China is one of the world's largest countries. It is located in eastern Asia. Like India, China is surrounded by natural barriers. Mountains and deserts lie to the north, south, and west of China. To the east lies the Pacific Ocean. Natural barriers helped to protect ancient China from invasion. The barriers also limited China's contacts with other civilizations.

**The Hwang He**

As in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and India, civilization in China arose in the valley of a great river. That river was called the **Hwang He** Yellow soil called *loess* washes into the Hwang He as it flows toward the sea. The soil turns the river a yellow color. Hwang Ho means "Yellow River." The Hwang He is usually a slow, lazy river. But sometimes the river overflows its banks. In ancient times, great floods destroyed villages and farms along the river. For that reason, the Hwang Ho became known as "China's Sorrow."

**The Earliest Settlers**

Thousands of years ago, people began to settle along the Hwang Ho. The earliest settlers left no written records, so little is known about them. But archeologists believe that by about 2500 B.C., some early peoples had learned to farm. Those people built villages surrounded by thick walls. Like other peoples, the Chinese have legends about their earliest people. Some legends say the earliest people were led by wise and powerful kings. Those kings taught the people to farm. They also taught the people music and writing.

The legends say that a king named Yu found a way to control the flooding rivers. "Without Yu," the Chinese say, "we would all have become fish."

**Looking Back**

1. What natural barriers protected China?
2. Where did civilization begin in China?
3. What do legends say about the earliest people?
The Shang Dynasty

Chinese civilization began about 1500 B.C., about 1000 years after the beginning of civilization in India.

A people called the Shang built the first civilization in China. The Shang were one of the ancient peoples living along the Hwang He. They learned to use chariots and conquered the entire river valley.

The Shang started China's first dynasty. When a Shang king died, his son became the new king. In that way, the Shang kept power in one family. The Shang dynasty ruled China for over 400 years.

Shang Cities

The Shang built China's first cities. Their largest city was Anyang, the capital. Anyang and other cities were protected by thick walls.

The Shang divided their cities into sections for different craftsmen. Potters lived in one section. They made beautiful pottery from fine white clay. Weavers lived in another section. They wove silk thread into cloth.

Shang Farmers

Most Shang were farmers who lived outside the city walls. Farmers grew wheat, rice, and millet in fields along the river. (Millet is a grass-like grain.)

Shang farmers had no plows. They used wooden sticks to work the soft loess soil of the valley.

Shang Religion

The Shang worshiped many gods. Like their ancient peoples, they tried to please their gods. They sometimes sacrificed, or killed, animals and human beings as gifts in the gods.

The Shang believed that when people died, they became spirits. They believed the spirits of dead people could help their living relatives. The Shang tried to please the spirits of their ancestors with prayers and gifts. That practice became known as ancestor worship.

Shang Writing

One of the great accomplishments of the Shang was their system of writing. Like the Egyptians, the Shang first used pictures to stand for words. Later they developed symbols to stand for both words and ideas. The Shang developed several thousand different symbols. People in China today still use the system of writing developed by the Shang. It is the oldest system of writing still in use. Other peoples, such as the Koreans and the Japanese, borrowed the Shang system.

Looking Back

1. How did Shang kings keep power in one family?
2. What is ancestor worship?
3. Describe Shang writing.
China and Confucius

Confucius lived over 2000 years ago. Yet his teachings are still followed by people today. What other teachers of the past are still influencing people today?

In Chapter 7, you read that civilization began in China about 1500 B.C. A people called the Shang built the first civilization. They began a dynasty that ruled China for nearly 400 years.

Around 1122 B.C., a people called the Zhou conquered the Shang. The Zhou dynasty ruled China for over 800 years. During that time, a great teacher was born in China. His name was Confucius. The teachings of Confucius had a lasting influence on Chinese life.

Look them up in the Glossary at the back of Part 1.

bureaucracy noble
civil service system tradition

The Zhou Dynasty

The ancient Chinese believed that Heaven gave a king the right to rule. (Heaven was what the Chinese called the god who created the world.) If a king ruled justly, Heaven was pleased. But if a king ruled unjustly, Heaven was not pleased and would end the king's rule.

The last Shang king was a cruel ruler. Around 1122 B.C., a people from western China marched against the king. Those people were called the Zhou.

The Zhou claimed the king had lost the support of Heaven. They overthrew the king and conquered the Shang kingdom. In time, the Zhou built a large empire in China.

Zhou Government

To govern their empire, Zhou kings divided it into hundreds of small states. Each state was ruled by a local noble, or rich and powerful landowner. Each noble promised to obey the king's orders and send the king troops in time of war.

For a time, the Zhou kings controlled the nobles. But by about 700 B.C., the kings' power had declined. Nobles no longer obeyed the king. Instead of sending troops to the king, they built their own armies.

Powerful nobles used their armies to take over smaller states. Between about 400 and 221 B.C., the states were almost constantly at war. The Chinese call that period the Time of the Warring States.

As time went on, Zhou kings had less and less power. The real power was held by the leaders of the warring states.

Looking Back
1. How did the Zhou govern their empire?

2. What happened to the Zhou government by about 700 B.C.?
Confucius

During the Time of the Warring States, a great teacher appeared in China. His name was **Confucius**.

Confucius was born in eastern China about 551 B.C. That was a few years after the birth of the Buddha in India. At about the age of 22, Confucius began a school in his home. Later, he left his school to travel around China and teach. Confucius was saddened by the war and sorrow he saw during his travels. In his teachings, he tried to show people how to live together in peace.

**The Five Relationships**

Confucius taught that there are five important relationships in life. They are the relationships between ruler and people, parent and child, older brother and younger brother, husband and wife, and between friend and friend.

In each relationship, people have certain duties. If people carry out their duties, there will be order and harmony (peace) among people. These are the duties of the five relationships:

- A ruler should care for the people he governs. The people should obey a ruler who rules well.
- Parents should love and care for their children. Children should respect and obey their parents.
- Older brothers should care for younger brothers. Younger brothers should respect and obey older brothers.
- Married people should live in harmony. Wives should obey their husbands.
- Friends should trust each other and treat each other well.

**Other Teachings of Confucius**

Confucius taught that people should honor their ancestors and respect ancient traditions. (Traditions are ideas, beliefs, and ways of living that are handed down from the past to the present.) "I believe in the old teachings and honor them," he said.

Like the Buddha, Confucius taught that people should treat each other with kindness. "What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others," he said.

Confucius also believed in the power of love. In time of war, he said, "Love offers peace." He believed that "a heart set on love can do no wrong."

Confucius taught that rulers should be honest and wise. If a ruler lived a good life, the people would follow the ruler's example.

**The Spread of Confucianism**

Confucius died in 479 B.C. But his students kept his teachings alive. They traveled across China teaching people the wisdom of Confucius. Those teachings became known as **Confucianism**.

Later, Confucianism spread throughout much of Asia. Today, people in China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Taiwan, and other Asian lands follow the teachings of Confucius. Many of the sayings of Confucius are known around the world.

**Looking Back**

1. What did Confucius say was the duty of a leader to the people? Of the people to a leader?

2. Why did Confucius say a ruler should lead a good life?

3. **Thinking Deeper**: Confucius said, "Bad government is worse than a fierce tiger." What do you think those words mean?
The Chin Dynasty

You read that during the Zhou dynasty, China was torn apart by warfare among the states. In 221 B.C., the state of Chin conquered the other states. The first ruler of the Chin dynasty called himself Shih Huang Ti, or the First Emperor.

Chin Government

Shih Huang Ti wanted to unite China under his rule. To do that, he divided the states into provinces. He sent his own officials to rule over each province. He forced the nobles who had ruled over the states to live near him at the capital. There he could watch and control them.

Before Shih Huang Ti, each state had its own code of laws. Shih Huang Ti set up one code for all of China. He also built good roads connecting the provinces to his capital. The code of laws and system of roads helped to keep the empire united.

Shih Huang Ti took steps to prevent rebellions in his empire. He ordered all the people, except his soldiers, to turn their weapons over to the government.

The Chinese built the Great Wall along their northern border as protection against invaders. Chinese guards watched for invaders from watchtowers along the wall.

Burning China's Past

Some Chinese spoke out against the changes of Shih Huang Ti. They wanted to go back to the way things were before he came to power. Shih Huang Ti came to believe that knowledge about the past was dangerous. It caused unrest and might lead to rebellion. He decided to destroy all record of China's past.

Around 213 B.C., the emperor ordered books about China's past to be burned. All books on history, except those praising Chin rule, were destroyed. Scholars who had memorized ancient works were killed. Others were banished, or forced to leave the empire.

Since Confucius honored the past, books about him and his teachings were also destroyed. But a few copies of those works were hidden away and survived.

The Great Wall

The Huns and other nomads often attacked China along its northern border. In earlier times, the Chinese had built some walls for protection from invaders.

Shih Huang Ti had workers repair the old walls. Then he had them connect the walls into one long wall. When the work was done, the wall stretched for over 1400 miles along northern China. It became known as the Great Wall of China. Parts of the Great Wall still stand today.

Looking Back

1. How did Shih Huang Ti unite China?

2. Why did he destroy books about China's past?

3. What was the purpose of the Great Wall?
The Han Dynasty

Shih Huang Ti once said that his dynasty would last for 10,000 years. Instead, it lasted for only a few years. Soon after he died, the Chinese rebelled against his government.

In 202 B.C., a new dynasty began. It was called the Han dynasty. The Han dynasty ruled China for over 400 years.

At the same time the Romans were building an empire in the Mediterranean, the Han were building a great empire in Asia. Under the Han, China became one of the largest empires in the world.

Government under the Han

Han emperors ruled China through a large bureaucracy. Government workers were divided into different departments. Each department carried out a certain job. For example, one department was in charge of agriculture. Another department ran the army.

Each department was headed by a chief official called a minister. Many officials worked under each minister. Government officials could not work where they grew up. In that way, they were prevented from doing special favors for family or friends.

Choosing Officials

In the past, government officials were chosen because they came from powerful families. Some officials chosen in that way were dishonest. Others had little education or skill.

Han emperors wanted honest and educated officials in government. For that reason, they set up a civil service system. People who wanted a government job had to pass a test. They had to show that they knew something about law, ethics, and good government.

Confucianism and Buddhism

The Han emperors admired Confucianism. They ordered that boys study Confucianism in school. Government officials followed the teachings of Confucius in carrying out their duties.

Late in the Han dynasty, Buddhist missionaries came to China from India. The Chinese liked the new religion. Buddhism spread quickly in China.

Looking Back

1. What happened after the death of Shih Huang Ti?

2. How did the Han emperors rule China?

3. How did the Han civil service system work?
Mr. Moore’s Ancient China Handouts

Chinese Achievements
The ancient Chinese were skillful crafts workers and inventors.
Chinese crafts workers often made everyday items, such as cloth and clay pots, into beautiful works of art. Chinese inventors gave the world many practical, or useful, inventions.

Silk
The Chinese were the first people to discover how to make silk cloth. They kept the discovery secret for thousands of years.
Silk is made from the fibers spun by silkworms. The Chinese learned to twist the fibers into silk thread. They then wove the thread into a cloth that was beautiful and comfortable to wear.
During the Han dynasty, people in India and the Roman Empire paid high prices for Chinese silk.

Chinese Inventions
The Chinese invented many things that are still used today. One of those inventions was the wheelbarrow. Wheelbarrows helped Chinese workers carry heavy loads. For that reason, the Chinese called the wheelbarrow the "wooden ox."
Earthquakes often caused death and destruction in ancient China, as they do in China today. During the Han dynasty, the Chinese built the first seismograph. That is a machine that shows the location of an earthquake.

Paper
One of the most important Chinese inventions was paper. According to Chinese history, an inventor named Tsai Lun made the first paper around A.D. 100.
The invention of paper helped to spread learning in China. Before paper, the Chinese wrote on bamboo wood or silk cloth. Paper was easier to use than bamboo or silk. It was also less costly. More people could afford books made of paper.
The Chinese found other uses for paper. In time, they were making paper napkins, paper money, and wallpaper.

Looking Back
1. What are some Chinese inventions?
2. How did the invention of paper help to spread learning in China?
3. Thinking Deeper: Why do you think the Chinese kept their method for making silk cloth a secret?