6 Ancient China to 221 BCE

> The people of our race were
> created by Heaven
> Having from the beginning
> distinctions and rules
> Our people cling to customs
> And what they admire is
> seemly behavior.
>
> —*The Zhou Book of Songs*

c. 2200–1700	Xia Dynasty
c. 1700–1100 BCE	Shang Dynasty
c. 1100–750 BCE	Western Zhou Dynasty: unified empire, capital at Xian
c. 750–221 BCE	Eastern Zhou Dynasty: new capital at Loyang
551–479 BCE	Life of Confucius
c. 400–221 BCE	Era of the Warring States

THE MOST STABLE AND in many ways the most successful civilization that history has known began in China in the second millennium BCE. It continued in its essentials through many changes in political leadership, meanwhile subjecting an enormous area and many different peoples to "the Chinese way." The Chinese educated classes, who considered themselves the hub of the universe, formed the most cohesive ruling group the world has ever seen. They combined scholarship and artistic sensitivity with great administrative abilities. Most of the classic elements of China's culture were firmly established by about 500 BCE, and thereafter they would change only very slowly.

Earliest China: The Shang Dynasty (1700–1100 BCE)

Of all the ancient civilizations, China was the most isolated from outside influences—even more so than Egypt. Both agriculture and metalworking apparently originated independently in China. The exact time and place in which agriculture first appeared in the Far East is disputable. Yet once in place, Chinese civilization had features that were typical of other early civilizations we have encountered: It rested on an agrarian foundation (Chapter 1); it produced a long series of dynastic monarchies; and, bordered by deserts and steppe lands, it endured episodic warfare and invasion from nomadic Turco-Mongolian tribespeople who inhabited the dry steppe lands to the west and northwest.

The Chinese heartland was divided between the dry Yellow River plain, the western steppe lands, and the better-watered southern valleys. Late Paleolithic Chinese roamed the grasslands of the great Northern Plain, gathering wild varieties of millet. Around 7000–6000 BCE, they began creating a village culture along the Yellow River, elevating their villages above the floodplain on rammed-earth platforms and surrounding them with earthen walls. They developed terracing and irrigation techniques to grow millet, barley, soy, and hemp in the yellow, wind-blown soils called *loess* (LOW-us). It was this region that became the cradle of Chinese civilization.

However, another river would play almost as important a role in China's later history: the Yangtze (YAHNG-tzuh). This great stream is much tamer than the Yellow and runs far to the south, through a warmer and wetter landscape. Agriculture actually appeared earliest in a vast region that spanned most of southern China and Southeast Asia. There, non-Chinese peoples hunted pigs and gathered wild varieties of rice that grew in swamplands along the Yangtze and the other rivers that drained the region. Between 10,000 and 7000 BCE, settled farm life appeared, and it became the center of wet rice culture in southern China and Southeast Asia. Eventually, the northern Chinese (called the *Han*) conquered the south, and the rice of the Yangtze became even more important to the their food supply than the millet of the Yellow River drainage.

Much as in Mesopotamia and the Indus River Valley, the Yellow River's floods were tremendously damaging and had to be controlled by extensive levees, painfully erected and maintained. Perhaps, as in these other early civilizations, it was this need to control the floods and to coordinate the labor of thousands in vast construction projects that contributed most toward political unification.

The worship of clan ancestors and nature spirits seems to have been an early feature of Chinese religion. And it was this—particularly the need for the ritual appeasement of the ancestors of landowning senior lineages—that assured that unification and dynastic rule went hand in hand in Neolithic and Bronze Age China. Around 2200 BCE, several of the Neolithic cultures along the central course of the Yellow River were drawn into an organized state for the first time (see Map 6.1 inset). This state was the product of military conquest by a Bronze Age people who were ruled by a dynastic monarchy called the *Xia* (shah), about whom little is known.

Following the Xia, around 1700, the **Shang** (shahng) **Dynasty** replaced the villagers' earlier political overseers, and its rise appears to have been associated with two important innovations: bronze casting and writing. Most of what we know of ancient China comes from archaeology rather than from history, because Shang writings were limited. Since the 1920s, Chinese and foreign archaeologists have been excavating many rich grave sites. From the elaborate order found among the tomb remains and their contents, we can infer that Shang society was strictly hierarchical. At the top was a powerful king with his warrior court. War was commonplace, and warriors were favored in every way, much as in feudal Europe. Below the warriors were many skilled artisans and a growing class of small traders in the towns. In the countryside lived the great majority—the peasants in their villages.

Being agrarian, the early Chinese believed in deities and ancestor spirits who controlled natural forces. Scholars know precious little about the actual gods in whom the peasant classes believed and about their religious activities, but most believed that nature was controllable by the royal ancestors of the ruler. Therefore, the key to everyone's welfare was the king's ability to discern their will and control them. To accomplish this, they used *oracle bones*, which provide us with some of the earliest examples of Chinese writing. Questions were written on tortoise shells or the shoulder bones of sheep, and then a heated rod was applied to produce cracks. Priests interpreted their patterns as answers.

Several fundamental aspects of Chinese life were already visible in the Shang Epoch. Some of these resemble traits that are typical of all early agrarian societies (Chapter 1):

> The supreme importance of the family. The reverence shown to ancestors and the aged by the young. The Chinese believe that experience is far more important than theory and that the young must learn from the aged if harmony is to be preserved and progress achieved.
>
> The salient responsibility for assuring the general prosperity belongs to the ruler and his household. The ruler enacts this by performing critical functions of both a secular and a religious nature that are essential to prosperity. On the other hand, the legitimacy of the ruler and the ruling dynasty is tied to their effectiveness in performing these duties.
>
> The emphasis on this world. No other civilization of early times was so secular in orientation as China. Although the emperors were titled Son of Heaven, the earthly, practical tasks performed by the government were at least as important as their religious role.
>
> The importance of education, particularly literacy. No other culture has made the ability to read and write so critical for success. The ancient Chinese written language was extremely complex (it has since been simplified). Years of hard study were required to master it, but once acquired, it opened the doors to both wealth and power.

In the eleventh century BCE, the Shang rulers seem to have faced internal conflicts that weakened the dynasty. Somewhat later, they fell to the **Zhou** (joh) **Dynasty**, a related but alien group from farther west. The Zhou would be the most enduring of all the Chinese ruling dynasties.

IMAGES OF HISTORY

EARLY BRONZE CEREMONIAL WARE

This covered "Fang-yi" wine vessel from the Shang era (twelfth century BCE) is typical in several respects of articles that were manufactured for ceremonial use. First, such vessels were cast from bronze, and at the time it was made, the metal and the technology needed to make it were both rare and precious. As such, they were made exclusively for the king and members of the royal household, and only for ceremonial or military purposes. Although bronze was made in western and southern Asia, Chinese techniques were considerably more advanced, and articles like this one were of a much higher level of workmanship. There were also certain motifs that were typical of ceremonial containers. This one employs the "tao-ti," or mask, motif.

credit to come

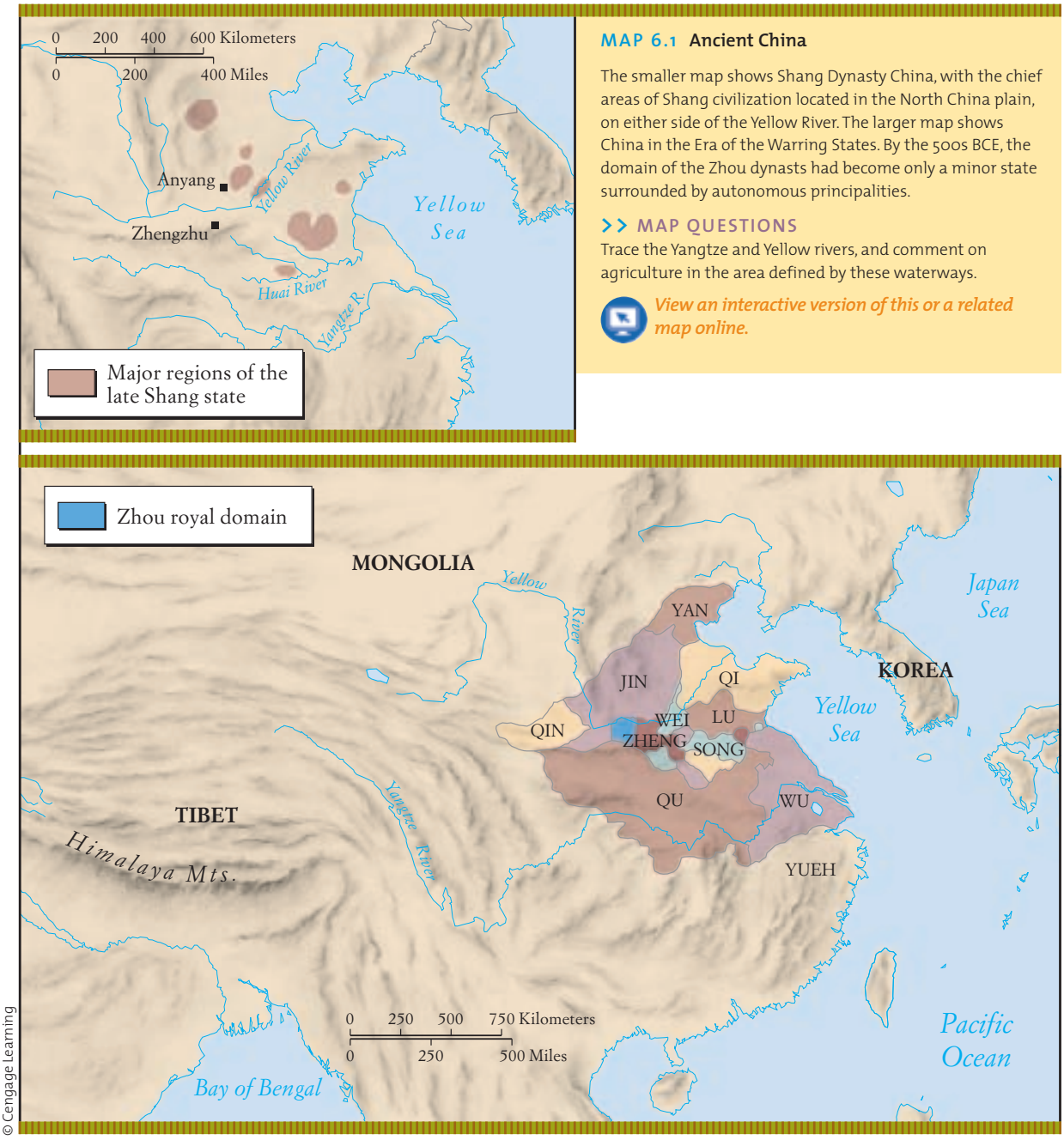
The Zhou Dynasty (1100–221 BCE)

From time to time, pastoralist groups from the north or west succeeded in conquering China's ruling warlords and seating their own tribal leaders in power. The Zhou were the first of a series of ruling dynasties of nomadic origins that came from China's borderlands to the west.

During the 700 years that they ruled, at least in name, the Zhou greatly extended China's borders. Where the Shang had been content to rule a relatively restricted segment of north-central China on either side of the Yellow River, the Zhou reached out almost to the sea in the east and well into Inner Mongolia in the west. We know much more about the Zhou era than the Shang because an extensive literature survives. Much history was written, and records of all types—from tax rolls to lists of imports and exports—have been found. The dynasty falls into two distinct phases: the unified empire, from about 1100 to about 750 BCE, and the Later Zhou, from about 750 to about 400 BCE. The earlier period was the more important. The Later **Zhou Dynasty** experienced a series of constant provincial revolts until, finally, the central government broke down altogether (see Map 6.1).

One of the novelties of the Zhou Period was the idea of the **mandate of heaven**. As did most tribespeople who originated in the west, the Zhou worshiped an unchanging, cosmic entity called "Heaven," or **Tian**. In certain respects, Tian resembled the Hindu *karma*—that is to say, a universal principle of ethical cause and effect. Like karma, too, Tian functioned as an organic whole that was linked to earthly people and events. It was the "heavenly" vault that covered all things and all peoples of the world. So, to justify their forcible overthrow of the Shang, the first Zhou rulers developed the idea that heaven gave earthly rulers a mandate to rule justly and well. As long as they did so, they retained the mandate, but it would be taken from them if they betrayed the deities' trust. A king who ruled inefficiently or who failed to protect his people from injustice or invaders or who failed to contain internal revolt had betrayed this trust. Thus, if a Chinese ruler fell to a superior force or a successful conspiracy, as did the Shang ruler, it was a sign that he had "lost the mandate" and had to be replaced. This marvelously self-serving theory was to be highly influential in Chinese history.

The first Zhou kings were powerful rulers who depended mainly on their swords. The royal court employed hundreds of skilled administrators, and we see here the faint beginning of a professional bureaucracy in the Zhou era. China led the world in this development, as in so many others. As the centuries passed, however, power slipped from the monarch's hand and a feudal society developed, as the kings delegated more and more of their military and



MAP 6.1 Ancient China

The smaller map shows Shang Dynasty China, with the chief areas of Shang civilization located in the North China plain, on either side of the Yellow River. The larger map shows China in the Era of the Warring States. By the 500s BCE, the domain of the Zhou dynasts had become only a minor state surrounded by autonomous principalities.

>> MAP QUESTIONS

Trace the Yangtze and Yellow rivers, and comment on agriculture in the area defined by these waterways.

View an interactive version of this or a related map online.

administrative duties to local aristocrats. These men stood to gain from the acquisition of new territory, and they did so at every chance. As a result, China expanded, but at the same time the control of the royal government weakened.

By the 500s, the local aristocrats were in command of much of the empire, and by 400, the central power had broken down completely—one of the few times that has happened in China.

Writing

Like most languages, written Chinese was originally pictographic, but from its origins around 1700 BCE, it soon developed a huge vocabulary of signs that had no picture equivalents and were not at all related to the spoken word (that is, they were not alphabetic). These characters are called *logographs*, or "words in signs." Chinese spoken

language is monosyllabic (each word has but one syllable), and a single logograph can take the place of as many as several words in other languages, conveying whole descriptions or actions in one sign. Some logographs were derived from common pictorial roots, but others were not connected in any way, which made learning them difficult. All in all, students had to memorize about 5,000 logographs to be considered literate. Understandably, literacy was rare, and those who knew how to read and write entered a kind of elite club that carried tremendous prestige.

Although writing emerged considerably later in China than in Mesopotamia or Egypt, it developed quickly and had a richer vocabulary and more conceptual refinement than any other written language before the first century CE. The earliest writing beyond pictography is found on oracle bones, but by the end of the Shang Period (about 1100 BCE), histories and stories were being written, and some have been preserved.

Culture and Daily Life Under the Zhou

The greatest artistic achievement of the ancient Chinese was undoubtedly their bronze work. Craftsmen in the late Shang and early Zhou periods turned out drinking cups, vases, wine vessels, brooches, and medallions, whose technical excellence and artistic grace were stunning. Metal technology in general was advanced in early China. Besides bronze, cast iron and copper were widely used for both tools and weaponry.

The Shang buildings that have been partially unearthed by modern archaeologists are impressive in both size and design. The upper class built large palaces and strong forts around towns such as Anyang and Zhengzhou (chung-choh), in the middle reaches of the Yellow River plain. The distinctive Chinese architectural style, with pagoda-type roof lines and diminishing upper stories, was developed at this time, although it was carried out much more elaborately later on. Most of the art forms of modern China had their roots in very early times.

British Museum, London, UK/Bridgeman Art Library

ORACLE BONE. On the flat surface of bones such as this, Shang sages incised the earliest surviving examples of Chinese ideographs. The messages are questions addressed to the gods, and the sages read the answers by examining the patterns of cracks in the bones after hot irons had been pressed against them.

The Zhou era also saw great advances in every area of arts and crafts. Silkworm cultivation and the weaving of silk have been demonstrated to be an important part of Shang and Zhou culture and trade with foreign states. The famous Silk Road (the caravan route to the Near East and the Black Sea) did not yet exist, but regional trade did, and goods flowed between China and its western neighbors. Along China's borders, there was great demand for products like metal and jade wares, salt, and above all, silk that issued from the shops of China's artisans. In exchange for these, the Chinese aristocracy prized the sturdy horses supplied by nomads who wandered the Central Asian steppes.

With China's incessant need to defend itself against the nomads on its borders, the importation of the war chariot from Western Asia led to a technical breakthrough of the first rank: a harness or collar that allowed the horse to pull with the full strength of its shoulders and body without choking. This type of harness transformed the value of horses, not only in warfare but also as beasts of burden. Only much later did other civilizations recognize and copy this fundamental breakthrough.

As for living standards in Zhou China, the evidence we have suggests that peasants were moderately prosperous and rarely enslaved at this time. Although their life was undoubtedly difficult, it was not miserable. Zhou peasants were in more or less the same economic situation as Egyptian peasants: They were sharecropping tenants, with some rights, on the aristocracy's land and at least in the early Zhou years were usually protected from the worst excesses of grasping landlords by a powerful and respected government.

© China Newsphoto/Reuters/Corbis

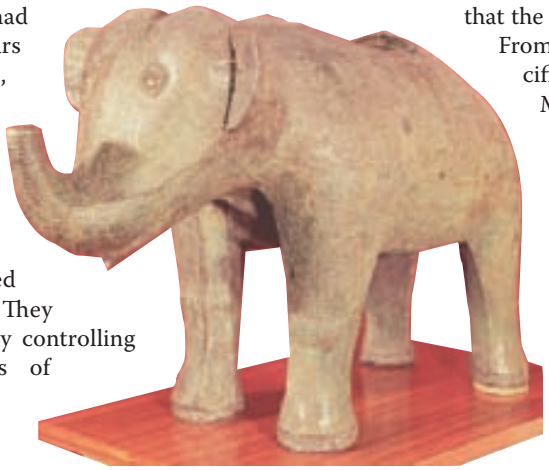
BATTLE CHARIOT. Chariots were invented in western Asia but came into use in China during the Shang period, greatly revolutionizing warfare. Chinese archaeologists recently excavated burials at Anyang that included both chariots and horses.

In the literary arts, many of the classics that have been taught to Chinese children through the centuries originated in the Zhou era. The earliest surviving books stem from the 800s BCE, much earlier than any from other civilized centers. They were written either on strips of specially prepared bamboo, strung together with silken cord, or on silk scrolls. Professional historians, employed by the court, wrote chronicles of the rulers and their achievements. Poetry made its first appearance in Chinese letters during the early Zhou period, beginning a tradition of sensitive, perceptive nature poetry that continues to the present day. The revered collection, called "The Book of Songs," was produced by one or several hands at this period, remaining a mainstay of Chinese education ever since. Calligraphy also began at this time, and officials were expected to master this art form as a qualification for office.

Metals, Salt, and Silk

Agriculture was the foundation of royal authority in China, but as elsewhere, manufacturing and trade played important supporting roles. There was no long-distance overland or oceanic trade during the Bronze Age—those materialized during the Qin and Han periods (Chapter 13)—but the governments of the Shang and Zhou kings tightly regulated or monopolized the manufacture of certain high-demand rare goods. Trade in these items took place throughout the territories over which their rule extended, and even beyond to the lands and peoples of the north and northwest.

Although bronze making had existed for at least 3,500 years before 700 BCE, until then, bronze was still rare enough that for most practical applications China remained a Neolithic society. Early dynasties like the Shang, the Zhou, and the Qin (chin) held sway because they monopolized warfare and public religion. They reached this position by strictly controlling access to the accoutrements of warfare and public ritual—namely weapons (particularly bronze weapons) and ritual objects (see the battle chariot and bronze artifacts). Royal workshops turned out all manner of weaponry, vessels, and statues, and reached an apex of perfection in Shang times. Much of it was produced using the lost wax method of casting into molds, a method that allowed greater production and more delicacy of form and design than that used in the West, where hammering and forging methods were employed.



BRONZE ELEPHANT. The form of bronze casting known as *cir perdue* (lost wax) was widely used by the Zhou Dynasty artists. But using clay molds that locked tightly together before the liquid metal was poured into them produced the finest work. This enabled them to achieve a particularly fine detailing of the surface, as seen here.

Starting in the sixth century BCE, iron came into common use for tools and utensils, as well as for weapons. Iron making produced stronger materials than bronze, but more importantly, once perfected, iron could be produced in far greater quantities than bronze and could be used for tools as well as sacred objects and weapons. The iron plowshare opened up huge areas of northern and central China to agriculture, enabling unprecedented growth—perhaps 400 percent—of both the economy and the population during the Zhou era.

Salt is so basic to modern diets that it is hard to think of it as a valued commodity—which it was in the ancient world. The high demand for salt made it an obvious target for government control and an important source of revenue for the emperors, who needed the income to support their large armies. There have been estimates that 50 to 80 percent of the emperors' purses derived from the salt monopoly. Through China's long run of dynastic rulers, there were periods when the monopoly on salt and metals was relaxed, but so fundamental were these goods to royal authority that these rare exceptions proved the rule.

Yet as central as was the place occupied by salt and iron in its political economy, it is silk that comes to mind when thinking of Imperial China. Woodcarvings of silkworms and weaving apparatus have turned up in excavations of Chinese Neolithic sites, suggesting that the craft had prehistoric beginnings. From its inception, it was a craft specifically associated with women: Most silk deities were female, for example, and China's queens had the responsibility for successfully enacting state procedures in honor of the goddess of silk weaving. The critical importance of silk weaving is indicated by the fact that its ritual honors were carried out on the state level. Furthermore, silk itself played a critical role in all public rituals. In conjunction with bronze and jade objects, it was a ubiquitous key element of royal ancestral offerings.

More commonly, of course, silk was prized for its usefulness and beauty. It was an enormously strong, tough fabric that was superior to all others in its ability

SILK: A WOMAN'S BUSINESS. Throughout history, certain crafts have tended to be gender related. Silk weaving—one of China's most important industries—was women's work, as shown in the Ming-period vase.

to hold dyes, so it far outshone all fabrics in popularity wherever it came to the attention of local elites. No Silk Road existed until imperial times (beginning with the First Emperor, Shi Huangdi; see Chapter 13), but already by 1000 BCE some trade existed with peoples to the west. By 500 BCE, Central Asian elites were importing silk from China. Developments during the Eastern Zhou period—iron making, dramatically increased agricultural production and population, plus the introduction of patterned weaving—no doubt contributed to expanded trade.

Demand for silk also increased noticeably when new uses were found for it during late Zhou times. For the first time, scribes and artists found it to be a useful medium for writing and painting, while government officials discovered that it was useful as currency to purchase warhorses from nomadic tribespeople and to pay them bribes when demanded. Kings collected taxes in the form of silk textiles and paid their officials with it. There was little state control over silk production before 221 BCE, but in many respects the steadily rising levels of useful applications, demand, and trade in silk occurring after 1000 BCE created opportunities that later emperors like Shi Huangdi or Wudi were quick to use to their advantage.

The Confucian and Daoist Philosophies

Confucianism

China's greatest single cultural force, the historical figure Kung Fu-tzu (551–479 BCE), or **Confucius** (con-FYOO-shus), appeared toward the end of the Zhou era. For twenty centuries, Confucius was the molder of Chinese patterns of education, and the authority on what a true Chinese should and should not do. Confucius's interests were practical, centered on the hierarchy of ethical and political relations between individuals, and especially between the citizenry and the governor. The great model for Confucius's politics was the Chinese family.

Among the Chinese, the *yin-yang principles* identified the female as the passive element and the male as the active, creative one. Although all civilizations we have thus far studied gave pride of place to the father, none applied this principle so systematically as the Chinese. In ancient China, children and grandchildren accorded the father absolute obedience, and furthermore, the mother supposedly never raised her voice in contradiction to her husband. A widow owed the same obedience to her father and sons. This arrangement remained the ideal in modern China before the Communist takeover, although one can question whether it was a reality. (There is no scarcity of reports of independent Chinese wives within the four walls of the home in modern times.) But without a doubt, the principle of male superiority and female inferiority was adhered to and implemented systematically throughout Chinese history.

In Confucius's view, the state should be like a harmonious family: The father was the undisputed head, each person had his or her special rights and duties, and the wisdom of the aged guided the young. The oldest male was responsible for protecting and guiding the others, who owed him absolute obedience even when he appeared to be wrong.

Confucius insisted on *gentility*—that is, courtesy, justice, and moderation—as the chief virtue of the public man. He taught that the rich and the strong should feel a sense of obligation toward the poor and the weak. A gentleman was made, not born. An aristocrat might not be a gentleman, whereas a lowborn person could learn to be one. The proper calling of a gentleman was government. He should advise the ruler and see to it that government policies were fair and promoted the general welfare. A ruler who followed the advice of his gentlemanly counselors would surely retain the mandate of heaven.

LAW AND GOVERNMENT

Confucius (551–479 BCE)

The most revered of all Chinese statesmen and philosophers was Master Kung, known in the West as Confucius. As a lasting influence on a nation, he has no equal in world history. During his long lifetime, he acquired a devoted group of followers who gave educated Chinese their moral and ethical landmarks for 2,000 years. Confucianism has, of course, evolved considerably over the centuries, and no one now knows precisely what the Master's original thoughts may have been. But by reading what his disciples said about him and about their own understanding of his message in ***The Analects***, we can appreciate his greatness and his importance in the life of the Chinese people.

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PORTRAIT OF CONFUCIUS. This undated illustration, much like other depictions of Confucius made after his death, was based on a relief from the stela in the Pei Lin de Sigan-fou.

Confucius was born into an impoverished but aristocratic family in the state of Lu at the time when the Zhou Empire was falling apart and the Era of the Warring States was beginning. Given a good education, the young man set out to find a suitable place for himself in the world. His ambition was to acquire a post in the government of his home state, which would allow him to exert a real influence for good and to assist the princely ruler in providing wise and benevolent rule.

Frustrated by the intrigues of his rivals in Lu, where he briefly obtained a post in the ministry of justice, Confucius was forced to seek a position elsewhere. But in the neighboring states, too, he was disappointed in his quest, never securing more than minor and temporary positions before running afoul of backbiting competitors or speaking his mind when that was a dangerous thing to do. He had to return to Lu to earn his living as a teacher, and for the rest of his life he subsisted modestly on the tuition fees of his wealthier students.

Confucius accepted this fate with difficulty. For many years, he continued to hope for appointment as an adviser to the prince and thus to translate his beliefs into government policy. Only gradually did he realize that by his teaching he could have more influence on the fate of his people than he might ever attain as a minister to a trivial and corrupt ruler. By the end of his life, his fame had already reached much of China's small educated class (*shi*), and his students were going out to found schools of their own, reflecting the principles the Master had taught them.

Confucius taught that all human affairs, public and private, were structured by the **Five Great Relationships**: father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger brother, ruler and subject, and friend and friend. The fact that three of these relationships are within the family circle shows the Confucian emphasis on the family. He believed it to be the model and building block of all other social or political arrangements. This emphasis continues in Chinese life to this day.

Confucius was not so much an original thinker as a great summarizer and reformulator of truths already embraced by his people. He did not attempt a complete philosophical system and was not at all interested in theology or what is now called *metaphysics*. Rather, his focus was always on the relationship of human being to human being, and especially of governor to governed. He was an eminently secular thinker, and this tradition, too, has continued among educated Chinese to the present.

Two of the sayings attributed to him in the collection of his sayings called *The Analects* give the flavor of his teaching:

> Tsi-guang [a disciple] asked about government.
>
> Confucius said: "Sufficient food, sufficient armament, and sufficient confidence of the people are the necessities." "Forced to give up one, which would you abandon first?" "I would abandon armament." "Forced to give up one of the remaining two, which would you abandon?" "I would abandon food. There has always been death from famine, but no state can exist without the confidence of its people."

The Master always emphasized the necessity of the ruler setting a good example:

> Replying to Chi Gang-tsi who had asked him about the nature of good government, Confucius said, "To govern is to rectify. If you lead the people by virtue of rectifying yourself, who will dare not be rectified by you?"

>> Analyze and Interpret

After a generation of contemptuous treatment and proscription, the Chinese Communist government has recently allowed the reintroduction of Confucian teaching and commentary in the schools. Why do you think this has happened? Do you think Confucius has anything to say to modern people?

You can read more from the *The Analect* online.

This philosophy of public service by scholarly, virtuous officials was to have enormous influence on China. Rulers came to be judged according to whether they used the Confucian prescriptions for good government. A corps of officials educated on Confucian principles, subscribing to his values and believing him to be the Great Teacher, came into existence. These *shi*—or **mandarins** (MAN-dah-rihns), as the West later called them—were the actual administrative class of China for 2,000 years.

The rulers naturally tended to see, in Confucius's admonition that the state should resemble a well-run family, a condemnation of revolt for any reason. In time, many of the Confucian-trained bureaucrats not only agreed but also came to believe that the status quo was the only natural and proper way of doing things. The insistence that harmony was the chief goal of politics and social policy was sometimes twisted into an excuse for stagnation. Also, like many Chinese, Confucius had a low opinion of people who lived by trade, so the Confucian notion of the ideal society placed merchants at the bottom of the social ladder. Both of these factors led to contempt for the new, a fear of change—however necessary—and a distrust of foreigners. From time to time in China's long history, these tendencies led to acute problems.

Daoism

Daoism (Taoism) is a philosophy centered on nature and following the "Way" (Dao: dauw). It was supposedly the product of the only teacher-sage, **Lao-Zi** (or Lao-tzu: LAUW-tzuh), who was purportedly a near contemporary and rival of Confucius but may be entirely legendary. The book attributed to him, the famous **The Way of the Dao** (***Dao de Jing***), was probably written by his followers much later.

If Confucius stood for the active principle in Chinese philosophy, Daoism (DAUW-ism) is the passive one, seeing the best government as the least government, a minimum of correction and guidance for those who are inherently unable and unwilling to govern themselves. In so doing, the rulers should follow the Way of Nature, as it is perceived through meditation and observation. The intelligent man seeks a lifestyle that is in tune with the natural world, a harmony of parts in a serene whole. The excerpt from the *Dao de Jing* in the Patterns of Belief box shows this harmony through paradoxical examples drawn from everyday life. All extremes should be avoided, even those meant to be benevolent. The truly good ruler does little except be; excessive action is as bad as no corrective action at all.

Daoism has taken so many forms through the centuries that it is almost impossible to provide a single description of it. Originally, it was a philosophy of the educated classes, but it eventually degenerated into a superstition of the peasants. Yet for many centuries it was a serious rival of Confucius's ideas and was often adopted by Chinese seeking harmony with the natural world and escape from earthly conflicts. This dichotomy was summed up in the saying that the educated classes were "Confucian by day, Daoist by night." In their rational, public lives, they abided by practical Confucian principles of conduct, but in the quiet of their beds, they sought immersion in mysterious, suprarational nature.

Other Rivals

In the later Zhou Period, sometimes also called the **Hundred Schools Period**, many rival philosophies arose to challenge the Confucian views. Only Daoism was as successful in capturing the permanent allegiance of the educated classes, but two others were repeatedly seized upon as alternatives or necessary additions to the teachings of the Great Teachers.

Legalism

Legalism was more a philosophy of government than a philosophy of private life. It was popularized in the **Era of the Warring States** (*c.* 400–225 BCE), between the collapse of central Zhou dynastic authority (around 400 BCE) and the rise of the Qin emperor in the 220s (see Chapter 13). The general breakdown of authority that characterized this period provided the motivation for Legalist ideas.

The Legalists were convinced that a government that allowed freedom to its subjects was asking for trouble. Legalism was a rationalized form of governmental manipulation. It was not so much a philosophy as a justification for applying force when persuasion had failed. Its basis was the conviction that most people were inclined to evil selfishness and that it was the task of government to restrain them and simultaneously guide them into doing "good"—that is to say, whatever the governors wanted. This task was to be accomplished by controlling people even before their evil nature had manifested itself in their acts. In other words, the Legalists advocated strict censorship, prescribed education (differing by social rank), and immediate crushing of any signs of independent thought or action that could upset the status quo.

Moism

For awhile, the philosophy taught by Mozi was a serious rival to the other three major schools of Chinese thought. The philosopher Mozi, after whom this school was named, propounded a doctrine of universal love as a solution to the chaos of the Warring States period. Mozi intended this as an intellectual repudiation of Confucius's ideas about the primacy of family relations; ideas that he thought undermined the ideal of social equality. Mozi instead expounded a doctrine that closely resembled

PATTERNS OF BELIEF

Dao de Jing of Lao Zi

Confucian philosophy was by no means universally accepted in ancient China. It had to overcome several rival points of view among the educated class and was only partly successful in doing so. Among the ordinary people, Daoism was always stronger because it lent itself more readily to personal interpretation and to the rampant superstitions of the illiterate. It drew many of its principles from close observation of nature, emphasizing the necessity of bringing one's life into harmony with nature. Rather than the illusions of well-bred Confucians or the brutality of the Legalists, the followers of the Way sought serenity through acceptance of what is.

The *Dao de Jing*, or The Way of the Dao, is a collection of sayings attributed to Lao Zi (Lao-tzu), who supposedly lived in the sixth century BCE. Like much Chinese philosophy, the essence of the *Dao de Jing* is the search for balance between opposites, between the *yin and yang* principles. Unlike Confucianism, Daoism puts little faith in reason and foresight as the way to happiness. Instead, it urges its followers to accept the mystery of life and stop striving for a false mastery. It delights in putting its truths as paradoxes.

Chapter II

It is because everyone under Heaven recognizes beauty as beauty, that the idea of ugliness exists.

And equally, if everyone recognized virtue as virtue, this would create fresh conceptions of wickedness.

For truly Being and Non-Being grow out of one another; Difficult and Easy complete one another; Long and Short test one another; High and Low determine one another.

The sounds of instruments and voice give harmony to one another.

Front and Back give sequence to one another.

Therefore the Sage relies on actionless activity, Carries on wordless teaching. . . .

Chapter IV

The Way is like an empty vessel That yet may be drawn from Without ever needing to be filled.

It is bottomless; the very progenitor of all things in the world.

In it is all sharpness blunted, All tangles untied, All glare tempered, All dust smoothed.

It is like a deep pool that never dries.

Was it, too, the child of something else? We cannot tell.

Chapter IX

Stretch a bow to the very full And you will wish you had stopped in time; Temper a sword edge to its very sharpest, And you will find that it soon grows dull.

When bronze and jade fill your halls It can no longer be guarded.

Wealth and position breed insolence That brings ruin in its train.

When your work is done, then withdraw!

Such is Heaven's Way.

Chapter XI

We put thirty spokes together and call it a wheel; But it is on the space where there is nothing that the utility of the wheel depends.

We turn clay to make a vessel; But it is on the space where there is nothing that the utility of the vessel depends.

We pierce doors and windows to make a house; But it is on these spaces where there is nothing that the utility of the house depends.

Therefore, just as we take advantage of what is, we should recognize the utility of what is not.

>> Analyze and Interpret

What application of Daoist thought can you find in your own experiences? Does the paradox of saying that doors and windows can be appreciated only if one keeps in mind the walls of the house strike you as truthful? As memorable?

Source: *The Way and Its Power: A Study of the Dao de Qing*, ed. and trans. A. Waley. © 1934.

You can read more from the *Dao de Jing* online.

the Judeo-Christian golden rule: that people should treat one another as they themselves wished to be treated. As a practical consequence, his followers developed a military science that emphasized the use of defensive tactics as a way of ending chronic warfare. For several centuries, such tactics were in high demand among smaller, weaker states that were threatened by more powerful neighbors, but once the First Qin ruler, Shi Huangdi, restored order and established the first empire, they and Moist philosophy quickly lost favor.

SUMMARY

THE CIVILIZATION OF CHINA ORIGINATED in the Neolithic villages of the northern plains near the Yellow River late in the third millennium BCE. Under the first historical dynasties of the Xia, the Shang, and the Zhou, this agrarian civilization displayed certain characteristics that were to mark China for many centuries to come: reverence for ancestors, the tremendous importance of the family, and the prestige of the educated and of the written word. Fine arts and literature were cultivated in forms that persisted: bronze ware, ceramics, silk, historical literature, and nature poetry.

The Shang dynasts were a warrior aristocracy who took over the village folk as their subjects in the eighteenth century BCE. What we know of them is almost entirely through a smattering of oracular fragments and archaeology carried out in recent times. They were succeeded after several centuries by another warrior group called the Zhou, which established perhaps the most influential of all Chinese dynasties in the realm of culture. The arts flourished, and the limits of the state expanded greatly. Gradually, however, power to hold this vast realm together escaped from the dynastic ruler's hands and flowed into those of the provincial aristocrats.

The breakdown of central government that ended the long Zhou Dynasty and introduced the Era of the Warring States demanded further definition of basic values. In response, many schools of practical philosophy arose between 500 and 250 BCE: Most influential were Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism, while a fourth, Moism, quickly faded from view once order was restored. Of these, the most significant for later Chinese history over the next 2,000 years were the rationalist and pragmatic thought of Confucius and the passive, minimalist views of Lao Zi.

Identification Terms

Test your knowledge of this chapter's key concepts by defining the following terms. If you can't recall the meaning of certain terms, refresh your memory by looking up the boldfaced term in the chapter, turning to the Glossary at the end of the book, or accessing the terms online: www.cengagebrain.com.

The Analects
Confucius
Era of the Warring States
Five Great Relationships
Hundred Schools Period
Lao Zi
Legalism
mandarins
mandate of heaven
Shang Dynasty
Tian
The Way of the Dao (*Dao de Jing*)
Zhou Dynasty

For Further Reflection

1. In what ways did the early development of Chinese civilization resemble those of other civilizations we have explored in this Part? What seems to have been unique to early China?
2. How do you account for China's rapid development of new technologies? How did this compare with other civilizations?
3. Why do you suppose there was a particular emphasis on the worship of royal ancestors in the first two dynasties? What importance did these have for the average peasant farmer?
4. How do you think it is possible for many Chinese to adhere to the teachings of both Confucianism and Daoism?