

- For all the upheaval, this is a time of economic and technological progress (note 3).
- The frontier state of Qin, viewed as semi-barbarous by the central states, is now the strongest of all (note 4).

### Additional Notes

#### **1. Powerful kingdoms**

To survive, these powerful states build up large armies. In order to pay for such armies, their governments need to collect taxes more efficiently than ever before. To do this, they have increasingly centralized power in the hands of royal officials. These are appointed more and more for their ability, education and loyalty. Many do not come from the traditional ruling classes which dominated the states in previous times. Instead they are drawn from the class of smaller landowners, the gentry.

States on the frontiers of Chinese civilization have expanded the most. They have been able to push out their borders into lands inhabited by non-Chinese peoples. They have become the largest and most powerful states in China.

#### **2. The Hundred Schools**

While the fight between the states is based on the principle “might is right”, that seems to be the same in society at large as well. This is a time of uncertainty and change. Beliefs and practices which had previously been accepted without question now, such as loyalty to family and clan, seem to be under threat. Teachers travel through the land putting forward new ideas. This is the period in China known as the One Hundred Schools, as competing ideas battle for followers and influence.

The most important of these schools of thought are Legalism, Mohism, Daoism and Confucianism.

- **Legalism** teaches that for people to live securely, strong states are needed. People’s highest duty, therefore, is to serve the state. Rulers should do whatever it takes to maintain and strengthen their power. They should rule their states harshly, so that the people obey them unquestioningly. In dealing with other states, treachery, trickery and force are all to be used when needed.
- **Mohism** believes that all men, especially rulers, should treat others with respect and compassion. A ruler can go to war, but only to defend his subjects from attack.
- **Daoism** holds that men should live in harmony with nature (or the universe), and encourages them to “go with the flow” of life. For example, where a problem needs to be resolved, direct action should be avoided; an indirect approach is much better. A wise ruler should interfere with his people’s lives as little as possible.
- **Confucianism**, put forward by Confucius (Kong fuzi, or Master Kong), calls for people to live moral lives in harmony with one another. To do this, all should give others their due respect. Children should obey their fathers (thus showing filial piety), wives their husbands, subjects their rulers and so on.

In due course, Confucianism would become the leading belief-system in China. It will help to create a society in which obedience and respect for authority are important values.

One idea, already ancient by this date and which will have a huge influence on Chinese history, is to do with the Mandate of Heaven. This holds that rulers have Heaven's support only so long as they govern justly. If they don't, Heaven will transfer its support to another ruler.

### 3. Society in transition

Although there are frequent wars, in many ways this is a time of great progress in China.

- **Agriculture:** In order to gain more taxes, states' governments encourage the use of iron tools in agriculture. This makes it easier for farmers to clear forests and turn them into farmland. Some states also carry out large-scale irrigation projects. This brings much new land into cultivation, or makes existing farmland more productive.
- **Trade and towns expand:** Taxing trade is another good source of revenue. Many princes therefore encourage the growth of trade. They make trade easier by minting coins (metal coinage is introduced into China in about 400 BCE). Towns and cities grow, and new ones appear. The number of those who live in towns, such as merchants and artisans, increases.
- **Technological innovations:** There are major technological advances at this time. Most notably, the Chinese develop the manufacture of steel, more than a thousand years before the West. In the military sphere, the crossbow appears. This is a more effective weapon than the bows and arrows of the time. In this period, also, canals are first built in China for transportation, rather than just for irrigation. Chinese engineers would be by far the most skilled canal builders in the world for the next two thousand years.

### 4. The Qin State

The state of Qin was one of the frontier states mentioned above (see note 1). Its rulers have constantly faced threats from the non-Chinese "barbarians" on their doorstep. They have therefore focussed on making their state as strong as possible.

The rulers of Qin and their ministers have put into practice the teachings of the Legalist school of thought (see note 2 above).

- They have ruthlessly centralized power in their own hands, and that of their ministers.
- They have appointed ministers, officials and commanders on the basis of merit rather than birth.
- They have introduced harsh laws and insisted on unquestioning obedience from their subjects.
- They have imposed heavy taxes and labour duties on the population, and made all men liable to military service.

In this way the Qin regime have developed the most efficiently governed state, with the strongest army.

## Slide 6: 220 BCE

**This military strength of the kingdom of Qin has allowed it to conquer all the other states, and so unify China under its rule. Its king has taken the title "First Emperor".**

Additional Note

The state of Qin has achieved this success through a combination of raw military power, diplomatic skill and cunning espionage.

The Qin thus create one of the largest empires in the Ancient World. The Qin ruler now styles himself the “First Universal Emperor of Qin”, or Qin Shi Huang.

## **Slide 7: 210 BCE**

**The First Emperor, Qin Shi Huang imposed a harsh regime on the whole of China.**

- The Qin ruler and his chief minister, Li Si, ruthlessly concentrated all power in their own hands. They rigidly standardized many aspects of China’s government and society (note 1).
- Qin armies ventured out into non-Chinese territories and expanded the empire’s borders to north and south. They also strengthened the defenses of the empire (note 2).

### Additional Notes

#### **1. Centralization and Standardization**

The Qin regime, having achieved supreme power, pursued a policy of rigid standardization across the whole of China.

- They divided the whole of their territory into provinces and (below them) districts, each under a an official appointed directly by the emperor and his ministers.
- The harsh Qin law code was imposed across the country.
- The coinage, weights and measures, road widths and cart axel sizes - all these were standardized throughout the length and breadth of the empire.
- They even attempted to standardize the thoughts of the Chinese people. They banned all schools of thought other than their own Legalist philosophy. To enforce this ban, they confiscated and burned thousands of Confucian, Mohist and Daoist books. Many Confucian scholars risked death to hide their books. Hundreds paid with their lives by being buried alive.

The ruthlessness with which these policies were carried out caused immense misery. By the time of the First Emperor’s death, several rebellions had sprung up in different parts of the empire.

#### **2. Expansion**

The Qin expanded their borders to the far south of China. This was regarded by the Chinese of the time as a land inhabited by “barbaric” tribes with strange customs.

The Qin government also pushed out its borders into the northwest.

#### *The beginnings of the Great Wall of China*

Elsewhere, they created a strong system of defense by uniting all the defensive systems of the previous states into one unified system. This policy created a series of frontier walls which were the forebear of the Great Wall of China.

This was not the amazing stone walls that tourists can see today - this would be built centuries in the future. The Qin walls have long since vanished as it was made of beaten earth. Nevertheless it was a massive undertaking. It required the forced labor of millions of peasants. Tens of thousands died from the harsh conditions under which they worked, and many more never saw their homes again.

## Slide 8: 205 BCE

**Many rebellions sprang up after the death of the First Emperor, and chaos engulfed the country.**

### Additional Note

By the time the second emperor had come to the throne, several rebellions had broken out in the empire, and soon gathered strength.

The new emperor was completely dominated by his ministers, but these quarrelled violently amongst themselves. The emperor was caught in the in-fighting and was forced to commit suicide. The imperial throne was now vacant.

The rebels captured and sacked the Qin capital, and then began to fight each other. Warfare spread across China.

## Slide 9: 202 BCE

**The period of chaos in China has come to an end. A man of peasant origin, called Liu Bang, has defeated his rivals and founded a new dynasty.**

- This is the Han dynasty, which will rule China for more than 400 years (note 1).
- The Han adopted many Qin dynasty policies, but applied them less harshly (note 2).

### Additional Notes

#### **1. The foundation of the Han dynasty**

Liu Bang, the founder of the Han dynasty, was a man of peasant origin with little education but great ability. He became a leader of one of several rebellions against the Qin.

After the second Qin emperor's death, he had to spend years of hard fighting against the other rebels. At last he was able to defeat them. He thus became the founder of the Han dynasty, in 202 BCE.

#### **2. A less harsh regime**

He has continued many of the Qin dynasty policies, but has reduced the harshness with which they are applied. He is also careful not to start major projects that require huge amounts of forced labor.

After years of anarchy, this approach brings him the widespread support of the ordinary people of China.

The Han dynasty will last for more than 400 years. To this day the Chinese people call themselves “The Han”, in recognition of the fact that it was under this dynasty that China became a unified nation.

## Slide 10: 100 BCE

**Under the Han dynasty, China has experienced internal peace and stability. Externally, the empire has expanded dramatically.**

- The Han regime has largely kept in place the governing structures they inherited from the Qin, but have adopted Confucianism as their official ideology (note 1).
- With peace has come prosperity for the Chinese people (note 2).
- Under the Han, the Silk Route, that great trade route across central Asia, has come into operation (note 3).

### Additional Notes

#### **1. Government and Ideology**

The Han regime has largely kept in place the governing structures they inherited from the Qin: the division of the empire into provinces and districts, the well-organised bureaucracy, the huge army, and so on. Even the Han law code is based on that of the Qin, though less harshly enforced. These public institutions have their roots in Legalist ideas, which the Qin promoted. However, it is Confucianism which has won out as the ideology of the Han court.

#### *Confucianism*

The Han emperors have increasingly surrounded themselves with Confucian scholars, and by now Confucianism is the defining ideology of the Han regime.

Confucianism teaches that rulers and their officials should govern in the interests of the ordinary people. This helps the Han rule remarkably well by pre-modern standards.

For example, the Han government has established “ever-normal” granaries around the empire, to ensure that people can buy grain at moderate prices even in years of bad harvest.

#### *The Civil Service*

The Han inherited a well-run civil service from the Qin, and under the Han, the number of officials have multiplied to form a huge bureaucracy.

The Qin appointed officials on merit, but the Han have taken this a step further. They require senior officials to recommend young men for government service, who then have to come to the imperial court and be tested on their educational attainments (which include having a good knowledge of the Confucian Classics).

This is the first step towards creating the famous imperial examination system of later centuries.

## **2. Peace and Prosperity**

The peace that the Han government has brought has allowed commerce and industry to flourish, uninterrupted by war.

Farming has expanded into new lands, often with government support. The wheelbarrow is developed in China at this time, as is an early version of a seed drill (not invented in the west until nearly two thousand years later).

The standardization which the Qin introduced, and the Han have continued, has helped trade to flourish within China. The uniform system of coinage, weights and measures, writing, and axle widths on carts are used all over the empire. This helps merchants from different regions to trade easily with each other.

## **3. International Expansion and Trade**

### *The South*

Under the vigorous rule of the emperor Han Wudi (reigns 140-87 BCE), the Han empire has brought vast areas of southern China under its rule. In due course, this will allow Chinese merchants to become involved in the maritime trade of the Indian Ocean.

### *Korea*

Chinese armies also occupy a large part of the Korean peninsula at this time. Other states in the peninsula become vassals of the Han.

### *Central Asia*

The Han have also imposed their control over the eastern steppes of central Asia, where the Xiongnu people had been a growing threat for several centuries.

### *The Silk Road*

The emperor Wudi has sent diplomatic missions to central Asia and on as far as the Middle East, to establish trade relations with the peoples there.

One of Wudi's main aims has been to purchase the fine horses bred by the nomads on the steppes, to strengthen the Chinese army. In exchange, the nomads purchase silk, that highly-prized fabric which the Chinese have been making for centuries. They have successfully kept the secrets of how to make silk, so other nations can only get it from them.

The nomads then exchange the silk for other commodities with peoples further west. These include the Romans. The Romans value silk so highly that the Roman government would come to worry that the purchase of silk was draining the empire of its silver, and thus damaging its economy.

It was the importance of this textile to this long trade route that led to it becoming known as the Silk Road.

## Slide 11: 220 CE

**After ruling China for more than four hundred years, the Han dynasty has fallen.**

- Han rule was briefly interrupted between 9 CE and 23 CE when a chief minister, Wang Mang, seized the throne (note 1).
- The period of the Han Empire from 23 CE to 220 CE is known as the Later Han, to distinguish it from the Former Han, who ruled from 202 BCE to 9 CE (note 2).
- The period saw Buddhism arrive in China and paper invented (note 3).

### Additional Notes

#### **1. Wang Mang and after**

Wang Mang's policies were aimed at trimming the wealth and power of the landowners, and making life better for the peasants. However, the measures he tried to introduce proved completely unworkable, and actually made life a lot worse for the poor.

At the same time the politics roused the anger of the landowning class. The country fell into disorder as rebellions started breaking out. Eventually Wang Mang and his family were killed in their palace.

During these troubles, the Chinese lost control of central Asia and of their possessions in Korea. The central Asian possessions were later regained, but not the Korean ones.

#### **2. The Later Han**

After a period of widespread disturbance the Han dynasty was restored. This was largely due to the support of the landowning class, who had been the main targets of Wang Mang's policies.

The Later Han government therefore favored this group. Landowners grew wealthier as their estates grew larger. Many peasants lost their land to become tenant farmers or serfs. In short, the rich got richer while the poor got poorer.

From the mid-second century onwards, the emperors (many of whom were just young children) became more and more withdrawn. Standards of government have slipped badly. Violent factionalism at court went unchecked, completely undermining stable government. Corruption spread, and the rich landowners prospered even more at the expense of the poor farmers.

Unsurprisingly, in the 180s a huge peasant uprising, that of the "Yellow Turbans", broke out. It ravaged large areas of the country. It almost toppled the Han regime, but forces under the control of three generals eventually defeated it.

The three generals divided the empire between themselves. In 220, one of them removed the last Han emperor (a child) from his throne and proclaimed himself king. The other two immediately declared themselves kings as well.

The huge empire had now divided into three kingdoms.

#### **3. Other developments in Late Han times**

*The coming of Buddhism*

Buddhism came to China from India during the 1st century CE. It was brought by traders and monks along the Silk Road.

This foreign religion is at first treated with great suspicion by the Chinese. As the years go by, however, it gradually spreads. Some officials at the highest level of government become converts.

### *Paper*

Sometime during the Later Han, the technology of paper-making has been developed in China.

This innovation apparently occurred at the imperial court itself. Previously, bamboo scrolls had been used on which to write documents, but these were awkward to make and heavy to carry. Silk was suitable for writing on, but far too expensive for everyday use.

Paper is cheap and simple to make, and easy to carry around. Its use has quickly spread throughout China.

## **Slide 12: 280 CE**

**The three kingdoms struggle amongst themselves for supremacy. One of them, the Wei, eventually succeeds in conquering the other two.**

- However, just at the moment of its triumph, the last Wei emperor is ousted and a new dynasty takes its place. This is the Jin dynasty (known to Chinese history as the “Western Jin”).
- This period, known as the “Three Kingdoms”, is a famous one in Chinese history. Many thrilling stories are set then. In reality, however, it was a wretched time for the people of China. Millions lose their lives, and many more lose their homes and livelihoods.

## **Slide 13: 304 CE**

**The Western Jin fail to impose real unity on China, and lose control of the borders; soon several non-Chinese peoples are invading northern China.**

- The invasions are accompanied by appalling levels of violence, causing more widespread suffering for millions of people, especially in northern China (note 1).
- At this time, Buddhism is spreading strongly (note 2).

### Additional Notes

#### **1. Misery**

The violence of the times has caused great suffering for millions of people, especially in northern China. Here, many cities are sacked by the “barbarian” invaders, and farms and homes devastated. With law and order weak, wealthy landowners are able to seize the farms of poor peasants and force them into serfdom. Other poor peasants offer their lands to local landowners for protection. Yet others flee their homes and head south.

## 2. Buddhism

The mass experience of suffering turns many Chinese towards Buddhism. Its message of salvation offers hope at a time when life seems so fragile. It is becoming the most popular religion in China, amongst all ranks of society.

## Slide 14: 316 CE

**The whole of northern China has now come under the control of several different non-Chinese groups.**

- The Jin emperors have retreated to southern China (where they are designated the “Eastern Jin” in Chinese history).

## Slide 15: 407 CE

**Over time these non-Chinese groups settle down and establish a number of kingdoms.**

- As these kingdoms become more settled, they also become more “Sinified” - that is, they become more Chinese (note 1).
- Southern China is ruled as a single state under Chinese emperors. During this period, this region is becoming increasingly absorbed into Chinese civilization (note 2).

### Additional Notes

#### 1. Northern China

In order to establish and govern their kingdoms, the non-Chinese rulers find that they need Chinese officials to administer and tax their subjects. Over time the rulers and their followers adopt more and more Chinese customs. Sometimes, the non-Chinese nobles rebel at this state of affairs, determined to keep the habit of their nomadic ancestors. Even if these rebels are successful in taking control of a kingdom, however, the process of becoming more Chinese in their way of life soon starts again.

#### 2. South China

Politically, this state has remained unstable. No less than five dynasties rule in succession. Economically, however, this has been a period of change and expansion. The upheavals in the north have caused millions of people - mostly poor peasants - to migrate to more peaceful areas in the south. During these centuries, southern China has become more Chinese in its population and culture. Native tribal peoples either have to give up their customs and adopt Chinese ways, or be forced to give up their best lands to the settlers and retreat into hilly areas where farming is more difficult.

## Slide 16: 500 CE

**The kingdom of the Northern Wei has unified the whole of northern China under its rule.**

- Although ruled by a non-Chinese dynasty, this kingdom is more or less Chinese in its government and outlook (note 1).
- In both north and south China, Buddhism is now the dominant religion. Nevertheless, the education of the officials is still largely along Confucian lines (note 2).

### Additional Notes

#### **1. The Northern Wei**

The Northern Wei, ruled by the leading clan of the Xianbei people, reunited the whole of northern China in 439 CE.

Although a non-Chinese dynasty, the Northern Wei rule over a kingdom that is more or less Chinese in its government and outlook.

Its civil service is modelled on the Chinese pattern, with officials from both “barbarian” and Chinese backgrounds. Indeed, the leading families of “barbarian” nobles and Chinese officials have intermarried, merging to form a single aristocracy.

#### **2. Buddhism**

During these troubled centuries, Chinese of all ranks of society have been searching for a deeper meaning beyond the life of the here and now. Confucianism does not have the answers, as at this date it focuses on rules to follow in this life (this will change in later centuries). Many Chinese are therefore turning to Buddhism for comfort, with its message of salvation.

Confucianism, however, remains the dominant medium for the education of upper class Chinese, especially of future officials.

# Questions

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 line of defenses did this dynasty establish? (*The Great Wall of China*)
6. Which long-lasting dynasty came to power in 202 BCE after a period of chaos? (*The Han dynasty*)
7. This dynasty adopted a particular philosophy as its official ideology - what was it? (*Confucianism*)
8. The dynasty built on trends already apparent long before to develop a particular governmental system. Was this a system of elected officials (as in a republic), a system of appointed officials (as in a bureaucracy), or a system of priestly officials (as in a theocracy)? (*Appointed officials, or bureaucracy*)
9. The dynasty organized a great trade route across central Asia - what is it called? (*The Silk Road*)
10. What important technological development occurred during the later stages of this dynasty's time in power? (*Paper-making*)
11. 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*)
12. Non-Chinese tribes invaded China in the 4th century CE - which part of China did they occupy, the north or the south? (*North*)
13. A system of belief from outside China became popular during these years - which religion was this? (*Buddhism*)

## Further Reading

Here is a selected list of the key articles on this topic.

Ancient China - an overview of Chinese civilization in ancient times

The Shang Dynasty - a survey of the first period in Ancient China for which there are historical records

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.