

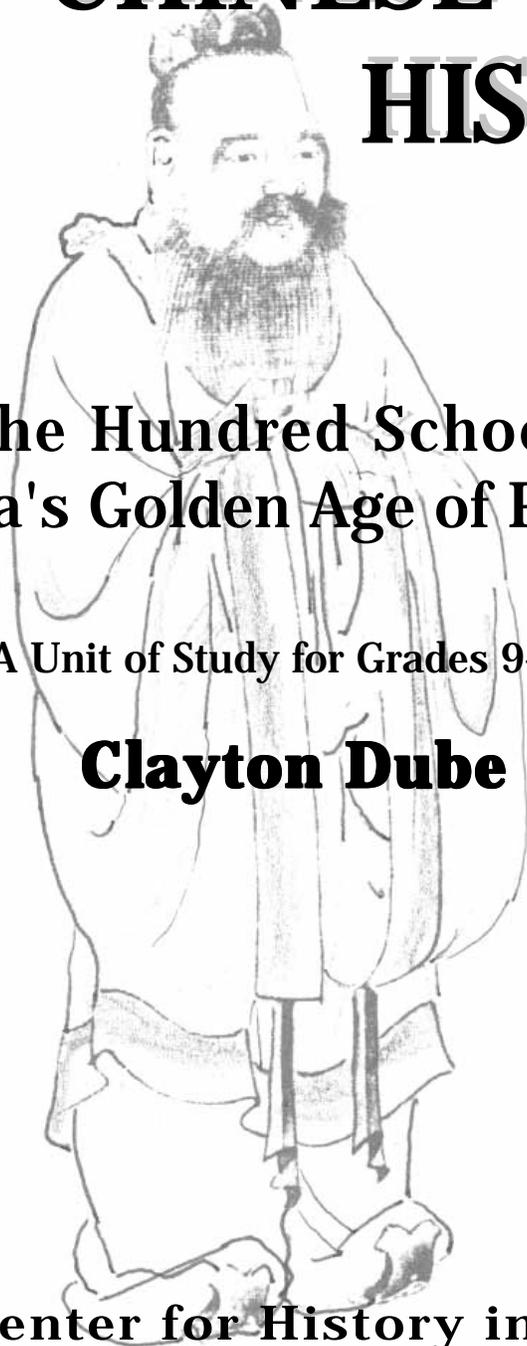
# **EARLY CHINESE HISTORY**

**The Hundred Schools Period  
China's Golden Age of Philosophy**

A Unit of Study for Grades 9–12

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## INTRODUCTION

### APPROACH AND RATIONALE

*E*arly 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

**W**ithin 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.

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## 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,