Name: _____

Date: _____

China's Early Dynasties

For more than 3600 years, until 1911, China was ruled by dynasties. A dynasty is a ruling family that passes control from one generation to the next. One dynasty lasted more than 800 years, while another lasted only fifteen.

The Mandate of Heaven

The ancient Chinese believed their ancestors in heaven had chosen their leaders. They called this the Mandate of Heaven. When rulers became weak, corrupt, or ineffective, people believed they had lost the Mandate of Heaven and no longer deserved to rule.

Yu the Great and the Xia Dynasty

Scholars long treated the Xia Dynasty (pronounced *she-ah*) as mythical, but modern archaeologists are finding evidence that the Yellow River civilization in north-central China may have evolved into the Xia. Children in China are told of Yu the Great, a legendary ruler who controlled devastating floods and brought prosperity to his people. While many details of Yu's story may be legendary, growing archaeological evidence suggests that some form of the Xia likely existed.

The Shang

The Shang Dynasty ruled from approximately 1766BCE to 1046BCE and was the first dynasty to leave written records. Shang rulers expanded their kingdom from the Yellow River Valley to include much of northeast China. The Chinese developed an early form of writing that can still be recognized in many modern Chinese characters.

The Zhou

The Zhou (pronounced *joe*) overthrew the Shang and ruled China from 1046BCE to 256BCE. The Zhou gained power partly through their ability to forge stronger iron weapons. As their kingdom grew, Zhou rulers could no longer govern every village directly. To solve this problem, they created a feudal system.

Zhou rulers appointed nobles to govern small kingdoms. Most people looked to them for protection, justice, and leadership. Families paid taxes and, in return, expected their rulers to keep the peace and defend their communities. The nobles remained loyal to the Zhou rulers, and the people to their local nobles.

The Age of Warring States

The feudal system worked well for centuries, but local nobles gradually became more powerful than the Zhou rulers. The change was slow at first, but the authority of the Zhou court weakened over time. Rival kingdoms fought bloody wars for generations, leaving many people willing to follow anyone who could restore peace and stability.

During this period, Confucius searched for ways to restore order and good government. His teachings would later shape Chinese civilization for more than two thousand years, but not before a ruthless warlord conquered his rivals and united China under a government built on fear, obedience, and harsh punishments.

Timeline of the Early Dynasties

Xia (c. 2200 - 1766BCE) – Chinese storytellers have spoken of a Xia Dynasty for thousands of years. Many scholars believed the stories were little more than legend, but recent archaeological discoveries suggest that some of those ancient tales may have been based on real events.

Shang (1766 - 1046BCE) -- Craftworkers of the Shang era produced some of the most sophisticated bronze objects in the ancient world. Shang royal tombs contained weapons, chariots, and even human sacrifices intended to serve rulers in the afterlife.

Zhou (1046 - 256BCE) -- The Zhou came from northwestern China and conquered the Shang from the west. During their long rule, Chinese civilization expanded far beyond the Yellow River Valley.

Age of Warring States (c. 481–221BCE) — Many Chinese believed the Zhou had lost the Mandate of Heaven as rival kingdoms fought for power. Because the Zhou rulers still existed, this period overlaps the final centuries of the Zhou Dynasty.

©Mike Dowling. All Rights Reserved.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Fill in the Blanks

China was ruled by ruling f____li__s called d__n__s__i__s, that passed power from one g__n__r__ti__n to the next. The ancient Chinese believed their rulers governed through the M__n__a__e of H__av__n. If a ruler became weak, c__r__u__t, or i__e__f__c__i__e, people believed he had lost the right to rule. Chinese tradition describes the X__a Dynasty and the legendary Y__ the G__e__t, who was said to have controlled f__oo__s along the Yellow River. Although many scholars once considered the Xia to be m__t__i__al, archaeological discoveries suggest the Xia likely existed. The S__a__g was the first Chinese d__n__s__y to leave w__i__t__n records. During S__a__g rule, the Chinese developed an early form of w__i___i__g that can still be partially r__c__g__i__ed today. The Zhou overthrew the Shang and created a f__u__al system. Over time, local n__b__es became more p__w__r__ul than the Zhou rulers, and rival kingdoms fought wars for generations. During this period, C__n__u__ius searched for ways to restore o__d__r and good g__v__r__m__nt. Confucius' t__a__h__n__s later shaped Chinese civilization, but first a ruthless w__r__o__d united China under a government built on fear, o__e__i__n__e, and harsh p__n__s__m__n__s.

Timeline

*On the timeline below, mark the beginning and the ending dates of the Shang Dynasty and the Zhou Dynasty. Think of a creative way to show how the Zhou Dynasty faded into the Age of Warring States.

Answer in Complete Sentences

*1. If we shared the beliefs of the ancient Chinese, what might a modern leader do to lose the Mandate of Heaven?

*2. Explain role of the nobles in the Zhou Dynasty before the Age of Warring States

*A higher order learning question. Any reasonable answer will be accepted.

©Mike Dowling. All Rights Reserved.