The Zhou Dynasty ruled from 1122 BC to 256 BC, the longest ruling dynasty in China. It is believed that the Zhou culture began west of the Shang Kingdom in the Wei River Valley. They worshiped Tian, a god meaning “heaven”. The Zhou Dynasty began when King Wu won over the Shang in 1122 BC. The mandate of heaven is something the Zhou people believed gave them the order to rule China. The kings showed virtue (good qualities) to keep the mandate. Zhou kings created a social structure, which had the kings in the position on top, followed by noble families, then peasant families. People in each class showed virtue by offering services to other classes. Kings provided land to nobles for military support. This is a political system of exchange known as feudalism. Peasants paid nobles for land use and lived hard lives of farming and serving in Zhou armies. The nobles helped protect them from enemies.

In 800 BC, they were invaded by warlike nomads from the north and the west. In 771 BC Hai, the capital of the Zhou, dynasty was attacked. The king was killed and Zhou moved to the east North China Plain. Once they moved, nobles grew powerful and began to call themselves kings. The last 200 years of the dynasty is referred to as the Warring Kingdoms Period or the Warring States Period because of the fighting between kings and the Zhou. Near 600 BC the Chu Kingdom had replaced feudalism by dividing their land into counties, and appointing people to run them based on skill. In 535 BC, the king of Zheng called for written laws, which were firsts for China.

1. Religion—How did religion effect the leadership of China?

2. Government—Describe the social class structure called feudalism that the Zhou leaders created.

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