

## **Ancient China** How did Ancient China organize its social Hierarchy?

The Chinese civilization began along the Huang He River. The earliest examples of Chinese writing have been found on oracle bones, which the ancient Chinese used to speak with their ancestors.

The Zhou Dynasty adopted a philosophy known as the Mandate of Heaven. The Mandate of Heaven was a belief of the Chinese people that the gods would only allow a government to stay in power as long as it was good and moral. When the Zhou came to power, they claimed that the gods had allowed them to defeat the Shang Dynasty because the Shang were no longer moral.

Dynasties that came after the Zhou also used the Mandate of Heaven to justify their rule. An important ruler of China is the First Emperor, Shi Huangdi of the Qin Dynasty. Shi Huangdi is known for being the first person to unite China into one country. Before him, China was made up of many different, smaller kingdoms that were constantly at war with one another.

After defeating the other warlords and uniting the country into one empire, Shi Huangdi earned the title of First Emperor. He founded the school of Legalism, which is a political philosophy that taught that a government needed to maintain order through powerful and efficient means. Legalists believed that rulers should rule with force because people were naturally evil. After the Qin's ruler died, the empire began to crumble.

In 206 BCE, a peasant rebel, Liu Bang, rounded up volunteer troops and led his army to defeat the Qin forces.

This event marks the beginning of the Han Dynasty, which is considered one of the greatest periods in the history of China.

## **Ancient India** How did Indian civilization organize its social Hierarchy?

Historians believe that sometime after 2000 BCE a group of people called the Aryans migrated to and took control of what is now the northern part of modern-day India. The word "Aryan" means "noble" in Sanskrit, and most of what is known of this group of people comes from a collection of sacred texts called the Vedas. Vedic beliefs heavily influenced the development of Hinduism, one of the world's oldest religions.

Over time, Hinduism helped organized India's society into groups called castes. A caste was a social class based on a person's ancestry. A person was born into a particular caste. That caste determined the jobs one could hold and whom one could marry. Hindus believe in reincarnation, where after the body dies, the soul is reborn, often in an animal or human form. Only through death and rebirth can a person leave their caste.

In 326 BCE, the legendary conqueror Alexander the Great marched his army into India and defeated the Indian forces. He did not stay to rule long, however, and another man, Chandragupta Maurya, was inspired by Alexander's example. Maurya seized power and founded the first Indian Empire, the Mauryan Empire, in 321 BCE.

Chandragupta Maurya was able to create a strong, centralized government after coming to power. The Mauryan Empire was able to grow and expand largely because of Maurya's reliance on a member of the priest caste as a political adviser. This adviser called for a secret society of spies to monitor activities. Also, the emperor owned a great deal of land, which he rented to farmers. These farmers also paid taxes and the money raised was used to create a massive army to crush any challenge to his rule.

The Maurya Empire reached its height during the reign of Emperor Ashoka, also known as Ashoka the Great. Ashoka rose to power over several older half-brothers and one younger brother because of his military conquests. He commanded the Mauryan army and extended the empire to include most of South Asia, from Afghanistan to Bengal. After seeing many bloody battles, Ashoka converted to Buddhism and began an official policy of nonviolence in his reign. He built monuments marking several significant sites important to Buddhism. He promoted vegetarianism and protected wildlife against sport hunting and branding. He also built universities for study and irrigation systems for trade and agriculture. Ashoka treated all his subjects equally, no matter what caste they were in. He made many allies with weaker kingdoms. He reigned from 273 BCE until he died in 232 BCE.