

Name: _____

EVERYTHING ABOUT ANCIENT CHINA

GEOGRAPHY

Chinese culture began around 1500 BCE. They had a very advanced civilization. The ancient Chinese first lived along the Huang He and the Yangzi Rivers. These rivers helped people grow crops and feed the large population. The rivers also supplied them with water for irrigation and transportation.

The Huang He River is also known as the Yellow River. The river got its name from the “loess” found in it. Loess is a fine, windblown yellow soil that is found in the river. As this loess settles on the bottom, the water rises and then there can be a flood. A large flood could wipe out crops and lead to starvation. These floods led the Huang He River to be called the “River of Sorrows” because it could bring such sadness and devastation.



RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

During the Shang Dynasty, people prayed to many gods (polytheistic) and also nature spirits. The Chinese believed that their gods would not listen to prayers from common people; the gods would only listen to prayers from the ancestors of the king. This made the king very powerful because the people need him to pray to his ancestors to ask the gods for good things like health, wealth, and victory in war. Eventually, people decided that everyone could pray to their ancestors and the king was not the only one allowed to do this. This special respect for their deceased ancestors is called “veneration of ancestors.” People would pray to their deceased ancestors and ask them to speak to the gods and help them. The Chinese believed that Yin and Yang had to be in harmony for the well-being of the universe. Yin and Yang represent opposites – Yin was Earth, darkness and female forces and Yang was heaven, light and male forces..

ORACLE BONES

The Ancient Chinese used oracle bones to see what would be in the future. Priests would



carve questions into animal bones or turtle. The question usually needed a yes or no answer. Priests then heated the bone or shell until it cracked. The cracks were then interpreted and thought to be advice from their ancestors or god

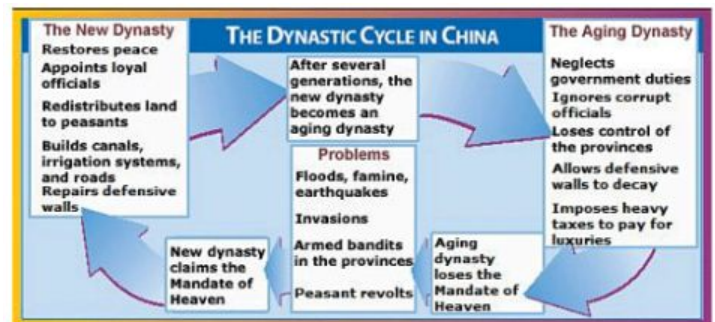
THE SILK ROAD

By 1000 BCE, the Chinese had learned how to make silk from the cocoons of silkworms. Only nobles and royalty could buy this expensive and beautiful fabric. Silk became China's most important and valuable export (exports are goods that are sent to another place and sold to other people). The Chinese would not allow anyone outside their empire to learn how to make silk because they did not want others to steal this secret and take this profitable export away from them. The trade route that took silk to other parts of the world was called the Silk Road. The Silk Road linked China to the west.



THE MANDATE OF HEAVEN

The Mandate of Heaven was the divine right to rule. This means that the rulers of ancient China believed that the gods had given them the right to rule by giving them the Mandate of Heaven. If the empire was experiencing good things like wealth, healthy crops and victory in war, then they believed the ruler had the Mandate of Heaven. When things started to go bad in China, like sickness, bad crops, floods and defeat in war, then they believed that gods had taken the Mandate of Heaven away from the ruler and they needed to find someone new to rule them.



When a new ruler came to power in China, they would say that person now had the Mandate of Heaven, or the right to rule given to them by the gods. As long as the dynasty provided good government, it kept the Mandate of Heaven. If the rulers became weak or corrupt, the Chinese believed that Heaven would take away its support for that ruler. The rise and fall of dynasties was called the dynastic cycle. Each time a new ruler came to power the dynastic cycle started over.

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DIRECTIONS: Use the reading above to answer the following questions. Use complete sentences.

1.) Why was the Huang He River also called the “River of Sorrows?”

2) Why did the Shang pray to their ancestors?

3) What does veneration of ancestors mean?

4) What were oracle bones?

5) Why did the Chinese try and not tell anyone how to make silk?