

READING ESSENTIALS AND STUDY GUIDE 7-2

Life in Ancient China *For use with pages 232–239*

Key Terms

- social class:** includes people who share a similar position in society (page 233)
- filial piety:** children must respect their parents and older relatives (page 234)
- Confucianism:** philosophy that taught that all men, regardless of their social class, should be allowed to join the government if they can do the work (page 236)
- Daoism:** philosophy that promotes a peaceful society and giving up worldly desires (page 238)
- Legalism:** philosophy that taught that people need a "School of Law" and harsh punishments to make them do their duty (page 239)

Drawing From Experience

What do you do when your friends are fighting with each other? If you are playing a game, you can refer to the rules. If something else is causing a problem between your friends, you try another idea to solve it. Philosophers, or thinkers, have come up with many ideas for solving problems between people.

In the previous section, you learned about the Shang and Zhou dynasties. In this section, you will learn what everyday life was like during the Zhou dynasty. You will also learn about three Chinese philosophies for solving problems between people. These philosophies are Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism.

Organizing Your Thoughts

The early Chinese thought of three ways to build peace and a good way of living. They were Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism.

To answer the questions below, mark **C** for Confucianism, **D** for Daoism, and **L** for Legalism. Use details from the text to help you fill in the blanks.

1. Which one said that anyone could be in government if they could do the work? _____
2. Which one thought that duty was important?

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3. Which one thought that laws were important? _____
4. Which one began in the 500s B.C.? _____
5. Which one began in 200 B.C.? _____
6. Which one thought that nature was important?

7. Which one did the aristocrats like? _____
8. Which two said that you must treat other people well? _____

Life in Ancient China (page 233)

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

A social class includes people who have a similar position in society. Early China had three main social classes:

- Landowning aristocrats
- Peasant farmers
- Merchants

Classes in Chinese Society China's aristocratic families owned estates. They lived in large houses. The houses had tile roofs, courtyards, and gardens. Fine furniture and silk hangings filled their rooms. Walls went around their houses to keep out bandits.

In the beginning, the estates were large. But they did not stay large. That is because each aristocrat divided his land among his sons. For example, if a man had four sons, each of them would get one-fourth of the land. As time went on, each estate got smaller and smaller.

Aristocrats did not farm their own land. Instead, farmers share-cropped it. This means that the farmers planted all of the crop but did not keep it all. In the north, the crop was a grain like wheat or millet. In the south, farmers grew rice.

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The farmers harvested all of the crop, too. But the farmers did not keep all of the crop. They gave most of it to the aristocrats as rent for the land. The aristocrats became very rich.

Nine out of ten Chinese were farmers. They lived in simple houses inside village walls. Most farmers owned a small piece of land where they grew food for their family. The farmers paid taxes. They also had to work one month of each year on government projects like building roads. Farmers also served as soldiers.

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

Many merchants were very rich, but landowners and farmers still looked down on them. Chinese leaders thought that government officials should not think about money. So 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. Farming in ancient China required many workers. So people had big families. Everyone in the family—even the young children—worked in the fields. Older sons raised their own crops. They shared them with their parents. A typical family ate fish, turnips, beans, wheat and rice, and millet.

Chinese families also took care of people in need—the aged, the young, and the sick.

Chinese families practiced **filial piety**. This means that children had to respect their parents and older relatives. If the head of the family said “Do this,” then everyone had to do it. The head of the family was the oldest male, usually the father. However, a son could take on this role. Then even his mother had to obey him!

Men and women had very different roles in early China. Men were respected because they grew the crops. They went to school. They ran the government. They

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fought wars. The Chinese considered these jobs more important than the work that women did. Most women raised children and ran the house.

Chinese women could not hold government posts. However, royal women did affect government decisions. Women in the royal family often talked the men into doing things the way that the women wanted.

9. Why did the amount of land owned by each aristocrat decrease over time?
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Chinese Thinkers *(page 235)*

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

The Zhou kingdom grew weak in the 500s B.C. Violence became common. During the Period of the Warring States, whole villages of men, women, and children were beheaded. Many Chinese looked for a way to restore peace and order.

Chinese thinkers developed three major ideas about making a peaceful society. These theories are Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism.

Who Was Confucius? Confucius was born in 551 B.C. He was ancient China's first great thinker and teacher. Confucius wanted to end the problems in China. He tried to bring peace to society.

Confucius believed that people needed a sense of duty. Duty meant that people should not think of themselves first. He said that people must put the needs of family and community first.

Confucius said that each person owed a duty to another person. Parents owed their children love. Children owed their parents honor. Husbands owed their wives

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support. Wives owed their husbands obedience. People also had a duty to try to improve their community.

Most of all, the rulers had to set good examples. If a king ruled well, his subjects would respect him. Society would be strong and good.

Confucius believed that society would be fine if each person did his or her duty.

He also urged people to be good and to seek knowledge. He said:

“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*

Confucius asked people to treat each other well. He told people to “measure the feelings of others by one’s own,” for “within the four seas all men are brothers.” This means that everyone has the same basic feelings and needs. We should think about what we do to others. If we would not like it being done to us, then we should not do it to anyone else. Confucius thought that there would be peace if people treated each other this way.

Confucius traveled through China teaching his ideas. These ideas became **Confucianism**. Confucius said that all men—not just aristocrats—should be part of the government. At that time, the government officials were all aristocrats. They did not like his ideas!

Other people liked his ideas, though. Over time, Confucius won many followers. They honored him as a great teacher. They wrote down his sayings and carried his message. Confucius died in 479 B.C., but his sayings are still taught today.

What is Daoism? **Daoism** is another Chinese philosophy that promotes a peaceful society. Daoism is also called Taoism. It is based on the Dao, or the “force that guides all

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things." Tradition says that Laozi, or the Old Master, first taught Daoism. No one knows if Laozi was a real person, but tradition says that he lived around the same time as Confucius. Daoism became popular between 500 B.C. and 300 B.C.

The ideas of Daoism are written in *Dao De Jing*. Daoists believed that people should stop wanting worldly things like money or fame. Instead, people should follow nature and the Dao.

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, *Dao De Jing*

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

What Is Legalism? A third group of thinkers thought that strong laws were the only thing that would bring peace. People called their thinking **Legalism**. This means the "School of Law."

A scholar named Hanfeizi developed legalism during the 200s B.C. Confucius and Laozi thought that people were basically good. Hanfeizi did not. Hanfeizi taught that humans were naturally evil. He thought that they needed laws and punishments to make them do their duty. His followers believed that only a strong ruler could keep peace.

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Many aristocrats liked Legalism. One reason was that Legalism said that rulers did not have to be good to the lower classes. Legalism let the aristocrats pass laws to control the farmers.

10. Why did Hanfeizi believe that people needed laws and punishments?
