

Chapter 5: Early Society in Mainland East Asia

King Yu and the Taming of the Yellow River

- Ancient Chinese stories often depict heroic figures who invented + introduced various important contributions to China. Three of these heroes were the three sage-kings; **Yao, Shun, and Yu.**
- King Yao was a modest and sincere man who brought harmony to his family and to all of China.
- King Shun succeeded Yao and continued his work. Shun **ordered the four seasons, instituted uniform weights, measures, and units of time.**
- King Yu was a vigorous and tireless worker. He rescued China from the flooding of the **Yellow River.**
- Before Yu, dikes were built to contain the water, but the water became too strong and eventually broke through, unleashing massive floods.
- Yu avoided building a dam and instead looked to two different alternatives. **He first dredged the river in order to deepen it and avoid it overflowing. He then dug canals parallel to the river** so that any overflow would travel harmlessly into the sea.
- Yu was said to have worked on the river for thirteen years without ever going home. Thanks to his efforts on the river, Yu made it possible to **cultivate rice and millet**; making him quite popular.
- King Yu soon succeeded King Shun as leader, and is believed to have **founded the first ruling house of ancient China (The Xia Dynasty).**
- Although many ancient stories, including the legends of the three sage-kings, exaggerate virtues and deeds, **many people who retold the stories used them to highlight and advocate values they considered beneficial to society.**
- Around 3000 B.C.E. people from both the Yangtze River and the Yellow River Valleys, communicated and traded with others in the region.
- During the second millennium B.C.E. cities were established, large states were built, and distinctive social and cultural traditions were constructed. Dynastic states with much power, brought most of China under their authority and forged local communities into one larger society.

Political Organization In Early China

- Expansion of agricultural populations cause villages and towns to flourish throughout the **Yellow River and Yangtze (Yangtze)** valleys
- By the third millennium B.C.E , larger regional states emerged

- The **Xia, Shang and Zhou** dynasties took over china and controlled the development of a distinctive chinese society

Early Agricultural Society and the Xia Dynasty

- **Yellow River (Huang He)**like the Indus is unpredictable
- Rises in the mountains bordering before it empties into the yellow sea
- Loess is a fine powder like soil deposited on the planes of china about 12 to 15 thousand years ago
- So much loess is suspended in the yellow river that it turns yellow and river becomes as consistent as soup
- The soil raises the riverbed unleashing a tremendous flood
- Yellow river caused so much destruction it has gained the name “China's Sorrow”

Yangshao Society and Banpo Village

- Harvests in Northern China supported the development of several Neolithic societies during centuries after 5000 B.C.E
- Yangshao flourished from about 5000 to 3000 B.C.E in the middle region of the Yellow river valley
- In **1952** the discovery of an entire neolithic village at **Banpo**, near modern Xi'an
- Large quantity of fine painted pottery and bone tools used by early cultivators in the 6th and 5th millennium B.C.E were excavated
- In east Asia the concentration on people in small areas brought a need for authorities who could maintain order ,resolve disputes ,and organize public projects
- Little was done to prevent conflicts within villages without authorities
- The 3 dynasties arose before the **Qin** and Han dynasties brought China under unified rule in the third century B.C.E
- The Xia,Shang , and Zhou dynasties were hereditary stated that extended their control over larger regions
- None embraced the territory claimed by later chinese Dynasties
- Little written accounts survive to throw light on the **Zhou** dynasty known as a historical ruling house
- Many historians dismissed the **Xia** and **Shang** dynasties as myths when info came from only legendary accounts
- In the 20th century archaeological excavations turned up evidence that certainly the Shang and maybe the Xia were historical dynasties

The Xia Dynasty

- Archaeological studies of the dynasty are still in its early stages
- The past few decades discoveries suggest that efforts were made to organize public life in china
- The Xia appeared to have been one of the ore vigorous states of its time

- The dynasty came around 2200 B.C.E in roughly the same region as the Yangshao
- Established a precedent for hereditary monarchical rules in China
- Sage-King Yu was the dynasty's founder that Ancient legends credit with the organization of effective flood control
- The Xia dynasty exercised power throughout the middle Yellow River Valley by controlling the leaders of individual villages
- Encouraged the founding of cities and the development of metallurgy
- The recently excavated city of Erlitou might have the capital of the Xia
- The city had more modest houses ,pottery workshops, and bronze factory

Shang Dynasty

- It is said that the last Xia king was an oppressive despot who lost his rule to the founder of the **Shang dynasty**.
- However, the Xia state did not entirely collapse and did not disappear so much as it gradually gave way for before the Shang.
- The Shang ruled from the period 1766 to 1122 B.C.E. Because of the written records and materials left by the Shang Dynasty, the basic features of China become much clearer.

Bronze Metallurgy and Horse-drawn Chariots

- Bronze metallurgy shaped Chinese society and allowed for the Shang to displace the Xia.
- It is argued how these technologies arrived in China.
- When the production of bronze was introduced in China, the Xia limited the use of bronze tools + weapons.
- Control over the production of bronze, strengthened Shang forces and provided them with arms far superior to stone, wood, and bone weapon that were wielded by their enemies.

Society and Family in Ancient China

The Social Order

- The royal family and allied noble families held honored positions in Xia Dynasty
- Lived in large, palatial compounds made of pounded earth
- They lived on the agricultural surplus and taxes
- Copper and Tin were very expensive
- Bronze was for everyone but the rich
- Ruling elite set the rich apart from the poor

- Ruling elite possessed the bronze weapons that ensured the military dominance
- Supplied their homes with A LOT of cast-bronze utensils:
- pots, jars, wine cups, plates, serving dishes, mirrors, bells, drums, and vessels used in ceremonies which were for the rich
- The rich food: steamed rice, fish, pheasant, poultry, pork, mutton, and rabbit
- The poor food: veggies, porridges made of millet, wheat, or rice
- The rich's metal utensils were nicely decorated and elaborate detailed
- The poor relied on clay pots
- Privileged class of hereditary aristocrats rose from military allies of Shang and Zhou
- By Zhou time the aristocrats moved to the city
- Got at least elementary education
- Living standards more sophisticated than the commoners and slaves that worked for them

Specialized Labor

- Artisans and craftsmen plied their trades in ancient china
- Worked for the privileged classes
- Bronze Smiths built houses from pounded earth

Merchants and Trade

- Little information about merchants and trade until later in the Zhou Dynasty
- Small scale trade networks linked china with to the west and south early in the 3rd millennium B.C.E

Peasants

- Resided on the countryside
- Owned no land but provided agricultural, military, and labor services for their lords in exchange for protection, plots to cultivate, and a portion of the harvest
- Lived in small subterranean houses about 3ft tall
- Women were to weave, make wine, and cultivating silkworms
- Men spent their time working in the fields, hunting and fishing

Slaves

- Most were enemy warriors captured during the battles of the different states of Ancient China
- Cleared new fields and builded city walls

- During Shang Dynasty, hundreds of slaves also figured among the victims sacrificed during funerary, religious, and other observances

Family and Patriarchy

- Throughout human history the family has served as the principal institution for the socialization of children and the preservation of cultural traditions
- The early dynasties ruled their territories largely through family and kinship

Veneration of Ancestors

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The Zhou Dynasty

- The principles of ancient Chinese politics become more clear in the practices of the Zhou dynasty and that succeed the Shang as the preeminent political authority in northern China.
- The Zhou allied with the Shang and won recognition as kings of the western region because of how well they organized their allies, however, they outshined Shang dynasty and ultimately displaced it all together.
 - ◆ Shang and Zhou clashed in the last 20th century B.C.E.
- After several unsuccessful tries to teach the Shang King the correct way to rule, Zhou forces seized the Shang capital of Yin, beheaded the king and replaced his administration with their own state in 1122 B.C.E.
 - ◆ The new ruler gave Shang some authority but to only govern small districts, they reserved them from any right to oversee affairs throughout the realm. This new dynasty ruled most of northern and central China until 256 B.C.E.

-the mandate of heaven-

- The Zhou had a theory of politics having the assumption the earthly events were closely related to heavenly affairs. Heavenly powers granted the right to govern-- the "**mandate of heaven**"-- to a special individual known as the "son of heaven".
 - ◆ The "son of heaven" will be the well grifted leader and will take care of his realm. And if he takes on this task the heavenly powers would approve his work and the dynasty will retain the mandate to govern.

- ◆ If the “son of heaven” fails to stick by his duty there will then be chaos and suffering towards the realm. The heavenly powers will take away the mandate to rule and give it to a more deserving candidate.
- From that time to the 20th century china took over this routine of the mandate of heaven to justify their own rule, soon the emperors took the title “son of heaven”.

-political organization-

- The Zhou state was much larger than the Shang and because of how big it was the Zhou rulers relied on decentralized administration: they trusted power, authority, and responsibility to assistants who in return owed allegiance, tribute and military support to the government.
 - ◆ For a while this technique worked out well, until they allotted possessions in conquered territories to relatives and other allies. Then again the assistants had little to no supervision from the government. They will still go to the Zhou royal court to show their loyalty by delivering taxes, tributing help with finances to the major part of Zhou and giving them military forces. The Zhou rulers sought to give them arranged marriages to help strengthen them as a whole.

-weakening of the Zhou-

- The Zhou kings soon couldn’t stick by their best efforts of controlling their realm. The assistants gradually started to make their own bases of power: they ruled their territories not only as allies to the Zhou but also as traditional governs.
 - ◆ They set up regional bureaucracies, armies, and tax systems which allowed them to push start their authority. They gave themselves law codes and enforced them to their sources. Because of how fast they are growing on their own they became independent and started to fade away from the Zhou dynasty. They became less loyal with bringing them taxes and financial funds. Also refused to provide military forces and would even turn against the Zhou dynasty using their own resources.

-iron metallurgy-

- The Zhou were lacking the resource of any iron, copper and tin and because of this they weren’t able to make their weapons unlike their allies, Shang.
- In the early 18th century B.C.E. Zhou developed many problems of the nomadic people and allies of the Zhou, invaded China from the west.
 - ◆ By the 5th century B.C.E. territorial princes ignored the central government and used their resources to build, strengthen, and expand their states.
- In 256 B.C.E. the Zhou dynasty ended when the last king abdicated his position under pressure from his ambitious subordinate the king of Qin.

Early Chinese Writing And Cultural Development

- Religion didn’t play as big of a role in China like it has in other societies. The early myths and legends explained human race, agriculture, and the various arts and crafts. But

Chinese thinkers didn't feel the need to apply those things into their religion of an impersonal heavenly power--tian ("heaven") which is person responsible for taking away the mandate of heaven rulers and didn't find the interest in the human behavior. for the most part family patriarchs represented the interests of living generations to the spirits of departed ancestors.

- ◆ China may have used writing symbols to keep simple records during Xias times, but the surviving evidence suggests that writing came into extensive use only during the Shang dynasty.

-oracle bones and early chinese writing-

- The earliest known writing served the interests rulers rather than traders. It goes back to at least the earliest part of the second millennium B.C.E.
 - ◆ The surviving writings that were founded were about the important events on strips of bamboo or pieces of silk. Unfortunately most of the writings have been perished along with the messages.
- Oracle bones have gotten tremendous light in Shang dynasty and china. Oracle bones were principal instruments used by fortune-tellers in ancient china.
 - ◆ They specialized on the bones, such as shoulder blades of sheep or turtle shells. They would inscribe a question on the bone then burn it in fire or by scorching it with a really hot tool. It would then come out of the fire with cracks and different lines and they would study those features to answer the question inscribed on the bone.
- During the 19th century peasants would find the bones, unsure of the writing but knew they had something they could use for themselves, naming them "dragon bones". So they would take the bones and sell them to druggist so that they could smash it up into powder and sell it for medicine. It would clear up aches, pains, and ills before scholars knew the real use for them.
 - ◆ During the late 1800's scholars then took the bones they found, around 400,000, and examine the questions and concerns of the Shang royal court. Taken these bits of information have helped historians understand the political and social order of Shang times.

-early chinese writing-

- The earliest form of chinese writing was pictographs-a stylized representation of an object. it was a combination of the pictographs into the ideograph. For example if there's a picture of a mother and child the meaning is "good". There was no form of alphabet in the chinese writing system.
 - ◆ Scholars have identified 2,000 characters inscribed on oracle bones. Chinese had about 5,000 characters in their writing. throughout time the writing became more stylized, conventional, and abstract.

-thought and literature in ancient america-

- Some oracle bones survived for Zhou, along with a large number of inscriptions on bronze utensils. Zhou dynasty also had books of poetry and history, manuals of divination and ritual, and essays dealing with morals, religion, philosophical and political themes.

-Zhou writing-

- Zhou writing had lots of attention, even used in schools. The book was named “book of changes” which was a manual on telling the future. another was the “ book of history” which was filled with documents about Zhou. they then learned the art of polite and the proper way to conduct rituals with “ book of etiquette” or “ book of right”.

-the book of songs-

- This book was a collection of verses on themes both light and serious. it was edited around the time of 600 B.C.E. but before that there was 3111 writings in the book with a much earlier date of the Zhou dynasty. Some of the poems were about politics, love, life, drinking, eating, family, friendship and daily life.

-destruction of early chinese literature-

- The books were just small bits of the chinese literature. There was still things written on the bamboo and silk fabrics have deteriorated; records indicate that the tomb of Zhou have hundred of books written in bamboo and silk but none survived.
 - ◆ Also some of the writing that did not survived was because of humans. When china was ruled by the victorious ruler during 221 B.C.E. he ordered for all the writing that questions his authority, must be destroyed. Also writings about medicine, culture, poetry, history, and philosophy be destroyed. a few survived and scholars worked on those to rewrite and understand. These that survived represented the earliest development of chinese literature and moral thought.