

# The power of china and the shang dynasty history essay



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As we know it today, China has been one of the most powerful countries in the world. Early China is much different from what we know to be the Republic of China. Before becoming one giant country, China was divided into many kingdoms settled along the Yellow and Yangtze rivers. With origins dating back well over five thousand years, historians have been able to uncover facts about the Chinese dynasties to as early as 1700 B. C. Artifacts such as animal bones, turtle shells, and bronze weapons with messages written on them are a few items that show existence of the people that lived there. These oracle bones are said to be the earliest form of written records, showing subsistence of an era to be known as the Shang Dynasty.

The Shang Dynasty, known to be the longest ran dynasty in the history of China, has been noted to have been ruled by at least 31 emperors. Each king, chosen based on hereditary, simultaneously acts as priests that serve as the connection between their people to the spirit world. As the religious leader the kings were responsible for making animal sacrifices and interpreting messages that were written on oracle bones prepared by divine followers. The writings on the oracle bones show evidence that the Chinese had a strong belief in supernatural forces. In fact, the meaning of the oracle bones was to communicate with the gods. After exposing the bones to fire the Chinese would inscribe questions and concerns on the matters of the world. During the Shang dynasty China was classified as an agricultural society. One major issue during the Shang dynasty was their association with war and combat. With the discovery of the new technology of horse-drawn carriages, it has been noted that these tactics were what aided their rise in power in northern China.

After many years of ruling the Shang dynasty was overthrown by a powerful young state later to be known as the Zhou dynasty. The Zhou embraced the political system of the previous dynasty, but made a few changes. The Zhou continued to practice the Shang's idea of dividing the kingdom into different regions in which king selected officials managed. As the Zhou's establishment began to expand began to create organizations that were responsible for the overlook of education, law, and even public works. Much like the Shang, the Zhou people believed in a close relationship between the king and the gods of heaven. To represent the overthrown of the Shang, the Zhou people created the idea of the mandate of heaven which would also be adopted by many succeeding dynasties. The mandate of heaven explains that the heavens give the power to kings to keep rule over society as long as he does it to please the gods and protect the interest of his people. But if the gods were not pleased in the way the king ruled, the mandate would be taken away from him. Thus resulting in his overthrowing and replacement by a new ruler that accepted heavens mandate. The idea of the mandate of heaven was closely associated with the reason of the Zhou's triumph over the Shang dynasty, and also becoming the structure of following Chinese tradition. The decline of the Zhou dynasty started to become evident around the sixth century. As the power of the central government began to weaken, conflicts between different principalities began to escalate. At the expense of the king, his governing official's power began to climb as they began to regulate the local economy. By creating government monopolies and imposing taxes on key resources such as salt and iron.

During the last couple centuries of the Zhou dynasty, the authority of its king started to become minimal. Several of the smaller areas of the Zhou kingdom began to divide and evolve into powerful states which created a potential threat to the then Zhou emperor. At first, the rivalries were calm but by the end of the fifth century the bitter jealousy sparked into civil war. This time period is what to be known as the Period of the Warring States. With new methods of warfare emerging such as the invention of iron weapons and crossbows along with introduction of foot soldiers and cavalry, the states feuded with each other over control of the empire with no regards to the authority of the Zhou court. With the advantage of a strong defensive position in the mountains, the state of Chin easily conquered their main rivals through invasion or tactful maneuvering. In 221 B. C. the China's first genuinely unified government was established. The reason of triumph of the Chin over its neighboring states has been heavily associated with the character of its fearless ruler, Shi Huang Ti. Ti strongly believed in unity and peace of the empire over the violence and chaos of the previous dynasties. In efforts to end the philosophical ideology of feudalism embraced by the Zhou, Ti adopted the ideas of legalism. Those who opposed Ti's idea of legalism were punished, even sometimes executed. Even books that contradicted the concept of legalism were burned. To fuel his efforts Ti began to strip the lords of their power, giving them no governing authority and also preventing them from having their own military force. Instead of having many different armies Ti brought the idea unifying these militaries to make one strong force. Many fundamental and political advancements were birthed under the legalistic theory, most of them survived throughout the Chin Empire served as standard for future dynasties. Very unlike the Zhou, <https://assignbuster.com/the-power-of-china-and-the-shang-dynasty-history-essay/>

the Chin's centralized government was divided into 3 levels of primary ministries: civil and military authorities and a censorate, whose purpose was to investigate the effectiveness of officials throughout the system. Under the central government were two levels of administration: provinces and counties. Also unlike the Zhou system, officials did not inherit their positions but are appointed by the court and subject to dismissal at the emperor will. The Chin dynasty's totalitarianism based government also consisted of a penal code that was strictly enforced. Punishments for wrongdoers were usually subject to fines or taken to prisons and forced to do convict labor. With the convict labor of about a half million prisoners the Chin's building program flourished. Many of China's historic landmarks were built during their rein such as the Great Wall of China which stretched more than 1, 500 miles, the Grand Canal which links the Yellow and Yangtze rivers, tombs and also 16 palaces. The Chin Empire quickly began to fall after the death of its emperor in 210 B. C.

After the disappearance of the Chin the idea absolute rule of Chinese society would be viewed as betrayal of the new humanistic principles. But on the other hand the Chin system, although somewhat extreme, was a successful answer to a large, complex society.