



Early Peoples Activity Sheet:
Chinese of the Shang, Zhou, and Qin Dynasties

1. Physical Features

a) Name the two main geographical regions of China's dynasties?

The land of ancient China's dynasties had two main geographical regions, the North and South.

b) Describe the features of the two regions?

Northern region: the Yellow River and Loess Plateau.

Southern region: Yangtze River and many smaller rivers

c) Identify the difference in climate between the northern and southern regions.

The northern region is generally cold and dry with little rainfall during the year. The southern region is much warmer and wetter compared to the northern region.

d) What does the Great Wall tell us about the landscape?

The Great Wall winds over green hills, craggy mountains, and dusty hillsides.

2. Roles of key groups

a) Which class of people stood directly below the rulers?

Aristocrats.

b) During the Shang dynasty, what did aristocratic leaders provide Shang rulers?

The local lords provided Shang rulers with soldiers and officers, as well as with workers for the many huge Shang construction projects.

c) How did the role of aristocrats increase under the Zhou dynasty?

Under the Zhou dynasty, many local leaders became feudal lords and were able to govern states as part of Zhou territory. The status of a lord could be passed onto his sons. They were also able to attend the king's court and serve as the king's ministers.

d) Who were the shih?

The Shih served the feudal lords. The shih included younger sons of lords, as well as some people who were not born into high status.

e) How was status given under the Qin dynasty?

In Qin culture, upper-class status mainly came from success in the army. There were 20 levels to the Qin status ranking system.

f) Under what dynasty was the king the most important religious leader?

Shang dynasty. People believed the king's family had the closest connection to the highest god.

g) Who were the Diviners?

Diviners helped the king with rituals in which he tried to learn about future harvests or battles.

h) What archaeological evidence from the diviners of the Shang period have been found?

Bones known as the Oracle Bones, have been found with questions and answers asked by diviners written on them.

i) What was the role of the Invocators?

The invocator's job was to know the prayers and invocations from the past and to write new invocations when needed.

j) Who were the Shamans?

Shamans were thought to act as intermediaries between the visible world and the invisible spirit world. They practiced magic to heal people and control natural events such as weather.

k) In the warrior classes, what did chariots symbolise during Zhou and Qin dynasties?

Chariots symbolised leadership during the Zhou and Qin dynasties.

l) Name some of the different classes of people in Chinese society.

Leaders, aristocrats, artisans, merchants, peasants, farmers.

3. Law

a) How do we know what laws were like in ancient China?

Oracle bones and ancient books give us an idea of what laws were like in ancient China and what happened to people who broke those laws.

b) During the Shang and Zhou dynasties, who made all the laws?

The king made all the laws.

c) What were some of the punishments given to those that broke the law during the Zhou dynasty?

People who broke the law could have a leg or an ear cut off. They also might have their noses sliced off or have an eye put out. Less harsh punishments included tattooing criminal's faces or their foreheads.

d) During the Qin dynasty, what was the goal of many of the laws?

The goal of many Qin laws was to prevent crime. Some Qin laws, however, were meant to shape society in positive ways.

e) What were the lu and ling?

Lu and ling were written commands that told people what they must do and what would happen if they did not do it.

f) What evidence do historians have that explains the punishment for robbers under the Qin laws. What is the punishment?

625 bamboo pieces with Qin laws written on them were found in a tomb which includes information on the law for robbery. If five men jointly rob something worth a certain

amount, they should have their left foot cut off, be tattooed, and made convict labourers.

4. Beliefs, values and practices:

a) Of the gods worshipped by early Chinese dynasties, which gods were the highest during the Shang and Zhou dynasties?

Di was the highest god under the Shang dynasty. Tian was the highest god under the Zhou dynasty.

b) Look at the ritual vessel on page 28, what does the inscription tell us about Chinese spiritual life?

The ritual vessel is inscribed with a dedication to a deceased ancestor of the vessel's owner. For the Chinese, honouring ancestors was an important part of spiritual life.

c) How did people during the Shang era worship Di?

Believing that Di could affect military victories, the weather, and harvests, the Shang worshipped Di with rituals that included sacrifice of animals and humans.

d) What was the difference between how the Shang worshipped their highest god, Di and how the Zhou worshipped their highest god, Tian?

Only the king was allowed to worship Tian during the Zhou era, unlike during the Shang era where the people worshipped Di as well.

e) Who was the spirit she?

The Chinese during the Zhou era believed that each lord's territory had its own spirit related to Earth, which the Chinese called she. Each lord worshipped at an altar representing the territory that he held and its spirit. The king worshipped both she and Tian.

f) What did people during the Zhou dynasty believe the spirits of their ancestors could do?

During the Zhou dynasty, people believed that the spirits of their ancestors could talk directly to Heaven for them.

g) What is yin and yang?

During the Zhou era, some thinkers began to see the world as guided by two opposite forces: yin and yang. They believed that these two forces balanced each other and were responsible for such movement as the turning from day to night and the changes in the seasons.

h) During the Shang dynasty, what was involved in the veneration ceremonies?

People used stone tablets in temples to represent their ancestors. They believe that the spirits of the ancestors returned to the tablet for the veneration ceremonies. The ceremonies also centred on sacrifices of animals and even humans.

i) Why did people take part in the veneration ceremonies?

The people of the Shang dynasty believed that these ceremonies would bring them rain, good harvests, children and success in war and ward off evil spirits.

j) Who were thought to be the victims of human sacrifice?

Some of the victims of human sacrifice are thought to have been servants or relatives of the dead person, and these victims did not have their bodies mutilated. Other sacrifice victims are thought to be prisoners captured in wars.

k) What is the fengchan ceremony?

Kings performed the fengchan ceremony when they had accomplished something great. Fengchan involved piling rocks on top of a mountain to bring humans closer to Heaven.

l) What did the manner of burial reveal about a person's social status?

Members of the highest class were buried in large tombs. Their tombs were up to 12 metres deep and contained wooded burial chambers. Building these tombs required thousands of workers.

m) Why did the wealthy sacrifice victims as part of a burial ceremony?

The ancient Chinese believed that sacrificial victims would follow and continue to serve the person being buried in the afterlife.

n) How were middle and lower classes buried?

Members of the middle classes were buried in pits. The bodies of the lowest classes were thrown into garbage dumps or into unused wells.

o) Why did the wealthy include grave goods in their tombs?

Grave goods were placed in a tomb to indicate a person's status and to ensure that the dead person has the things he or she will need in the afterlife. These included food, vessels, hairpins, weapons, oracle bones and jewellery. It also included sacrificed family members, servants, horses, and dogs.

p) What unique feature did the tomb of Shi Huangdi contain?

The tomb of Shi Huangdi had thousands of sculptures of soldiers known as the terra-cotta army. It was an army to protect the emperor in the afterlife. The largest pit holds more than 6,000 statues of soldiers, including archers, foot soldiers, and charioteers. Other pits contain horses, wooden chariots and horse-drawn carriage. Each statue is unique ranging in height and varying facial features and hairstyles. Each was equipped with real weapons. They were originally painted in bright colours, but today only traces remain. It is unknown how many other statues and artefacts remain uncovered.

5. Philosophy

a) Who was Confucius?

Confucius is China's most famous and influential philosopher. His goal was to teach people how to improve their behaviour. Confucius taught that political disagreement would end if everyone followed a code of behaviour set during the Zhou dynasty.

b) Summarise Confucius' teachings.

Confucius believed everyone had a clear role in life. He arranged people in roles ranked from highest to lowest – he did not consider people to be equal. Each person had to

figure out what his or her role was. Instructions in the books explain how a person should fulfil his or her role. The idea was to lead by example.

c) How were Confucius' teachings different to those of Taoism/Daoism?

Followers of Taoism believed people should live in harmony with nature and avoid doing harm to others.

6. Everyday life

a) Explain the structure of the family in ancient China.

Fathers had total control over the lives of their children. They made decisions about their children's education and future work. They could also punish their children.

b) What is filial piety?

Filial piety was more than respect, it was a duty owed to one's parents from whom one had received life and to whom one owed everything. It was a major crime to disobey or harm one's parents in any way, even accidentally, and it was punishable by death.

c) Who in the household was not ruled by the men of the family?

Men did not rule their wives; that role was assumed by the husband's mother, a wife's mother-in-law.

d) What did bearing sons mean for the family?

Bearing sons increased the family's standing in the community.

e) Who could not marry in ancient China?

In ancient China, men and women with the same surname were thought to be related and could not marry.

f) What did the brother of one of the first Zhou kings invent to encourage monogamy?

The brother of one of the first Zhou kings invented a six stage marriage ceremony which had to be performed at sunrise or sunset. At each of the six stages, the groom's family gave the bride's family a live, wild goose to symbolise monogamy.

g) How do historians and archaeologists know what houses looked like in ancient China?

Historians and archaeologists know what houses looked like in ancient China from models left in tombs and from foundations unearthed.

h) Describe what an artisan's house would have looked like during the Shang era.

Most artisans lived in aboveground houses with rammed-earth walls. These houses had two rooms and often a window with lattice.

i) What type of houses did peasants live in?

Peasants likely lived in houses which were partially underground. However, some artefacts found in these houses indicate that some artisans may have lived in these type of dwellings as well.

j) Describe the layout of the house of a ruler or noble.

Rulers and nobles lived in large, aboveground buildings. They were rectangular, with rammed-earth foundations. Palaces consisted of buildings around a courtyard which had a central gate and a second courtyard behind connected by another gate. The most important rooms were located in the rear courtyards.

k) What were the staple foods in ancient China?

Grains, including millet, rice and wheat were the staple foods in ancient China.

l) Name two examples of bronzes used for cooking and what they were used for.

The ting, is a pot usually with three or four legs. A fire could be built under it. The yan is another type of pot. It is a similar shape to a ting but it has space in its legs for water and an inner rack, the ting was used for steaming food.

m) Describe the basic clothing during the Shang and Zhou dynasties.

The basic clothing included a yi and a shang. The yi was a coat, and the shang was a skirt worn beneath the yi.

n) What is the shenyi?

The shenyi was a one-piece robe that was worn by both men and women of different classes.

o) Who is said to have founded China's first educational system?

Wen Wang, the first king of the Zhou dynasty, is said to have founded ancient China's first educational system.

p) Explain the first educational system.

This system had primary schools for boys, who started at age 8. The pupils attended school until they were 15 years old. Good students could then go on to an advanced academy in the Zhou capital, which taught both these students and sons of the upper class.

q) Why did Shi Huangdi order the burning of books and execution of scholars?

According to some historians, China's first emperor, Shi Huangdi did not want people to question his laws and so controlled access to books and education.