

Chinese Dynasties, Part One

The Shang Dynasty Through the Tang Dynasty—1600 BCE to 907 CE

PRODUCED BY THE STANFORD PROGRAM ON INTERNATIONAL
AND CROSS-CULTURAL EDUCATION (SPICE),
FREEMAN SPOGLI INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

REVIEWED BY ALAN WHITEHEAD

Chinese Dynasties Part One: *The Shang Dynasty Through the Tang Dynasty* is a recent offering from the Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE). Anyone with exposure to the curriculum products previously offered by SPICE will find themselves on familiar ground with this unit, which contains a collective history of China's early civilization and endurance through a succession of kings, emperors, and their respective dynasties.

The purpose of this curriculum is to introduce students to the first 2,500 years of Chinese history and to provide an in-depth view of China from the nascent years of the Shang Dynasty to the golden age of the Tang Dynasty. Each dynasty left behind a unique legacy, whether in the form of cultural and artistic achievements, new religions and philosophies, or innovative ideas about government, society, military strategy, and economy. These instructional materials, produced by Waka Takahashi Brown and Selena Lai, comprehensively cover the Chinese Dynasties from 1600 BCE to 907 CE with lessons that can be differentiated and adapted for grades five through twelve.

The chronological arrangement of the unit helps students progress through the Shang (1600 to 1050 BCE), the Zhou (1050 to 453 BCE), the Qin (221 to 206 BCE), the Han (206 BCE to 220 CE), the Six Dynasties (220 to 581 CE), and the Sui and Tang Dynasties (581 to 907 CE). This provides students with the opportunity to comprehend the dynastic cycle, while comparing and contrasting cultural developments in China. Students analyze the development of civilizations and the institutions that evolved through each dynasty era. They grow to understand how the dynasties laid the foundation for some modern Chinese institutions and beliefs in spite of the repeated fragmentation and reunification of historical China. The basic tenets of Chinese religions, philosophies, belief systems, and appreciation of the cultural achievements and legacies of each dynasty are evident through this all-inclusive curriculum. Evaluation of acquired knowledge is assessed in the culminating activity of producing an extensive timeline and time capsule.

There are six lessons in the unit, and each lesson contains organizing questions, introductory material, objectives, connections to curriculum standards, materials, maps, equipment lists, teacher preparation notes, and procedural timelines for each presentation. Higher order thinking skills are emphasized throughout, and group work predominates with lessons well designed and somewhat balanced. Reproducible copies of handouts and transparencies are included along with assessment activities. Rich illustrations are provided on a CD, as are extensive explanations of each in the lesson guides. For full

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implementation, each lesson lasts between four and eight fifty-minute class periods. Supporting resources in the appendices include a Pinyin Pronunciation Guide, Time Travel Log Worksheet, and extensive Glossary.

The unit could be taught in its entirety, or the lessons may be adapted as extensions and enrichments to classes in social studies, English, art, music, literature, geography, and drama. The lessons could easily be tailored for intellectually gifted students in the elementary or middle grades. Activities range from Chinese calligraphy, poetry, ballads, and skits, to piece-mold production, which allow for differentiated instruction that encompasses the learning modalities of all students. Prose, poetry, and lyrical writing, as well as oral history and drama, offer opportunities for both student-led and student-centered learning. Historical and cultural diversity is presented through activities and projects. Students can work independently or in groups, since all of the essential information is available to them. The use of this curriculum by both novice and expert in a variety of disciplines is almost limitless. Chinese Dynasties Part One offers a wealth of lessons and supplementary materials for instant classroom use.

The unit, in a three-ring binder, is accompanied by a CD-Rom with forty-seven excellent high resolution JPEGs (twenty-two images of Shang bronzes for Lesson One are particularly impressive) that can be used with lessons one, three, four, and five. One does wonder why the many paper pages in the notebook labeled "transparencies" (intended for teachers to reproduce as actual transparencies for overhead projectors) were not also furnished as JPEGs, or even offered as PowerPoint presentations.

In summary, this is a well designed, user-friendly, nicely organized, easily adaptable curriculum that is well worth considering as an addition to one's teaching tool kit.

For further information please contact: Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE), Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, 616 Serra St., Encina Hall, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305-6055, <http://spice.stanford.edu>, email: SPICE-sales@stanford.edu. ■

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