

THE SHANG DYNASTY

KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER

Summary

The Shang Dynasty, also known as the Yin Dynasty, ruled the Yellow River Valley in the second millennium BCE (approx 1675-1046BCE).

The Shang Dynasty succeeded the Xia Dynasty and was followed by the Zhou Dynasty.

It was the first Chinese Dynasty for which there is written and archaeological evidence.

The Dynasty expanded its territory and moved its capital city on several occasions.

The Dynasty has become famous for the artistry of its bronze and jade work.

Map showing the expanse of the Shang Dynasty between 1523 and 1028 BCE.



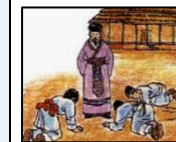
Life in the Shang Dynasty

THE UPPER CLASSES



Shang society was divided into different classes. At the top were the royal family, and then priests and administrative classes. Members of the aristocracy were well-respected, and had clothes made from the finest materials. They were often given the responsibility of governing small areas.

THE LOWER CLASSES



Life was very different for peasants, who were at the bottom of the social ladder. The majority of the population was in this bracket were limited to farming crops and selling handmade items for a profit. Some lower classes were buried with their masters, leading archaeologists to believe they were slaves.

FOOD



Shang people ate a varied diet! The basic food was millet, a type of grain, but barley and wheat were also grown. Shang farmers were also skilled, growing vegetables and beans. Fish were caught in the rivers, and some animals (for example deer and bears) were hunted out on the plains.

ORACLE BONES



Oracle bones were bones from ox shoulder blades or turtle shells, upon which questions were carved using a sharp tool. It was believed that the gods were able to read these questions. These oracle bones now offer some of the first-known examples of writing from ancient civilisations.

RELIGION



The people of the Shang Dynasty were polytheistic, meaning that they worshipped many gods. The main god was Shangdi. They also believed in an afterlife, and so they were buried with the goods, animals, and slaves that they would need.

HOUSES



The Shang people built their houses out of wood and mud. There is evidence that some of these were circular. They also built mud banks in order to try and hold back flooding. Their defensive walls and towers were also built out of mud.

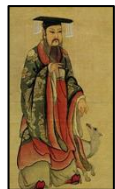
BRONZE



The Shang Dynasty is well-known for its advanced use of Bronze in comparison – as such it is often known as the 'Bronze Age' in China. Bronze was used for crafts, weapons, and everyday items such as cooking utensils and pots. The use of Bronze continued into the age of the Zhou Dynasty.

Shang Rulers and Gods

Tang Shang (reign. 1675-1646BCE)



Tang Shang (otherwise known as Cheng Tang or Da Yi) was the first King of the Shang Dynasty. He overthrew Jie, who was the last ruler of the Xia Dynasty. Jie had mistreated people through his reign, whilst Tang aimed to unite people. He is regarded as a good King, having lowered taxes and spread the dynasty.

Shangdi

During the Shang Dynasty, prayers and sacrifices were offered to a number of different gods. The most powerful of these was known as Shangdi (meaning 'High God' or 'God Above.') Unlike other gods, who were thought to control human affairs and issue, Shangdi was believed to be responsible for larger cosmic and natural events.



Tai Wu (reign. 1450-1375BCE)



Tai Wu (also known as Da Wu) was the ninth Shang King. It is thought that he was the longest reigning of all of the Shang King's staying on the throne for 75 years! It is thought that, as a young king, he was alarmed by two very quickly-growing trees in his palace. He listened to his ministers and became a good king, and the trees soon withered.

Fuxi and Nuwa

Fuxi and Nuwa were Shang gods who were believed to have created humanity. They were a twin brother and sister partnership, who were often shown as having the faces of people with the bodies of snakes. Some people in the Shang times believed that Fuxi and Nuwa also descended from the heavens to become the first people on earth.



Lady Fu Hao (died around 1200BCE)



Lady Fu Hao was one of the many wives of the King Wu Ding, and (unusual for a woman at the time) was also the military commander. She is said to have been a successful general, leading over 10,000 men, and having won many battles. Her tomb contains the bodies of 16 sacrificed slaves.

Emperor Zhou (reign. 1075-1046BCE)



Emperor Zhou (sometimes known as King Zhou or Di Xin) was the last king of the Shang Dynasty. Although in his early reign he was much admired (he was very strong and intelligent) over time he became very cruel and reliant on alcohol. He was overthrown by Wu, starting the Zhou Dynasty.

Top 10 Facts!

- The Shang Dynasty is sometimes also called the 'Yin' Dynasty.
- The last capital of the Shang Dynasty was called Yin Xu – many oracle bones have been found there.
- The people of the Shang Dynasty worshipped their dead ancestors.
- A Shang week lasted for 10 days!
- The Shang enjoyed music, and played pipes, bells, ocarinas, chimes and drums.
- The Shang were the first Chinese to develop writing, using pictographs.
- Shang craftsmen were experts with Bronze – many beautiful artefacts have been found.
- The Shang Year was 360 days – 12 months of 30 days. It was based on the lunar month.
- The Shang Dynasty performed human sacrifices – killing humans as an offer to the Gods.
- The name for the battle in which Emperor Zhou was overthrown is the Battle of Muye.

Timeline

c.1675BCE – Tang overthrows Jie of the Xia Dynasty. The Shang Dynasty begins.

c.1500BCE – Large scale Bronze production begins. This is the start of the Bronze Age in China.

1450-1375BCE – King Tai Wu rules the Shang Dynasty for around 75 years!

1450BCE – The capital city of the Shang Dynasty is Yin, although this is later moved.

1300BCE – Pan Geng rules. He has many enemies, and has to move his capital city.

1200BCE – Lady Hao dies, and is buried with many worldly treasures.

1046BCE – Emperor Zhou is overthrown by Wu, ending the Shang Dynasty.