UNIT 3
Asia’s Classical Age

1500 B.C.
About 1500 B.C. Aryan migrations begin

1200 B.C.

900 B.C.
1122 B.C. The Zhou claim the Mandate of Heaven in China

UNIT 1
Early People and Lifeways
UNIT 2
Cradles of Civilization
UNIT 3
Asia’s Classical Age
UNIT 4
The Mediterranean
UNIT 5
Rise of New Empires
Between 1500 B.C. and A.D. 100, the foundations of Asia’s major civilizations were laid. Political, social, and economic changes created traditions that have lasted for thousands of years. Asia’s Classical Age also saw the rise of new religions and new ideas about life. These continue to play a role in the way people live in Asia and in other parts of the world.

The emperors of ancient China greatly affected the way of life of the people. In this miniature painting Emperor Mou of the Zhou dynasty travels in fine style.

- 600 B.C.
  - 551 B.C. Confucius born in China

- 300 B.C.
  - About 320 B.C. Chandragupta Maurya unites northern India
  - 221 B.C. Shi Huangdi unites China

- 539 B.C.
  - The Persians conquer the Babylonians

- 221 B.C. A.D.
  - About A.D. 100 Paper invented in China

- About 106 B.C.
  - China trade reaches the Mediterranean region
An Ancient Tale
retold by Cheng Hou-tien

illustrated by Jean Hirashima

Before people learned to write, storytellers held an honored place in most ancient civilizations. Storytellers guarded people’s history and legends. They kept stories alive by passing them on by word of mouth. Later, scribes wrote down some of the stories that had been passed down by storytellers. Through these stories we can learn about the values, customs, and traditions of ancient people.

Now read a retelling of an ancient tale from China. In this story six brothers show their loyalty to their father and to one another in spite of danger and the threat of death. Generation after generation of Chinese people learned the importance of loyalty from stories like this.
Long ago, in ancient China, lived an old farmer with his six sons. The first son was clever. The second son could stretch his arms to either end of the world. The third son had a head so hard, steel bounced off it. The fourth son had skin like iron. The fifth son could withstand the greatest heat.

And the sixth son, why he was able to stretch his legs for inches and feet and yards—and for miles and miles.

One day the old farmer fell ill. None of the doctors could cure him. “There is only one way to save your father,” said one. “You must get the pearl from the king’s palace, boil it in water, and give your father the water to drink.”

First Son said, “Second Son, stretch out your arms and get the pearl.”

Second Son reached out across the plains into the city, where the palace was, and into the king’s window and drew out the pearl. The brothers boiled the pearl and gave their father the water to drink, and the old man got better.

When the king discovered that his precious pearl was missing, he was furious. He sent his soldiers to find it. They went from door to door. When First Son opened the door and the soldiers saw the pearl, they seized it.

And they arrested First Son and brought him before the king. “Off with his head!” cried the king.

First Son could not stand the thought of dying without seeing his father one more time.

“Please let me see my father before I die,” he begged. The king allowed him to go.

When the old farmer learned that his son was to be beheaded, he was very sad. “But wait,” said Third Son. “Let me go and take my brother’s place.”

The next day, it was Third Son who put his head on the block. The executioner lowered the ax, but the head remained. The people laughed and jeered.

The king was angry. He ordered his soldiers to run him through with a knife. Third Son was frightened. “Please let me see my father before I die,” he said.

The king allowed him to go. When the brothers heard the news, it was suggested that Fourth Son go back instead. This, Fourth Son did.

And the next day, when the soldiers brought the knife down on him, the blade snapped in two, like a bamboo stick.

“Throw him into boiling water,” cried the king. “That will finish him off.”
“Please let me go home and see my father before I die,” Fourth Son pleaded.

The next day, when Fifth Son was thrown into boiling water, to the great surprise of all around, he merely called for more heat and began to sing.

The king sputtered and railed. “Throw him into the sea! No one escapes from its depth,” he cried.

“I accept my fate,” said Fifth Son. “But before I die, please let me go home and see my father.”

Fifth Son hurried home and told what had happened.

“Never mind,” said First Son. “Sixth Son will take your place. He can never drown.”

Sixth Son returned to the palace in his brother’s place. He was taken out to sea and dropped overboard. The soldiers watched him disappear. They saw bubbles form on the surface of the water and were sure he had drowned.

But Sixth Son was far from gone. He stretched and stretched his legs until he was standing on the ocean floor. There, he found many precious jewels. When he rose to the surface, the surprised soldiers brought him to the king.

Sixth Son presented the king with the jewels he had found. The jewels pleased the king and he decided to spare the boy’s life.

“How is it that you have escaped sure death again and again?” asked the king. When the king heard the story, he sent for the other five brothers and said, “You boys are a fine example of devotion to family. China is proud of you.”

And he held a banquet for the old farmer and his six sons at the palace, which hundreds of people attended.

As you read about the ancient peoples of Asia, you will learn more about loyalty. You will also learn about values, customs, and traditions that developed long ago in Asia and have continued through the centuries.
A time of disorder followed the fall of the Qin dynasty. Order finally returned when the Han dynasty gained control of China in 202 B.C. For the next 400 years, Han rulers advanced Chinese civilization. They led China into a golden age of peace, wealth, and progress. To this day the Chinese people proudly call themselves children of Han.

**THE HAN VIEW OF GOVERNMENT**

After Shi Huangdi’s death, China plunged into civil wars. In a civil war groups of people from the same place or country fight one another. During this time China’s noble families regained their land. They fought one another for more land and authority. In the end the winner was a peasant, not a noble. His name was Liu Bang (lee·oo·bating). Unlike the nobles, Liu Bang wanted China to be united.

In 202 B.C. Liu Bang claimed the Mandate of Heaven. Like other leaders, Liu Bang believed his name should tell of his accomplishments. He became Han Gao Zu (gow zo), or the “Great Founder of the Han.”

Gao Zu knew the importance of having the support of those he ruled. “The prince is the boat; the common people are the water. The water can support the boat, or the water can capsize the boat,” he said. He thought out each of his decisions so that his ship of state—China—stayed afloat.

Gao Zu won the support of the nobles by giving them land and by allowing them to rule their lands as they wished. He won over the peasant farmers by lowering
The leaders of the Qin dynasty had taxed the peasants heavily to pay for the Great Wall and other public works. The peasants welcomed Gao Zu's new policy of lower taxes.

Gao Zu’s view of government combined ideas from two conflicting philosophies—Legalism and Confucianism. Gao Zu accepted the Legalist idea of the need for a strong central government and an all-powerful ruler. But he rejected harsh laws and cruel treatment. Instead, Gao Zu believed in the Confucianist idea that a ruler should set an example for the people. He believed that by setting a good example, he could win the respect of his people.

Gao Zu succeeded. He was as respected as Shi Huangdi had been feared. But just when Gao Zu had ended problems within China, trouble appeared on its borders. Invaders from the north attacked. One attack brought them to the city walls of Chang’an, the Han capital. Gao Zu was wounded while defending his city. He died from his wounds in 195 B.C.

What type of leader did Gao Zu think should rule China?
Wu Di and the Civil Service System

In 140 B.C. Wu Di (Woo Dee) came to the Han throne. The name Wu Di means “Warlike Emperor.” Wu Di created armies, some with as many as 300,000 soldiers, to conquer new lands. These armies pushed the borders of the empire north, south, and west.

To guard against attacks by nomads, Wu Di extended the Great Wall. Wu Di also took other actions. In some cases he paid nomads—with silk, rice, or money—not to attack. These payments gave outsiders their first taste of the riches of China.

Wu Di also sent out ambassadors, or representatives of the government, to make peace with his enemies. Wu Di’s efforts helped bring about what historians later called the Pax Sinica, or “Chinese Peace.”

Wu Di’s changes in government brought peace within his empire. Wu Di set up China’s first civil service system. A civil service oversees the day-to-day business of running a government.

In the bureaucracy created under the Qin, a job was a reward for loyalty. In contrast, Han civil service officials earned their jobs by scoring well on tests. Wu Di invited all people of the empire—peasants as well as nobles—to take the civil service tests.

Only those who made the highest grades earned government jobs. This examination system for government officials was used for centuries. The civil servants who ran the Han empire so well were proof that it worked.

How did Wu Di protect his empire and run it?

A Golden Age

Under Wu Di’s “Chinese Peace,” China entered a Golden Age in both the arts and learning. Without the fear of war, the study of language, history, philosophy, and religion blossomed.

During Han rule, scholars improved the Chinese writing system. One scholar created the first Chinese dictionary, in 100 B.C. Other scholars, such as Sima Qian (SOO•MAH•CHEN), recorded China’s history. Sima’s review of...
China’s past from the earliest dynasties to the Han was not just a listing of dates and events. He connected causes and effects. This made it easier for people to understand why things happened.

Confucianism became the official teaching of the Han Empire. Wu Di and later Han rulers also supported the study of such teachings as Daoism (Dow•ih•zuhm). Daoism teaches that the key to long life and happiness is to accept life as it is.

The Han Golden Age also brought new ideas in technology. A Han general, for example, developed the wheelbarrow. This invention was of great use to the army because one soldier alone could now move more than 330 pounds (150 kg) of equipment. In A.D. 132 a Han inventor created an instrument to detect earthquakes.

The most important innovation of the Han dynasty was paper. Invented around A.D. 100, paper proved to be an ideal material for recording information. The use of paper led to advances in printing. Han workers soon began printing on paper by using designs etched on stone.

**What was the most important innovation of the Han dynasty?**

**Trade on the Silk Road**

The early Chinese people had always depended upon their country’s own resources. They did not import, or bring in, goods for

Wealthy Chinese during the Han dynasty lived in large houses like this. The poor usually lived in small, one-story houses.
sale from other lands. They also did not export, or send out, their own goods for sale in other places. But during the Han dynasty, Chinese goods began flowing out of the empire.

In 126 B.C. an ambassador sent west by Wu Di returned with incredible news. Beyond the deserts of central Asia lay other kingdoms of “civilized” people. These people wanted Chinese silk. In turn the Chinese emperor wanted their large and strong “heavenly horses.”

In 106 B.C. the first camel caravan, or group of traders, headed west from China with a load of silk. Along the way nomadic tribes demanded payment for allowing others to pass through their lands. The journey was dangerous. However, the profits, or money gained, more than made up for the risks.

The Chinese easily found buyers for their silk. Those who received silk directly from the Chinese traders did not go all the way to Africa and Europe but their goods did. By the second century A.D., the trade route, now called the Silk Road, stretched 5,000 miles (8,047 km) to the Mediterranean Sea.

The arrival of silk in the West caused an even greater demand for goods. Caravans heading west carried apricots, iron and bronze goods, and silk. Caravans heading east to China carried such items as gold, ivory, wool, linen, grape-vines, and new breeds of horses. Along with goods, news of China traveled to the continents of Africa and Europe. News of those places also made its way to China.

What was the Silk Road?

This wooden model of a servant girl, placed in a tomb over 2,000 years ago, wears silk clothing that has been damaged little by time.

Lesson 3 Review

Check Understanding

1. Recall the Facts What advances were made during the time of Han rule?
2. Focus on the Main Idea Why is the Han period thought to be an outstanding time in Chinese history?
3. Think More About It Why do you think the Han emperors were more successful than earlier emperors in keeping peace?
4. Personally Speaking For centuries the Chinese people have proudly called themselves children of Han. Why do you think they feel this way?
5. Past to Present Do you live in an age of great achievement? Explain why or why not.

Show What You Know

Collage Activity Some people say that the twentieth century has been a century of innovations. Using pictures and headlines from newspapers and magazines, create a collage that illustrates this idea.