



Chapter 5

Ancient China to 221 BCE

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Chapter Chronology

c. 2200–c. 1700 B.C.E.

Xia Dynasty

c. 1700–1045 B.C.E.

Shang Dynasty

1045–771 B.C.E.

Western Zhou Dynasty: unified empire, capital at Xian

771–256 B.C.E.

Eastern Zhou Dynasty: new capital at Loyang

551–479 B.C.E.

Life of Confucius

c. 400–221 B.C.E.

Era of the Warring States

Early China (Slide 1 of 3)

- Most isolated of all ancient civilizations
- Developed agriculture & metalworking independently
- Shared characteristics of other early civilizations
 - Agrarian base
 - Long series of dynastic monarchies
 - Bordered by desert & steppe lands
 - Endured frequent invasions (by nomads, Turco-Mongolians)
- Chinese religion involved worship of ancestors and nature spirits



Early China (Slide 2 of 3)

- China's geographic regions:
 - Dry Yellow River Valley Plain
 - Western Steppe Land
 - Better watered southern plains
- Yellow River, “Cradle of Chinese Civilization”
 - Villages appeared, 7000-6000 BCE
 - Irrigation and terracing
 - Millet, barley, soy, hemp in loose soil called **loess**
- Yangzi River – Second center
 - Tamer river, more water
 - Villages appeared, 10,000-7000 BCE
 - Wet rice cultivation
 - People not originally Chinese

Early China (Slide 3 of 3)

- Eventually, Northerners (Han) conquered South
- Rice became more important than millet
- Flood control required coordinated labor for big construction projects, contributing to unification of China
- Religious practice of ritual appeasement of ancestors contributed to rise of dynastic monarchy
- Xia, first dynasty, c. 2200 BCE – little known of it



Shang Dynasty, 1700-1045 BCE (Slide 1 of 2)

- Associated with two important innovations: bronze casting and writing
- Strictly hierarchical society
 - Powerful king with warrior court
 - Skilled artisans, small traders in towns
 - Peasants (majority)
- Public cult of the royal ancestors
- Oracle bones used to discern divine wishes



Shang Dynasty, 1700-1045 BCE (Slide 2 of 2)

Aspects of Chinese Life Visible during the Shang Dynasty

- Supreme importance of family
- Ruler & his household responsible for prosperity
- Emphasis on this world
- Importance of education, literacy

Zhou Dynasty, 1045-256 BCE

- Nomadic origins
- Zhou extended China's borders
- Phases of the Zhou Dynasty
 - Unified empire, strong rulers, dynamic growth, 1045-750 BCE
 - Provincial revolts, central power declined, 750-256 BCE
- Extensive literature survived: history, records of all kinds
- Zhou took power, claiming Mandate of Heaven



Mandate of Heaven

- Zhou concept of Heaven (**Tian**) – universal principal of ethical cause and effect
- Heaven gave a mandate to the ruler as long as he ruled well and justly
- If he betrayed the mandate, the mandate could be lost, thus justifying regime change
- Highly influential concept in Chinese history

Writing

- Early Chinese pictographs date to about 1250 BCE
- Later logographs, “words in signs,” used to signify non-pictorial concepts
- Students had to memorize about 5000 logographs to be literate
- Richest vocabulary of any ancient written language
- Earliest writing found on oracle bones
- Immensely important in unifying groups which came to call themselves “Chinese”

Culture and Daily Life (Slide 1 of 2)

- Bronze work
 - Technical excellence, artistic grace
 - Metal technology generally advanced
 - Cast iron and copper widely used
- Distinctive Chinese architectural style developed during Shang Dynasty
 - Tile pagoda-style roof-lines
 - Diminishing upper stories
- Trade with central Asian Steppes
 - Silk, jade, metals and salt traded for horses
 - Nomad's war chariot inspired invention of horse harness

Culture and Daily Life (Slide 2 of 2)

- Peasants
 - Moderately prosperous
 - Rarely enslaved
 - Majority were sharecropping tenants
- Literary arts
 - Earliest surviving books date to 800 BCE
 - Professional historians wrote chronicles of rulers
 - Poetry, “Book of Songs”
 - Calligraphy

Metals and Salt

- Shang, Zhou, Qin monopolized access to bronze weapons and ritual objects
 - Lost wax method
- 6th c. BCE - iron was used for tools, utensils, sacred objects, and weapons
- Iron plowshare raised agricultural yield, resulting in 400% population growth
- Government had salt monopoly to create tax revenue for armies – 50-80% tax from salt

Silk

- Silk production women's work
- Ancestral offerings in public ritual
- Prized for its beauty
- Easy to dye
- Medium for writing and painting
- Used as currency to buy war horses
- Source of tax revenue



Confucius (Kong Fuzi)

Confucius (551-479 BCE): most influential philosopher

- Molder of patterns of education
- Ultimate authority on Chinese ethical conduct
- Born into an impoverished aristocratic family
- Lived during chaotic Warring States Period
- Failed to attain a high government position
- Became a teacher

Confucian Philosophy (Slide 1 of 3)

Confucian Philosophy found in **The Analects**

- Social philosophy centered on individual and political relations
- **Five Great Relationships** underlie all human affairs
 - Father and son
 - Husband and wife
 - Elder and younger brother
 - Ruler and subject
 - Friend and friend

Confucian Philosophy (Slide 2 of 3)

- Chinese family is the model
 - State should be like harmonious family
 - Headed by males
 - Each person has rights and duties
 - Women subservient to fathers, husbands and sons
- Benevolence and righteousness are chief virtues
 - Rich and strong had obligation to poor and weak
 - Proper role for gentleman was in government service

Confucian Philosophy (Slide 3 of 3)

Influence:

- Rulers judged according to his guidelines
- Educated officials (**mandarins, shi**) would eventually become the governing class and remain so for 2000 years
- Confucius had a low opinion of traders; merchants at the bottom of the social ladder
- Rulers came to prefer **status quo**, harmony and stability over change
- Distrust of innovation and foreigners

Daoism

Laozi (6th c. BCE), legendary founder

- Concentrated on nature, following the “Way”
- **Dao de Jing** (The Way of Dao) attributed to him
- Best government is least government
- Way of nature is perceived through meditation and observation
- Man must seek harmony with nature; avoid extremes
- Became popular religion, quest for immortality
- Dichotomy: “Confucian at the office, Daoist at home”

Other Rivals

- **Hundred Schools period**
 - Many new philosophical schools emerged
- **Legalism**
 - Political philosophy justifying the use of force
 - Popularized during Era of the Warring States
 - Sees people as inclined to evil selfishness, so government must restrain them
 - Strict censorship – crush independent thought

Rivals to Confucius

Moism, philosophy of Mozi (c. 470-390 BCE)

- Doctrine of universal love as solution to chaos during Warring States period
- Rejected Confucian emphasis on primacy of family
- Called for treating others as you wish to be treated
- Lost appeal with rise of authoritarian Qin, Shi Huangdi