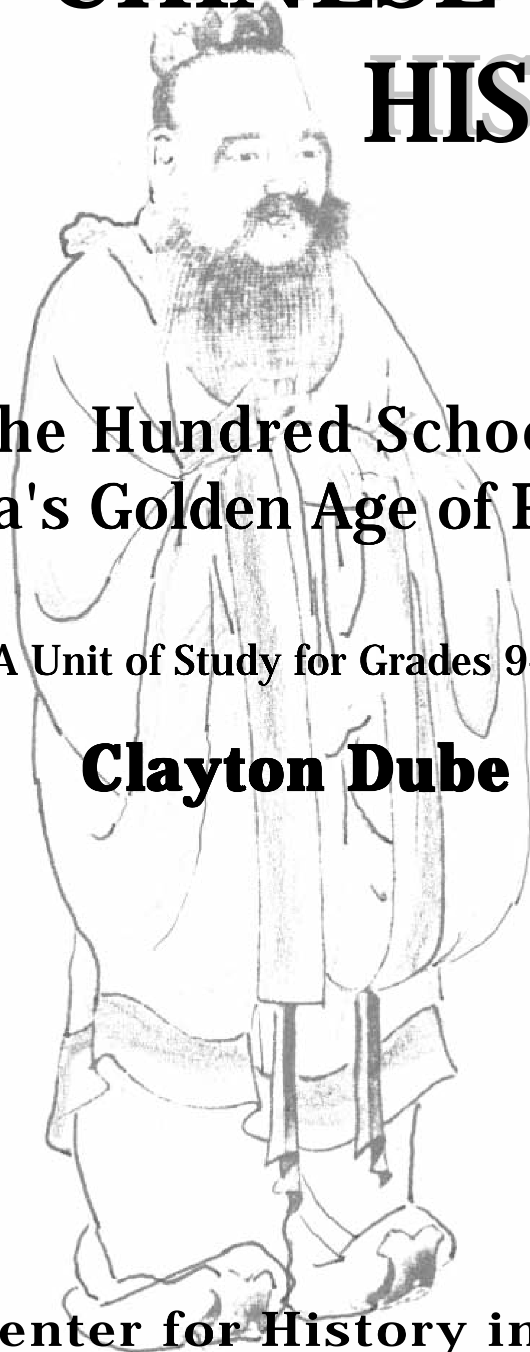
EARLY CHINESE HISTORY



The Hundred Schools Period
China's Golden Age of Philosophy

A Unit of Study for Grades 9–12

Clayton Dube

National Center for History in the Schools
University of California, Los Angeles

NATIONAL CENTER FOR HISTORY IN THE SCHOOLS
University of California, Los Angeles

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The National Center for History in the Schools
Department of History
University of California, Los Angeles
6339 Bunche Hall
405 Hilgard Avenue
Los Angeles, California 90095-1473
FAX: (310) 267-2103

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Acknowledgments

Clayton Dube was a Ph.D. student in Chinese history when he authored this unit. He has taught at Berea College and now serves as Associate Editor of *Modern China* and as Outreach Coordinator for the USC-UCLA Joint Center for East Asian Studies.

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Introduction

Approach and Rationale

Early Chinese History—The Hundred Schools Period is one of over 60 National Center for History in the Schools teaching units published by the National Center for History for the Schools that are the fruits of collaborations between history professors and experienced teachers of World History. They represent specific "dramatic episodes" in history from which you and your students can pause to delve into the deeper meanings of these selected landmark events and explore their wider context in the great historical narrative. By studying a crucial turning-point in history the student becomes aware that choices had to be made by real human beings, that those decisions were the result of specific factors, and that they set in motion a series of historical consequences. We have selected dramatic episodes that bring alive that decision-making process. We hope that through this approach, your students will realize that history is an ongoing, open-ended process, and that the decisions they make today create the conditions of tomorrow's history.

Our teaching units are based on primary sources, taken from government documents, artifacts, magazines, newspapers, films, private correspondence, literature, contemporary photographs, and paintings from the period under study. What we hope you achieve using primary source documents in these lessons is to have your students connect more intimately with the past. In this way we hope to recreate for your students a sense of "being there," a sense of seeing history through the eyes of the very people who were making decisions. This will help your students develop historical empathy, to realize that history is not an impersonal process divorced from real people like themselves. At the same time, by analyzing primary sources, students will actually practice the historian's craft, discovering for themselves how to analyze evidence, establish a valid interpretation and construct a coherent narrative in which all the relevant factors play a part.

In our approach, the continuing narrative provides the context in which the dramatic moment is situated. By studying a crucial turning-point in history, the student becomes aware that choices had to be made by real human beings, that those decisions were the result of specific factors, and that they set in motion a series of historical consequences. We have selected dramatic moments that best bring alive that decision-making process. We hope that through this approach, your students will realize that history is an ongoing, open-ended process, and that the decisions they make today create the conditions of tomorrow's history.

Content and Organization

Within this unit, you will find: 1) Unit Objectives, 2) Correlation to the National History Standards, 3) Teacher Background Materials, 4) Lesson Plans, and 5) Student Resources. This unit, as we have said above, focuses on certain key moments in time and should be used as a supplement to your customary course materials. Although these lessons are recommended for grades 9–12, they can be adapted for other grade levels. The teacher

background section should provide you with a good overview of the entire unit and with the historical information and context necessary to link the specific "dramatic moment" to the larger historical narrative. You may consult it for your own use, and you may choose to share it with students if they are of a sufficient grade level to understand the materials.

The Lesson Plans include a variety of ideas and approaches for the teacher which can be elaborated upon or cut as you see the need. These lesson plans contain student resources which accompany each lesson. The resources consist of primary source documents, any handouts or student background materials, and a bibliography.

In our series of teaching units, each collection can be taught in several ways. You can teach all of the lessons offered on any given topic, or you can select and adapt the ones that best support your particular course needs. We have not attempted to be comprehensive or prescriptive in our offerings, but rather to give you an array of enticing possibilities for in-depth study, at varying grade levels. We hope that you will find the lesson plans exciting and stimulating for your classes. We also hope that your students will never again see history as a boring sweep of inevitable facts and meaningless dates but rather as an endless treasure of real life stories and an exercise in analysis and reconstruction.

Romanization Note

Two systems are commonly used to romanize Chinese words. In this unit, as in most current textbooks and periodicals, the *pinyin* system is employed. When names and terms are first introduced, however, the Wade-Giles form is provided in parenthesis. For example, "Confucius emphasized ren (jen) or benevolence." A pronunciation guide is provided on page 7.

TEACHER'S BACKGROUND

I. UNIT OVERVIEW

In the late Zhou (Chou) period (roughly sixth–third centuries B.C.E.), the area we call China was fragmented into many virtually independent states which were engaged in bitter and often violent competition. It was a time of enormous economic, social, political, and intellectual change. This unit focuses on the philosophical battles of the era, a period often called "the Golden Age of Chinese Philosophy," when Chinese philosophers sought to account for the chaos of the age and to articulate comprehensive plans to restore order. Not until the twentieth century would such a range of ideas again be as widely discussed in China. To emphasize the diversity of ideas put forward, the Chinese call this era the "Hundred Schools" period.

In this unit students examine the four most influential of these philosophical traditions: Confucianism, Mohism, Daoism (Taoism), and Legalism. Confucianism, stressing human relationships, was the official imperial doctrine for most of China's imperial age (over two-thousand years of successive dynasties). Mohism stressed public spirited-pragmatism, an ideal which was periodically revived. Daoism allowed for both totalitarianism and extreme individualism. Legalism provided the intellectual basis for the unification of China and for the centralization of all authority.

In five lessons, students will compare the ideas of these schools and explore how such ideas were conditioned by and, in turn, impacted society, economy, government, and culture. In so doing, they will exercise their critical reading skills as well as synthetic, group, and communication skills.

II. UNIT CONTEXT

This unit provides an excellent opportunity for students to wrestle with significant issues: 1) the relationship between economic, social, and political circumstances and thought, 2) the universality of concerns and solutions, and 3) construction and evolution of philosophical doctrines. To gain maximum benefit from this unit, student should have studied the basic geographical, economic, social, and political realities of late Zhou China. One or two class sessions prior to this unit should be sufficient to: 1) familiarize students with China's location relative to other countries in Asia and with the political fragmentation of China during the late Zhou era, 2) explain how technical improvements (e.g. cast-iron implements, water control) led to expanded agricultural production, which fostered the rise of towns and commerce, leading to social change, 3) review the links between population growth, expanded agricultural production, and enhanced military power, and 4) discuss how the lack of central control allowed for competition among thinkers.

Depending on when other regions are studied, students should be asked to compare the ideas of the schools examined in this unit with those present in ancient India, the Near East,

Greece, and Rome. Further, students should be asked to speculate on the impact of these philosophies on China's subsequent experiences and doctrines.

This unit should be followed by one focusing on the unification of China under the Legalist Qin dynasty in 221 B.C.E. and the establishment of China's basic imperial system under the Han dynasty (202 B.C.E.–C.E. 220).

III. Correlation to National Standards

Early Chinese History: The Hundred Schools Period provides teaching materials that address *National Standards for History, Basic Edition* (National Center for History in the Schools, 1996), **Era 3**, "Classical Traditions, Major Religions, and Giant Empires." Lessons specifically address **Standard 3C** calling upon students to explain how China became unified under the early imperial dynasties, to examine the concept of the "Mandate of Heaven," and to compare and contrast the major philosophical schools of thought during China's "golden age."

IV. Unit Objectives

- To examine the relationship between economic, social, political, and intellectual trends in China's late Zhou period (roughly 550–221 B.C.E.)

- To critically read primary sources and identity the principal tenets of four of China's most influential schools of thought: Confucianism, Mohism, Daoism (Taoism), and Legalism.

- To compare these schools' beliefs in the areas of inherent human nature, the source of social and political chaos, the means of establishing social order, the ideal person, and the ideal state.

- To speculate on the impact of these schools of thought on later Chinese history.

V. Introduction to The Hundred Schools Period

The ability of the Zhou dynasty (1122–256 B.C.E) rulers to control the states of what is now China disintegrated following the movement of the Zhou capital east from Xi'an (Sian) to Luoyang (Loyang) in 770 C.E. The move was necessary because of the loss of the former capital area to Central Asian invaders. Peace among the states was maintained for a couple of centuries by one powerful state upholding the rule of the Zhou family. This arrangement fell apart, however, by the sixth century B.C.E. and the result was constantly shifting alliances and frequent war between states. This fragmentation was accompanied by the changes brought by widespread use of cast iron tools and weapons. Agricultural production increased and commerce expanded. Given the agriculture-based economy and the shift of warfare from chariot-riding elite warriors to mass armies, it is not surprising that states competed with each other to control the resources of land and population.

This competition also permitted the rise of a new profession: travelling consultants. These individuals travelled from capital to capital, offering military, political, and moral advice to rulers who were anxious to gain any possible advantage over neighboring states. The most successful of these received official office, healthy stipends, and prestige. Others, while respected for their knowledge and sincerity, were never permitted to put their theories into action. These thinkers often attracted bright young men as students who later transmitted and expanded on their teachings.

The explosion of different analyses of the sources of late Zhou disorder and proposals for remedying the situation was so great that Chinese have labelled this period the "Hundred Schools" era. This unit focuses on the four most influential of these schools: Confucianism, Mohism, Daoism (Taoism), and Legalism. Each of these schools is discussed in more detail in **Lesson Two**, but a brief description of each may be useful.

> **Confucianism** is often characterized as a human-centered philosophy, where individuals change society by first cultivating their own virtue and then placing their families in order. Relationships between people are made correct through education and attention to following rules of decorous behavior. The ideal ruler governs by providing a shining example of refined benevolence.
>
> **Mohists** attacked Confucianism's hierarchy of relationships, obligations, and loyalties. Mohists believed that partiality to one's own led people to struggle with others instead of working for the public good. Consequently, they stressed universal love, discipline, and cooperation. Mohists became expert in military defense, advising small states on how to survive in a hostile world. Rather than emphasizing attention to rituals and music, as the Confucianists did, they advocated education which focused on mathematics and other "practical" arts.
>
> **Daoism** is the most elusive of these philosophies, partly because of the way the philosophy was presented (in poem and parable) and partly because the two most

important Daoist texts offer rather different visions of the ideal state. Both the Lao Zi and the Zhuang Zi counsel against material striving and recommend a simple lifestyle, but the Lao Zi has a totalitarian aspect (a ruthless sage king) while the Zhuang Zi argues for a complete absence of laws or behavioral norms.

Legalism places the interests of the state above all other. The ruler is to insure that laws are clear, that people know the laws, and that officials consistently carry out the laws. The laws are to compel people to work hard in (relatively easy to tax) agriculture, to disdain crafts and commerce, and to refrain from worrying about philosophical discourse. Through a system of punishment and rewards, the ruler strengthens, his state so that it will prevail over others. Developing agriculture was presumed to lead to triumph in war as economic strength and population growth was transformed into military power.

The rulers of the state of Qin (Ch'in), a state on China's periphery, used Legalist measures to build their state and defeat all other Chinese states. They unified China in 221 B.C.E., but the Qin dynasty was short-lived and collapsed with the death of first emperor and rebellions sparked by the harsh practices of the regime. The first emperor burned philosophical texts he deemed heretical and had hundreds of dissenting scholars executed. The Han dynasty successors to the Qin decried Qin policies and adopted Confucianism as its official doctrine. Actually, however, Han practices owed much to the Qin Legalist example. Some scholars call the Han hybrid "imperial Confucianism" in recognition of its strong Legalist components. With a short break the Han dynasty lasted some four centuries.

After four centuries of disunion, China was reunited in 589 C.E. by another strong ruler using Legalist principles (and using Buddhism as partial justification of his power-grab), this led to another short dynasty (Sui), followed by the Tang (T'ang) and subsequent dynasties. These later dynasties were officially Confucian, but all employed Legalist measures of control. Confucianism spread through Korea, Japan, and Vietnam.

Mohism was Confucianism's chief early competitor, but proved less durable than these other philosophies. Daoism, on the other hand, provided individuals an escape from human-centered, activist, state-building philosophies. It splintered into philosophical and popular religion strains. The rebellion begun by Daoist religious communities brought down the Han dynasty.

IV. Lesson Plans

1. The Historical Context

2. The Four Major Schools of Thought

3. Comparing the Four Schools

Romanization of Chinese

Since Westerners began to write about China and the Chinese, they have sought to develop systems which accurately use roman letters to represent the sounds of Chinese. For most of the 20th century the most commonly used system was the Wade-Giles system. Most of the articles contained in this packet use this system. Since 1979, however, the PRC has used the *pinyin* system. Most Western authors and periodicals are now using this system. Below is an effort to help you pronounce Chinese words and names using these systems.

Vowels
Wade-Giles/Pinyin

a/a	ah as in father
e/e	uh as in but, sometimes eh as in wet: men rhymes with pun but yen rhymes with pen
i/i	ee as in keep
ih/i	something like i in shirt (include part of the r which follows): chi'ih sounds like church
o/o	aw as in paw, except in ko, k'o, ho, h'o and o when it is uh as in but
u/u	oo as in goo, except yu when it is like yogurt
u/u	as French u or German u

Diphthongs

ai/ai	rhymes with shy, lai sounds like lye
ao/ao	rhymes with now, ch'ao sounds like chow
ei/ei	rhymes with stay, lei sounds like lay
ia/ia	rhymes with German ia, liang is one syllable: lyahng
ieh/ie	rhymes with yeah, lieh is pronounced lyeh
iu/iu	varies between yogurt and youth, liu might be Leo or Lew
ou/ou	rhymes with know, lou sounds like low
ua/ua	wah as in suave
ui/ui	rhymes with way, sui sounds like sway
uo/uo	waw as in walk

Consonants

This is where the two systems differ most. Consonants are not always voiced. In Wade-Giles this is indicated by an apostrophe [‘]. If the consonant is followed by ‘, it is aspirated. In Pinyin spelling indicates the difference.

l, m, n, ng, r, s, sh, and w	pronounced as in English
ch’/q	as in cheat
k’/k	as in king
p’/p	as in put
t’/t	as in top
ts’/c	as in its
tz/c	as in its
ch/j	as j in job or as ch in church (e.g chih/chi)
k/g	as g in got
p/b	as b in but
t/d	as d in dog
ts/z	as dz in adze
tz/z	as dz in adze

Examples

pinyin	**Wade-Giles**
Deng Xiaoping	Teng-Hsiao-p’ing
Zhou Enlai	Chou En-lai
Mao Zedong	Mao Tse-tung
Beijing	Peiching (Peking)
Nanjing	Nanching (Nanking)
Taibei	Taipei
Qianlong	Ch’ien-lung
Qin Shi Huang	Ch’in Shih huang
Jiang Zemin	Chiang Tze-min

Adapted from Charles O. Hucker, *China’s Imperial Past* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), pp. 436–439.

Dramatic Moment

In capitals throughout the region, our rulers are consulting their advisors. It is a time of crisis, our governments are crippled by corruption and war, and war preparation is never-ending. Some of our states join schemes against other states and powerful families plot with others to improve their own positions. Rulers show little concern for the common people. They tend to see the common people as a resource to be managed and marshalled in the struggle against their enemies. Commoners can only resist by running away. And they are doing this in great numbers, fleeing greedy lords and officials and brutal armies.

What has led to this danger? Technology has advanced so much. Agriculture has never been so productive. Our cities are sites of tremendous trade (aided by new means of exchange) and places of a great cultural flowering. There is dance, music, and scholarly investigation.

At the same time, our weapons have been made even more lethal. Our armies are larger and the devastation of war is greater than ever. Our small states are being devoured by the large ones. Or they engage in secret diplomacy and espionage to undermine their neighbors.

In the past, in the days of our sage kings, our ancestors did not have to endure such chaos. There was order. There was peace. There was prosperity. Where have we gone wrong? What will happen now? What is in store for us?

It is the late Zhou (pronounced "joe") era in China. We are a diverse group of people who have been invited to meet with the ruler of a troubled state. Some of us come from the privileged class, we have money and leisure, and have become quite well educated. Others have military backgrounds. A few are only reluctantly here, preferring instead the quiet of the mountains. A couple have government experience. However, all of us have strong feelings about the origins of this chaos, some pointing to the rise of unprincipled rulers, some to emphasis on oneself and one's family rather than one's society, some to focusing on material concerns, and some to weak and disordered leadership. All of us also have ideas about how to resolve the problems and restore order. Each of us is competing with everyone else to convince this ruler of the correctness of our views. To persuade him, we must put forward our ideas clearly and precisely. Most of us, begin by discussing human nature. After all, to manage people, one must first comprehend their fundamental nature.

Lesson One
The Historical Context

A. Objectives

- To define the context within which the "Hundred Schools" debate took place.
- To point out the connection between thought and economic, social, and political concerns.
- To express and examine opinions on the central questions of "nature" vs. "nurture" and the connection between assumptions about human nature and social, political, and economic policy.

B. Lesson Activities

1. Read the **Dramatic Moment** aloud to the class.

2. Ask students to speculate on the place and time being described. Many may be struck on how contemporary the account seems.

   Discussion Questions

   a. Do humans share a common inherent nature?

   b. If they do, what is this nature? Do people start out good? Evil? Something in-between? What is the relative tendency of people to do good or bad?

   c. Given your ideas about human nature, what should a ruler do to bring about order?

3. Pass out **Student Handout 1**, "Chronology of Chinese History" which will help students situate the late Zhou period in history and **Student Handout 2**, "Background of the Late Zhou Period" which presents the key economic, social, and political conditions of the period. Discuss the **Dramatic Moment** within the late Zhou period context.

4. Inform students that for the next few days they will be studying the ideas developed in the late Zhou dynasty; ideas that helped shape the next two thousand years of Chinese history, ideas that influenced thinkers in neighboring countries, and ideas that continue to be debated in China and elsewhere.

Chronology of Chinese History

2205?–1706? B.C.E.	Xia (Hsia) dynasty (only partially verified)
1766?–1122? B.C.E.	Shang (Shang) dynasty
1122?–256 B.C.E.	Zhou (Chou) dynasty
	Western Zhou (1122-771)
	Eastern Zhou (770-256)
	Spring and Autumn Period (722-481)
	Warring States Period (403-321)
221–207 B.C.E.	Qin (Ch'in) dynasty
202 B.C.E.–220 C.E.	Han (Han) dynasty
220 - 589	Six Dynasties Period (unity, prolonged disunity, and then unity again)
589–618	Sui (Sui) dynasty
618–907	Tang (T'ang) dynasty
907–960	Five Dynasties Period (a period of disunity)
960–1279	Song (Sung) dynasty
1279–1368	Yuan (Yüan, Mongol) dynasty
1368–1644	Ming (Ming) dynasty
1644–1912	Qing (Ch'ing, Manchu) dynasty
1912–1949	Republic of China (The Taiwan government continues to use this name.)
1949–	People's Republic of China

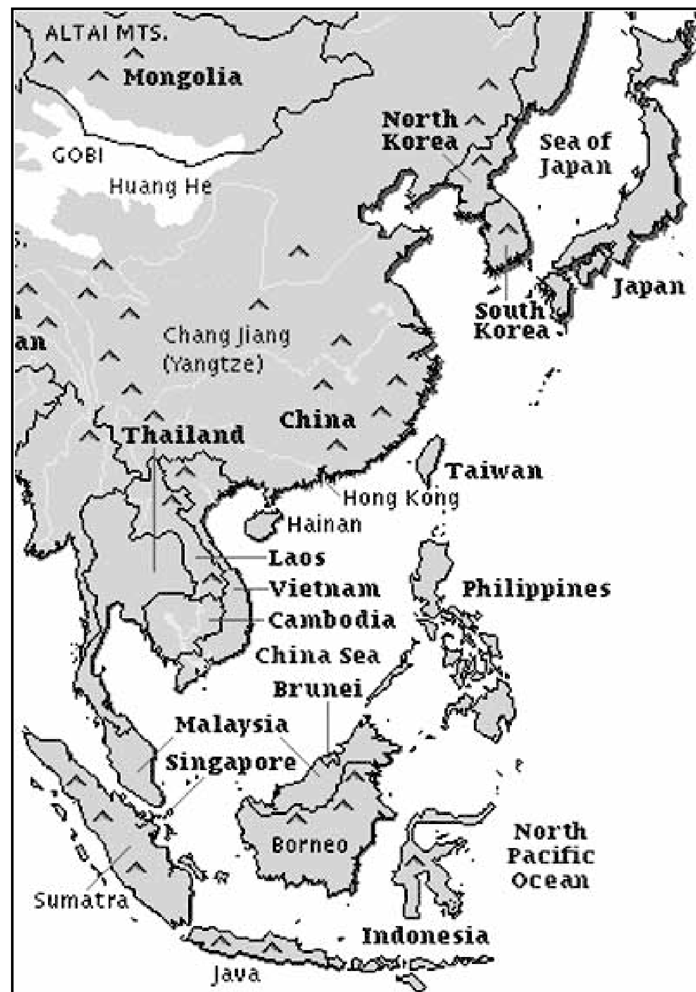
Names of dynasties are given in *pinyin* romanization (the form used in the People's Republic, in most North American periodicals, and in many history texts). Wade-Giles romanization (the standard most frequently used prior to the 1980s) follows in parenthesis.

The Late Zhou Period

Geography

Locate China on a world map and identify its neighbors. Confucianism spread to Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. Buddhism later came to China from India (it was fairly well established by the first century C.E.) Judaism, Christianity, and Islam later followed. The Roman and Han empires were neighbors and their mercenary armies once met in battle in Central Asia.

The Zhou (Chou) dynasty China was much smaller than later Chinese empires or the present day People's Republic of China. Note, too, that people tended to think first in terms of their family and village, and only later in terms of the feudal state or empire in which they lived. The number of states decreased to just a handful through war and annexation during the late Zhou dynasty.



China's Neighbors