

## Unit 3 The Asia–Pacific world

# Introduction to the Asia–Pacific world

Asia is the largest and most populated continent on Earth. It stretches from Europe and Africa in the west to Australia and Oceania in the south. Asia – including the sub-continent of India – is the birthplace of nearly all major religions in the world today, as well as a vast number of technological and philosophical achievements.

In this chapter you will learn how things like geography, social structure and government, religion, and war and conflict influenced a number of different Asian societies. You will also learn how ancient civilisations in China and India influenced our modern world.



# chapter 13

## 13A

Where and when did ancient societies in Asia develop?

## 13B

What were the key features of ancient societies in Asia?

## 13C

How did ancient societies in Asia influence our modern world?

**Source 1** The Great Wall of China is a series of defensive structures that were built over 2000 years ago to protect ancient China from invaders. In total, the wall is almost 9000 kilometres long. Today, it is considered one of the seven wonders of the world.

### UNIT 3 THE ASIA–PACIFIC WORLD

This unit offers a choice of two topics:

- Ancient India
- Ancient China.

**You must choose AT LEAST ONE of these topics for study.**



# 13.1 The where and when of the Asian world

Some of the most significant ancient civilisations developed on the continent we now know as Asia. They included ancient India and ancient China.

In this unit you will be studying these ancient civilisations in detail. To get a better understanding of how and why your chosen civilisation developed, it helps to look at some of the factors they had in common and how their development was linked.

Source 2 shows the location and size of these ancient civilisations and provides some key information about each of them. The timeline (Source 1) also shows the dates for each of the civilisations shown here. Note the dates for each civilisation as you are looking at the map – not all of them existed in the same time periods. Some flourished and then disappeared, only to later become part of another civilisation. This was the case with the Indus Valley civilisation in India, which became part of the Mauryan Empire.

**Check your learning 13.1**

Remember and understand

1

Use Sources 1 and 2 to order the ancient civilisations in Asia by size and by length of time they existed.

2


Where did the first civilisation in India begin? What was the name of this civilisation?

3

Ancient China was ruled by dynasties. What is a dynasty?


**Ancient India (3500 BCE–184 BCE)**

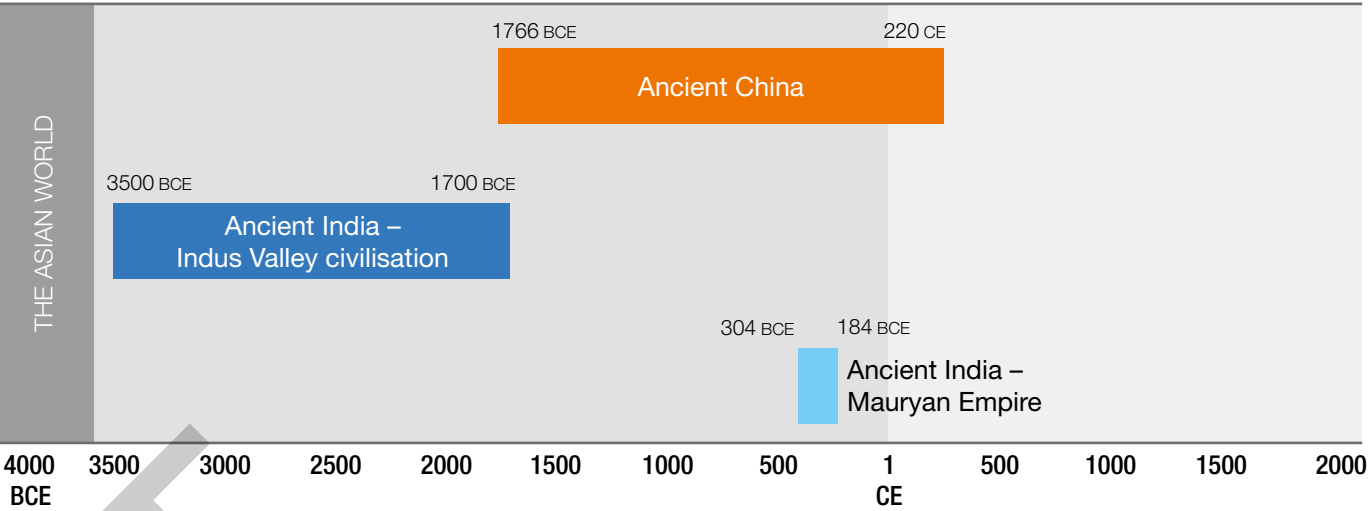
Civilisation in India began in the Indus Valley in 3500 BCE. For much of its history, ancient India was a collection of separate regions and kingdoms, some of which were at war with one another. At different times, some of these were ruled as part of **dynasties** or **empires**; this included the Mauryan Empire, a civilisation that rose and fell in just 120 years.



**Ancient China (1766 BCE–220 CE)**

Ancient China was ruled for 3600 years by dynasties (ruling families). The last dynasty – the Qing – ended in 1912. Chinese society was one of the earliest in the world to establish towns and cities. It also contributed important technological developments to the rest of the world, such as gunpowder and printing.





Source 1 A timeline showing the rise and fall of ancient civilisations



Source 2 This satellite image of Earth shows the location and size of key ancient civilisations in Asia when they were at their peak.



## 13.2 Key features of ancient societies in Asia

### Geography

For a long time, ancient societies in the West knew very little about civilisations in Asia, such as China and India. In China's case, a large part of this was due to its geography. The largest ocean on Earth (the Pacific) lies to its east, dense forests to the south, the world's tallest mountains (the Himalayas) to the west, and large deserts to the north-west. All of these geographical features made China difficult to reach. In the 3rd century BCE, the Great Wall of China was constructed as a final barrier to would-be invaders at its northern border.

Chinese society was based on agriculture in the fertile plains of its two major rivers, the Yellow River and the Yangtze River. China's large area means it has very different climates in different regions.



Source 1 The Yangtze River in Yunnan Province, southern China

India's geography was also influential in shaping its history. To the north, deserts and the Himalayas provided a natural barrier. There was plenty of fertile land for people to settle, including coastal regions, plains and river valleys. Trade was made possible by the region's rivers. They provided transport routes to the coast, where goods could be traded with other countries.

This geography was important for the development of two separate civilisations. First, there was the Indus Valley civilisation (c. 3000–1300 BCE) in north-western India. This civilisation relied on the Indus River as a major transport route for trade – a major occupation of its people. Much later, there was the Mauryan Empire (321–185 BCE), which began near the Ganges River in the north-east of India. At the head of this empire was the Mauryan Dynasty, whose rulers were strong in both politics and warfare. They formed ancient India's first empire and rapidly conquered most of the Indian subcontinent.

Much of India is very hot throughout the year, and monsoonal rains mean it is wet for months at a time. These conditions influenced architecture, clothing and food.

### Social structure and government

China was governed under ruling **dynasties** (ruling families) for much of its history. The emperors came from powerful, wealthy families, and passed the leadership down to their children. Dynasties sometimes changed after a power struggle between rival families, or if a ruler became very unpopular with the people because of floods or famine. The Han Dynasty ruled the longest – nearly four centuries.

China had a strict social hierarchy. Rulers, scholars and nobles made up the wealthy and powerful group at the top of the hierarchy. Farmers and then merchants were below them. Like women in other ancient societies, Chinese women had a lower status than men and had few freedoms. Their life was mostly restricted to the home.



Source 2 A procession of modern-day Brahmins, the highest caste in Indian society



Source 3 A ceramic figure of a woman from the Indus Valley civilisation in India. Women had a similar status to men.

Like China, India also had a strict social hierarchy. India's hierarchy was part of the Hindu religion. This hierarchy was known as a **caste system**, which divided people into social groups that determined their status, responsibilities and privileges. There were four main castes, with Brahmins at the top. Outside the caste hierarchy were the Untouchables, who were the most deprived group in Indian society. People were born into a caste or group and could not move into a different one. This social hierarchy dominated people's lives – it determined their job, who they could marry and who they could socialise with.

As in many other ancient civilisations, slaves were an important source of labour in ancient India. Unlike in the Mediterranean, slaves in India were usually not prisoners of war. Many were brought to India by traders, or were made slaves as punishment for crimes they committed. Slaves had some rights in India and

were theoretically protected by laws. People were rarely slaves for life.

Unlike in many other ancient societies, women in ancient India seem to have had a similar status to men. They were active in society, were educated, and were respected by men. With the arrival of Islam and Christianity, the status of women began to change, and they were increasingly socially repressed.



Source 4 A statue of Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of China (221 BCE)



## Cultural evidence

A great part of what we know about ancient civilisations comes from cultural **evidence**. This evidence includes artefacts such as paintings, sculpture and pottery. Cultural evidence is also present in iconography. This term refers to the content of art – how civilisations used pictures and symbols to represent their ideas and way of life.

Written records provide probably the strongest cultural evidence of all. Not all ancient societies produced a system of writing, but scripts did develop in China and India. Very few people in ancient societies could read or write. Those who could do so usually belonged to the more privileged groups in the social hierarchy.

### Art, iconography and pottery

Chinese art changed with different dynasties, and the materials used differed somewhat from those in the Western world. For example, decorative objects were first made from metal, ivory or jade (an ornamental green stone). Later, the Chinese created lacquered boxes and developed porcelain. Chinese paintings depicted nature, such as animals, trees and water, using distinctive brushstrokes. They were sometimes painted on silk cloth.

In ancient India, paintings and sculptures mostly related to Hindu symbolism (religious subjects). They often depicted gods and legends. As with Chinese art, Indian art changed over time as it was influenced by different rulers and foreign ideas.



**Source 5** A bronze figure of a maidservant holding an oil lamp, made in the Western Han Dynasty in 172 BCE

## Writing

The Chinese script is the world's oldest writing system still in use today. It began, like many other scripts, with characters that looked like tiny pictures. Over time, these became more stylised. There are tens of thousands of characters, although educated Chinese people today only use an average of 5000 characters. Most Chinese words consist of one or two characters, sometimes three. Each character represents a syllable. Chinese characters were traditionally drawn with a brush. The size of the brush tip, the type of ink and the brush pressure all influence the look of the script.



**Source 6** Calligraphy brushes, ink and the Chinese character for 'double happiness'. Calligraphy – the art of handwriting – is still taught in Chinese schools today.

Various scripts developed in ancient India. The first was in the Indus Valley civilisation, around 2600 BCE. The script has still not been deciphered by historians. Later, different scripts developed. These were used for royal and religious texts as well as for administrative purposes.



**Source 7** An example of Indus Valley script

## Religion

The people of ancient China worshipped their ancestors as well as gods and goddesses. Chinese deities, like those of ancient Mediterranean societies, were believed to control the forces of nature. China had a number of organised religions. Taoism focused on the spiritual struggle between the yin (female) and yang (male) forces of the world. Buddhism was brought to China from India in the 1st century CE and focused on a pathway to spiritual meaning and enlightenment. Confucianism was also a significant influence on Chinese beliefs, but was not a religion. It was more a system that governed how people behaved. It was developed by the famous Chinese philosopher Confucius (see Source 8).

Ancient Indian society was dominated by religion and superstition. Ancient Indians had deities (gods and goddesses), but also believed in other supernatural beings. From about 1500 BCE, the Aryan people began to move into the Indian subcontinent, bringing Hinduism with them. This became the major religion in India. Hinduism had multiple gods and, like Buddhists, Hindus believed in **reincarnation** (rebirth). Buddhism was also a major religion in India. It was founded by a wealthy Indian prince in the 5th century BCE and was an established religion in India before it spread into China.



**Source 8** An artist's impression of Confucius



**Source 9** A statue of Buddha in India

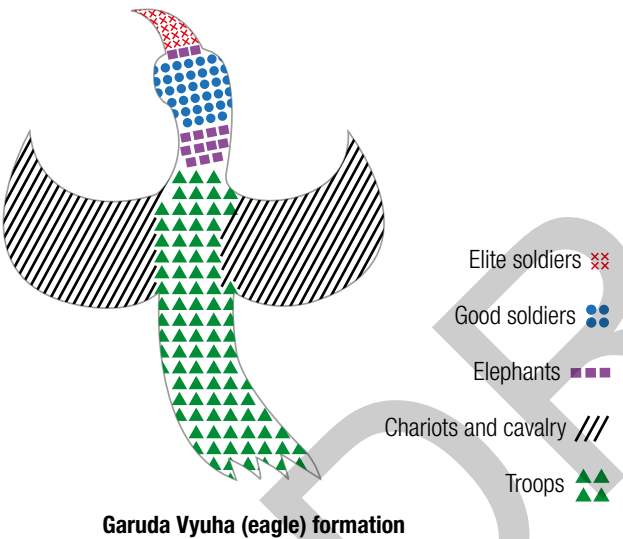
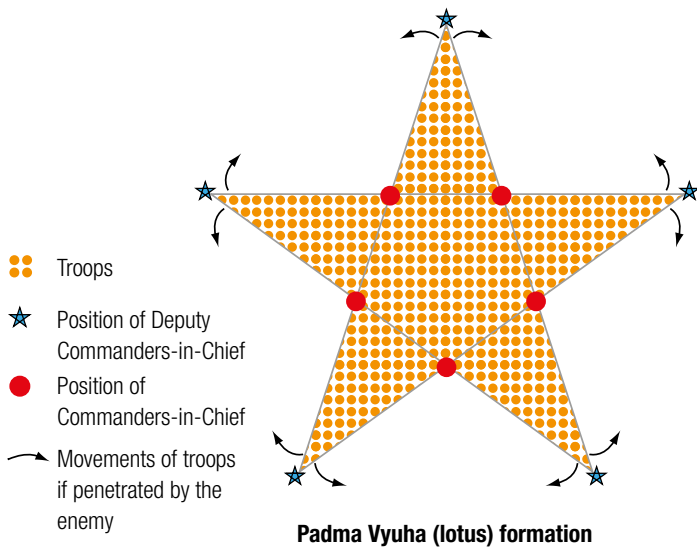


War and conflict

China did not have a permanent, professional army until relatively late in its history, during the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). China was united in 221 BCE; before this, each region had its own fighting force, and these regions would fight with each other to gain power. Their armies were usually made up of ordinary men. During the Han Dynasty, however, all able-bodied men were forced to enlist. The Chinese used a range of tactics and equipment to fight and these changed over time. Early on, chariots were important, but these were gradually replaced by cavalry (soldiers on horses). Some Chinese dynasties used large armies of foot soldiers. The permanent army established under the Han Dynasty allowed China to combat tribes of invading barbarians to the north, known as the Mongols.

Throughout its history India fought many invaders, and different kingdoms within India also went to war with one another. Kings therefore built strong armies. The Ksatriyas, people from the warrior caste, made up these armies. The army under the Mauryan Empire was strong enough to unite most of the country. At the time, the Mauryan army was one of the biggest in the world. Like the ancient Roman army, the Mauryan army had a highly organised structure and hierarchy. Indian armies used elaborate battle formations, and they were the first to use elephants in battle. They also had foot soldiers, cavalry and chariots.

One of India’s invaders was Alexander the Great. Having conquered Greece and Egypt, he invaded India in 326 BCE and took over territories in the Indus Valley region. Soon afterwards, the Mauryan Empire was established.



Source 10 Two army formations used in ancient India



Source 11 A sculpture of two members of the Han cavalry with their spears



Source 12 An artist's impression of Alexander the Great defeating the Indian army, complete with battle elephants, at the battle at Hydaspes River in 326 BCE

Check your learning 13.2

Remember and understand

- 1 The development of ancient societies in China and India were influenced by the world’s tallest mountain range. What are these mountains called?
- 2 Ancient India had two separate civilisations. What were they called?
- 3 In what way were the social structures of ancient Chinese and ancient Indian societies similar?

- 4 How did the ancient Chinese writing system begin?

Apply and analyse

- 5 Explain what was unique about the status of women in the Indus Valley civilisation.
- 6 Predict how India and China may have developed differently if they had not been surrounded by natural barriers.

Source 13 The Great Wall was built to protect China from invasions.



# 13.3 Legacies of ancient societies in Asia

Ancient Chinese and Indian practices and beliefs have influenced other societies around the world. Even in today's societies, we can easily identify some of the lasting effects of these ancient Asian civilisations.

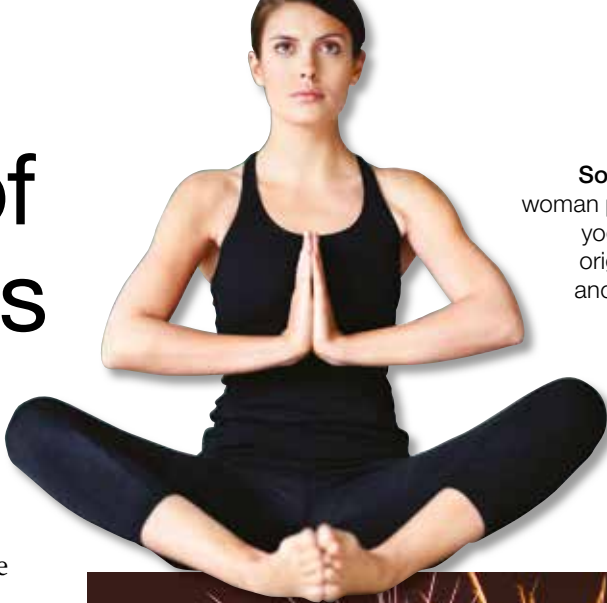
## Belief systems

The belief systems of ancient China and India are influential to this day. These belief systems include religion as well as other less formal beliefs. Hinduism and Buddhism, which originated in ancient India, are major world religions today. Some of the principles of those religions have had a wider impact, such as the principle of not harming living beings. This influenced Mahatma Ghandi's passive resistance in struggle for independence from Britain in the 20th century, and Martin Luther King's peaceful quest for civil rights in the USA in the 1960s. Yoga and meditation grew out of ancient Indian belief systems and are commonly practised in many countries around the world today.

Ancient Chinese religious beliefs significantly influenced religion and belief in ancient Japan. The principles of Confucianism also continue to be important in modern China.

## Science and technology

Ancient China and India made important contributions to mathematics and other areas of knowledge. As was the case with the Greeks and Romans, mathematics was important to the design of religious buildings in India. The first use of the decimal system, which is the basis of modern mathematics, is credited to 5th-century Indian astronomer and mathematician Aryabhata. The Chinese were also advanced mathematicians and independently developed many mathematical systems that were later adopted by Western civilisations.



Source 1 A woman practising yoga, which originated in ancient India



Source 2 Without gunpowder – invented by the Chinese – we would not have fireworks today



Source 3 Our system of Arabic numerals is founded on a numeral system developed in India.

Many inventions that were crucial to the development of the modern world arose in China. The ancient Chinese developed printing, using flat wooden blocks carved so that the character to be printed stood above the rest of the block. Magnetic compasses, which became very important for navigation, were invented in China c. 250 BCE.

Gunpowder was invented by a Chinese scientist in 850 CE and became a powerful weapon in warfare. Silk cloth was also invented in China and helped it to become a very wealthy country.

## The Silk Road

Ancient China and India also influenced the societies and cultures of other civilisations through the establishment of the **Silk Road**. European powers developed trading routes with China and India in order to gain access to spices and silk to sell at home. When trade opened, ideas, beliefs and inventions from Asia were brought back to Europe.

Much exploration of undiscovered continents was prompted by a desire to find new trading routes with China and India. For example, Italian navigator Christopher Columbus found the Americas when he was trying to find a new way to reach India. This is why the islands in the Caribbean are called the West Indies. Thus, the ancient world in Asia also indirectly caused enormous changes in countries that were discovered and colonised by European powers looking for better trading routes with Asia.

### 13C What are the legacies of ancient societies in Asia?



Source 4 A section of the Silk Road in the Hunza Valley of northern Pakistan

### Check your learning 13.3

#### Remember and understand

- 1 Discuss how ancient Chinese society has influenced the rest of the world.
- 2 How did developments in mathematics in ancient China and India influence the modern world?
- 3 When and where was gunpowder invented?

#### Apply and analyse

- 4 What is the Silk Road and why was it important to the development of the modern world?

#### Evaluate and create

- 5 Copy and complete the table below in your notebook. Fill in the blanks to show how different religions and belief systems from ancient China and India have influenced the development of our modern world. You will need to conduct some additional research on the Internet to help you. The first example has been done for you.

Civilisation	Religion or belief system	How this religion or belief system influenced society in ancient times	How this religion or belief system has influenced the modern world
China	Confucianism	• A system of behaviours by which people lived their lives (similar to laws)	• The teachings of Confucius are still taught around the world. There are 465 Confucius Institutes in 123 countries. • Confucianism still influences Chinese society today in areas like politics, education and law. • World leaders often use quotes from Confucius in their speeches.
China			
India			
India			