

Life in Ancient China

Get Ready to Read!

What's the Connection?

In Section 1, you learned about the Chinese government under the Zhou dynasty. This section describes what life was like during the Zhou dynasty.

Focusing on the Main Ideas

- Chinese society had three main social classes: landowning aristocrats, farmers, and merchants. (page 233)
- Three Chinese philosophies, Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism, grew out of a need for order. (page 235)

Meeting People

Confucius (kuhn•FYOO•shuhs)

Laozi (LOWD•ZOO)

Hanfeizi (HAN•fay•DZOO)

Building Your Vocabulary

social class

filial piety

(FIH•lee•uhl PY•uh•tee)

Confucianism

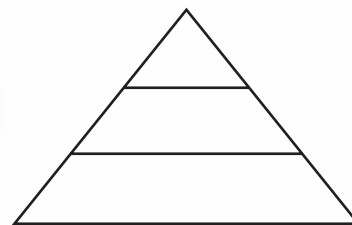
(kuhn•FYOO•shuh•NIH•zuhm)

Daoism (DOW•IH•zuhm)

Legalism (LEE•guh•LIH•zuhm)

Reading Strategy

Organizing Information Create a pyramid diagram like the one below showing the social classes in ancient China from most important (top) to least important (bottom).



When & Who?

600 B.C.



551 B.C.

Confucius is born

400 B.C.



c. 300 B.C.

Laozi's ideas of Daoism become popular

200 B.C.

c. 200 B.C.

Hanfeizi develops Legalism



Life in Ancient China

Main Idea Chinese society had three main social classes: landowning aristocrats, farmers, and merchants.

Reading Focus Have you heard the terms *high society* and *working class*? They describe social classes in America. Read on to find out about social classes in early China.

A **social class** includes people who share a similar position in society. Early Chinese society had three main social classes:

- landowning aristocrats
- peasant farmers
- merchants

Classes in Chinese Society China's aristocratic families owned large estates in early China. They lived in large houses with tile

roofs, courtyards, and gardens. Fine furniture and silk hangings filled their rooms, and their houses were surrounded by walls to keep out bandits.

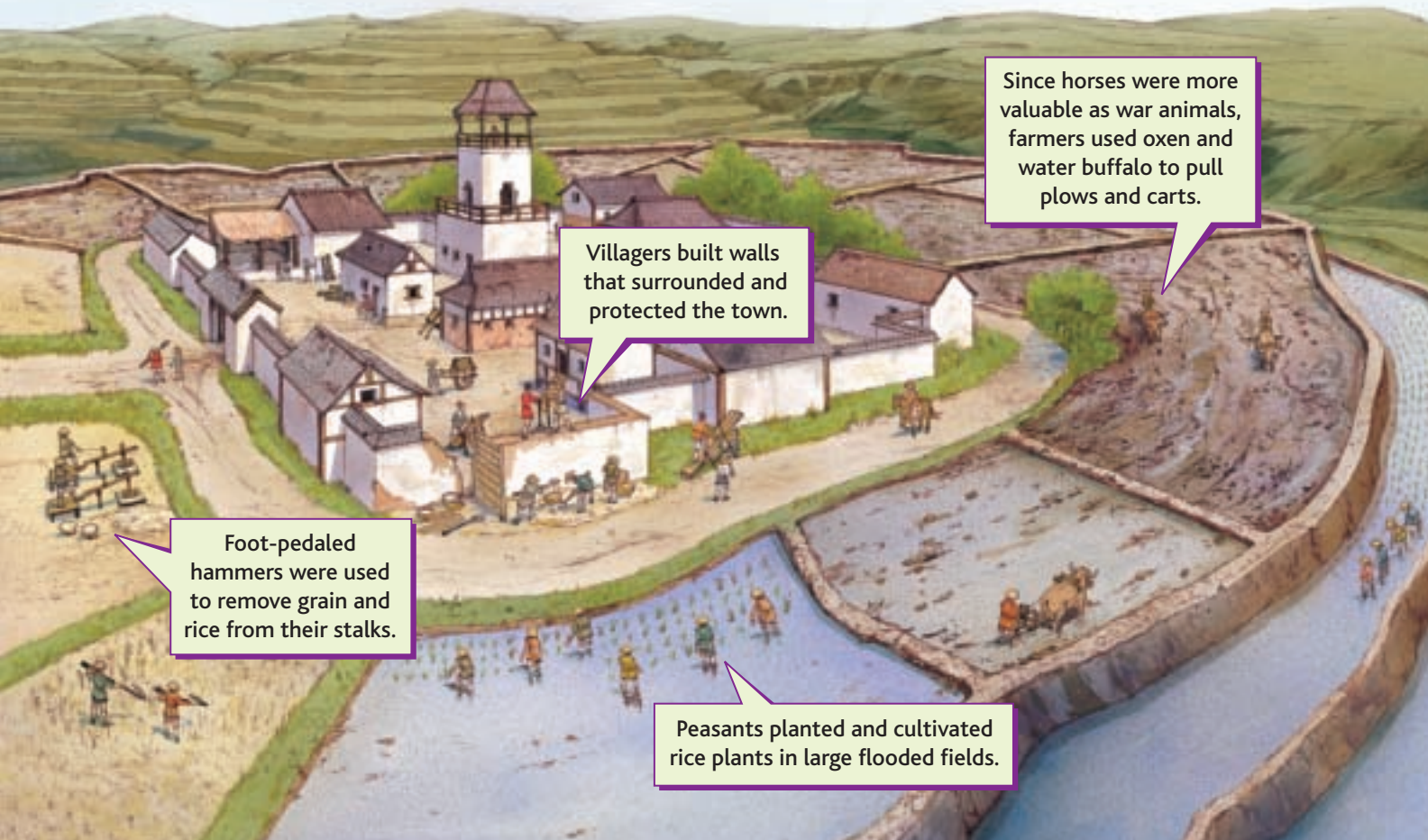
The aristocratic families did not own large estates for long. Each aristocrat divided his land among his sons. As a result, sons and grandsons owned much less property than their fathers and grandfathers had owned.

Aristocrats relied on farmers to grow the crops that made them rich. About nine out of ten Chinese were farmers. They lived in simple houses inside village walls. The aristocrats owned the fields outside the village walls. In these fields, farmers in northern China grew wheat and a grain called millet. In the south, where the climate was warmer and wetter, they were able to grow rice.

Chinese Village

Chinese farmers lived in small villages made up of several families. They farmed fields outside the village walls.

How did farmers pay for the use of the land they farmed?



Since horses were more valuable as war animals, farmers used oxen and water buffalo to pull plows and carts.

Villagers built walls that surrounded and protected the town.

Foot-pedaled hammers were used to remove grain and rice from their stalks.

Peasants planted and cultivated rice plants in large flooded fields.

To pay for the use of the land, the farmers gave part of their crop to the landowners.

Most farmers also owned a small piece of land where they grew food for their family. A typical family ate fish, turnips, beans, wheat or rice, and millet. The farmers had to pay taxes and work one month each year building roads and helping on other big government projects. In wartime, the farmers also served as soldiers.

In Chinese society, farmers ranked above merchants. The merchant social class included shopkeepers, traders, and bankers. The merchants lived in towns and provided goods and services to the landowners.

Many merchants became quite rich, but landowners and farmers still looked down on them. Chinese leaders believed that government officials should not be concerned with money. As a result, merchants were not allowed to have government jobs.

What Was Life Like in a Chinese Family?

The family was the basic building block of Chinese society. Because farming in ancient China required many workers, people had big families to help them produce more and become wealthier. Even the young children of a family worked in the fields. Older sons raised their own crops and provided food for their parents. Chinese families also took care of people in need—the aged, the young, and the sick.

Chinese families practiced **filial piety** (FIH•lee•uhl PY•uh•tee). This meant that children had to respect their parents and older relatives. Family members placed the needs and desires of the head of the family before their own. The head of the family was the oldest male, usually the father. However, a son could take on this role, and then even his mother had to obey him.



The Way It Was

Focus on Everyday Life

Chinese Farming Farmers in ancient China had to find ways to grow enough food to feed their large population. It was often difficult because of the dry, mountainous land.

Over centuries, farmers learned to cut terraces—flat areas, like a series of deep steps—into the mountain slopes. Terraces made more land available for farming and kept the soil from eroding, or wearing away. Early farmers also used the terraces as a way to irrigate their crops. As rain fell, it flowed down from one terrace to the



▲ Terrace farming in China

Men and women had very different roles in early China. Men were respected because they grew the crops. They went to school, ran the government, and fought wars. The Chinese considered these jobs more important than the work that women did. Most women raised children and managed the household.

Chinese women could not hold government posts. However, women in the royal court could influence government decisions. Wives of rulers or women in the royal family often convinced men in power to see things their way.



▲ Chinese female figurine

Reading Check Explain Why did the amount of land owned by each aristocrat decrease over time?

Chinese Thinkers

Main Idea Three Chinese philosophies, Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism, grew out of a need for order.

Reading Focus If people around you were arguing and fighting, what would you do? Read to learn about early Chinese ideas for restoring order.

As the Zhou kingdom weakened in the 500s B.C., violence became common. During the Period of the Warring States, rulers sent armies to destroy enemy states. Whole villages of men, women, and children were beheaded. Many Chinese began looking for ways to restore order to society.

Between 500 B.C. and 200 B.C., Chinese thinkers developed three major theories about how to create a peaceful society. These theories are called Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism.

next, watering the crops. This method of farming, called terrace farming, is still used in China today.

Farmers in ancient China were the first to use insects to protect their crops from damage by other insects. As early as A.D. 304, Chinese farmers used ants to prevent other insects from damaging their citrus fruit trees. They also used frogs and birds for pest control.

The ancient Chinese used bronze and iron tools like those on the right, to farm their land and harvest crops.

Hoe ▶



▼ Plow blade



▲ Head of a shovel

Connecting to the Past

1. How did farmers in ancient China increase the amount of productive farmland?
2. What three farming methods helped farmers in ancient China grow more food?

Chinese Numbering System

Chinese Number	English Number	Chinese Number	English Number
零	0	七	7
一	1	八	8
二	2	九	9
三	3	十	10
四	4	百	100
五	5	千	1,000
六	6	万	10,000

Examples:

二十	(2×10)
二百	(2×100)
三千	$(3 \times 1,000)$
四百五十六	$[(4 \times 100) + (5 \times 10) + (6)]$

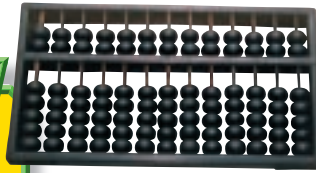
Understanding Charts

The Chinese system of numbering is based on units of 10. It uses characters to represent 0 through 9 and the powers of 10 (10, 100, 1,000, and so forth).

- How would you write the number 328 using the Chinese numbering system?
- Analyze** What is the English number for 六百四十一?

Who Was Confucius? **Confucius** (kuhn • FYOO • shuhs) was ancient China's first great thinker and teacher. He wanted to end the problems in China and bring peace to society.

Confucius believed that people needed to have a sense of duty. Duty meant that a person must put the needs of family and community before his or her own needs. Each person owed a duty to another person. Parents owed their children love, and children owed their parents honor. Husbands owed their wives support, and



◀ Abacuses, like this one, were used by the Chinese to solve math problems. These ancient calculators held

stones on wooden pegs, which would be moved up and down to add, subtract, multiply, and divide.

wives owed their husbands obedience. Above all, rulers had to set good examples. If a king ruled for the common good, his subjects would respect him and society would prosper.

Confucius believed that if each person did his or her duty, society as a whole would do well. He also urged people to be good and to seek knowledge:

“There are those who act without knowing; I will have none of this. To hear a lot, choose the good, and follow it, to see a lot and learn to recognize it: this is next to knowledge.”

—Confucius, *Analects*

To Confucius, the best way to behave was similar to an idea known as the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.” Confucius urged people to “measure the feelings of others by one's own,” for “within the four seas all men are brothers.”

Confucius traveled through China trying to persuade government leaders to follow his ideas. **Confucianism** (kuhn • FYOO • shuh • NIH • zuhm) taught that all men with a talent for governing should take part in government. Of course, this idea was not popular with aristocrats, and few leaders listened.

Over time, Confucius won many followers who honored him as a great teacher. They wrote down his sayings and carried his message. After Confucius died in 479 B.C., his sayings spread throughout China.

Biography

CONFUCIUS

551–479 B.C.

Historians believe that the great thinker and teacher Confucius was born in the small state of Lu and named Kong Qui. His parents were poor, although his family had probably been wealthy at one time. One record says that Confucius was only three years old when his father died. His mother may have also died when he was young, because another record describes Confucius as an orphan.

Even as a teenager, Confucius was a talented scholar with strong, fixed beliefs. He devoted himself to learning and mastered literature, history, music, and arithmetic. He served as an apprentice to a bookkeeper and a stable manager but really wanted to obtain a government position. When he was 19, Confucius married and soon had a son and a daughter.

Confucius lived in a time when many people no longer held to traditional values and the government was struggling. Because he was concerned about these problems, Confucius took a government job to help improve society. He taught that the most important thing was for people to do their duty. In addition, he taught that people should honor their promises to others, use education to improve themselves, avoid extreme actions or feelings, and avoid bad people. Confucius also wanted everyone to return to the beliefs and rituals of their ancestors.

Government officials in Lu were not interested in his ideas, so at age 30 Confucius left politics and began a teaching career. He devoted the rest of his life to improving society through learning and teaching. Confucius did not write down any of his ideas, but his followers put together a book of his sayings called the *Lun Yü (Analects)*.

Confucius ▶



“What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.”

—Confucius

Then and Now

Give an example of how the above quote from Confucius might help society today.

Chinese Philosophers

Confucianism

Founder

Confucius



Main Ideas

People should put the needs of their family and community first.

Influence on Modern Life

Many Chinese today accept his idea of duty to family. His ideas helped open up government jobs to people with talent.

Daoism

Laozi



People should give up worldly desires in favor of nature and the Dao.

Daoism teaches the importance of nature and encourages people to treat nature with respect and reverence.

Legalism

Hanfeizi



Society needs a system of harsh laws and strict punishment.

Legalists developed laws that became an important part of Chinese history.

Understanding Charts

Three philosophies developed in early China.

1. Which philosophy encourages followers to concentrate on duty and humanity?
2. **Conclude** Which of these philosophies do you think would be most popular in the world today? Explain.



▲ Some legends state that Laozi rode his water buffalo westward into a great desert and disappeared after writing *Dao De Jing*. **When did the ideas of Daoism become popular?**

What Is Daoism? **Daoism** (DOW•IH•zuhm) is another Chinese philosophy that promotes a peaceful society. Daoism (also called Taoism) is based on the teachings of **Laozi** (LOWD•ZOO). Laozi, or the Old Master, lived around the same time as Confucius. Scholars do not know if Laozi was a real person. However, the ideas credited to him became popular between 500 B.C. and 300 B.C.

The ideas of Daoism are written in *Dao De Jing* (The Way of the Dao). Like Confucianism, Daoism tells people how to behave. Daoists believed that people should give up worldly desires. They should turn to nature and the Dao—the

force that guides all things. To show how to follow the Dao, Daoists used examples from nature:

“Higher good is like water:
the good in water benefits all,
and does so without contention.
It rests where people dislike to be,
so it is close to the Way.
Where it dwells becomes
good ground;
profound is the good in its heart,
Benevolent the good it bestows.”

—Laozi, *Tao Te Ching*

In some ways, Daoism is the opposite of Confucianism. Followers of Confucius taught that people should work hard to improve the world. Daoism called on people to give up their concerns about the world. It said they should seek inner peace and live in harmony with nature. Many Chinese followed both Confucianism and Daoism.

What Is Legalism? A third group of thinkers disagreed with the idea that honorable men in government could bring peace to society. Instead, they argued for a system of laws. People called their thinking **Legalism** (LEE•guh•LIH•zuhm), or the “School of Law.”

A scholar named **Hanfeizi** (HAN•fay•DZOO) developed the teachings of Legalism during the 200s B.C. Unlike Confucius or Laozi, Hanfeizi taught that humans were naturally evil. He believed that they needed harsh laws and stiff punishments to force them to do their duty. His followers believed that a strong ruler was needed to keep order in society.

Many aristocrats liked Legalism because it favored force and power, and did not require rulers to show kindness or understanding. Its ideas led to the cruel laws and punishments often used to control Chinese farmers.

Reading Check Explain Why did Hanfeizi believe that people needed laws and punishments?

Section 2 Review

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Reading Summary

Review the **Main Ideas**

- Early Chinese society had three main social classes: aristocrats, farmers, and merchants. The family was the basis of Chinese society.
- During a time of disorder, three new philosophies developed in China: Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism.

What Did You Learn?

1. Describe the concept of filial piety.
2. Why did many aristocrats favor the philosophy of Legalism?
3. **Compare** Draw a table to compare the three main classes of ancient Chinese society.
4. **Contrast** How did Daoism differ from Confucianism?
5. **Writing Questions** Suppose you could interview Confucius about his concept of duty. Write five questions you might ask him about the subject. Include possible responses.
6. **Expository Writing** Do you think any of the Chinese philosophies studied in this section are reflected in our society today? Write an essay explaining your answer.

Chinese Society		
Aristocrats	Farmers	Merchants