**Ancient China Notes**

**Zhou Dynasty**

The Zhou dynasty ruled China from 1100 BCE to 256 CE, the longest rule of any dynasty in Chinese history. During much of the dynasty the Zhou emperors were only figure heads, the real power resided with the feudal lords of the outlying regions. As these feudal lords looked to expand their influence and political power, they gathered large groups of educated men to advise them.

From these educated men, many schools of thought or philosophies were created. The three most important philosophies of this period were Daoism, Confucianism, and legalism.

Daoists did not believe in a lot of rules or government. They believed that people should be at one with nature and that all living things have a universal force flowing through them. Daoism was founded by Lao Tzu and he wrote his beliefs down in a book called the Tao Te Ching.

Confucius travelled throughout the feudal states and offered his services as a political advisor and teacher. Confucius’ philosophy focused on how people should behave and live. His teachings focused on treating others with respect, politeness, and fairness.

Legalist philosophers taught that to build a strong state, a ruler must have absolute power over his subjects.

**Qin Dynasty**

The Qin Dynasty only lasted for 15 years (221-206 BCE). Yet it is one of the most famous dynasties in ancient Chinese history. Emperor Qin ran his dynasty with absolute control. Punishment for those who disagreed with him was swift and harsh. You could be put to death simply by suggesting another way to do things. There was only Qin's way.

It was not enough to have two people in charge of each little piece, so that they could keep an eye on each other. Qin also developed a spy system, so that all people kept an eye on each other. Spies were rewarded very well.

Qin set people to work building the Great Wall. He believed the country needed better protection. Just as cities had wall built around them, he wanted a wall built around China.

Qin took land away from the nobles so they would lose most of their control and wealth. Qin did not want the nobles to band together to remove him from power. Anyone who fought this change was either buried alive or put to work building the Great Wall.

Censorship was introduced. Qin burned what he called useless books. If a book was not about agriculture, medicine, or prophecy, it was burned. Scholars who refused to allow their books to be burned where either burned alive or sent to work on the wall. Qin did not want his people to waste time learning, he wanted the people kept busy growing food.

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A peasant was assigned to grow food or to harvest silk. If they tried to do anything else besides their assigned job, they were put to death or sent to work on the wall.

If people were slow or lazy, they were put to death or sent to work on the wall.

Qin put some people to work building bridges, roads, canals, and systems of flood control. The people he assigned to do this work either did the work they were assigned to do quickly and well, or they were killed or sent to work on the wall.

Qin created a system of standardization

* Qin introduced one system of weights and measures
* one system of money
* the same written language
* the same laws

His law code applied to everyone. He created a huge law enforcement group, to enforce those laws.

Qin had planned that his son would take over one day. After Qin died of natural causes, his son tried to rule the country. A peasant led revolt was successful. That peasant became the new emperor. He called his dynasty the Han dynasty.

**Han Dynasty**

The Han Dynasty was one of the great dynasties of Ancient China. Much of Chinese culture was established during the Han dynasty and it is sometimes called the Golden Age of Ancient China. It was an era of peace and prosperity and allowed China to expand to a major world power.

The Han Dynasty began with a peasant revolt against the Qin Emperor. It was led by Liu Bang, son of a peasant family.

The Han emperors gathered a number of educated men about him to help them run the empire. Later Han emperors would establish examinations and schools to make sure that only the most intelligent men would run the government. This method of government would run for over 2,000 years.

The period of the Han Dynasty was a time of invention and science. One of the most important inventions was paper. Paper allowed the government to easily keep records and pass on instructions throughout the empire.

Other important inventions include iron casting, crop rotation, and acupuncture as well as advancements in medicine, mathematics, building, agriculture, engineering, and astronomy.

**The Silk Road**

The Silk Road was a trade route that went from China to Eastern Europe. It went along the northern borders of China, India, and Persia and ended in Constantinople and then across the Mediterranean Sea to Venice, Italy.

The Silk Road was important because it helped to generate trade and commerce between a number of different kingdoms and empires. This helped for ideas, culture, inventions, and unique products to spread across much of the settled world.

It was called the Silk Road because one of the major products traded was silk cloth from China. People throughout Asia and Europe prized Chinese silk for its softness and luxury. The Chinese sold silk for thousands of years and even the Romans called China the "land of silk".