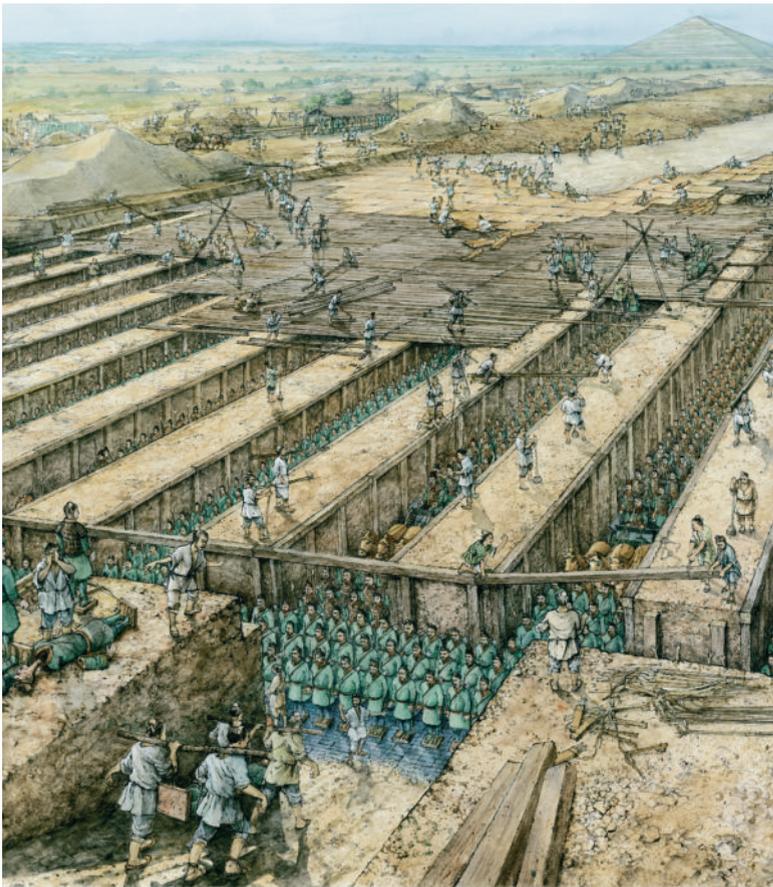


The Origins of the Chinese Empire, to 220 C.E.



- China's Geographic Diversity
- Early Chinese Societies
- State and Society During the Zhou Dynasty
- The Classical Age of Chinese Philosophy
- The Birth of the Empire Under the Qin Dynasty
- The Growth of the Empire Under the Han Dynasty
- Society, Technology, and the Silk Road
- Chapter Review

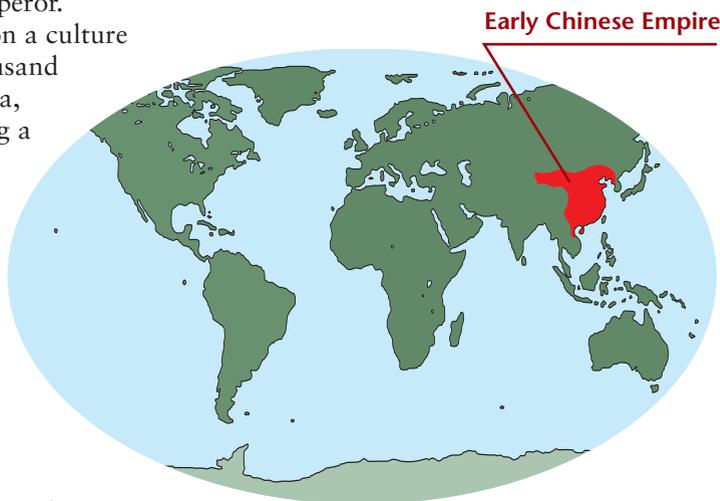
The First Emperor's Underground Army

The tomb of China's First Emperor, guarded by a huge underground clay army rediscovered in 1974, attests to the power and grandeur of ancient China. This sketch shows how scholars think the tomb was constructed in the third century C.E.

In 1974, workers drilling a well near the Chinese city of Xi'an (*shē-AHN*) made an extraordinary discovery. Much to their surprise, they found a huge underground chamber filled with thousands of elaborate statues: an army of life-sized clay horses and soldiers armed with real bronze weapons. Nearby chambers, seemingly guarded by this clay army, were later found to contain hundreds of additional artifacts, scores of human remains, and a magnificent bronze mausoleum. Scholars soon determined that this subterranean sepulcher, dating from the third century B.C.E., was the tomb of an ancient Chinese ruler known to history as the First Emperor.

The realm of the First Emperor centered on a culture that had arisen in northern China several thousand years before his time. Here, as in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and India, early societies emerged along a waterway, in this case the treacherous Yellow River that flows across North China. Farming villages grew into towns, some of which evolved into city-states that expanded into larger domains. Here, as in West Asia and India, moral and religious concepts developed that over the ages would influence millions of people. Here, too, as in other ancient empires, the land was united through the conquests of a mighty ruler, in this case the First Emperor.

Despite such similarities, however, the culture that arose in ancient China was in certain ways distinctive. The Chinese adopted an outlook on governance, for example, that held state officials accountable for public welfare and justified revolts against rulers who failed to maintain it—an outlook most uncommon in the ancient world. The Chinese developed a worldview that conceived reality as a balance of complementary forces, unlike other cultures that perceived life as a struggle between good and evil. The Chinese produced goods, such as paper and silk, found in no other early cultures. And Chinese leaders, building upon the centralized state created by the First Emperor, assembled a professional civil service system to administer one of history's most extensive, populous, and enduring empires.



China's Geographic Diversity

China's geography provides a study in contrasts. The west and southwest are mountainous and bleak. The north is arid and barren, dominated by the Gobi (*GŌ-bē*) desert and Mongolian plateau (Map 4.1). Desolate and forbidding, these regions have remained sparsely inhabited throughout Chinese history. They have also separated China from other societies. Although ancient China had contacts with other cultures, connections were sporadic and hard to maintain.

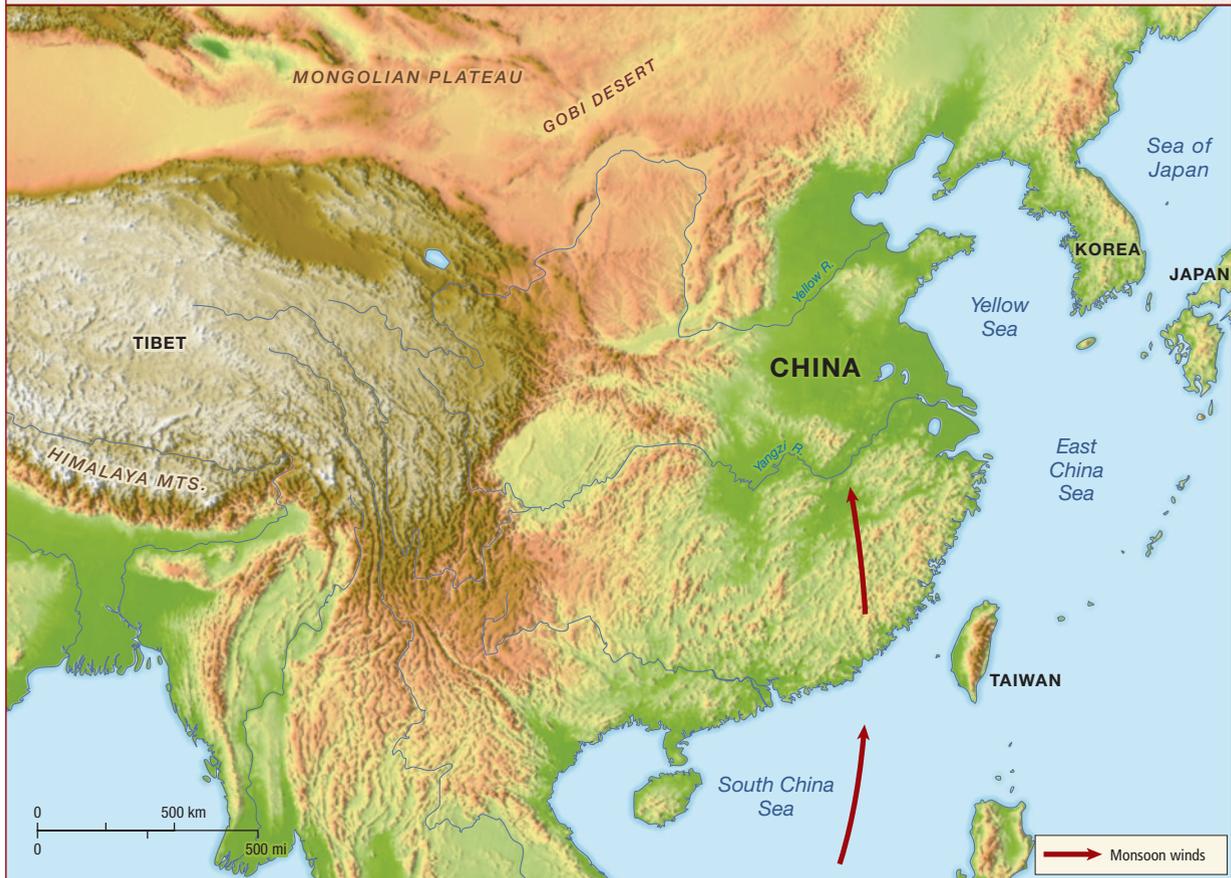
Eastern China is defined by its two great rivers. In the south is the Yangzi (*YAHNG-DZUH*) River, or Changjiang (*CHAHNG jē-AHNG*), sometimes called "China's

China's diverse geography impedes early intercultural connections

Yangzi and Yellow Rivers irrigate and connect eastern China

FOUNDATION MAP 4.1 China's Geography and Environment, Third Millennium B.C.E.

China's northern deserts and western mountains made connections with other cultures challenging. Note, however, that the great rivers flowing eastward from the mountains aided internal connections and facilitated farming, while seasonal monsoon winds from the South China Sea brought China regular rainfall. How could ease of internal connections and productive farmlands help to form the foundations for a strong Chinese state?



blessing.” A broad, deep waterway that seldom floods, it is excellent for transport and reliable for irrigating nearby lands. The climate is warm, the growing season long, and rainfall abundant, as seasonal monsoon winds bring in moisture from seas to the south. The terrain is lush and green, sustaining a variety of fruits, vegetables, and grains. In the north, by contrast, is the Yellow River, or Huanghe (*HWAHNG-HUH*), also known as “China’s sorrow.” It is shallow, flows through flat plains, and has no regular river bed, so its frequent floods and occasional course changes devastate those who live nearby. In the north the climate is cold and dry, the growing season short, and nature harsh, with recurrent danger of drought, floods, and frost.

Early Chinese Societies

Despite its harsh environment, however, the north was where China's first settled societies emerged. Several factors help to explain this development. One was the profusion of brownish-yellow silt carried by the Yellow River, giving it both its appearance and its name. Deposited through the countryside by periodic floods, this silt was rich in nutrients, regularly restoring the soil's fertility. Farming thus came early to this area, helping to sustain the growing population needed to form cities and states. Another key factor may have been the Yellow River's unpredictability, compelling those who lived nearby to organize into communities large enough to build dikes and channels to control the current.

Responding to the benefits and challenges of their environment, from the seventh through second millennia B.C.E. the people of northern China developed a culture that served as the basis for later Chinese societies. They adopted farming and herding, settled with their families in villages, instituted religious rituals, and learned to produce silk. In time they also built towns and cities, fashioned bronze tools and weapons, established a social class structure, created a centralized state, and devised a writing system. As a result, by the second millennium B.C.E., many basic features of Chinese civilization already existed in the Yellow River valley.

Predynastic China

Aided by the silt-enriched soil, people started farming near the Yellow River as early as 7000 B.C.E. As in other agricultural societies, farmers resided in villages and raised food on the surrounding lands. To protect themselves from wind and cold, the villagers lived in pits dug in the ground and covered with thatch roofs. To feed themselves they grew millet, and eventually cabbage and wheat; they also produced fine pottery and domesticated cattle, sheep, goats, and pigs. Later some villagers additionally cultivated silkworms, little short-lived caterpillars that feed on mulberry leaves and spin cocoons of fine soft thread. After painstakingly unraveling these cocoons, Chinese peasants wove the thread into silk, eventually valued as the world's finest cloth.

According to legend, early China was blessed with heroic benefactors who began its development. Fuxi (*FOO-SHĒ*) supposedly established the family and taught the people how to domesticate animals. Shennong (*SHUN-NUNG*) is said to have invented farming and basic farming tools. Huangdi (*HWANG-DĒ*) is credited with the development of silk, the bow and arrow, boats, and a system of writing. Huangdi is also considered the first of China's predynastic rulers, a series of fabled monarchs who reigned before the rise of ruling dynasties.

Legend also credits the last predynastic ruler, a former poor peasant named Shun, with selecting a man named Yu to harness the floods that disrupted life along the Yellow River. The ingenious Yu purportedly dug channels to divert the floodwaters, thereby creating northern China's other rivers. Shun was said to have been so impressed that he selected Yu to rule after him. Then, when Yu died, the Chinese installed Yu's son as their next ruler. Thus, according to tradition, began the pattern of familial rule, initiating a series of dynasties that would dominate China from then until modern times.

Although they are legends, these accounts reveal the perceptions and priorities of the ancient Chinese. They show that the Chinese saw family, farming, writing, river control, and dynastic rule as central elements of their culture. Furthermore, when supplemented



The Yellow River.

Farming villages emerge near Yellow River by 7000 B.C.E.



Early Chinese pottery.

Legend says heroic predynastic rulers initiate Chinese society

Legends reflect Chinese focus on farming, family, rivers, and rulers

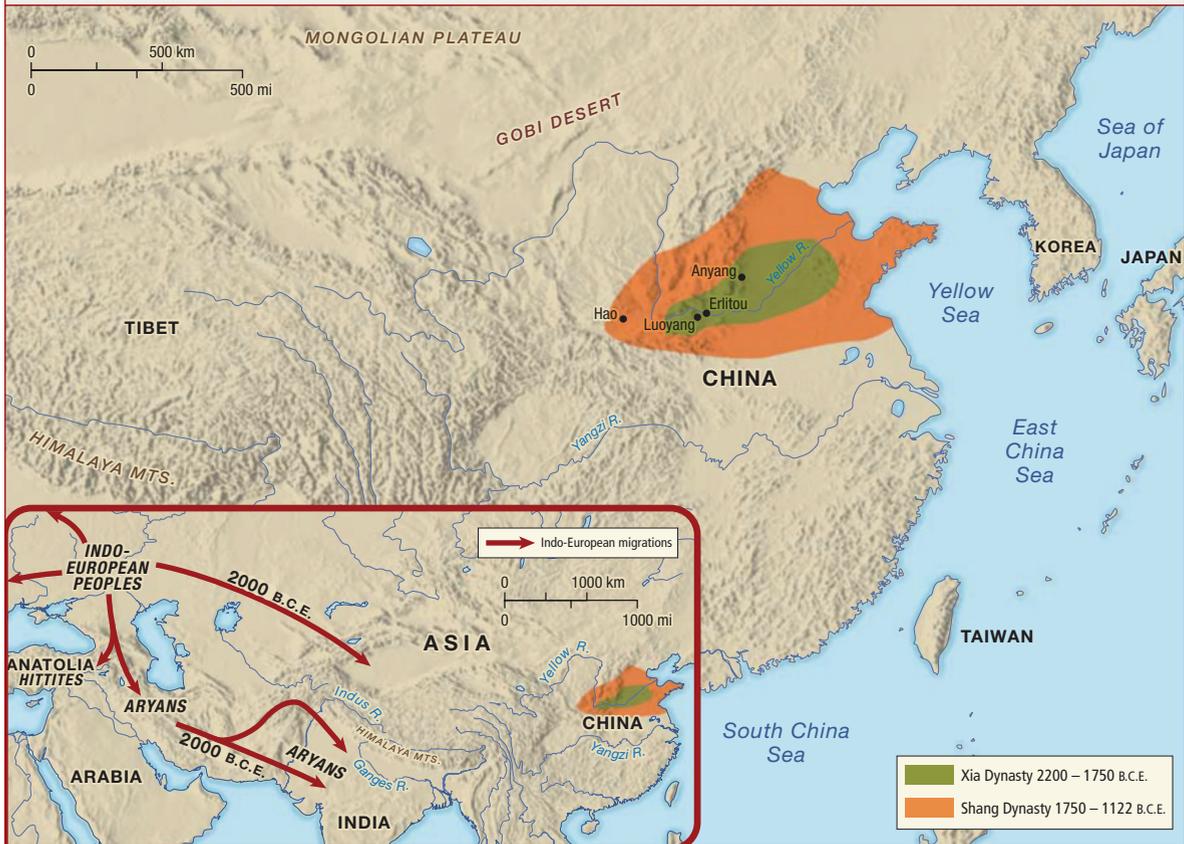
by archeological evidence, these stories help historians discern the general features of early Chinese society, especially as it existed under China's first two dynasties.

Xia and Shang Societies

Yu and his son are traditionally regarded as the first two rulers of the Xia (*shē-AH*) dynasty, which reigned in the central Yellow River region from approximately 2200 to 1750 B.C.E. (Map 4.2). Once seen as a figment of folklore, the Xia is now considered China's first historical dynasty, as cities and towns unearthed near the Yellow River appear to have been part of a real Xia realm. One large city called Erlitou (*ER-lē-TŌ*), possibly the capital, had stately palaces and tombs, paved roads, and even a foundry for making bronze tools and weapons.

Map 4.2 China's Early Cities and Dynasties, Second Millennium B.C.E.

China's earliest cities were located in northeast China, around the Yellow River, in lands governed by the Xia Dynasty (2200–1750 B.C.E.) and Shang Dynasty (1750–1122 B.C.E.). Observe, as indicated on the inset map, that some Indo-European nomads apparently migrated to the region west of China by around 2000 B.C.E. What ideas and techniques might the Chinese have learned through contacts with these Central Asian nomads?



Bronze metallurgy probably came to China by way of the Indo-European migrations, discussed in Chapter 2, which provided early connections among Eurasian cultures. Much as the Hittites moved to Anatolia and the Aryans to India, other Indo-European pastoral nomads moved to what is now northwest China, during the Xia dynasty, with their horse-drawn chariots and bronze weapons (see Map 4.2 inset). The subsequent appearance of such devices in Yellow River societies, and similarities between old Chinese and Indo-European words for wheels and chariots, suggest that China learned of these devices through contacts and conflicts with the nomads.

Some Chinese warriors made good use of these vehicles and weapons. In the eighteenth century B.C.E., according to both legend and archeological evidence, the Xia regime was defeated and displaced by a new dynasty known as the Shang (*SHAHNG*), whose warrior nobles were armed with bronze spears, protected by bronze armor, and skilled in the use of war chariots.

Since the Shang dynasty, which reigned from roughly 1750 to 1122 B.C.E., produced some written records, historians know much more about it than they know about the Xia. Along with evidence from excavations of Shang settlements, especially the capital, Anyang (*AHN-YAHNG*), these records portray a complex, warlike, stratified society.

By Shang times, a number of city-states had emerged in northern China. Although each had its own local ruler, many of these rulers were tied by allegiance, and often also by kinship, to the Shang royal family. These ties brought some political unity to the Yellow River valley.

Shang society was stratified into several classes. At the top were the king and his warrior aristocracy, who lived in the city centers in palatial homes, wore fine silk garments, and indulged in food and beverages served in splendid bronze vessels. Below the aristocrats were artisans, who lived elsewhere in the cities in homes made of earth and wood, and who produced bronze vessels and weapons, lacquered wood containers, and fine pottery for the upper classes. Less well off were the peasants, who lived in pit homes in rural villages and worked the fields to supply the society's food. At the bottom of the social structure were slaves, typically prisoners of war, who worked as servants in royal and noble households and as forced laborers in the construction of walls, roads, palaces, and dikes.

Although the leaders of Shang society believed in a supreme deity and numerous lesser gods, the most common form of religion appears to have been **ancestor** worship, veneration of a family's departed relatives and forebears. Based on the belief that the spirits of the dead can influence the gods to help relatives who are still living, this worship involved rituals performed at graves and shrines set up to honor dead kinfolk.

People in Shang times also took part in other religious rituals. On occasion, for example, they seem to have sacrificed domestic animals, and even human slaves, to win divine favor. The early Chinese also studied the sun, stars, and planets, presuming that by doing so they could come to know the will of the gods. In the process they devised a calendar, recorded eclipses of the sun, and invented a form of mathematics.

Chinese Writing

The writing system used in ancient China also evolved out of religious practices. For centuries Chinese oracles—spiritual leaders who sought to communicate with the gods—inscribed little pictures on a tortoise shell or cattle shoulder bone and then heated the

Central Asian nomads introduce horses and bronze weapons to China

Shang dynasty replaces Xia by 1700 B.C.E.

Shang rule unites and connects Yellow River region



Remains of early Chinese chariot, with bones of horses and driver.

Chinese writing evolves from efforts to receive divine messages



Shang oracle bone.

shell or bone until cracks appeared in its surface. The oracles then followed the cracks to connect the pictures, each of which represented a word, in a sequence believed to convey a divine message. By inscribing pictures denoting the sun, clouds, rain, and upcoming days, for example, and then observing how they were connected by the heat cracks, oracles could theoretically foretell the weather. By using other pictures and symbols, oracles could similarly predict the results of battles, harvests, hunts, and other endeavors.

Shang rulers, anxious to foresee the outcome of their endeavors, made extensive use of these “oracle bones,” thousands of which have been rediscovered in modern times. Scholars have been able to decipher the oracle bone symbols, and to determine that they are early versions of modern Chinese characters.

In Chinese writing, each character represents an entire word, not just a single sound as in Western alphabets derived from the Phoenician writing system (Chapter 2). Learning to read and write in China has hence meant mastering thousands of symbols. Because it was not closely tied to the sounds of spoken words, however, the system proved very useful in China, where people in one region often could not understand the dialects spoken in other regions. Since each written character conveyed the same concept no matter what the dialect, people could communicate in writing even if they could not understand each others’ spoken words. The written character for horse, for example, conveyed the concept of a horse to people who spoke different dialects, even if the spoken words for horse did not sound the same. Chinese writing thus helped ruling centers communicate with outlying regions, thereby helping to unite a vast and disparate land. As it did elsewhere, writing in China also enabled people to record their history and convey their ideas.

Chinese writing helps to connect a vast and diverse realm

State and Society During the Zhou Dynasty

By the late twelfth century B.C.E., according to traditional accounts, the Shang kings had become oppressive and corrupt, provoking rebellions against them. The victor in these struggles was King Wu, the ruler of Zhou (*JŌ*), a small realm west of the Shang domain. In 1122 B.C.E. he defeated the Shang and started a new dynasty that reigned for more than 800 years in much of northern China (Map 4.3). The Zhou era is traditionally divided into two periods: the Western Zhou (1122–771 B.C.E.), when the kings resided at Hao (near modern Xi’an) in the west, and the Eastern Zhou (770–256 B.C.E.), when they lived further east at Luoyang (*LWŌ-YAHNG*).

The Mandate of Heaven and Dynastic Cycle

Composed by Zhou era writers, traditional accounts of the Shang’s overthrow tend to discredit the old dynasty and exalt the early Zhou leaders—especially King Wu’s brother, the legendary Duke of Zhou. Based on these accounts, after King Wu died in 1116 B.C.E., the duke served as regent for the new king, the late ruler’s son, who was too young to rule on his own. The energetic duke reportedly went on to consolidate his family’s control and destroy the vestiges of Shang rule, serving as a wise and loyal administrator. When King Wu’s son came of age, the duke turned over power to the young king, thus affirming the succession of father to son and setting an example of loyal devotion for future public servants.

Zhou Dynasty replaces Shang regime, calling it corrupt

Map 4.3 The Zhou Dynasty, 1122–256 B.C.E.

The Zhou dynasty connected much of northern China for centuries, extending its rule throughout the Yellow River region and beyond. Note, however, that in the Warring States Era (403–221 B.C.E.), although the dynasty still existed in name, various nobles with their own large armies acted as independent warlords, fighting among themselves and eventually controlling a very large area. What commercial and cultural developments continued to connect Chinese society despite these divisions and conflicts?



The Duke of Zhou's most important contribution, however, may have been his success at laying the philosophical foundation for Chinese dynastic authority. To justify his family's ouster of one dynasty and creation of another, he is said to have developed the idea of the **Mandate of Heaven**. This concept asserts that, in order to rule China, a dynasty must have the authorization of "Heaven," perceived not as a place but as the main divinity, god of the skies and ancestor of Chinese rulers. This mandate empowered the ruler to reign as "Son of Heaven," but it also required that he govern justly and humanely. If a ruler grew corrupt and oppressive, and if the people were suffering, Heaven would withdraw the mandate and bestow it on someone else, who would then take power and rule with virtue and benevolence. This principle allegedly legitimized the Zhou overthrow of the Shang.

Mandate of Heaven
legitimizes Chinese rulers
only if just and humane

Rise and decline of dynasties creates dynastic cycles

In claiming this mandate, however, Zhou leaders unwittingly provided both a precedent and a pretext for future rebels to challenge the reigning power, establishing a pattern that would recur throughout Chinese history. This pattern, known as the **dynastic cycle**, had four basic phases. First, a strong leader would arise and conquer all of China, creating a powerful and effective regime. Then he would pass on the rule to his heirs, initiating a dynasty that would reign for some time in stability and prosperity. Eventually, however, the rulers would grow oppressive and corrupt. Taxes would increase, prosperity would decline, and a series of natural and military disasters would signal the loss of Heaven's Mandate. In the cycle's final phase, a new hero would arise to challenge the old dynasty, claiming the mandate for himself and his heirs. If he failed to gain power, he was seen as lacking Heaven's favor; if he succeeded he would found a new dynasty, starting the cycle anew.

Mandate of Heaven implies right to rebel if a dynasty grows corrupt

The rise and fall of ruling families was not unique to China; Egypt, for example, also had a long chain of dynasties. But the concept of Heaven's Mandate, combined with the persistence of the dynastic cycle, eventually set up expectations that were distinctively Chinese. In China, at least in theory, a dynasty's survival depended on its ability to provide security, stability, and prosperity. If it failed to do so, for whatever reason, it forfeited its mandate, giving the people a right to rebel and replace it.

Conflict, Chaos, and Commerce

Decentralized Zhou regime provides land and power to nobles

This implicit right of rebellion, combined with China's vast dimensions and cultural complexity, made governance a formidable challenge. Rather than trying to control their territories directly, early Zhou rulers developed a decentralized regime in which the regions were governed by subordinates, who received large landholdings in return for their service. These lands were then handed down from father to son, creating a hereditary nobility based on service to the king. But for the kings this system also had a potential drawback: the leading nobles, who had their own lands and armies, might acquire enough power to threaten the regime.

This drawback almost ended the Zhou dynasty in 771 B.C.E., when rebellious nobles joined with nomadic invaders to overthrow a king named You. According to legend, King You sometimes played an extravagant game to entertain a female consort. He lit beacon fires signaling his soldiers to prepare for enemy attack, and then had his consort watch in delight as armies assembled from all directions to meet the imaginary threat. But eventually the soldiers, tired of this game, failed to respond to the beacon fires when real attackers appeared. The capital was overrun, the palace was ransacked, King You was killed, and his lover was captured.

Whatever the truth of this tale—patriarchal societies often have legends blaming women for men's misfortunes—it did help King You's foes justify his removal. But his heir managed to maintain some power by fleeing east to the city of Luoyang, making it his capital and starting a new era now called the Eastern Zhou.

During the Eastern Zhou era (770–256 B.C.E.), many Chinese nobles, acquiring more wealth and power than the king himself, began to act as independent warlords in their own domains. Centuries of chaos and civil war resulted in the Era of Warring States (403–221 B.C.E.), during which all sense of unity and central authority ceased.

Commerce keeps China connected in Warring States era

As political conflict tore China apart, however, commerce was tying it together. The Eastern Zhou era saw the rise of many new cities, which served as centers of trade, with

markets where farmers, artisans, and merchants from near and far exchanged their goods. Roads and canals connecting these cities, built by rulers to move troops and supplies, were traveled by traders transporting such items as metal tools and utensils, lacquered wood plates and boxes, silk, pottery, gems, salt, and lumber. A money economy emerged, using copper coins called cash, with holes in the center so they could be strung together for counting and carrying. China's towns and cities were likewise linked into a large economic system. Although trade between China and faraway lands was difficult and dangerous, by the end of the Zhou era Chinese merchants were trading by sea with Southeast Asia and by land routes crossing Central Asia.

The Central Asian Connection

Central Asia, the vast expanse to China's north and west where the climate was too dry for farming (Map 4.3), was inhabited mainly by pastoral nomads who grazed their herds on its plateaus and plains. Skilled on horseback, the nomads often attacked Chinese settlements to carry off goods and supplies, but they also spread commerce and useful knowledge. Some nomads, for example, exchanged their hides, wool, and horses for Chinese silk, pottery, metalware, and wood products, and then traded what they did not use with others across Central Asia. Direct connections with the nomads, and indirect connections through the nomads with other Eurasian societies, had major impacts on China over time.

Interactions with the nomads, for example, transformed Chinese warfare in the Eastern Zhou era. Chinese armies adopted horseback riding from the nomads, replacing charioteers with mounted riders who could move and maneuver much more quickly. The nomads in turn began using the crossbow, a Chinese invention that could kill with precision from a distance.

Even more momentous was ironworking, a West Asian innovation that spread across Central Asia to China during the Zhou dynasty. Since iron was far more abundant than the copper and tin employed in making bronze, ironworking could be used to produce vast numbers of shields and daggers, enabling rulers to field much larger forces. No longer limited to fairly small forces of bronze-armed noble warriors on horseback, Chinese armies in the Warring States era also fielded tens of thousands of peasant foot soldiers armed with iron weapons.

Ironworking also brought economic benefits to China. Crop cultivation was vastly enhanced by the use of iron-bladed plows, pulled by oxen hitched to a wooden harness, and by iron-bladed spades, used in tilling soil and digging irrigation ditches to expand the amount of farmland. Iron picks and shovels were used in building earthen dams and dikes to protect against floods, earthen walls to defend against nomad attacks, and roads and canals to aid the movement of both armies and goods. Central Asian connections thus helped to expand warfare, farming, and commerce in early China.



A metal bell from the Zhou era.

Central Asian nomads connect China with other cultures

Nomads and Chinese adopt horse riding and crossbows from each other

Iron tools and weapons spread to China from west

Iron tools and weapons enhance farming, warfare, and commerce

The Classical Age of Chinese Philosophy

The Eastern Zhou era, with its ongoing warfare, political turmoil, and economic growth, also produced ideas intended to promote harmony and stability. These ideas laid the basis for China's main belief systems, including especially Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism.



Confucius and his disciples.

Confucius aspires to help form a just society

Disciples of Confucius compile his sayings and ideals

Historians have noted that this era, from the eighth through third centuries B.C.E., also produced Buddhism, Jainism, and the Upanishads in India, the Avesta (sacred book) of Persia, the major Hebrew prophets, and the foremost Greek philosophers. Although China's great thinkers had no direct contact with those in distant societies, increasing connections among these societies doubtless fed the intellectual ferment that helped inspire some of history's main belief systems.

Confucianism: Noble-Minded Conduct and Familial Respect

The central Chinese philosopher was Kongfuzi (*KONG-FOO-DZUH*) or Master Kong the Sage (551–479 B.C.E.). Later known in the West as Confucius, he laid the foundations for China's foremost ethical system. Like other famous moral teachers, including the Buddha and Jesus, Confucius left behind no writings, so it has been hard to separate his ideas from those added later by his followers. His impact nonetheless has been enormous.

Born into a minor noble family in east central China, and raised in humble circumstances after his father's early death, Confucius aspired to a political career. He dreamed of becoming a wise and loyal official who, following in the footsteps of the Duke of Zhou, would help some ruler create a just society based on the wisdom of the past. For years he sought such a post, and briefly held several government positions. Frustrated, however, by administrative indifference to his ideas, he became a wandering teacher, earnestly preaching his convictions to a growing group of disciples.

After Confucius was gone, his followers compiled his reflections to produce the *Analects*, a collection of sayings, each typically prefaced by the phrase "The Master said . . ." As a whole, they depict a man deeply troubled by the chaos and corruption of his day, and eager to bring social order and harmony to the violent Eastern Zhou era. The *Analects* envision a society regulated not by rigid enforcement of laws, but by the virtuous behavior of its leaders and citizens. They idealize especially the honorable, "noble-minded" public servant who inspires the people by example and treats them with wisdom, moderation, compassion, and respect. Over the next several centuries, these ideas were elaborated and organized into **Confucianism**, a system of thought that would dominate Chinese public life for more than 2,000 years.

Although Confucians recognized the divinity called Heaven, and later built many temples, Confucianism was not so much a religion as an ethical philosophy. Based on the *Analects* and the Five Classics, a set of Chinese literary works compiled over many centuries, Confucian philosophy focused on human behavior rather than divine worship. Its main virtues included:

- *ren* (*RUN*), or "humanity," involving compassion, humane conduct, and benevolence;
- *li* (*LĒ*), or "ritual," the courtesy, etiquette, and civility by which people should treat one another; and
- *xiao* (*shē-O W*), or "filial piety," the devotion that a son owed to his father (and, by extension, that all people owed to their parents, ancestors, and leaders).

In promoting these virtues, Confucianism envisioned a hierarchical society in which all people knew their place, based on mutual respect between rulers and subjects, parents and children, spouses, siblings, and friends (the "five relationships"). Its main premise was that people would irresistibly follow and emulate wise, benevolent leaders. Although

Document 4.1 Excerpts from the *Analects*

In the *Analects*, followers of Confucius recorded his wise sayings and thoughtful exchanges with disciples. Over the centuries, his insights and advice would serve as guides for providing noble-minded public service and leading honorable lives.

The Master said: “Worthy admonitions cannot fail to inspire us, but what matters is changing ourselves. Reverent advice cannot fail to encourage us, but what matters is acting on it . . .”

The Master said: “Above all, be loyal and stand by your words. Befriend only those who are kindred spirits. And when you’re wrong, don’t be afraid to change.”

Adept Lu asked about governing, and the Master said: “Put the people first, and reward their efforts well . . .”

Adept Lu asked: “To be called a noble official, what must a person be like?” “Earnest and exacting, but also genial,” replied the Master. “. . . Earnest and exacting with friends, genial with brothers.”

The Master said: “The people should be broadly educated by a wise teacher for seven years—then they can take up the weapons of war.”

The Master said: “Sending the people to war without educating them first: that is called *throwing the people away*.”

The Master said: “The noble-minded seek within themselves. Little people seek elsewhere.”

The Master said: “The noble-minded stand above the fray with dignity. And when they band together with others, they never lose track of themselves.”

The Master said: “The noble-minded don’t honor a person because of something he said, nor do they dismiss something said because of the person who said it.”

The Master said: “We’re all the same by nature. It’s living that makes us different.”

Adept Chang asked Confucius: “What makes a person fit to govern?” “Honoring the five graces and despising the four deformities,” replied the Master . . . “What are the five graces?” asked Adept Chang. “The noble-minded are generous without expense, hard working without resentment, wishful without greed, stately without arrogance, stern without cruelty . . .” “And what are the four deformities?” asked Chang. “Killing instead of teaching, which is called terror. Expecting results without telling people what you want, which is called tyranny. Issuing vague orders and expecting prompt action, which is called plunder. Grudging and miserly when giving people what they deserve, which is called officialdom.”

SOURCE: Confucius, *The Analects*, translated by David Hinton (New York: Counterpoint, 1998) 97, 139, 148, 176, 195, 230–231.

elist in upholding an all-male ruling class of scholars and gentlemen, Confucianism favored noble-mindedness of spirit rather than nobility of birth. Although conservative in championing the virtues and values of the past, Confucianism was progressive in stressing the rulers’ duty to provide good government (see “Excerpts from the *Analects*”).

The Confucian ethic had momentous implications for the practice of governance. The Master was not a revolutionary in the modern sense, but he clearly detested political oppression, as recorded in this parable: One day the Master came upon an old woman sitting by the mouth of a cave, weeping. When he asked her what was troubling her, she replied, “First my father-in-law, then my husband, and now my son were all killed by a tiger at this place.” When Confucius inquired as to why she insisted on living in so dangerous an area, the grieving woman replied, “There is no oppressive government here.” Confucius then said to his students, “My children, remember this. It is better to live among tigers than to live under a bad government.”¹

¹ James Legge, *The Life and Teachings of Confucius* (London, 1895) 67.

Mencius justifies rebellion against repressive rulers

The Master himself may not have intended his message to be subversive, but many of his followers taught that unjust leaders should be held accountable for their actions. Foremost among them was Mengzi (*MUNG-DZUH*), or Mencius, an eminent Chinese sage who lived from roughly 370 to 290 B.C.E. Mencius held that all humans are equal and good, and that a ruler must both practice and promote the virtue of *ren*. If a ruler failed to do so, Mencius claimed, it was a sign that the ruler had lost Heaven's Mandate, and his subjects had the right to rebel.

Confucianism holds rulers and officials to high moral standards

By holding rulers and officials to high moral standards, the Confucian tradition, over the centuries, promoted good governance and served as a check against tyranny. Some oppressive regimes sought to suppress Confucianism, but their efforts had little lasting success.

Daoism: The Way That Cannot Be Spoken

Daoism urges harmony with nature and avoidance of ambition

Another prominent school of ideas arising in the Eastern Zhou era was **Daoism** (*DOW-iz-um*), a naturalistic philosophy that, unlike Confucianism, had little use for organized social and political institutions. Its main text was the *Daodejing* (*DOW-DUH-JING*), or “Classic of the Way and Its Power,” supposedly written in the sixth century B.C.E. by a legendary figure called Laozi (*LAOW-DZUH*), the Old Sage, but probably compiled later from sayings ascribed to him. Centered on the notion of a mysterious, unchanging cosmic force called *Dao* (“The Way”), Daoism was naturalistic in calling on people to live in harmony with nature. It was also passive, and even escapist, urging people to “be bland like melting ice,” let go of control, avoid worldly ambition, and accept whatever came their way (see “Excerpts from *Daodejing*”). It delighted in noting that if there were no property there would be no theft, if there were no law there would be no crime, and if there were no fame there would be no disgrace. Beginning as a simple, romantic worldview, Daoism developed into a religion with numerous sacred rituals and shrines.

Unlike Confucianism, Daoism values silence, contemplation, and passivity

Daoism in many ways contrasted with Confucianism. While Confucians relished intellectual and political discourse, Daoists tended to be anti-intellectual and anti-political, focusing instead on silence, contemplation, and passivity. These values were reflected in Daoist precepts, often expressed as paradoxical sayings, such as, “Those who talk do not understand; those who understand do not talk,” and, “The way that can be spoken of is not the true Way.”

Chinese see Confucianism and Daoism as mutual correctives

Although Confucianism and Daoism might seem contradictory, many Chinese people espoused both. They saw them not as opposites but as mutual correctives, both necessary, each complementing the other. One could, for example, be Confucian in one's public life and Daoist in one's private life. Confucianism produced scholars and politicians, while Daoism inspired artists and poets, but each was essential to the Chinese culture and character.

Yin and Yang: The Balance of Forces in Nature

The balancing and blending of dissimilar concepts, such as those of Confucianism and Daoism, was a crucial characteristic of Chinese culture. This characteristic was reflected especially in another key concept that emerged in ancient China, the notion of **yin and yang**, a principle emphasizing the balancing and blending of natural forces.

Document 4.2 Excerpts from *Daodejing*

Unlike Confucianism, which promoted an active life of public service to others, Daoism advocated simplicity, passivity, avoidance of ambition, and conformity with a silent, shapeless cosmic force called Dao (“The Way”). The following excerpts from *Daodejing* (“Classic of the Way and Its Power”) provide a sampling of basic Daoist ideals.

When you never strive, you never go wrong . . .

Just do what you do and then leave: such is the Way of Heaven . . .

Way is perennially nameless, an uncarved simplicity. Though small, it’s subject to nothing in all beneath heaven . . .

Heaven mingling with earth sends down sweet dew, and the people free of mandates share justice among themselves . . .

Way flowing through all beneath heaven: it’s like valley streams flowing into rivers and seas . . .

Way is perennially doing nothing, so there’s nothing it doesn’t do . . .

Uncarved nameless simplicity is the perfect absence of desire, and the absence of desire means repose: all beneath heaven at rest of itself . . .

Bustling around may overcome cold, but tranquility overcomes heat. Master lucid tranquility, and you’ll govern all beneath heaven.

When all beneath heaven abides in Way, fast horses are kept to work the fields. When all beneath heaven forgets Way, war horses are bred among the fertility altars.

What calamity is greater than no contentment, and what flaw greater than passion for gain? The contentment of fathoming contentment—there lies the contentment that endures.

You can know all beneath heaven though you never step out the door, and you can see the Way of heaven though you never look out the window.

The further you explore, the less you know. So it is that a sage knows by going nowhere, names by seeing nothing, perfects by doing nothing . . .

. . . To work at Way brings less each day, still less and less until you’re doing nothing yourself. And when you’re doing nothing yourself, there’s nothing you don’t do.

To grasp all beneath heaven, leave it alone. Leave it alone, that’s all, and nothing in all beneath heaven will elude you . . .

. . . a tree you can barely reach around grows from the tiniest rootlet; a nine-tiered tower starts as a basket of dirt; a thousand-mile journey begins with a single step.

Work at things and you ruin them; cling to things and you lose them. That’s why a sage does nothing, and so ruins nothing, clings to nothing, and so loses nothing.

SOURCE: Lao Tzu, *Tao te ching*, translated by David Hinton (New York: Counterpoint, 2000) 10, 11, 35, 40, 54–57, 73.

Rather than seeing life as a conflict between mutually exclusive forces, such as good versus evil and hatred versus love, yin and yang expressed cosmic harmony and unity, with alternating forces supporting and completing each other. Yang represented light, heat, daytime, dryness, and masculinity, while yin signified darkness, coolness, nighttime, moistness, and femininity. Yang was active, aggressive, logical, and rational; yin was passive, nurturing, intuitive, and emotional. Yang was dominant in spring and summer; yin prevailed in fall and winter. Yang was rock and yin was water; yang had strength and yin had stamina; yang was the sun and yin was the moon.

As complementary forces, yin and yang both blended and gave way to each other, just as sun yielded to moon, day yielded to night, and summer yielded to fall. Nature needed both sun and rain, heat and coolness, and, of course, male and female. Society required both reason and emotion, strength and stamina, logic and intuition, action and passivity. Yin and yang represented a natural order based not on conflict and competition but on harmony, symmetry, and balance (see Figure 4.1).

Yin-yang concept stresses natural harmony and balance, not good versus evil

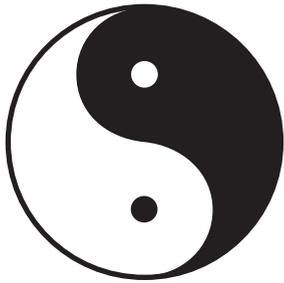


Figure 4.1

Yin-Yang Symbol

The traditional symbol of yin and yang, with the light (yang) side (representing light, heat, daytime, dryness, and masculinity) blending into the dark (yin) side (representing darkness, coolness, nighttime, moistness, and femininity), signifies cosmic harmony and unity, with alternating forces supporting and completing each other.

The notion of yin and yang furnished Chinese people with a framework not only for understanding nature, but also for bringing balance to their everyday lives. Farmers, for example, had to have both strength and stamina, parents needed to be both assertive and nurturing, and the same person might be both a Confucian scholar by day and a Daoist poet by night. Indeed, Confucianism seemed to be rooted in rationality and logic, coinciding with yang, while Daoism relied on intuition and inspiration, corresponding with yin.

Legalism: Regulation, Coercion, and Control

At the end of the Eastern Zhou era, another approach arose that, unlike Daoism, saw harmony and order not as existing naturally in society, but as needing to be imposed on people from above. This approach evolved from the insights of Xunzi (*SHOON-DZUH*), a Confucian scholar who lived from approximately 300 to 230 B.C.E. Witnessing the disorder and violence of the Warring States era, Xunzi concluded that humans are by nature brutal and selfish, and that their ambitions and passions must be curbed by rigorous laws, institutions, rewards, and punishments. Although Xunzi was a Confucian, his disciples Hanfeizi (*HAHN-FĀ-DZUH*) and Li Si (*LĒ-SUH*) expanded his ideas into **Legalism**, a philosophy advocating strict enforcement of stringent laws by a powerful authoritarian state.

Legalists believed above all in law and order, maintaining that only an authoritarian regime could instill the fear and discipline needed to impose unity and control. If the state was to be strong and prosperous, Legalists asserted, the ruler must possess both the power and the will to enforce strict laws, to punish those who disobeyed, and to suppress all disunity and dissent.

Legalism favors strong ruler to impose law, order, and stability

The Birth of the Empire Under the Qin Dynasty

In 247 B.C.E., anxious to implement his ideas, the Legalist Li Si became a key official in the state of Qin (*CHIN*), a rising power in northwest China that nine years earlier had overthrown the last Eastern Zhou king. Under Li Si's guidance, a talented, ambitious new Qin ruler set out to create a mighty empire. In one eventful decade, from 231 to 221 B.C.E., he conquered all the other northern states and much of southern China as well (Map 4.4). For the first time ever, almost all of China was united under one ruler. He came to be called Shihuangdi (*SHUR-HWAHNG-DĒ*), that is, the First Emperor, the man whose spectacular tomb was described at the start of this chapter.

With Legalist backing Shihuangdi creates a huge Chinese empire

Map 4.4 The Qin Empire, 221–206 B.C.E.

In a single decade, from 231 to 221 B.C.E., the state of Qin in west-central China conquered most of the rest of the country, creating China's first empire. Note that the First Emperor, who conquered and ruled all the area shaded on this map, also expanded China's northern fortifications against nomadic invasions, thus creating China's first "Great Wall." How did the Qin Empire, which disintegrated soon after the First Emperor's death in 210 B.C.E., help set the stage for even larger and much longer-lasting Chinese empires?



The First Emperor

Ably assisted by Li Si, the First Emperor ruled a regime remarkable for both its accomplishments and its brutality. He abolished the conquered states, disarming their forces and executing their rulers. He divided China into provinces and districts headed by officials selected for their talent and loyalty. Rather than appointing his relatives or members of the old nobility, he instead chose able civil servants who were wholly accountable to him. He made the local nobles move to his capital so he could both keep them under close watch and take away their rural lands, causing them also to deplete their wealth by building costly new city homes. Inspired by Legalism and his own

The First Emperor creates a centralized, repressive Qin regime

The First Emperor standardizes laws, writing, money, weights, and roads

The First Emperor builds huge palace, canals, roads, and first Great Wall



China's Great Wall, now built of brick, began as an earthen barrier under the First Emperor.

The Qin regime is overthrown after the First Emperor dies

The Han Dynasty rules huge powerful empire for centuries

ambitions, he maintained a huge army, a pervasive surveillance system, and a brutal penal code—branding, burning, boiling, or burying alive those who defied his will.

Nothing, it seemed, could escape the First Emperor's determination to regulate Chinese society. To improve command, communication, and commerce, he standardized the written language and laws, coins and taxes, weights and measures, and even the width of roads and axle-width of carts. To intimidate his subjects he made periodic grand inspection tours of his realm. To suppress dissent he is said to have banned the study of philosophy and history, burned the books on those subjects, and buried several hundred scholars alive (ensuring his eventual vilification by later Chinese historians).

Using vast armies of forced laborers, at a huge cost in human lives, the First Emperor constructed massive projects that testified to his magnificence and megalomania. His extravagant palace, for example, measured over 120,000 square feet and could house up to 10,000 persons. Even more colossal was his tomb, whose chance discovery and fantastic features are described at the start of this chapter. His more practical projects included a complex irrigation system, a network of canals connecting China's rivers, and more than 4,000 miles of roads, fifty paces wide, which extended like spokes to link his capital with the regions of his realm. His most renowned achievement, however, was to connect all the fortifications built in the north to protect against nomadic invasions. The resulting structure, 1,400 miles long, later rebuilt and extended, came to be known as the Great Wall of China.

As time went on, and as his inhumane policies alienated his people, the First Emperor grew increasingly paranoid. After several assassination attempts by embittered subjects, he became obsessed with the fear of death. He had oracles and magicians try to find him a formula for everlasting life, and he even sent out a sea expedition to search for "islands of immortality." These efforts apparently failed: in 210 B.C.E., on one of his grand inspection tours, the First Emperor fell ill and died.

The End of the Qin Dynasty

The First Emperor had intended that his dynasty would last 10,000 generations. Instead it outlived him by only four years. His death was followed by provincial rebellions that plunged China into chaos, and by government intrigues that killed both Li Si and the Second Emperor, leading in 206 B.C.E. to the Qin dynasty's collapse. The rebel leaders then battled among themselves until one of them, a former peasant named Liu Bang (*L'YOO-BAHNG*), perceived as a man of the people, emerged victorious in 202 B.C.E. Building upon the centralized state created by the First Emperor, but ruling far more flexibly and humanely, Liu Bang assumed the Mandate of Heaven, starting a dynasty called the Han (*HAHN*) that endured for over 400 years.

The Growth of the Empire Under the Han Dynasty

The Han dynasty (202 B.C.E.–220 C.E.), started by Liu Bang, presided over one of the world's largest and wealthiest domains. In size and population, it matched the vast Roman Empire, then flourishing in the West. The Han Empire also produced a large, effective imperial administration, a sophisticated urban culture and intellectual life, and

major advances in technology and commerce. The dynasty's impact was so enduring that, even today, the Chinese still call themselves the Han people.

The Early Han: Confucian Bureaucracy and Military Expansion

Liu Bang, later known as Emperor Gaozu² (*GOW-DZUH*), achieved considerable success by both extending the Qin state bureaucracy and reducing its severity. During his brief reign (202–195 B.C.E.) he lowered taxes, moderated punishments, and invited Confucian scholars, rigorously repressed by the Qin regime, to serve as state officials. Under his successors, in fact, these scholars came to dominate the bureaucracy, and Confucianism became the official ideology. The result was a ruling synthesis, combining the central authority of Legalism with the humane civility of Confucianism, that would endure for two thousand years—a shining example of China's ability to balance and blend dissimilar forces into a successful system.

In the first few centuries of Han rule the bureaucracy became more formal. Initially, the emperors simply asked local officials to recommend talented young men for government posts. In 165 B.C.E., however, the emperor started examining these candidates to determine which ones were best qualified. Then, to improve the preparation of candidates, in 124 B.C.E. the dynasty established an imperial university at Chang'an (*CHAHNG-AHN*), the capital, not far from modern Xi'an. Later the regime would use written exams, based on mastery of Confucian thought, to decide whom to appoint. These developments laid the groundwork for what would become a key feature of Chinese governance—a professional civil service made up of educated scholars. Elsewhere officials were often warriors trained in military combat; in China they were scholars educated in Confucian civility and ethics.

But China did not lack warriors. After early Han emperors consolidated their realm, Han Wudi (*WOO-DEE*), the Han Martial Emperor (141–87 B.C.E.), built the Chinese army into an expansive force. In a vigorous series of military campaigns, he extended his control to the south into northern Vietnam, to the north into southern Manchuria and northern Korea, and to the west into distant Central Asia (Map 4.5). He also attacked the Xiongnu (*shē-ONG-NOO*), warlike nomads who had menaced northern China for years, beginning a long struggle that continued under his successors. At its height the Han Empire ruled a vast territory extending more than 3,000 miles east to west and 2,000 miles north to south, embracing almost 60 million people.

Rebellion, Reform, and Ruin

Wudi's many wars, however, and the massive recruitments and harsh new taxes required to support these conflicts, exhausted both China's resources and its people's patience. His successors, less capable than he, were further weakened by repeated Xiongnu raids and internal revolts. The imperial court was racked by intrigues between the emperor's in-laws and his **eunuchs**, castrated males who ran his palace and guarded his many **concubines**, women who served him sexually to ensure that he would have a male heir. As the only males besides the emperor allowed to have contact with his concubines, these men were rendered sexually impotent to ensure that potential heirs born to these

Han rulers blend Legalist authority with Confucian civility

Han Empire forms the first strong, effective civil service bureaucracy

The Han Martial Emperor builds a huge army and conquers neighboring lands

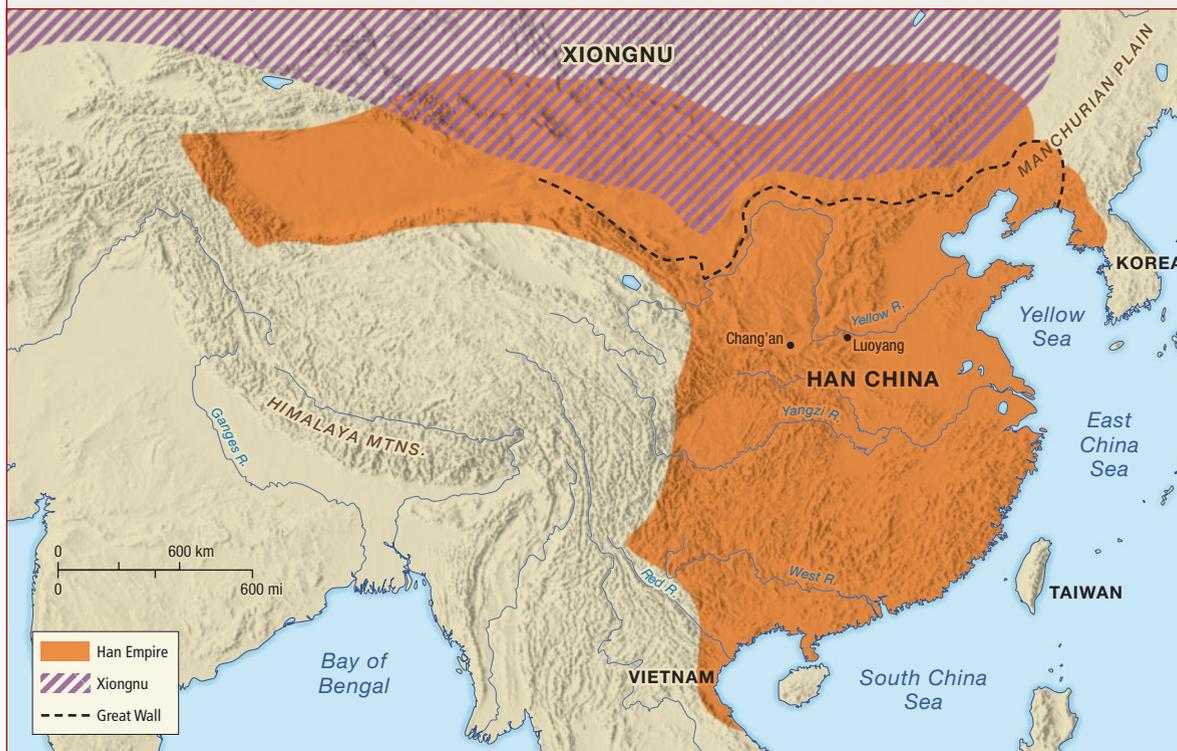


Han Wudi and companions, as pictured by a later artist.

² Chinese emperors often were awarded a historical name that differed from their given name. *Gaozu*, for example, means *High Progenitor*. The historical name is sometimes preceded by the dynasty name, for example, *Qin Shihuangdi*, *Han Gaozu*. The *first* name is the *family* name in China.

Map 4.5 The Han Empire, 202 B.C.E.–220 C.E.

China's longest enduring empire was that of the Han Dynasty, which reigned for over 400 years, extending its rule west into Central Asia, south into Southeast Asia, and northeast into Manchuria and Korea, forging cultural and commercial connections with these diverse regions. Observe that the Han also conflicted and connected with the Xiongnu, warlike nomads who threatened China from the north. How did the dynasty's territorial expansion, and its conflicts with the Xiongnu, impact developments in China?



women were really the ruler's sons. Nonetheless, with their management of the palace and regular access to the emperor, talented and ambitious eunuchs often acquired great influence. In the process, they tended to clash with the royal in-laws, who likewise sought to use their position to gain power and wealth.

In 22 B.C.E., as palace intrigues between eunuchs and in-laws continued to cripple the court, revolts erupted throughout the empire. It looked as if the dynasty was losing Heaven's Mandate. Then, in 9 C.E., a palace coup deposed a child emperor and replaced him with Wang Mang (*WAHNG-MAHNG*), a devoted Confucian who had been on the young ruler's regency council.

Idealistic and egalitarian, Wang Mang launched a series of reforms designed to improve the common people's welfare. He abolished slavery, for example, and tried to take land away from wealthy landlords for use by the poor peasants. He also declared himself emperor, intending to start his own dynasty. But a series of droughts and bad harvests interrupted his plans, and his land transfers sparked fierce opposition among the rich

Palace intrigues among eunuchs and royal in-laws undermine Han rule

landlords. Then, in 11 C.E., a catastrophic Yellow River flood drowned hundreds of thousands and left millions homeless. As China descended into chaos, various groups began to revolt, demanding the return of the Han dynasty. In 23 C.E., when victorious rebels beheaded Wang Mang and ate the rest of his body, it became clear that they did not think he possessed the Mandate of Heaven.

The Later Han: Revival and Decline

After a few more years of chaos, Han rule was restored under Guangwudi (*GWAHNG-WOO-DE*), the Shining Martial Emperor, who reigned from 25 to 57 C.E., initiating an era known as the Later Han (25–220 C.E.). Guangwudi moved the capital east to Luoyang, perhaps because it was near his power base and perhaps also to signify a fresh start. For the next few generations, he and his heirs maintained peace and prosperity, thanks partly to their energetic and conscientious rule, partly to a long stretch of disaster-free weather, and partly to internal strife among the Xiongnu nomads who threatened northern China. In 89 C.E., Chinese generals took advantage of this strife to inflict a crushing defeat upon the nomads, thus ending for a while the chronic Xiongnu threat. In the following decade the generals restored Chinese rule in Central Asia, and one of them even ventured as far west as the Caspian Sea. By 100 C.E. the Han realm had recovered much of its former size and wealth.

During the next century, however, dynastic decline resumed. A succession of youthful and short-lived emperors set off a new series of conflicts between their in-laws and court eunuchs. Dismayed by these intrigues, several groups of Confucian civil servants and students sought to rebel in the 160s, only to be tortured and butchered in a wholesale purge. Then came floods and droughts, locust infestations that destroyed the crops, and a deadly epidemic (perhaps smallpox or plague), apparently brought to China by Central Asian nomads, that took millions of lives. The result was massive suffering and population decline, adding to the impression that the Han rulers were losing Heaven's Mandate.

Taking advantage of the anarchy, powerful landlords seized the occasion to subject the villagers to serfdom, a status that bound them to perpetual service on the land. This action in turn triggered peasant revolts, led by a rebel group called the Yellow Turbans, whose head cloths signified solidarity with the earth, traditionally associated in China with the color yellow. Han armies ultimately crushed these revolts, but the generals then took the land for themselves and emerged as regional warlords. After the year 190 C.E., when one of these generals seized Luoyang, deposed the reigning ruler, and slaughtered hundreds of his relatives and eunuchs, all semblance of centralized authority ceased. In 220 C.E., after several more disastrous decades of chaos and civil war, another general forced the last Han emperor to abdicate, officially ending one of China's longest, strongest, and most illustrious dynasties.

The Shining Martial Empire restores Han rule and stability

Landlords impose serfdom, sparking mass rebellions

Revolts and civil war end Han rule in 220 C.E.

Society, Technology, and the Silk Road

Nonetheless, while the Han dynasty lasted, China boasted one of the world's most stable and productive societies, and many of the world's most useful technologies. As it extended its reach into Central Asia, China also increased its commerce with other cultures along a network of trade routes that came to be called the Silk Road.

Han Society

Han society, like that of other ancient civilizations, was based mainly on village farming and herding. In northern China, where the climate was cool and dry, farmers grew wheat and millet. In the south, where it was warmer and wetter, they mainly raised rice in fields that were flooded to provide continuous moisture. Many peasants also raised chickens and pigs, and some had oxen or water buffalo to help plow the fields. Most agrarian labor, however, was accomplished by human effort.

Chinese peasants' lives were centered on their families, including not just their parents and children but also the rest of their living relatives and even their departed ancestors, widely believed to be actively concerned with the fortunes of their descendants. Families were ruled by their patriarchs, elder males who made the major decisions, and these men consulted with the spirits of family forebears and conducted ceremonies to venerate both their ancestors and the gods. All family members were expected to obey their elders and superiors.

Chinese women, as a rule, were subordinate to men. A bride's father arranged her marriage, typically providing a dowry, and she then became part of her new husband's family. Due to such customs, daughters were often seen by their parents as a burden, to be raised and fed as children only to join and benefit another family as adults. Girls were thus treated as inferior to boys, and young women were trained chiefly to serve as wives and mothers. Wives were required to cook, make clothes, and clean—in Chinese script the character for wife was a woman using a broom. They were also expected to help in the fields when needed and, above all, to bear and raise sons. Women's lives were said to be governed by the “three submissions:” first to their fathers when they were young, second to their husbands when they were married, and third to their sons when they were ultimately widowed.

Despite their duties and submissions, Chinese women were to some extent protected by Confucian doctrine, which said that fathers, husbands, and sons should treat them with respect and dignity. In addition, Chinese custom made women the household managers, giving those with strong characters an opportunity for influence within the home and family.

The lives of most peasants were likewise confined. In theory, farmers were highly valued, since the food they grew was vital to survival. Indeed, the Confucian social order ranked farmers higher than merchants, since the former were producers while the latter were viewed as mere traffickers and traders. In reality, however, this ranking meant little. Most peasants lived in poverty, dwelling in villages of wood and bamboo huts, often toiling in service to a wealthy landlord. They worked the fields, tilling, hoeing, and harvesting, with little or no protection from the heat, wind, rain, or cold. Peasants were also expected to pay taxes, to provide the state with periodic labor for building public works projects, and often to serve in the army. Rural life was dreary, with few diversions to break the daily routine.

Urban life was far more diverse and sophisticated. Metropolitan areas such as Chang'an and Luoyang, the two great Han capitals, had overall populations of up to a quarter million people, with some 100,000 of them living within the city walls. Wealthy officials and merchants resided in two- or three-story homes made of stucco or wood, with gardens and terraces, plentiful food, and servants to tend their needs. Poorer residents, mostly artisans and laborers, lived in much humbler circumstances, but unlike peasants they had access to urban recreations and diversions. Major cities had palaces,

Patriarchal Chinese families include all living relatives and dead ancestors

Women seen as subservient to men in traditional Chinese society

Chinese women, despite subordinate status, often run their households

Chinese peasants endure poverty and harsh labor

Urban life provides comforts, entertainments, and diversions

parks, marketplaces, and temples; Chang'an even had a zoo. Entertainment ranged from music, art, and poetry to magic shows, juggling acts, and puppet performances.

Urban life in Han China also had a seamy side. As in modern cities there were gambling houses, brothels, and gangs of youths who roamed the streets. Public executions, designed to deter both crime and disloyalty, typically attracted large crowds. Still, officials posted in small provincial towns, deploring their humdrum existence, often dreamed of reassignment to one of the large, vibrant cities.

Technical and Commercial Creativity

Han cities were also centers of creativity, commerce, and craftsmanship. Here scholars, officials, doctors, inventors, and artisans, freed from the need to farm, developed ideas and techniques that would distinguish Chinese culture as enterprising and ingenious.

Scholars and bureaucrats, for example, exchanged ideas and kept records by writing with small brushes on paper—a product invented in Han China. Astronomers charted the paths of planets and recorded sunspots; other scientists studied acoustics and measured earthquakes. Doctors diagnosed diseases, prescribed herbal remedies and drugs, and discovered the circulation of blood. Physicians also used acupuncture, the insertion of thin needles at various points in the body, to relieve pain and cure ailments, theoretically by restoring the body's yin and yang balance. Farmers benefited from innovations such as wheelbarrows to help carry their loads, water mills to help grind their grain, iron plows to help turn their soil, and harnesses to enhance the labor of their oxen and buffalo.

Commerce and craftsmanship also reflected Chinese ingenuity. Metropolitan markets had a wide array of shops and stalls run by manufacturers and merchants. Their wares were produced by skilled artisans, who worked with bronze, pottery, lacquer, jade, and silk to make tools, utensils, plates, vessels, jewelry, and clothing. These goods might then be purchased directly by people of means or sold to merchants who took the products elsewhere and resold them at a profit. Their travels were aided by a network of canals and roads, complete with suspension bridges. Carts and wagons traversed the roads, while boats plied the rivers and canals, carrying commodities all across China—and, increasingly, beyond (Map 4.6).

The Silk Road and the Sea Trade

As conquest and commerce increased contacts with other cultures, Chinese products came to be highly prized in other lands. Indeed, by the second century B.C.E., several land and sea routes linking the Han Empire with southern and western Asia were already in operation. But long distance trade was risky, due to bandits, storms, and treacherous terrain.

Then, in 126 B.C.E., a Chinese general named Zhang Qian (*JAHNG che-AN*), after spending many years in Central Asia in the service of the Martial Emperor (Wudi), returned to China with reports of peoples, plants, and products hitherto unknown in the Han Empire. He told of lands far beyond the western wastelands, such as Bactria, Ferghana (*fur-GAH-nuh*), and Persia, with bountiful vineyards whose grapes produced fine wines, as well as splendid horses superior to any in China. He also said that in markets of these regions he had sometimes seen Chinese products, including bamboo canes and silk cloth, no doubt conveyed there along early trade routes.



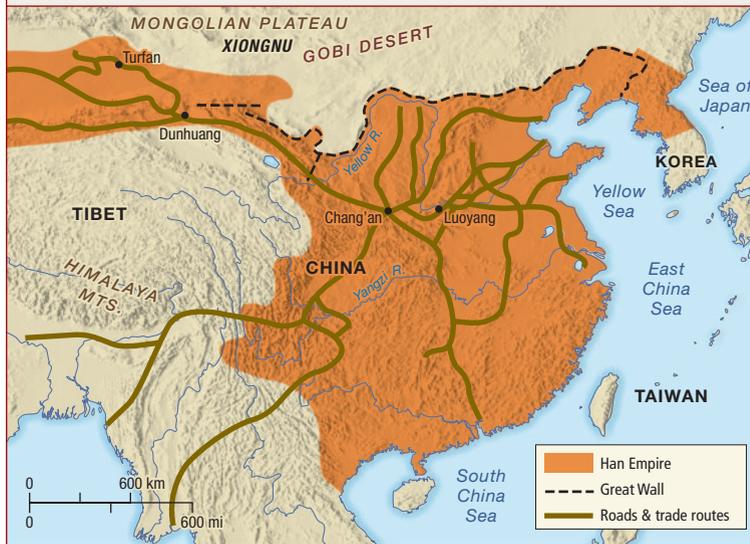
Model of a Han era house

Scholarship, science, medicine, and farming flourish in Han China

Networks of roads and canals aid commerce and crafts

Map 4.6 Roads and Trade Routes in Qin and Han China, 221 B.C.E.–220 C.E.

To expedite connections and communications, China's First Emperor (221–210 B.C.E.) and his successors built and expanded a broad network of roads and trading routes. Note that these roads and routes extended like spokes from the country's two capitals, Chang'an and Luoyang, to distant regions of the realm. How did these roads and routes help to unify China and reinforce imperial rule?



Chinese conquest of Central Asia boosts commerce with other cultures

Silk Road provides commercial connections across Eurasia

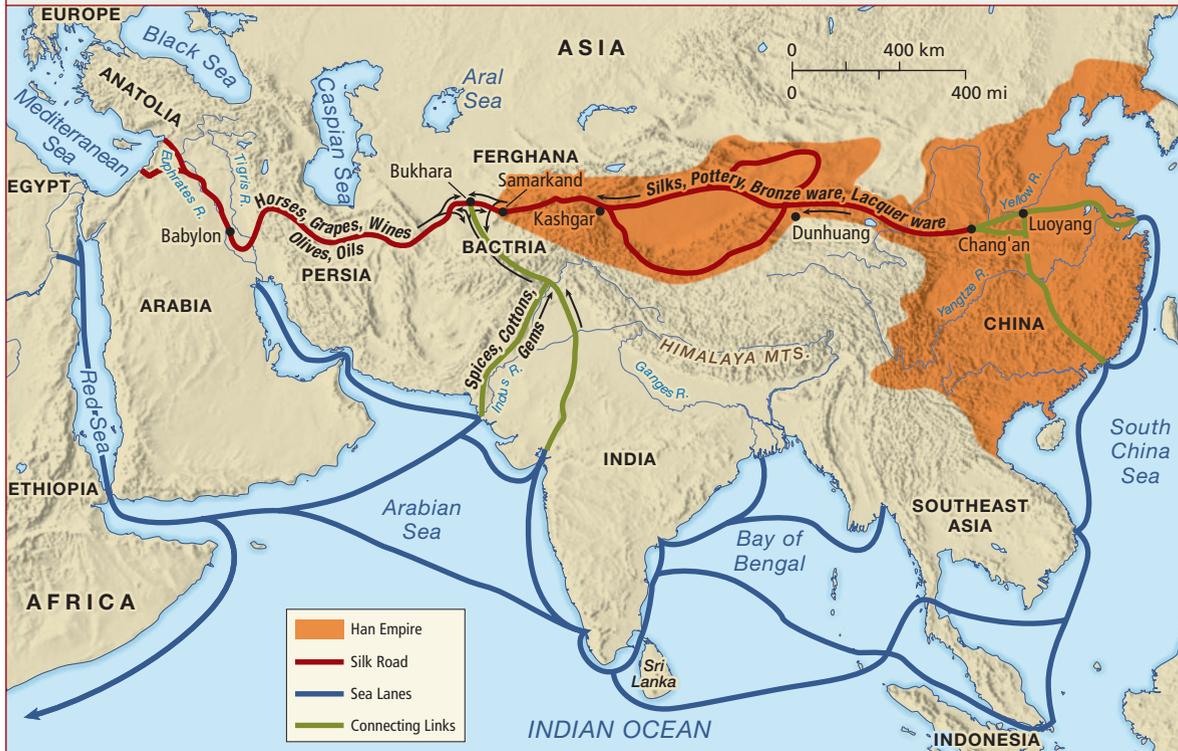
Eager to expand his power and wealth, Wudi sent armies into Central Asia, adding cities and realms to his domains and making them tributaries of China. For many of these new subjects this arrangement had advantages, as Chinese soldiers provided protection from bandits, while Han officials sent valuable silk to retain the tributaries' allegiance. The Chinese presence also helped to establish and sustain the long-distance trading network later called the Silk Road.

The **Silk Road**, named for the precious Chinese fabric often conveyed along its route, was actually a series of trails that connected trading towns across the heart of Asia. The route extended from China westward for thousands of miles across central Asia, with links from there through Bactria into India and through Persia into Mesopotamia and the eastern Mediterranean (Map 4.7). The Silk Road thus provided a commercial connection, though rather tenuous and treacherous, among the various societies of Eurasia and North Africa.

Merchants typically did not travel the whole length of the road; instead they made their way back and forth between certain trading cities, where they could exchange the goods they had brought for goods coming from the other direction. Merchandise was thus transported in a series of stages, passing through many hands along the way. Since

Map 4.7 The Silk Road and Sea Trade, by First Century B.C.E.

The Silk Road, opened by about 100 B.C.E., was a complex series of trade routes linking towns across Asia, providing connections among regions such as China, India, Persia, and West Asia. Note that overland links connected the Silk Road to several sea ports, from which goods were shipped by sea lanes connecting East and Southeast Asia, Indonesia, India, Persia, Arabia, and Africa. What key products were shipped along the Silk Road, and how were they transported? Along with goods, what else did the Silk Road and sea trade convey?



all who handled these items wished to make a profit, and since numerous local princes often imposed tolls and fees, items might well cost many times more at their final destination than they did at their point of origin.

Nonetheless the Silk Road flourished for more than a thousand years, as did the bustling cities and towns that grew up along its route. Located at key passes and junctures, cities such as Dunhuang (*DUN-WAHNG*), Kashgar (*KAHSH-gar*), Samarkand (*SAH-mur-KAHND*) and Bukhara (*boo-KAH-ruh*) bustled with traders, money-changers, camel breeders, and guides, and teemed with markets full of exotic goods. Less celebrated, but no less important, were many smaller settlements along the way, where travelers found rest and recreation as well as food and water for their horses and camels. Some of the cities were independent, with their own ruling princes and dynasties, but many in time came under the protection of larger domains such as China and Persia.

Trading towns flourish along the Silk Road for centuries

Goods from India, China, Europe, and West Asia are exchanged along Silk Road

Camel caravans transport goods along Silk Road



Bactrian camel.

Sea lanes link China with India, Persia, Arabia, Egypt, and Europe

Silk Road connections also spread diseases and beliefs.

Traffic on the trade routes typically consisted of items not produced in the country of destination. From the west came fine horses, highly treasured in China, as well as grapes and wines, olives and oils, precious stones and metals, jewelry, and arts and crafts. From the south came Indian cottons, along with cinnamon, ginger, and other Asian spices that were highly valued for flavoring food and for making medications, perfumes, and magic potions. From the east came Chinese pottery, bronze ware, and lacquerware, prized throughout Eurasia. But of all the choice items that made their way westward, perhaps the most treasured were the fine fabrics for which the Silk Road was named. By the first century B.C.E., Chinese silk clothing, with its brilliant colors and exquisite texture, was in fashion among the wealthy as far west as Rome.

Cargoes were conveyed along the Silk Road sometimes by horses and wagons, but often by caravans of camels, especially the dual-humped Bactrian variety, whose shaggy hair helped them endure the harsh, windy Central Asian winters. In time camel keepers crossbred these creatures with single-humped Arabian dromedaries, producing a larger and stronger camel that still had a warm shaggy coat. Saddled with bulging sacks, draped on both sides to equalize the weight, and skillfully led by trained guides across mountains and deserts, these ill-tempered but invaluable animals carried loads weighing hundreds of pounds for dozens of miles a day.

Some Chinese merchants, especially those near the southern coast and far from the Central Asian land routes, conducted their trade by sea. But as with the land routes, so along the sea lanes (Map 4.7), merchants and vessels rarely made the entire trip from one end of the line to the other. Instead, Chinese vessels typically traveled the South China Sea to trade with Southeast Asia and the lands later known as Malaya and Indonesia. From there some goods were transshipped, in Malayan or Indian vessels, to India and Sri Lanka, and thence in Persian or Arab crafts to Persia, Arabia, and Egypt. From Egypt some items were resold into the Mediterranean network, eventually ending up in places such as Greece or Rome.

Along with goods, diseases and beliefs were at times conveyed on the Silk Road. Epidemics of smallpox and plague, for example, including deadly outbreaks that ravaged both China and Rome in the second century C.E., spread through Central Asia along the trade routes. In that same century, as we saw in Chapter 3, Buddhist beliefs spread from India to Central Asia, and from there eventually to China along the Silk Road.

Despite the importance of the Silk Road and sea lanes, however, the contacts they provided between China and other lands were tenuous and indirect. The Chinese became acquainted with the goods of other regions, for example, but learned little about their people. And the Western societies that valued Chinese goods had little real knowledge of the eastern culture that produced such marvelous merchandise.

Chapter Review

Putting It in Perspective

In many ways, early China was similar to other ancient societies. Like the others, Chinese society began along a river, was based on agriculture, and developed extensive trade networks and large cities. Like the others, it came to be ruled by monarchs who had semi-divine status and governed by means of officials and armies. Like the others, its social structure was stratified, with an aristocratic elite, urban classes of merchants and artisans, and a rural peasantry that made up most of the population.

In other respects, however, Chinese society was distinctive. The Mandate of Heaven, for example, could justify rebellion against rulers who failed to furnish stability and security, a concept unknown in most other early cultures. The Confucian ethic, which held state officials accountable for public welfare, conveyed the relatively rare idea that government should serve society. The notion of yin and yang, with its focus on balance and harmony, provided a perspective that differed from the view of reality as a struggle between good and evil. And the Chinese civil service, with its stress on education and ethics, gave China a government whose officials were trained as scholars rather than as military leaders.

As China's contacts with other cultures grew, it was increasingly influenced by these connections. From Central Asian nomads, the Chinese learned to use chariots and cast bronze, and later to ride horses and forge iron. From the Silk Road and sea trade, the Chinese became acquainted with goods from India, Persia, and West Asia, while Chinese products likewise became available in these places. China nonetheless retained its distinctive character, a land whose products were prized, but whose ways were largely unknown, in expansive societies far to China's west, such as Persia, Greece, and Rome.

Reviewing Key Material

KEY CONCEPTS

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Mandate of Heaven, 87	Legalism, 94
dynastic cycle, 88	eunuchs, 97
Confucianism, 90	concubines, 97
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KEY PEOPLE

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Confucius (Kongfuzi), 90	Wang Mang, 98
Laozi, 92	Guangwudi (Shining Martial Emperor), 99
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ASK YOURSELF

1. In what ways was Chinese civilization similar to other ancient civilizations, and in what ways was it distinct? How do you account for these distinctions?
2. What were the advantages and disadvantages of the Chinese writing system? How did it benefit an empire that was vast and linguistically diverse?
3. What were the advantages and disadvantages of the Mandate of Heaven concept and the pattern of dynastic cycle? How did these concepts affect the development of the Chinese empire?
4. How did the concept of yin and yang differ from notions of good versus evil? How did the concept help the Chinese to embrace disparate belief systems such as Confucianism and Daoism?
5. Why did Legalist principles prove effective in creating a vast empire, but ineffective in maintaining it for long? Why did the Han ruling synthesis, combining elements of Legalism and Confucianism, prove so successful and enduring?

GOING FURTHER

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Key Dates and Developments

by 7000 B.C.E. Farming in Yellow River valley

2200–1750 B.C.E. Xia dynasty

1750–1122 B.C.E. Shang dynasty

1122–770 B.C.E. Western Zhou dynasty

770–256 B.C.E. Eastern Zhou dynasty

551–479 B.C.E. Confucius

by 500 B.C.E. Laozi and origins of Daoism

403–221 B.C.E. Warring States Era (Mencius, Xunzi)

231–221 B.C.E. China united by Qin Shihuangdi

221–210 B.C.E. Reign of Qin Shihuangdi (First Emperor)

202 B.C.E.–6 C.E. Early Han dynasty

202–195 B.C.E. Reign of Han Gaozu (Liu Bang)

147–87 B.C.E. Reign of Han Wudi (Martial Emperor)

by 100 B.C.E. Origins of the Silk Road

9–23 C.E. Reign of Wang Mang

25–220 C.E. Later Han dynasty