

CHAPTER 5: Early Society in Mainland East Asia

Political Organization in Early China:

- Early Agricultural Society and the Xia Dynasty-
 - The Yellow River valley and Yangzi River valley were key places where agriculture thrived.
 - The agriculturalists covered their land in loess which spread into the Yellow River and caused it to change into a yellowish color.
 - The Yellow River caused many devastating floods and is nicknamed China's Sorrow.
 - Xia dynasty was one of the first dynasties to organize public life in China on a large scale.
 - Started around 2200 B.C.E. - Ended around
 - The Xia dynasty created a hereditary monarchical rule in China.
 - Erlitou was most likely the capital of this dynasty.
 - Took control of many villages along the Yellow River.
- The Shang Dynasty
 - Period 1766 to 1122 B.C.E
 - Left written records; basic features of early Chinese society become clear
 - Some believe metallurgy went to China from Southwest Asia
 - Bronze metallurgy reached China before the Shang dynasty did
 - Rulers monopolized production of bronze in the Yellow River Valley by controlling access to tin and copper ores
 - Expanded production by employing government craftsmen to exclusively make large quantities of bronze axes, spears, knives and arrowheads
 - The control over bronze made The Shang Dynasty superior
 - Horse drawn chariots appeared in China about 1500 and 1200 B.C.E.
 - Similar to the Aryans in India, Shang warriors used vehicles for devastating effects against those who lacked horses and chariots
 - Shang had an abundant military force, sometimes capturing 30,000 enemy troops
 - Relied on large corps of political allies
 - Its earliest capital was named So, it was founded near modern day Zhengzhou
 - Another capital was Yin, founded near modern Anyang; capital during the last 2-3 centuries
 - Yin identified royal palaces, written documents, residential neighborhoods, two bronze foundries and scattered burial grounds
 - 11 large tombs were constructed for Shang Kings; similar to the Egyptian tombs
 - The most important tomb was Fu Hao; one of the 64 wives of Shang King, Wu Ding
 - Fu Hao's tomb was located inside the Shang Palace; it is claimed that Fu Hao was Wu Ding's favorite wife so her tomb contained 468 bronze objects, 755 jade carvings, 564 bone carvings, 5 carved ivory cups, 11 pottery objects and 6,900 cowry shells. It also held the remains of 6 dogs and 16 sacrificial human skeletons

- Shang Dynasty had a very large city at Sanxingdui occupied 1700-1000 B.C.E. and probably served as the regional capital
- The Zhou Dynasty
 - Capital Hao
 - The Zhou Dynasty was much larger than the Shang Dynasty
 - The Zhou Dynasty had its struggles with the Shang and nomadic raiders from the steppes.
 - The Zhou were much more organized with their allies than the Shang's. This made it possible for the Shang dynasty to be conquered and controlled by the Zhou dynasty.
 - They believed that heavenly powers granted the right to govern to an especially deserving individual known as the "son of heaven". (**Mandate of heaven**)
 - The ruler was a link between heaven and earth.
 - A ruler had to govern conscientiously, observe high standards of honor and justice, and maintain order and harmony within his realm. If he failed to do so then he was removed and replaced by a more deserving candidate.
 - The Zhou rulers relied on a decentralized administration. They entrusted power, authority, and responsibility to subordinates who in return owed allegiance, tribute, and military support to the central government.
 - They arranged marriages to try and strengthen their ties with the subordinates.
 - Zhou Kings were unable to maintain control over decentralized political system
 - Subordinates established their own power creating their own sense of government, armies, tax systems and regional bureaucracies becoming more independent from the Zhou Dynasty
 - In the early eighth century B.C.E. Zhou rulers faced severe problems bringing the dynasty to collapse

Society and Family in Ancient China

In China, the introduction of agriculture enabled individuals to accumulate wealth and preserve it within their families. Social distinctions began to arise during neolithic times, and after the establishment of the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties, these distinctions became even more precise.

- The Social Order

- During the Xia, Shang, and early Zhou dynasties, the royal family and other allied noble families held the honored positions in Chinese society.

- They lived on the agricultural surplus and taxes delivered by their subjects

- Copper and tin was very expensive, therefore the more wealthy possessed it, which set them apart from the less fortunate.

- Possessed most of the bronze weaponry and controlled most of the remaining bronze weapons available in northern China.

- Aristocrats possessed extensive landholdings, and they worked at administrative and military tasks.

- Manuals of etiquette from Zhou times instructed the higher classes, with proper behavior, to carry out rituals.

-There is little information about merchants and trade in ancient China, but archaeological discoveries show that long distance-trade routes may have reached China during the Shang dynasty.

-Legendary accounts credit King Yu, the supposed founder of the Xia dynasty, with the invention of sails. (there are no archaeological indication of Chinese sails before about 500 B.C.E)

-Peasants did not own land, but did provide agricultural, military and labor services for their lords in exchange for plots to cultivate, security and a portion of the harvest.

-They mostly relied on wooden digging sticks and spades with bone or stone tips (there were very few effective tools available to cultivate)

-Slaves were abundant---> they were captured during the battles between the many competing states of ancient China

-Slaves figured among the victims sacrificed during funerary, religious, and other ritual observances

- Family and Patriarchy

-Family is the backbone of everything (very important)

-Chinese families would practice the roots in neolithic times, known as the veneration of ancestors.

-They believed spirits of their ancestors was passed into another realm of existence

-The family became an institution linking departed generations to the living and even to the unborn.

-Chinese society invested in men as the head of the household

-Chinese society took on a strongly patriarchal character

-Women occasionally played prominent roles in public life during Shang times.

-During the later Shang and Zhou dynasties, however, women came to live increasingly in the shadow of men.

Early Chinese Writing and Cultural Development

- Early Chinese myths and legends explained the origins of:

- The World
- Human Race
- Agriculture
- Various Arts and Crafts

- They did not organize these ideas into systematic religious traditions.
- Spoke of impersonal heavenly power- (*tian*) who was responsible for bestowing and removing the mandate of heaven on rulers but they did not recognize a personal supreme deity (a god)
- Priests conducted ritual observances in honor of royal ancestors at royal courts. Family patriarch represented the interests of living generations to the spirits of departed ancestors.
- Writing served as the foundation for a distinctive secular cultural tradition.

- Scribes may have used written symbols to keep records during the Xia dynasty but writing came into everyday life during the Shang dynasty.
- Writing in east Asia became a tool of government and a means of expressing ideas.

Oracle Bones and Early Chinese Writing

- In Mesopotamia and India, merchants did the most writing
- In China, writing was used by rulers
- Scribes at the Shang royal court wrote on strips of bamboo or pieces of silk (Those materials perished quickly)
- Over a century ago, oracle bones were discovered with inscriptions on them
- Oracle bones were used by fortune tellers in ancient China. They used specially prepared broad bones, on which they would inscribe a question then put some type of fire on it. (Either they would put it in fire or scorched it with a hot tool.) When the bone was heated it developed a network of splits and cracks which the fortune teller studied and determined the answer to the question.
- During the 19th century in Anyang, people found the oracle bones. They didn't recognize the writing but they knew it had value.
- Called them "Dragon Bones"
- They sold them to druggists, who ground them into powder and sold them as medicine.
- In the 1860's dragon bones drew the attention of historians who determined the inscriptions were an unknown type of early Chinese writing.
- Many oracle bones came from royal archives, and the questions reveal day-to-day concerns of the Shang royal court
- Early Chinese writing (like the Egyptians and Sumerians) were pictographs-
-Pictograph: a conventional or stylized representation of an object.
- The characters used in contemporary Chinese writing are direct descendants of those used in Shang times.
- Written Chinese characters have become more stylized, conventional, and abstract.

Zhou Dynasty literature

- Produced books of poetry and history
- Some books were studied in ancient schools (Book of Changes, Book of History, Book of Etiquette)
- Most notable of the classics, Book of Songs.
- This book was compiled and edited after 600 B.C.E, most of the 311 poems date earlier.

The Destruction of Early Chinese Literature

- Most of the ancient writings that were on silk and bamboo strips perished and deteriorated.
- China was brought under centralized rule in 221 B.C.E. by the house of Qin
- The new emperor ordered the destruction of all writings of poetry, history and philosophy.
- Only a few were able to escape. These survivors represent the earliest development of Chinese literature and moral thought.

Ancient China and the Larger Worlds

Communication - China's isolation due to towering mountains, vast deserts and turbulent seas stood in the way of China and most early societies on the eastern hemisphere.

Ancient China still was able to develop as a society such as Trade , Migration and Expansion of Chinese agricultural society.

Whether the relations with neighbors from the West , South and North some was hostile and some was friendly.

Chinese Cultivators and Nomadic Peoples of Central Asia

Through the valley of the Yellow River, Chinese agriculture flourished from North to West. The different dry environments meant that things like steppes limited expansions. Although the different harvest progressively diminished the point to where agriculture was made impractical.

Steppe Nomads

Build Pastoral societies

Large agricultural societies grasses supports large herds of horses, cattle, sheep, goats and yaks.

Began to ride domesticated horses 4000 BCE

2900 BCE introduced heavy wagons into steppes

By 1000 BCE nomadic people organized construction, maintenance of elaborate irrigation systems

The State of Chu

Growing population led to emerging cities, states and complex societies.

Zhou and Chu dynasty

Yang Zai governed affairs autonomously and challenged Zhou.

Set up social traditions as well as Chinese writing.

The Southern Expansion of Chinese Society

The Yangzai Valley Chinese influenced spread to the South as well as North and West