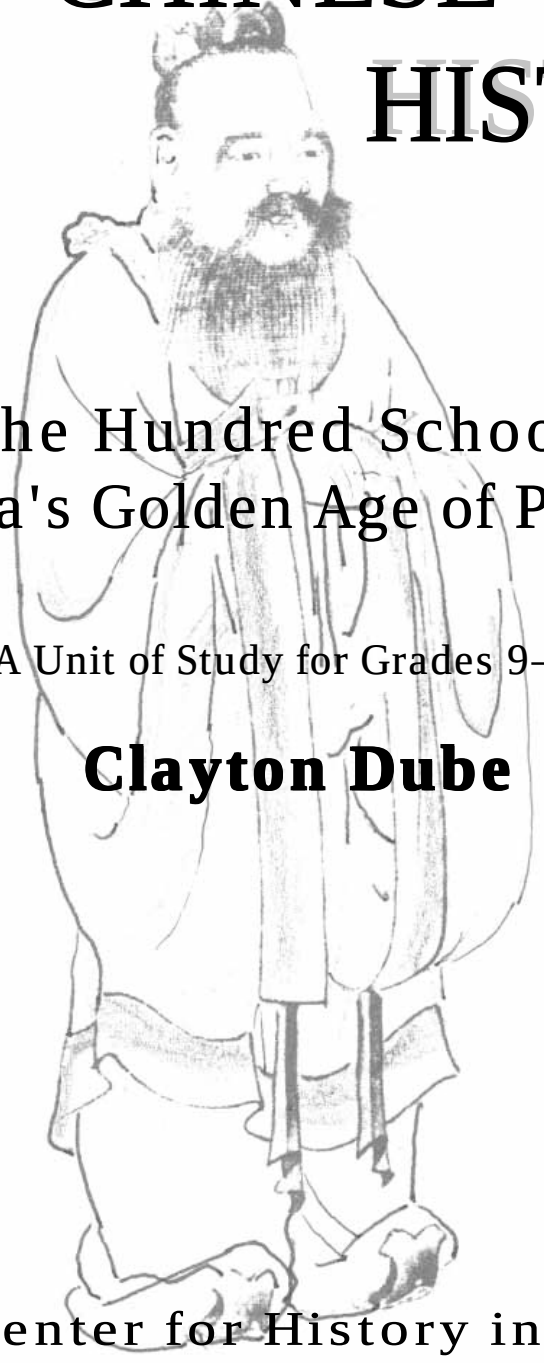
EARLY CHINESE HISTORY



The Hundred Schools Period
China's Golden Age of Philosophy

A Unit of Study for Grades 9–12

Clayton Dube

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COVER ILLUSTRATION: Traditional portrait of Confucius by an unidentified artist. Reproduced as published in Charles O. Hucker, *China's Imperial Past* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975) with the kind permission of the copyright owner, Stanford University Press.

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Acknowledgments

Clayton Dube was a Ph.D. student in Chinese history when he authored this unit. He has taught at Berea College and now serves as Associate Editor of *Modern China* and as Outreach Coordinator for the USC-UCLA Joint Center for East Asian Studies.

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TEACHER'S BACKGROUND

I. UNIT OVERVIEW

In the late Zhou (Chou) period (roughly sixth–third centuries B.C.E.), the area we call China was fragmented into many virtually independent states which were engaged in bitter and often violent competition. It was a time of enormous economic, social, political, and intellectual change. This unit focuses on the philosophical battles of the era, a period often called "the Golden Age of Chinese Philosophy," when Chinese philosophers sought to account for the chaos of the age and to articulate comprehensive plans to restore order. Not until the twentieth century would such a range of ideas again be as widely discussed in China. To emphasize the diversity of ideas put forward, the Chinese call this era the "Hundred Schools" period.

In this unit students examine the four most influential of these philosophical traditions: Confucianism, Mohism, Daoism (Taoism), and Legalism. Confucianism, stressing human relationships, was the official imperial doctrine for most of China's imperial age (over two-thousand years of successive dynasties). Mohism stressed public spirited-pragmatism, an ideal which was periodically revived. Daoism allowed for both totalitarianism and extreme individualism. Legalism provided the intellectual basis for the unification of China and for the centralization of all authority.

In five lessons, students will compare the ideas of these schools and explore how such ideas were conditioned by and, in turn, impacted society, economy, government, and culture. In so doing, they will exercise their critical reading skills as well as synthetic, group, and communication skills.

II. UNIT CONTEXT

This unit provides an excellent opportunity for students to wrestle with significant issues: 1) the relationship between economic, social, and political circumstances and thought, 2) the universality of concerns and solutions, and 3) construction and evolution of philosophical doctrines. To gain maximum benefit from this unit, student should have studied the basic geographical, economic, social, and political realities of late Zhou China. One or two class sessions prior to this unit should be sufficient to: 1) familiarize students with China's location relative to other countries in Asia and with the political fragmentation of China during the late Zhou era, 2) explain how technical improvements (e.g. cast-iron implements, water control) led to expanded agricultural production, which fostered the rise of towns and commerce, leading to social change, 3) review the links between population growth, expanded agricultural production, and enhanced military power, and 4) discuss how the lack of central control allowed for competition among thinkers.

Depending on when other regions are studied, students should be asked to compare the ideas of the schools examined in this unit with those present in ancient India, the Near East,

Greece, and Rome. Further, students should be asked to speculate on the impact of these philosophies on China's subsequent experiences and doctrines.

This unit should be followed by one focusing on the unification of China under the Legalist Qin dynasty in 221 B.C.E. and the establishment of China's basic imperial system under the Han dynasty (202 B.C.E.–C.E. 220).

III. Correlation to National Standards

Early Chinese History: The Hundred Schools Period provides teaching materials that address *National Standards for History, Basic Edition* (National Center for History in the Schools, 1996), **Era 3**, "Classical Traditions, Major Religions, and Giant Empires." Lessons specifically address **Standard 3C** calling upon students to explain how China became unified under the early imperial dynasties, to examine the concept of the "Mandate of Heaven," and to compare and contrast the major philosophical schools of thought during China's "golden age."

IV. Unit Objectives

- To examine the relationship between economic, social, political, and intellectual trends in China's late Zhou period (roughly 550–221 B.C.E.)

- To critically read primary sources and identity the principal tenets of four of China's most influential schools of thought: Confucianism, Mohism, Daoism (Taoism), and Legalism.

- To compare these schools' beliefs in the areas of inherent human nature, the source of social and political chaos, the means of establishing social order, the ideal person, and the ideal state.

- To speculate on the impact of these schools of thought on later Chinese history.

LESSON ONE
THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A. OBJECTIVES

- To define the context within which the "Hundred Schools" debate took place.
- To point out the connection between thought and economic, social, and political concerns.
- To express and examine opinions on the central questions of "nature" vs. "nurture" and the connection between assumptions about human nature and social, political, and economic policy.

B. LESSON ACTIVITIES

1. Read the **Dramatic Moment** aloud to the class.

2. Ask students to speculate on the place and time being described. Many may be struck on how contemporary the account seems.

   Discussion Questions

   a. Do humans share a common inherent nature?

   b. If they do, what is this nature? Do people start out good? Evil? Something in-between? What is the relative tendency of people to do good or bad?

   c. Given your ideas about human nature, what should a ruler do to bring about order?

3. Pass out **Student Handout 1**, "Chronology of Chinese History" which will help students situate the late Zhou period in history and **Student Handout 2**, "Background of the Late Zhou Period" which presents the key economic, social, and political conditions of the period. Discuss the **Dramatic Moment** within the late Zhou period context.

4. Inform students that for the next few days they will be studying the ideas developed in the late Zhou dynasty; ideas that helped shape the next two thousand years of Chinese history, ideas that influenced thinkers in neighboring countries, and ideas that continue to be debated in China and elsewhere.

Chronology of Chinese History

2205?–1706? B.C.E.	Xia (Hsia) dynasty (only partially verified)
1766?–1122? B.C.E.	Shang (Shang) dynasty
1122?–256 B.C.E.	Zhou (Chou) dynasty
	Western Zhou (1122-771)
	Eastern Zhou (770-256)
	Spring and Autumn Period (722-481)
	Warring States Period (403-321)
221–207 B.C.E.	Qin (Ch'in) dynasty
202 B.C.E.–220 C.E.	Han (Han) dynasty
220 - 589	Six Dynasties Period (unity, prolonged disunity, and then unity again)
589–618	Sui (Sui) dynasty
618–907	Tang (T'ang) dynasty
907–960	Five Dynasties Period (a period of disunity)
960–1279	Song (Sung) dynasty
1279–1368	Yuan (Yüan, Mongol) dynasty
1368–1644	Ming (Ming) dynasty
1644–1912	Qing (Ch'ing, Manchu) dynasty
1912–1949	Republic of China (The Taiwan government continues to use this name.)
1949–	People's Republic of China

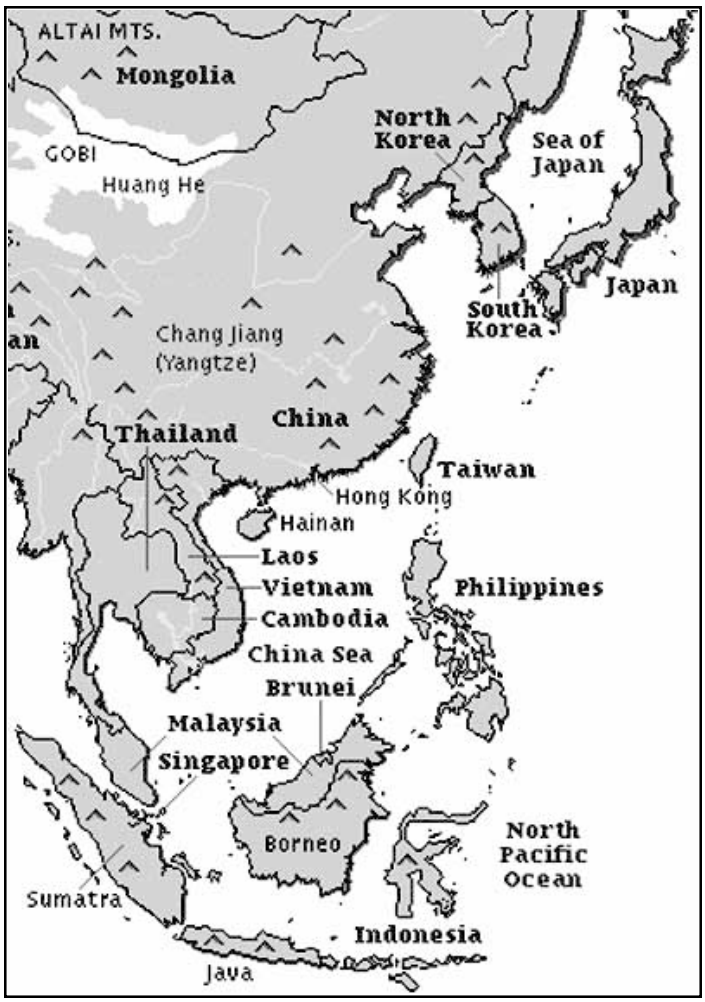
Names of dynasties are given in *pinyin* romanization (the form used in the People's Republic, in most North American periodicals, and in many history texts). Wade-Giles romanization (the standard most frequently used prior to the 1980s) follows in parenthesis.

The Late Zhou Period

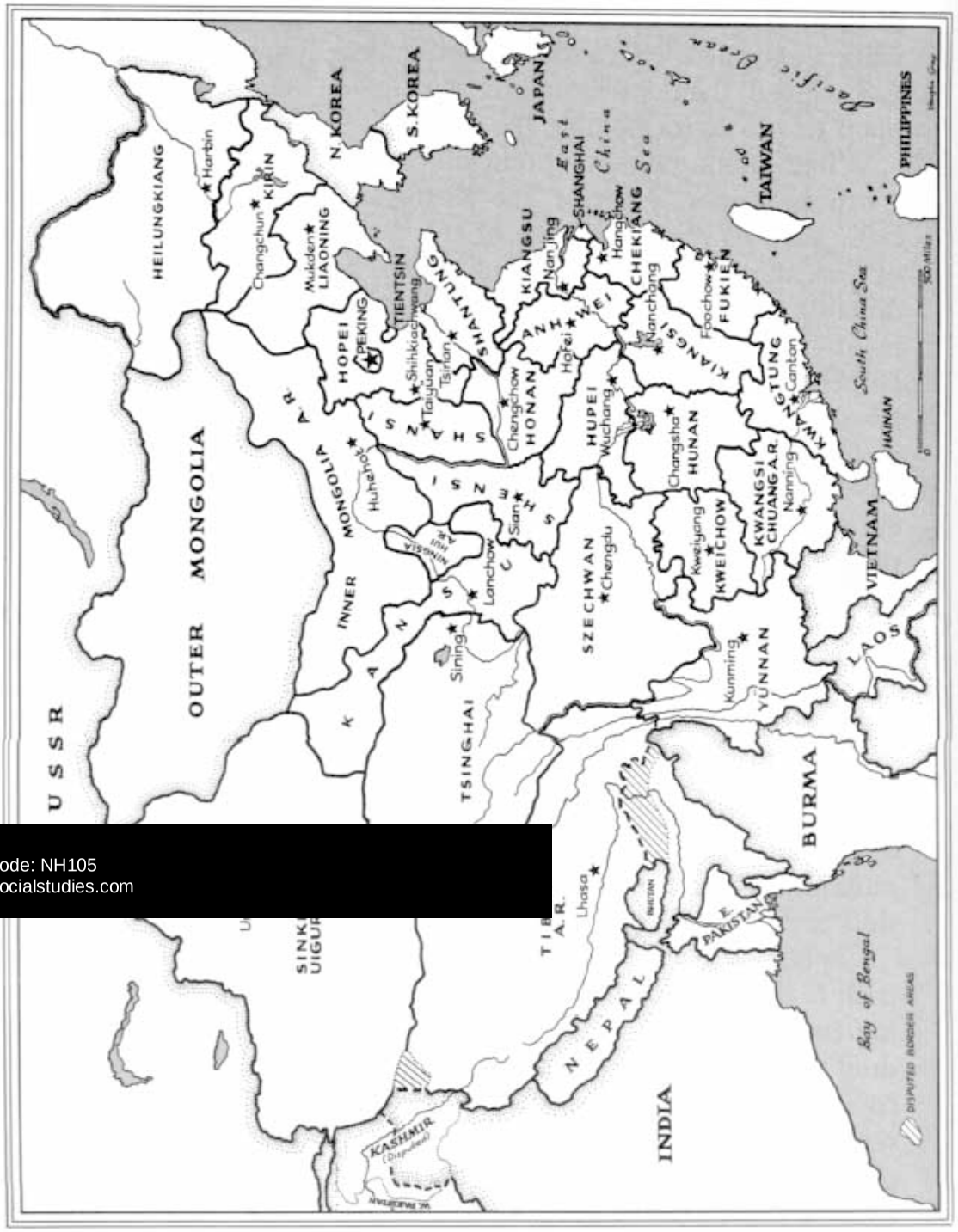
Geography

Locate China on a world map and identify its neighbors. Confucianism spread to Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. Buddhism later came to China from India (it was fairly well established by the first century C.E.) Judaism, Christianity, and Islam later followed. The Roman and Han empires were neighbors and their mercenary armies once met in battle in Central Asia.

The Zhou (Chou) dynasty China was much smaller than later Chinese empires or the present day People's Republic of China. Note, too, that people tended to think first in terms of their family and village, and only later in terms of the feudal state or empire in which they lived. The number of states decreased to just a handful through war and annexation during the late Zhou dynasty.

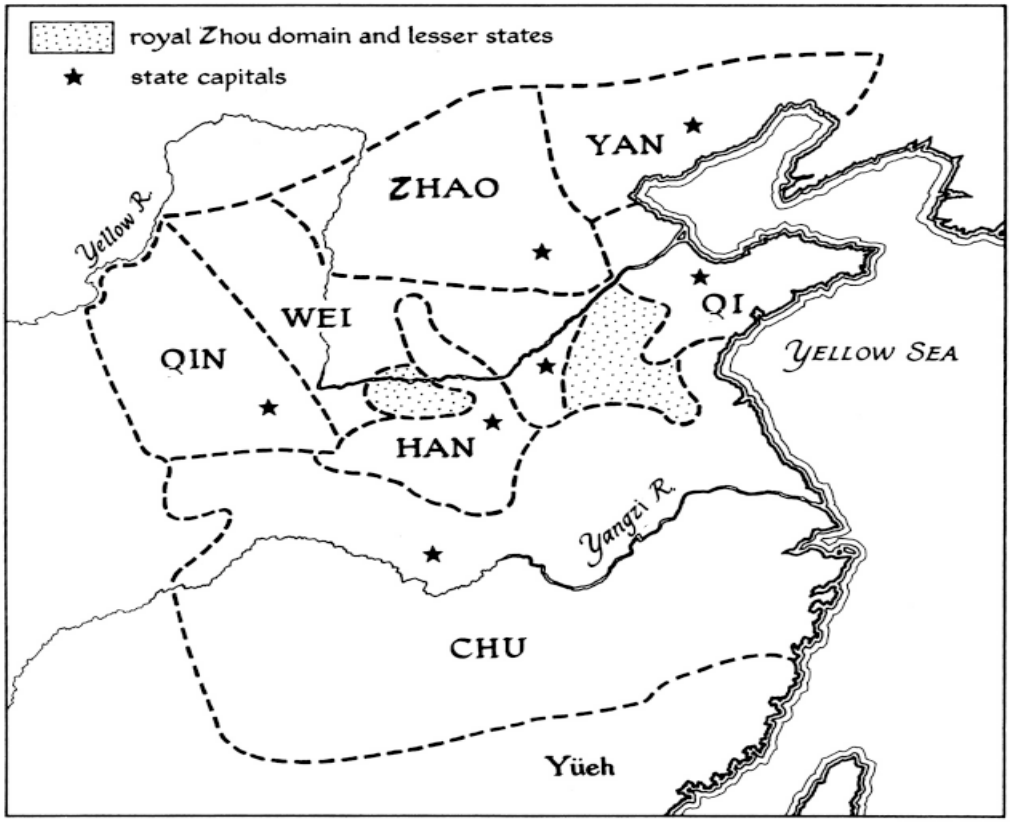


China's Neighbors

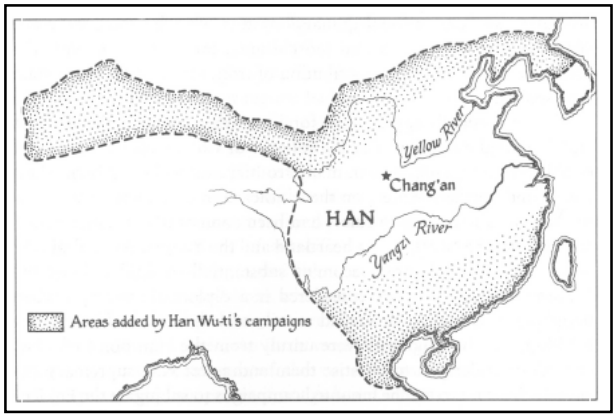


The People's Republic of China, ca. 1970.

Source: Deirdre and Neale Hunter, eds. *We the Chinese: Voices from China* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972).



The Warring States, c. 300 B.C.E.



The Han Empire, c. 100 B.C.E.

The Three Kingdoms, c. 230 C.E.

Maps reprinted from *China's Imperial Past,* by Charles O. Hucker, with the permission of the publishers, Stanford University Press.

Society

Then, as now, the overwhelming mass of Chinese people were farmers. The elite were concentrated in the capitals of the states. Their control over vast tracts of land and large numbers of families allowed an elegant lifestyle. Gradually, however, there was a shift away from feudal control over land to private ownership. It was this elite which could afford the leisure to become literate and involved in the arts. Bronze-work achieved a high aesthetic standard in the Shang dynasty and technique, if not artistry, improved during the Zhou. Of course, only the richest strata of Zhou society could use bronzeware and bury it with their leaders and family members.

Economy

Agriculture was the base of the Chinese economy until late into the twentieth century. In the late Zhou dynasty there was an agricultural revolution. This stemmed from the use of iron implements, the ox-drawn plow, and fairly large-scale water projects. These projects included canals to control water and to facilitate the transport of tax grain. Expanded production provided for commercial growth. Market towns sprang up and some merchants became fantastically wealthy. This trade was aided by the widespread use of copper coinage.

Use of the plow in China.
Paul Halsall, Brooklyn College
http://acc6.its.brooklyn.cuny.edu/
~phalsall/images/plow1.gif

Politics

The Shang dynasty argued its right to rule came from its close relationship through their deceased ancestors to an indifferent and all-powerful heaven. The Zhou dynasty, in contrast, justified its rule not through direct connection to heaven, but on having been so virtuous that it received heaven's mandate to govern. During the first three centuries of the Zhou era, the Zhou state was powerful enough to keep the other states in line. By the time the capital was moved east, however, Zhou domination was in decline, and by the sixth century B.C.E effective Zhou control had ceased to exist, though the fiction of Zhou supremacy was maintained until the third century B.C.E.

The border states were on the rise. Less densely populated, in greater contact with non-Chinese peoples, and more open to administrative innovation, these states, led first by the state of Qi (Ch'i), moved ahead. Some established government monopolies in key commodities and some successfully centralized tax collection and law enforcement.

War is, of course, the ultimate political act and war technology changed dramatically from the early to the late Zhou era. In the early period war was waged by elite soldiers with expensive bronze weapons riding in chariots. Battle was governed by strict rules of propriety (e.g. one could not attack an enemy who had been thrown from his chariot). Cheaper and stronger cast iron weapons in the later period allowed for huge infantry-based armies (tens of thousands soldiers strong). At the same time cavalries were assembled and crossbows were introduced.

Traditional woodblock print of a two-man crossbow team. From the late Ming encyclopedia.