The **Zhou dynasty** (c. 1046–256 BC; Chinese: 周朝; pinyin: Zhōu Cháo; Wade–Giles: Ch'ou¹ Ch'ao² [ts'ō tʂʰəʊ]) was a Chinese dynasty that followed the Shang dynasty and preceded the Qin dynasty. Although the Zhou dynasty lasted longer than any other dynasty in Chinese history, the actual political and military control of China by the dynasty, surnamed Ji (Chinese: 姬), lasted only until 771 BC, a period known as the Western Zhou.

This period of Chinese history produced what many consider the zenith of Chinese bronze-ware making. The dynasty also spans the period in which the written script evolved into its modern form with the use of an archaic clerical script that emerged during the late Warring States period.

### Contents

- **1 History**
  - 1.1 Foundation
  - 1.2 Western Zhou
  - 1.3 Eastern Zhou
- **2 Culture and society**
  - 2.1 Feudalism and the rise of Confucian bureaucracy
  - 2.2 Military
  - 2.3 Mandate of Heaven
  - 2.4 Philosophy
  - 2.5 Li
  - 2.6 Agriculture
  - 2.7 Art gallery
    - 2.7.1 Western Zhou
    - 2.7.2 Spring and Autumn period

### History
- Battle of Muye
  - c. 1046 BC

### Government
- Monarchy/Feudalism

### Capital
- Haojing
  - Luoyi

### Languages
- Old Chinese

### Religion
- Chinese folk religion, Hundred Schools of Thought

### Diagram

Population concentration and boundaries of the Western Zhou dynasty (1050–771 BC) in China
History

Foundation

According to Chinese mythology, the Zhou lineage began when a consort of the legendary Emperor Ku miraculously conceived Qi (lit. "the Abandoned One") after stepping into a divine footprint.[1][2] Qi was a culture hero credited with surviving three abandonments by his mother and with greatly improving Xia agriculture,[1] to the point where he was granted lordship over Tai and the ancestral name Ji by his own Xia king and a later posthumous name (Houji, "Lord of Millet") by the Shang king Tang. He even received sacrifice as a harvest god.

Qi's son Buzhu abandoned his position at court and either he or his son Ju abandoned agriculture entirely, living a nomadic life in the manner of their Rong and Di barbarian neighbors.[3] Ju's son Duke Liu,[4] however, led his people to prosperity by restoring agriculture and settling them at a place called Bin,[a] which his descendants ruled for generations. Old Duke Danfu later led the clan from Bin to Zhou, an area in the Wei River valley of modern-day Qishan County.

The duke passed over his two elder sons Taibo and Zhongyong to favor Jili, a warrior who conquered several Rong tribes as a vassal of the Shang kings Wu Yi and Wen Ding before being treacherously killed. Taibo and Zhongyong had supposedly already fled to the Yangtze delta, where they established the state of Wu among the tribes there. Jili's son King Wen bribed his way out of imprisonment and moved the Zhou capital to Feng (within present-day Xi'an). Around 1046 BC, King Wen's son King Wu and his ally Jiang Ziya led an army of 45,000 men and 300 chariots across the Yellow River and defeated King Zhou of Shang at the Battle of Muye, marking the beginning of the Zhou dynasty.[b] The Zhou, however are a later wave of the same or a more or less closely related group to the Shang.[c]
Western Zhou

King Wu maintained the old capital for ceremonial purposes but constructed a new one for his palace and administration nearby at Hao. Although Wu's early death left a young and inexperienced heir, the Duke of Zhou assisted his nephew King Cheng in consolidating royal power. He quelled rebellious Zhou princes, feudal rulers, and Shang partisans; countered Zhou's crisis of legitimacy by expounding the doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven while accommodating important Shang rituals at Chengzhou; and set up the fengjian system to maintain Zhou authority over its greatly expanded territory.

Over time, this decentralized system became strained as the familial relationships between the Zhou kings and the regional dynasties thinned over the generations. Peripheral territories developed local power and prestige on par with that of the Zhou. When King You demoted and exiled his Jiang queen in favor of the beautiful but common Bao Si, the disgraced queen's father the Marquis of Shen joined with Zeng and the Quanrong barbarians to sack Hao in 771 BC. With King You dead, a conclave of nobles met at Shen and declared the Marquis's grandson King Ping. The capital was moved eastward to Chengzhou, marking the end of the "Western Zhou" (西周, p Xī Zhōu) and the beginning of the "Eastern Zhou" (東周, p Dōng Zhōu).

Eastern Zhou

The Eastern Zhou was characterized by an accelerating collapse of royal authority, although the king's ritual importance allowed over five more centuries of rule. The Confucian chronicle of the early years of this process led to its title of the "Spring and Autumn" period. The partition of Jin in the mid-5th century BC initiated a second phase, the "Warring States". In 403 BC, the Zhou court recognized Han, Zhao, and Wei as fully independent states; in 344 BC, the first – Duke Hui of Wei – claimed the royal title of king for himself. A series of states rose to prominence before each falling in turn, but Zhou was a minor player in these conflicts.

The last Zhou king is traditionally taken to be Nan, who was killed when Qin captured the capital Chengzhou in 256 BC. A "King Hui" was declared, but his splinter state was fully removed by 249 BC. Qin's unification of China concluded in 221 BC with Qin Shihuang's annexation of Qi.

The Eastern Zhou, however, is also remembered as the golden age of Chinese philosophy: the Hundred Schools of Thought which flourished as rival lords patronized itinerant shi scholars is led by the example of Qi's Jixia Academy. The Nine Schools of Thought which came to dominate the others were Confucianism (as interpreted by Mencius and others), Legalism, Taoism, Mohism, the utopian communalist Agriculturalism, two strains of Diplomatists, the sophistic Logicians, Sun-tzu's Militarists, and the Naturalists. Although only the first three of these went on to receive imperial patronage in later dynasties, doctrines from each influenced the others and Chinese society in sometimes unusual ways. The Mohists, for instance, found little interest in their praise of meritocracy but much acceptance for their mastery of siege warfare; much later, however, their arguments against nepotism were used in...
favor of establishing the imperial examination system.

Culture and society

Feudalism and the rise of Confucian bureaucracy

Western writers often describe the Zhou period as "feudal" because the Zhou's fēngjiàn (封建) system invites comparison with medieval rule in Europe.

There were many similarities between the decentralized systems. When the dynasty was established, the conquered land was divided into hereditary fiefs (諸侯, zhūhóu) that eventually became powerful in their own right. In matters of inheritance, the Zhou dynasty recognized only patrilineal primogeniture as legal.\(^{[12]}\)[\(^{[13]}\]

According to Tao (1934: 17-31), "the Tsung-fa or descent line system has the following characteristics: patrilineal descent, patrilineal succession, patriarchate, sib-exogamy, and primogeniture"\(^{[14]}\)

The system, also called "extensive stratified patrilineage", was defined by the anthropologist Chang Kuang-chih as "characterized by the fact that the eldest son of each generation formed the main of line descent and political authority, whereas the younger brothers were moved out to establish new lineages of lesser authority. The farther removed, the lesser the political authority". K.E. Brashier writes in his book "Ancestral Memory in Early China" about the tsung-fa system of patrilineal primogeniture: "The greater lineage, if it has survived, is the direct succession from father to eldest son and is not defined via the collateral shifts of the lesser lineages. In discussions that demarcate between trunk and collateral lines, the former is called a zong and the latter a zu, whereas the whole lineage is dubbed the shi. [...] On one hand every son who is not the eldest and hence not heir to the lineage territory has the potential of becoming a progenitor and fostering a new trunk lineage (Ideally he would strike out to cultivate new lineage territory). [...] According to the Zou commentary, the son of heaven divided land among his feudal lords, his feudal lords divided land among their dependent families and so forth down the pecking order to the officers who had their dependent kin and the commoners who "each had his apportioned relations and all had their graded precedence"."\(^{[15]}\)

Ebrey defines the descent-line system as follows: "A great line (ta-tsung) is the line of eldest sons continuing indefinitely from a founding ancestor. A lesser line is the line of eldest sons going back no more than five generations. Great lines and lesser lines continually spin off new lesser lines, founded by younger sons".

This type of unilineal descent-group later became the model of the Korean family through the influence of Neo-Confucianism, as Zhu Xi and others advocated its re-establishment in China.\(^{[16]}\)

There were five peerage ranks below the royal ranks, in descending order with common English translations: gōng 公 "duke", hóu 侯 "marquis", bó 伯 "count", zǐ 子 "viscount", and nán 男 "baron".\(^{[17]}\)
At times, a vigorous duke would take power from his nobles and centralize the state. Centralization became more necessary as the states began to war among themselves and decentralization encouraged more war. If a duke took power from his nobles, the state would have to be administered bureaucratically by appointed officials.

Despite these similarities, there are a number of important differences from medieval Europe. One obvious difference is that the Zhou ruled from walled cities rather than castles. Another was China's distinct class system, which lacked an organized clergy but saw the Shang Zi-clan yeomen become masters of ritual and ceremony known as *Shi* (士). When a dukedom was centralized, these people would find employment as government officials or officers. These hereditary classes were similar to Western knights in status and breeding, but like Western clergy were expected to be something of a scholar instead of a warrior. Being appointed, they could move from one state to another. Some would travel from state to state peddling schemes of administrative or military reform. Those who could not find employment would often end up teaching young men who aspired to official status. The most famous of these was Confucius, who taught a system of mutual duty between superiors and inferiors. In contrast, the Legalists had no time for Confucian virtue and advocated a system of strict laws and harsh punishments. The wars of the Warring States were finally ended by the most legalist state of all, Qin. When the Qin dynasty fell and was replaced by the Han dynasty, many Chinese were relieved to return to the more humane virtues of Confucius.

**Military**

The early Western Zhou supported a strong army, split into two major units: "the Six Armies of the west" and "the Eight Armies of Chengzhou". The armies campaigned in the northern Loess Plateau, modern Ningxia and the Yellow River floodplain. The military prowess of Zhou peaked during the 19th year of King Zhao's reign, when the six armies were wiped out along with King Zhao on a campaign around the Han River. Early Zhou kings were true commanders-in-chief. They were in constant wars with barbarians on behalf of the fiefs called *guo*, which at that time meant "statelet" or "principality".

King Zhao was famous for repeated campaigns in the Yangtze areas and died in his last action. Later kings' campaigns were less effective. King Li led 14 armies against barbarians in the south, but failed to achieve any victory. King Xuan fought the Quanrong nomads in vain. King You was killed by the Quanrong when Haojing was sacked. Although chariots had been introduced to China during the Shang dynasty from Central Asia, the Zhou period saw the first major use of chariots in battle.\[18][19]

**Mandate of Heaven**

In the Chinese historical tradition, the Zhou defeated the Shang and oriented the Shang system of ancestor worship towards a universalized worship, away from the worship of Shangdi and to that of Tian or "heaven". They legitimized their rule by invoking the "Mandate of Heaven", the notion that the ruler (the "Son of Heaven") governed by divine right and that his dethronement would prove that he had lost the Mandate. Disasters and successful rebellions would thus show that the ruling family had lost this Mandate.

The doctrine explained and justified the demise of the Xia and Shang dynasties and, at the same time, supported the legitimacy of present and future rulers. Before conquering Shang, Zhou was a state in
Shaanxi. Gernet (1996:51) describes the Zhou state as a "city" which was in contact with the barbarian peoples of the western regions and more warlike than the Shang. The Zhou dynasty was founded by the Ji family and operated from four capitals throughout its history.\(^{[20]}\) Sharing the language and culture of the Shang, the early Zhou rulers, through conquest and colonization, established a large imperial territory wherein states as far as Shandong acknowledged Zhou rule and took part in elite culture. The spread of Zhou bronzes, though, was concurrent with the continued use of Shang-style pottery in the distant regions, and these states were the last to recede during the late Western war. The mandate of heaven was based on rules. The emperor was granted the right to rule by heaven.

**Philosophy**

During the Zhou dynasty, the origins of native Chinese philosophy developed, its initial stages beginning in the 6th century BC. The greatest Chinese philosophers, those who made the greatest impact on later generations of Chinese, were Confucius, founder of Confucianism, and Laozi, founder of Taoism. Other philosophers, theorists, and schools of thought in this era were Mozi, founder of Mohism; Mencius, a famous Confucian who expanded upon Confucius' legacy; Shang Yang and Han Fei, responsible for the development of ancient Chinese Legalism (the core philosophy of the Qin dynasty); and Xun Zi, who was arguably the center of ancient Chinese intellectual life during his time, even more so than iconic intellectual figures such as Mencius.\(^{[21]}\)

**Li**

Established during the Western period, the *Li* traditional Chinese: 禮; simplified Chinese: 礼; pinyin: lǐ) ritual system encoded an understanding of manners as an expression of the social hierarchy, ethics, and regulation concerning material life; the corresponding social practices became idealized within Confucian ideology.

The system was canonized in the *Book of Rites, Zhouli*, and *Yili* compendiums of the Han dynasty (206 BC–220 AD), thus becoming the heart of the Chinese imperial ideology. While the system was initially a respected body of concrete regulations, the fragmentation of the Western Zhou period led the ritual to drift towards moralization and formalization in regard to:

- The five orders of Chinese nobility.
- Ancestral temples (size, legitimate number of pavilions)
- Ceremonial regulations (number of ritual vessels, musical instruments, people in the dancing troupe)

**Agriculture**
Agriculture in the Zhou dynasty was very intensive and, in many cases, directed by the government. All farming lands were owned by nobles, who then gave their land to their serfs, a situation similar to European feudalism. For example, a piece of land was divided into nine squares in the well-field system, with the grain from the middle square taken by the government and that of surrounding squares kept by individual farmers. This way, the government was able to store surplus food and distribute it in times of famine or bad harvest. Some important manufacturing sectors during this period included bronze smelting, which was integral to making weapons and farming tools. Again, these industries were dominated by the nobility who directed the production of such materials.

China's first projects of hydraulic engineering were initiated during the Zhou dynasty, ultimately as a means to aid agricultural irrigation. The chancellor of Wei, Sunshu Ao, who served King Zhuang of Chu, dammed a river to create an enormous irrigation reservoir in modern-day northern Anhui province. For this, Sunshu is credited as China's first hydraulic engineer. The later Wei statesman Ximen Bao, who served Marquis Wen of Wei (445-396 BC), was the first hydraulic engineer of China to have created a large irrigation canal system. As the main focus of his grandiose project, his canal work eventually diverted the waters of the entire Zhang River to a spot further up the Yellow River.

**Art gallery**

**Western Zhou**

Defang ritual bronze vessel  
Dake bronze ritual vessel  
You bronze ritual vessel  
Qizhong Hu bronze vessel
Bronze mirror holder
c. 1000 BC (Hainan Provincial Museum)

Spring and Autumn period

- Dou vessel with a hunting scene
- A bo bell of the Duke of Qin
- Pu vessel with dragon designs
- Bronze ding vessel
- Bronze musical bell
- Bronze vessels (rightmost from Western Zhou)
- A square bronze hu vessel
- Bronze bird-shaped wine server
Kings

The rulers of the Zhou dynasty were titled Wang (王) like the Shang rulers before them. The position is normally translated into English as "king". In addition to these rulers, King Wu's immediate ancestors – Danfu, Jili, and Wen – are also referred to as "Kings of Zhou", despite having been nominal vassals of the Shang kings.

NB: Dates in Chinese history before the first year of the Gonghe Regency in 841 BC are contentious and vary by source. Those below are those published by Xia–Shang–Zhou Chronology Project and Edward L. Shaughnessy's *The Absolute Chronology of the Western Zhou Dynasty*. 
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal name</th>
<th>Posthumous name</th>
<th>Reign period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>夔 Fa</td>
<td>周武王</td>
<td>King Wu of Zhou 1046–1043 BC 1045–1043 BC</td>
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<tr>
<td>諡 Song</td>
<td>周成王</td>
<td>King Cheng of Zhou 1042–1021 BC 1042/1035–1006 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>釨 Zhao</td>
<td>周康王</td>
<td>King Kang of Zhou 1020–996 BC 1005/1003–978 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>瑕 Xia</td>
<td>周昭王</td>
<td>King Zhao of Zhou 995–977 BC 977/975–957 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>滿 Man</td>
<td>周穆王</td>
<td>King Mu of Zhou 976–922 BC 956–918 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>繼屄 Yihu</td>
<td>周共王/周彡王</td>
<td>King Gong of Zhou 922–900 BC 917/915–900 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>燚 Jian</td>
<td>周懿王</td>
<td>King Yi of Zhou 899–892 BC 899/897–873 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>辟方 Pifang</td>
<td>周孝王</td>
<td>King Xiao of Zhou 891–886 BC 872–866 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>梵 Xie</td>
<td>周夷王</td>
<td>King Yi of Zhou 885–878 BC 865–858 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>胡 Hu</td>
<td>周厲王/周剌王</td>
<td>King Li of Zhou 877–841 BC 857/853–842/828 BC</td>
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<td>共和 Gonghe Regency 841–828 BC</td>
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<td>靜 Jing 927–782 BC</td>
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<td>宮湜 Gongsheng 971–716 BC</td>
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**End of Western Zhou / Beginning of Eastern Zhou**

| 宜臼 Yijiu | 周平王  | King Ping of Zhou 770–720 BC |
| 林 Lin     | 周桓王  | King Huan of Zhou 719–697 BC |
| 佗 Tuo     | 周莊王  | King Zhuang of Zhou 696–682 BC |
| 胡齊 Huqi  | 周釐王  | King Xi of Zhou 681–677 BC   |
| 闕 Lang    | 周惠王  | King Hui of Zhou 676–652 BC  |
| 鄭 Zheng   | 周襄王  | King Xiang of Zhou 651–619 BC |
| 壬臣 Renchen | 周慎王      | King Qing of Zhou 618–613 BC |
| 班 Ban     | 周匡王  | King Kuang of Zhou 612–607 BC |
| 瑜 Yu      | 周定王  | King Ding of Zhou 606–586 BC |
| 夷 Yi      | 周簡王  | King Jian of Zhou 585–572 BC |
Nobles of the Ji family proclaimed Duke Hui of Eastern Zhou as King Nan's successor after their capital, Chengzhou, fell to Qin forces in 256 BC. Ji Zhao, a son of King Nan, led a resistance against Qin for five years. The dukedom fell in 249 BC. The remaining Ji family ruled Yan and Wei until 209 BC.

**Zhou in astronomy**

Zhou is represented by two stars, Eta Capricorni (周一 Zhōu yī, "the First Star of Zhou") and 21 Capricorni (周二 Zhōu èr, "the Second Star of Zhou"), in "Twelve States" asterism. Zhou is also represented by the star Beta Serpentis in asterism "Right Wall", Heavenly Market enclosure (see Chinese constellation).

**See also**

- Family tree of the Zhou dynasty
- Four occupations
- Historical capitals of China
- Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng

**Notes**
a. The exact location of Bin remains obscure, but it may have been close to Linfen on the Fen River in present-day Shanxi.\(^5[6]\)

b. Sima Qian was only able to establish historical dates after the time of the Gonghe Regency. Earlier dates, like that of 1046 BC for the Battle of Muye, are given in this article according to the official PRC Xia–Shang–Zhou Chronology Project, but they remain contentious. Various historians have offered dates for the battle ranging between 1122 and 1027 BC.

c. Bodman (1980), p. 41: "Moreover, Shang dynasty Chinese at least in its syntax and lexicon seems not to differ basically from that of the Zhou dynasty whose language is amply attested in inscriptions on bronze vessels and which was transmitted in the early classical literature."

References


9. Brashier, K. E. Ancestral Memory in Early China (http://books.google.es/books?id=aJAMLt5NYAQC&pg=PA71&dq=%22The+White+tiger+hall+discussion+is+here%22&source=bl&ots=v909EbDMK&sign=eOK5PHbTo7DSSNLqHstF1mHAEg&hl=es&sa=X&ei=i6E8UpziCJbR7AatzoDwBQ&ved=0CDEQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=%22The%20White%20tiger%20hall%20discussion%20is%20here%22&f=false).


11. Tao, Hsi-Sheng. Marriage and Family, Shanghai. 1934

12. Ancestral Memory in Early China Written By K. E. Brashier http://books.google.es/books?id=aJAMLt5NYAQC&pg=PA71&dq=%22The+White+tiger+hall+discussion+is+here%22&source=bl&ots=v909EbDMK&
16. The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology Written By Martina Deuchler

17. Alternatively, the sequence was translated as prince, lord, elder, master, chieftain: Brooks 1997:3 n.9.


Works cited

- Schirokauer, Conrad; Brown, Miranda (2006), A Brief History of Chinese Civilization (Second
Further reading


External links

- Chinese Text Project (http://ctext.org/dynasty.pl?if=en&dynasty=27), Rulers of the Zhou period – with links to their occurrences in pre-Qin and Han texts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preceded by</th>
<th>Dynasties in Chinese history</th>
<th>Succeeded by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shang dynasty</td>
<td>1046 – 256 BC</td>
<td>Qin dynasty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Communications and Technology, ed.), Wadsworth: Thomson Learning, pp. 25–47


Categories: Former countries in Asia States and territories disestablished in the 3rd century BC Zhou dynasty 1046 BC establishments in China 256 BC disestablishments in China