

## Was China a great civilisation?

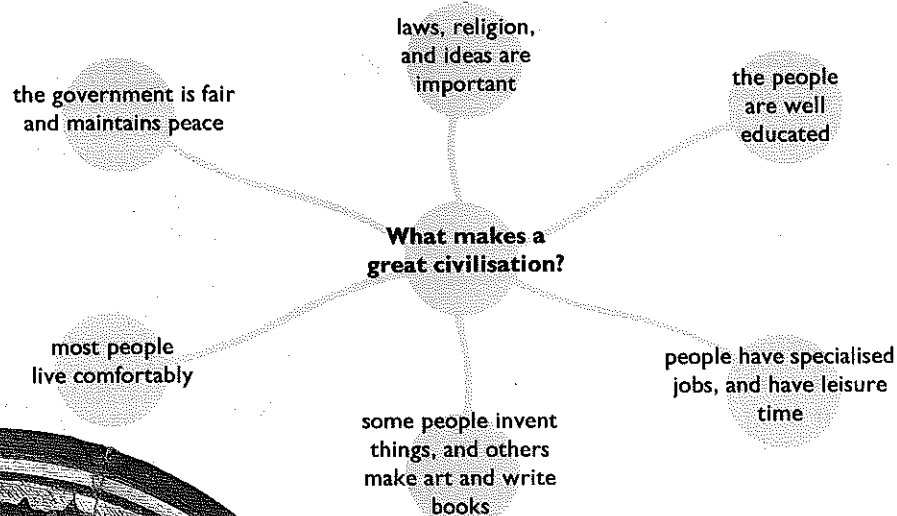
Marco Polo was not the only person to be impressed by China.

*'The Chinese have the oldest continuous civilisation in the world – going back some four thousand years – and also the oldest centralised state, which has survived, with interruptions, since 221 BC.'*

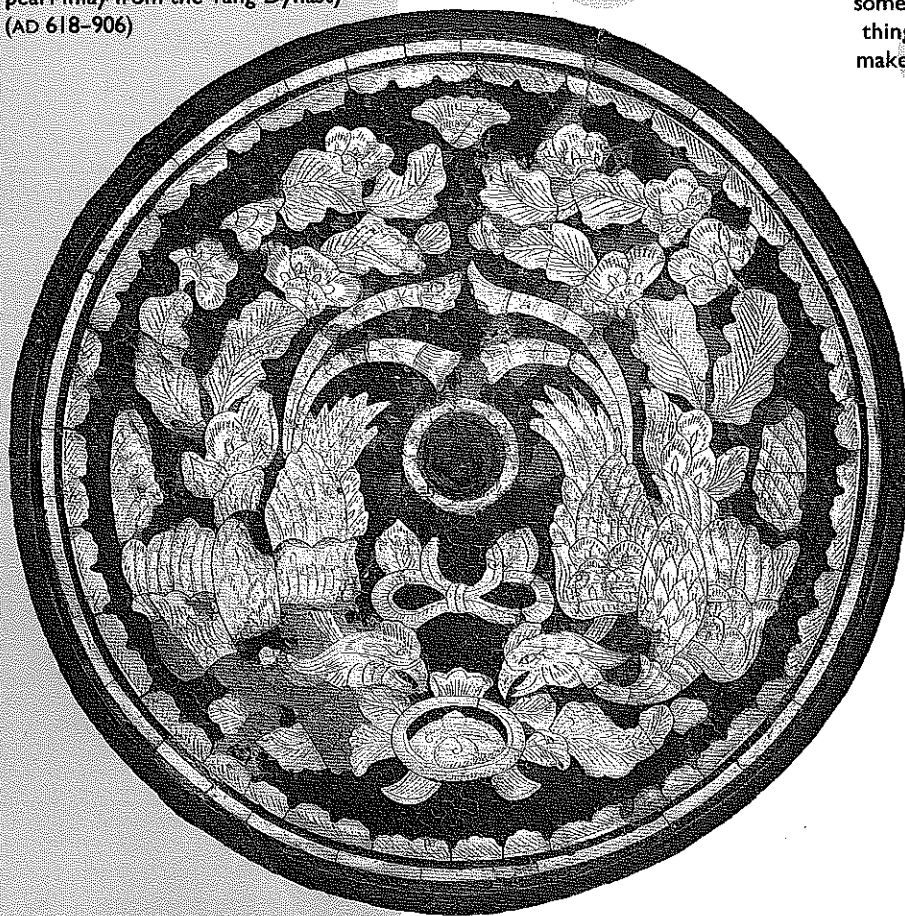
This was written by a modern historian, A. Clayre, and at the front of his book, *The Heart of the Dragon*, he said that he hoped that it would, *'... make Chinese*

*civilisation – the only surviving civilisation to have grown up and flourished until recently in independence of the West – better understood among some of the three-quarters of the people in the world who are not Chinese.'*

What did he mean by the word civilisation? You are going to investigate this word and attempt a definition. This will then become a framework for your study of China from 221 BC to AD 1279.



A bronze mirror with mother of pearl inlay from the Tang Dynasty (AD 618–906)



### Some more evidence on China

Francis Bacon, a sixteenth-century historian and English politician, said that three inventions – paper with printing, gunpowder, and the magnetic compass – completely changed the Europe of the Middle Ages into the modern world. He died not knowing that these three inventions had been in use in China for a very long time.

### Source A

The roof of the palace itself is very high. The walls of the halls and chambers inside are all covered with gold and silver and decorated with pictures of dragons, birds, horsemen, various beasts and battle scenes. The ceiling is similarly decorated. The hall is so vast and wide that a meal might be served here for more than 6000 men.

(Marco Polo describing the Winter Palace in Beijing)

### Source B

This is how they worshipped their gods. Each man keeps at home on one of the walls of his room, a statue representing the Supreme God of the Heavens. They burn incense daily, raise their hands and gnash their teeth three times, praying to the god to grant them good understanding and a long, happy, and joyful life. On the floor they have another statue who is god of the things of the earth, to whom they pray for earthly things like fair weather, for the fruits of the earth, for children, and so on.

(Marco Polo on religion in Hangzhou)

### Source C

They write with a brush such as painters paint with and make in one figure the several letters containing a single word.

(Friar John describing writing when he visited China from France in 1253)

### What was China like?

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A ceramic model of an armoured man on horseback from the Tang Dynasty. Note the stirrups, which were a Chinese invention in the third century.



### PEOPLE IN THE PAST: WAS CHINA A CIVILISATION?

- 1 Discuss the diagram opposite. Do you want to add other things to it? You might find it useful to think of other past societies that you have studied when younger, like the Greeks or Egyptians.
- 2 Study pages 3 to 7, and then copy and fill in the chart below with evidence.
- 3 Do the Romans seem to be a civilisation? Explain your answer.
- 4 Do the Anglo-Saxons seem to be a civilisation? Explain your answer.
- 5 Look at Marco Polo's comments again on page 3, and the evidence about China on pages 4 and 5. Do you think China was a civilisation? What answer do you have? Yes it was. No it was not. I'm not sure. Explain your answer.

	China	Romans	Anglo-Saxons
laws			
leisure			
comfort			
peace			
education			
others?			