



Daily Life in Ancient China

Most of the people in Ancient China were peasant farmers. They provided food for the rest of the Chinese people, and they also paid a tax to the government in the form of a percentage of their crops. It was a difficult life. Most farmers lived in small villages of about 100 families and worked small family farms. They did have plows that were pulled by animals, but the majority of the work was done by hand. Every farmer also had to work for the government on construction projects or serve in the Chinese military for one month each year.

Food in Ancient China varied by region. People in the north ate a grain called millet, while people in the south ate mainly rice. Over time, rice became the main staple crop for most of China. Animal foods were provided by farm animals like goats, pigs, and chickens. Communities near the water ate fish.

Some Ancient Chinese lived in cities and worked as merchants, craftsmen, government officials, and scholars. Some cities had hundreds of thousands of people living in them. These cities were surrounded by high walls made from packed dirt. At night, the gates of the cities were shut, and no one was allowed in or out.

The father was in charge of the Chinese family, and his family had to obey him without question. Women were considered of less value than men, to the point where baby girls were sometimes left out to die. Women took care of the housework. Parents chose who their children would marry, and the children (especially the girls) had little say on the matter. Chinese children were taught to respect their elders, and even grown-up children were expected to do as their parents wished. They prayed to their ancestors and offered them sacrifices.

In Ancient China, only the boys attended school. They learned to write with calligraphy. They also learned the wisdom of Confucius and studied poetry. These skills prepared them for lives as government officials and the nobles.

YOUR ASSIGNMENT: Imagine you are growing up in Ancient China. Write a paragraph describing what your life is like. What do you do all day? What do you wish for? What bothers you?