

2.1 Early Dynasties

TECHTREK
myNGconnect.com For photos
of ancient Chinese artifacts6.04.D Identify major human geographic features; 6.12.A Identify governments with rule by one;
6.17.A Identify how culture traits spread; 6.21.B Analyze by comparing, contrasting, drawing inferences**Main Idea** Powerful families ruled and shaped ancient China for about 2,000 years.

In the 2100s B.C., farming settlements developed along the Huang He in eastern China. Over time, some of these settlements grew into cities and marked the beginning of an early civilization. Because Chinese culture developed from this early society, China is said to have the world's longest continuous civilization.

Shang and Zhou Dynasties

Around 1766 B.C., kings from the **Shang** family took over some of the cities along the Huang He. The Shang established a **dynasty**, a series of rulers from the same family. Eventually, the Shang ruled much of the area along the North China Plain.

Shang society was largely agricultural, but the leaders also built large walled cities. The society was structured, with nobles at the top and peasants at the bottom. The Shang used horse-drawn chariots to defend themselves against invaders. They also developed a system of writing, which helped unify their lands.

The **Zhou** (joh) people often fought with the Shang. Around 1050 B.C., they defeated the Shang and established their

own dynasty. Throughout much of their long rule—longer than any other dynasty in Chinese history—the Zhou rulers waged war against invaders from the north and west. The Zhou also fought among themselves. Zhou kings had placed lords in charge of different parts of the region. These lords battled each other to acquire more land. The continual warfare led to great disorder in Chinese society.

Chinese rulers believed that the length of their dynasty was determined by the gods worshiped in ancient China. The pattern in the rise and fall of dynasties came to be known as the **dynastic cycle**, which is shown on the next page.

The Qin Dynasty

The **Qin** (chihn) Dynasty gained control of China in 221 B.C. *China* is thought to come from the name of this dynasty. Qin ruler **Shi Huangdi** (shee hwahng dee) strengthened the central government and expanded the lands under his control. He brought these lands together to form an **empire**, a group of states ruled by a single strong ruler, and became China's first emperor. Shi Huangdi unified his empire by building a system of roads and standardizing the Chinese currency.



Shi Huangdi also began construction on the **Great Wall of China** to protect against invaders from the north. Thousands were forced to labor on the huge project. Later rulers continued to expand the wall until it stretched about 4,500 miles.

Qin rule ended four years after Shi Huangdi's death in 210 B.C. Archaeologists discovered thousands of **terra cotta**, or baked clay, warriors buried near his tomb in 1974. Experts believe these life-sized statues were created to guard his tomb.

The Han Dynasty

The **Han** Dynasty came to power in China in 206 B.C. and lasted until A.D. 220. Han leaders expanded the empire and

established a strong central government. During this time, China began to trade with Europe and Central Asia along routes known as the **Silk Roads**. The goods and ideas traded helped create a prosperous civilization and an advanced culture in China. Many Chinese still call themselves "the people of the Han." You will learn more about the Silk Roads in Section 2.3.

Before You Move On

Monitor Comprehension How were the ancient Chinese dynasties alike, and how did they differ?

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

READING LAB

1. **Make Inferences** The Qin Dynasty ended shortly after the death of Shi Huangdi. What