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.
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.
China is a sea that salts all rivers that run into it.

Traditional Chinese saying

Life-size statue of a Chinese soldier, carved around 210 B.C.
The Classical Age in China began with the conquest of the Huang He Valley in 1122 B.C. by the Zhou (joH) dynasty. Under the Zhou and the dynasties that followed, China became large and powerful. These dynasties left a heritage that has lasted for thousands of years. A heritage is a set of ideas that has passed down from one generation to another.

**Winning the Mandate of Heaven**

The ancestors of the founders of the Zhou dynasty were a nomadic people. They lived in the western mountains of a land that today is part of China, near the source of the Huang He. In time the Zhou settled on the edge of the Shang Kingdom. Soon they became known not only as skilled farmers but as expert fighters as well.

The Zhou had settled just as the use of iron was spreading. They began to hammer this strong metal into tools and plows. They also formed pieces of iron into weapons—weapons that could help them defeat their fiercest enemies.

When the Shang tried to expand their borders, Zhou militia, or volunteer soldiers, fought back to protect their land. Shang weapons were no match for the Zhou’s iron weapons.

In 1122 B.C. the Zhou king, Wu, claimed the Mandate of Heaven—the order from the gods to rule China. King Wu told the Chinese people that the last Shang king did not have the virtues, or good qualities, needed to lead the people. King Wu said that the Zhou would be better rulers. The Zhou ruled China for almost
900 years, until 256 B.C. This dynasty was the longest-lasting dynasty in all of China’s history.

Who replaced the Shang as rulers of China?

Division of Classes

To help control the large kingdom, the Zhou created a new social structure. The king was at the top of Zhou society. Noble families were in the middle. Peasant farmers were at the bottom. Everyone owed loyalty to the king. The king gave land to the nobles in return for military service. The nobles ruled their land as separate states, governing in whatever way they wanted. The king used the nobles’ powerful armies to protect the kingdom.

The peasants lived on the land owned by the nobles and farmed it. In return for the right to farm a noble’s land, the peasants had to serve in the noble’s army.

The life of a peasant was filled with hardships. This poem from the Book of Songs, written sometime after 1000 B.C., offers a personal view of a peasant’s life:

“What plant is not faded?
What day do we not march?
What man is not taken
To defend the four bounds?
What plant is not wilting?
What man is not taken from his wife?
Alas for us soldiers,
Treated as though we were not fellow-men!”

Peasant farmers supplied the king with an almost endless number of workers. They constructed many huge public works. Public works are structures built by the government for everyone’s use.

Social Structure of the Zhou Government

- **King**
  - Gives land to the nobles
  - Perform military service for the king

- **Nobles**
  - Protects the peasants
  - Farm the land and serve the nobles

- **Peasants**

Learning from Charts: Each of China’s three social classes had responsibilities to the other classes.

- What was the main responsibility of the nobles in relation to the peasants?

During the Zhou dynasty, new dikes, dams, and canals helped to improve agriculture and increase the food supply. New roads meant better transportation and communication.

Under the Zhou kings, China’s civilization grew. By the 700s B.C., more people lived in China than anywhere else in the world.

What were the advantages and disadvantages of China’s system of government?

This bronze and jade statue of a peasant child is from the time of the Zhou dynasty. Why do you think statues like these were made?
In 771 B.C. the people in the Zhou capital city of Hao (how) got ready for an attack by the invaders. A legend tells that the Chinese leader, King Yoo (yoo), ordered fires lighted on the nights before the attack. The fires would warn the nobles to gather their armies and defend the king. However, the disloyal nobles ignored the signals. King Yoo died in the attack.

As its ruling system crumbled, China began a time that historians call the Warring States Period. From around 600 B.C. China’s many states were almost always at war with one another. Huge areas of farmland were burned, and many villages and public works were destroyed. The system that had kept order for hundreds of years was forgotten. Loyalty to a single powerful king was lost as well. This was a time of chaos. Finally, in 221 B.C., a strong leader claimed the Mandate of Heaven.

THE WARRING STATES PERIOD

In the 700s B.C. nomadic peoples from central Asia invaded the Huang He Valley. Rather than unite to fight the invaders, China’s nobles fought among themselves. The fighting weakened the Zhou authority, or power to rule, and threatened the dynasty. Without the loyalty of the nobles, China’s ruling system broke down.
The Ideas of Confucius

During the Warring States Period, Chinese people turned to their wisest philosophers to explain what had happened to their society. A philosopher is a person who studies the meaning of life. The most important of the Chinese philosophers was a teacher called Kung Fu Zi (koong foo zuh), or Master Kung. Kung Fu Zi later became known in the West as Confucius.

Confucius was born in 551 B.C. He compared his time with the time when the Zhou were strong. Confucius wondered why people then were loyal to their leaders. He decided that the leaders of the past had given the people a sense of order. Everyone knew how each person in society was supposed to behave.

According to Confucius, a ruler needed to set an example for the people, as a parent does for children. “To govern is to set things right,” said Confucius. The successful ruler begins by learning to act correctly. If a leader rules badly, the people have a right to get rid of that leader.

Confucius believed that a good society is like a family in which all members know their place and their responsibilities, or duties. “Let the father act as a father should and the son act as a son should,” Confucius.

Who?

Confucius 551–479 B.C.

Confucius grew up in the city-state of Lu in northeastern China. His father was a minor state official. Confucius also worked for the government. He began to think about how government could work for the good of all people. As a government worker, he had little chance to put his ideas into action. So he became a teacher of the sons of nobles. He hoped that when his students gained positions of authority they would govern by his ideas.
Proverbs of Confucius from the Analects

On Truth
Those who know the truth are not up to those who love it; those who love the truth are not up to those who delight in it.

On Education
In education there are no class distinctions.
Learning without thinking is labor lost; thinking without learning is dangerous.

On Government
If a ruler himself is upright, all will go well without orders. But if he himself is not upright, even though he gives orders they will not be obeyed.

people, however, respected Confucius. Long after his death in 479 B.C., Confucius’s followers wrote down his teachings in a book called the Analects. In time his ideas, which came to be called Confucianism, spread among other people of eastern Asia, including the Japanese.

Confucianism became a guide for the way people lived. They were guided by the five virtues of Confucianism: charity, kindness, hard work, good faith, and courtesy.

What were two important ideas of Confucianism?

Lesson 1 Review

Check Understanding
1. Recall the Facts What philosopher of ancient China developed an important system of ideas and values?
2. Focus on the Main Idea How did the Chinese people’s shared belief in a set of ideas help them work together?

Think Critically
3. Think More About It In what ways did Confucianism support the idea of the Mandate of Heaven?
4. Personally Speaking Zhou society was divided into three classes, each with different responsibilities. In your opinion, would such a system be more likely to lead to cooperation or to conflict? Explain.

Show What You Know

Creative Writing Activity
Confucius often presented his ideas about society as proverbs, or short sayings. Some examples can be found in the Proverbs of Confucius from the Analects, on this page. Using these examples as models, write your own proverbs about the need for order and cooperation in your school or community.
**Identify Causes and Their Effects**

**Why Is This Skill Important?**
To find links between different events in history, you need to understand causes and their effects. A cause is something that makes something else happen. What happens is an effect. Knowing about causes and effects is important not only for understanding history but also for making personal decisions. It can help you think about the consequences of your actions. In that way you can make more thoughtful decisions.

**Remember What You Have Read**
Before the Zhou lost the Mandate of Heaven, their rulers created a new social structure. The king was at the top, nobles were in the middle, and peasants were at the bottom. The whole structure depended on loyalty. For the structure to work successfully, the peasants had to remain loyal to the nobles, and the nobles had to remain loyal to the king. You read the legend of King Yoo. His story explains what caused the Zhou dynasty’s social structure to crumble and the dynasty to fall.

**Understand the Process**
Many events in history have more than one cause and more than one effect. Follow the arrows on the chart in the next column to help you understand the causes and effects of the fall of the Zhou dynasty.

1. What caused the Chinese nobles who lived during the time of the Zhou dynasty to fight among themselves? What was the effect of the fighting on the dynasty?
2. What caused King Yoo to signal the nobles by ordering fires lighted in the Zhou capital city of Hao?
3. What caused the death of King Yoo and the fall of the Zhou dynasty?
4. What were the effects of the fall of the Zhou dynasty?

**Think and Apply**
Identify an event that took place in your community or one that was reported in the news. Perhaps there was a bad storm or a community clean-up day. Link the event’s causes and effects on a chart like the one on this page. Use your chart to explain the event to a classmate or a family member.