People had already lived in China for at least 500,000 years when farming began in the valleys of the Huang He (Yellow) and other rivers, more than 5,000 years ago.

**China's Early Rulers**

From a hazy mixture of history and legend, we learn that China's first ruling family was the Hsia. The legendary first emperors are said to have tamed the rivers, so that farmers could grow millet and wheat.

The first rulers known from archaeological evidence were the Shang. From about 1500 BC, they controlled the best farmland around the Huang He valley, and from there their power spread.

**Shang Splendor**
The Shang kings were cruel, ruling in barbaric splendor. They built China's first cities. Shang bronzemiths were experts at making cooking pots, tools, and weapons. Slave workers sweated to dig enormous pit tombs for dead kings, who were buried with treasures, chariots, and horses, and dozens of slain servants and soldiers to accompany their master into the next world. Farmers supplied food to the local nobleman, in return for protection.

**The Zhou Invaders**
Shang rule lasted until 1122 BC. By then, according to Chinese history, the rulers had become tyrants. The Zhou from the west invaded and overthrew the last

> Ordinary people lived in villages, growing grains and raising chickens, pigs, sheep, and cattle. They used oxen and water buffalo to pull plows and dug ditches to water their fields.
Chinese writing

An example of Chinese writing on silk. The Chinese wrote in picture signs and made up about 50,000 characters. The first important work of Chinese literature, a collection of poems, dates from before 1000 BC.

△ Fierce warriors helped to keep the Shang rulers, China's first dynasty, in power for more than 400 years.

The new kings were backed by powerful nobles. Nobles built forts and walled towns to defend their lands against one another. They also fought off fierce nomads who swept down from the northern steppes on sturdy horses.

Warring states

No Zhou ruler was strong enough to control all China. For 500 years, small warring states fought for power. Yet China still prospered. Farmers grew more food, and metalworkers mastered the new skills of making iron tools. Potters, jewelers, tailors, and chariot-makers were kept busy. Scholars attended the nobles’ courts, seeking work as government officials. Trade grew, and people began to use money.

The first emperor

The Qin ruler Shih Huang-di fought his way to power as first emperor of all China in 221 BC. He crushed the power of the nobles, handing over the government to hired officials (who did what he told them). He ordered everyone to speak the same language and to use the same weights and measures. Thousands of people were forced to build new roads and canals, and the emperor also built the Great Wall, which linked up older walls to create the biggest frontier defense on the earth.

△ This food vessel, from the time of the Shang dynasty, is decorated with intricate animal motifs. It is in the form of a tiger protecting the body of a man.

The Shang kings were superstitious. They consulted “oracle bones” before making any important decisions. A soothsayer would read the signs in animal bones cracked by heat, and advise the king accordingly.
River Dynasties in China

BEFORE YOU READ
In the last section, you read about Indus Valley culture. In this section, you will learn about the earliest cultures in China.

AS YOU READ
Use the chart below to take notes on how geography and early cultures influenced the development of Chinese culture.

The Geography of China (pages 50–51)
How did geography affect China’s past?

The last of the great early civilizations arose in China and continues to this day. China’s geography caused it to develop apart from other cultures.

A great ocean, huge deserts, and high mountains isolate China from other areas. The mountains did not protect China totally, however. People living to the north and west invaded the land many times during Chinese history.

There are two rich rivers within China—the Huang He and the Yangtze. Almost all the good farmland in China lies between these rivers. The Huang He deposited huge amounts of silt when it overflowed. This silt is fertile soil called loess. The Chinese people also made use of the flood waters of these rivers.

1. Why did China develop apart from other cultures?

Civilization Emerges in Shang Times (pages 51–52)
What was the Shang Dynasty?

A few thousand years ago, some people began to farm along China’s rivers. About 2000 B.C., the first dynasty of rulers brought government to China.
Around 1500 B.C., a new dynasty, the Shang, began to rule. This dynasty left the first written records in China. Objects found in their palaces and tombs also tell us much about their society. Chinese people built their buildings of wood, not mud-dried brick as the other early cultures did. Huge walls made of earth surrounded these buildings to protect them. The walls were needed because it was a time of constant war.

The king and the nobles who helped him fight these wars were at the top of Shang society. At the bottom was the mass of peasants who lived in simple huts outside the city walls. They worked hard on the farms, using wooden tools because the Shang believed that bronze was too good to be used for farming.

2. What were three features of Shang culture?

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The Development of Chinese Culture (pages 52–54)

What beliefs shaped Shang society?

Shang society was held together by a strong belief in the importance of the group—all the people—and not any single person. The most important part of society was the family. Children grew up learning to respect their parents.

The family played a central role in Chinese religion, too. The Chinese thought that family members who had died could still influence the lives of family members who were alive. They gave respect to dead members of the family, hoping to keep them happy. Through the spirits of their ancestors, the Shang also asked for advice from the gods. They used oracle bones to do this. These were animal bones and shells. Priests wrote questions on them. Then they touched them with something hot. The priest interpreted the cracks that resulted to find their answers.

The Chinese system of writing differed from those of other groups. Symbols stood for ideas, not sounds. This allowed the many different groups in China to understand the same writing even though each had a special spoken language. The written language had thousands of symbols, however. This made it very hard to learn. Only specially trained people learned to read and write.

3. Name three important values of Shang culture.

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Zhou and the Dynastic Cycle (pages 54–55)

What is the Mandate of Heaven?

About 1027 B.C., a new group, the Zhou, took control of China. They adopted Shang culture. They also started an idea of royalty that was new to China. Good rulers, they said, got authority to rule from heaven. This was known as the Mandate of Heaven. They claimed the Shang rulers were not just and had lost the favor of the gods. That is why they had to be replaced. From then on, the Chinese believed in divine rule. However, it also meant that disasters such as floods or war pointed to a ruler that had lost the support of the gods and needed to be replaced. Until the early 1900s, the Chinese had one dynasty after another. This pattern of rise, fall, and replacement of dynasties is known as the dynastic cycle.

The Zhou gave members of the royal family and other nobles the rights to large areas of land. They established feudalism. Feudalism is a political system in which the nobles owe loyalty to the king. The nobles promise to fight for the rulers and to protect the peasants who live on the land.

Eventually the Zhou rulers lost all power. The nobles fought each other for control of China in a period called the “time of the warring states.” It lasted many hundred years. The Chinese people suffered during this time.

4. Name two important changes brought about by the Zhou.

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20 Chapter 2 Section 4
A. **Summarizing**  As you read this section, fill out the chart below by describing key features of ancient China under the Shang Dynasty.

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<th>4. Social classes</th>
<th>5. Role of family</th>
<th>6. Religious beliefs</th>
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<th>7. Writing system</th>
<th>8. Technological advances</th>
<th>9. Artistry</th>
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B. **Writing Expository Paragraphs**  On the back of this paper, use the terms **Mandate of Heaven** and **feudalism** to describe the form of government set up under the Zhou Dynasty.
CHAPTER 4
GUIDED READING The Unification of China
Section 4

A. Summarizing As you read this section, take notes summarizing the basic ideas of the following Chinese philosophies.

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ideas about social order:</th>
<th>Ideas about government:</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1. Confucianism</strong></td>
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<th>Ideas about order and harmony:</th>
<th>Ideas about a universal force:</th>
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<td><strong>2. Daoism</strong></td>
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<td><strong>3. Legalists</strong></td>
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<td>Founder:</td>
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B. Synthesizing On the back of this paper, explain the concept of yin and yang. How did this concept contribute to Chinese culture?

C. Writing for a Specific Purpose On the back of this paper, explain conditions in China during the Qin Dynasty under the rule of Shi Huangdi.
Environmental Factors Shape River Valley Civilizations

**CAUSE**

- People would settle in areas with water and fertile soil for farming.
- Sumerian villages were located on open plains without natural barriers.
- The Nile River flowed through upper and lower Egypt.
- China's land forms featured mountains and deserts.
- The Indus River linked its civilization to the sea.

**EFFECT**

- The earliest civilizations formed in river valleys.
- The Sumerians built fortified cities to help villages protect themselves.
- The Nile River helped unify upper and lower Egypt by creating a transport link.
- Mountains and deserts were barriers to invasion, which led to an enduring Chinese culture.
- Trade developed between the Indus River civilization and outside cultures.