

Introduction to Chinese Civilisation

Table of Contents

THE ORIGINS OF CHINESE CIVILISATION: Neolithic Period to the Western Zhou Dynasty (to 771BC)	1
PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS: The Eastern Zhou Period (770-256 BC)	4
Rival States	4
Confucius and his followers.....	5
Other schools of thought	6
THE CREATION OF THE BUREAUCRATIC EMPIRE: The Qin and Han Dynasties (265BC-220AD)	9
Unification by Qin	9
Han Government	10
Confucianism, the State and the Educated Elite	11
BUDDHISM, ARISTOCRACY, AND ALIEN RULERS: The Age of Division (220-589AD)	13
The Three Kingdoms and Jin Dynasty	13
The Northern and Southern Dynasties	14
Buddhism	15
A COSMOPOLITAN EMPIRE: The Tang Dynasty (618-907)	17
Empire-building	17
The Penetration of Buddhism into Chinese Life	19
Political and economic realignments	20
SHIFTING SOUTH: The Song Dynasty (907-1276)	23
The embattled state	23
The burgeoning economy	24
A turn inward	26
ALIEN RULE: The Liao, Jin and Yuan Dynasties (907-1368)	29
Steppe Nomadism and the Inner Asian States	29
Ghengis Khan and the Mongols	31
Life in China under Alien rule	33
THE LIMITS OF AUTOCRACY: The Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)	35
Ming Taizu and Despotism	35
Literati life	37
Relations with the outer world	39
MANCHUS AND IMPERIALISM: The Qing Han Dynasty (1644-1900)	42
Manchu rule	42
Maritime trade and relations with European nations	45
Self-strengthening	48
TAKING ACTION: The Early Twentieth Century (1900-1949)	51
Undermining the Qing dynasty	51
Dislodging authority	52
The Communist Victory	57

The Origins of Chinese Civilisation

Neolithic Period to the Western Zhou Dynasty (to 771 BC)

- Chinese civilisation theory attributed to the innovations of extraordinary human beings
 - Fu Xi, the Ox-tamer, domesticated animals and invented family
 - Shen Nung, Divine Farmer, invented the plough and hoe
 - Huang Di, Yellow Lord invented the bow and arrow, boats, carts, ceramics, writing and silk **also labelled one of the five great pre-dynastic rulers**,
 - Yao, developed the calendar and rituals, one of the five great pre-dynastic rulers
 - Shun, successor of Yao, due to his loyalty and filial piety though he was not a descendant of Yao
 - Yu, official that prevented floods, also associated with geography, his death and successor established the precedent of hereditary, dynastic rule
- China as being defined by technology and statecraft - agriculture, writing, flood control, monarchy combining virtue and hereditary succession

Geography

- China proper extends 1,000 miles N to S, E to W
- Huge expanse of land interlaced with mountain ranges, separating habitable river valleys from each other – in these valleys is where first human settlements were established
- Two great **rivers flow east**, Yellow River in the NORTH and Yangzi in the centre
- **North** is colder, flatter and more acid with alkaline soil making it best suited to crops like wheat and millet
 - People travelled by land on foot, back of horses/donkeys
- **South** as prone to flooding which resulted in the construction of dykes to keep the river in its course
 - Suitable for boat travel
- Chinese subcontinent as being so vast, human beings believed it was the centre of civilisation

Prehistory

- *Homo erectus* appeared on the Chinese subcontinent, spreading from Africa and West Asia – Peking Man as the best documented example
- *Homo sapiens* modern human beings appeared in East Asia around 100,000 years ago also spreading to Africa
- By 5000BC, Neolithic cultures with agriculture, pottery, villages and textiles had emerged in many of the river valley's of today's China – the cultivation of crops allowed for denser, more permanent settlement
- Dogs and pigs found as early as 5000bc and by 3000bc sheep and cattle had become important in the **north**, as water buffalo and cattle did in the **south**
- Graves as having been found with objects, for instance, necklaces and bracelets made of jade, stone or pottery beads in the **Dawenkou** in the **Shandong province**
- Jade as being fashioned into ritual objects – because it is such a difficult object to shape it requires grinding with abrasive sand in a slow, labour-intensive process, revealing that by this period c.3500BC, 'specialisation' had occurred
- *bi* (disk), *congs* (columns), were excavated and believed to have been used in ritual

Late Neolithic period (3000 – 2000bc)

- Time of increased contact between regional cultures
- Pottery shapes and designs spread into new areas, cooking tripods spread west, while geometric decoration spread east
- Time of increased conflict between communities
- Discovery of human remains and sacrifice – as a means of pleasing ancestors or gods

Ancestors

- Practice of burying dead with containers of food and other objects needed by the living was associated with belief about mutual dependency of the living and their dead ancestors
- Shang kings communicated with their ancestors through sacrificial rituals and divination
- Divination: applying a glowing metal poker or other heat source to turtle shell or cattle shinbone – resulting heat stress crack interpreted as auspicious, inauspicious or neutral
- Ancestors often asked about sacrificial offerings, or personal things experienced by the king
- **Di** spiritual force separate from ancestors (Lord on High) – but kings called on ancestors to act as intermediaries

Shang dynasty (1600 – 1050)

- More complex bronze-age civilisation marked by writing, metal working, domestication of horse, class stratification and a stable political-religious hierarchy administering a large territory
- Shang did not control a large part of china but their influence, extended beyond their territorial limits with their technology and decorative motifs adopted by peoples through the Yangzi
- Military technology advanced with the invention of bronze-tipped spears, composite bows and horse drawn chariots
- Shang king played priestly role in the worship of the high god Di and the royal ancestors
- Principle of sacrifice as being reciprocity and feeding: one makes offerings to those from whom one wants help, and one feeds rich foods to the god or ancestor to keep him strong
- Tomb 1001 at Anyang found to have the most sacrificial remains (74 humans, 12 horses and 11 dogs)
- Vast tombs as evidence of the ability of the Shang rulers to mobilise human and material resources – predated Anyang seen in the enormous city walls of Zhengzhou
- **Lady Hao** – tomb never to have been robbed, holds evidence of human sacrifice and profusion of valuable objects

Philosophical Foundations:

The Eastern Zhou Period 770-256 BC

- Establishment of intellectual foundations, period of political fragmentation and moral crisis
- First half of this era called **Spring and Autumn period** (722-481 BC)
- Zhou kings reigned by default while putative vassals competed against each other, making and breaking alliances, sporadically taking arms
- Ruthless competition fostered social, technological and economic advances:
 - Iron casting
 - Infantry armies
 - Coinage
 - Private ownership of land
 - Social mobility

Rival states

- Western Zhou rule was decentralised as regional lords became more powerful by 771BC the Zhou king was killed by an alliance of Rong tribesmen and Zhou vassals
- Capital was moved east out of the Wei River to modern Luoyang and China entered period of time with no central power
- Zhou kings had ritual functions as intermediaries with heaven but militarily inferior to supposed vassals
- 335BC regional kings began calling themselves kings, refusing to recognise sovereignty of the Zhou king
- Eastern Zhou was violent time but also a time when diplomacy was studied earnestly and practised
- During Spring and Autumn period, code of chivalrous or sportsmanlike conduct still regulated war-fare between states
 - One state would not attack another while it was in mourning for its ruler
 - During battle one side would not attack before other side had time to line up
- Technology of building walls had to be steadily improved because techniques of attacking and laying siege to city walls were perfected
- Warfare stimulated advances in military techniques and technology that altered the social relations of warfare
 - Need for chariot riding aristocracy declined with mastery of cavalry and infantry armies
 - Powerful new crossbows allowed farmers to be made effective soldiers
- Increase of serfdom as rulers wanted to reward farmers for effort and have direct access to their labour power
- Use of casting coins which supplemented use of bolts of silk as units of exchange
- Iron tech as assisting in economic expansion – iron deposits were being exploited and used for farm tools and weapons
- To expand control over people and land, rulers sent out their own officials rather than delegate authority to hereditary lesser lords
 - Centralised bureaucratic control created opportunities for social advancement for those on the lower end of old aristocracy
- In this period, the Zhou is small and weak, while states on the periphery are gaining strength, lots of texts and sources reveal competition for resources between states and competition for the control of the population, creating alliances
- Rulers gathered around them advisors, assistants, teachers, strategists, and clerks

- These men made proposals about what the rulers should do and rebutted each other's ideas advancing art of oratory, science of strategy and logic
- Schools of thought developed through compilation and circulation of recorded teachings

Confucius and his followers (Analects, Book of Songs, Book of documents)

- Spent years at the Lu court but did not gain influence so wandered through neighbouring states with disciples in search of a ruler more receptive to his advice
- Committed to inspiring people to do good, becoming China's first moral philosopher
- Linked moral behaviour to traditional roles and hierarchies and thus became a great defender of the Zhou court
- Identified with 'learned men' who assisted rulers in rituals/ceremonies such as sacrifices to ancestors and reception of envoys
 - Learned men performed divinations and interpreted results
 - Kept records and advised on precedents
- Ideal world: conventions governed actions and hierarchical differentiation resulted in harmonious co-ordination
- Extolled filial piety – reverent respect of children toward parents
 - Ritual and attitude, conventional actions needed to be animated by sincere feelings
- *Ren* – highest virtue entailed benevolence, humanity, co-humanity, deep concern for the well-being of others

Mencius (c.370-c.300)

- Reminded rulers of the Mandate of Heaven, telling them to their faces that if they did not rule well, heaven would bring it about that their people would rebel and oust them
- Concerned with the common people and officials who he felt, should be treated respectfully by the ruler and be given incomes proportionate to their rank
- Argued for the superiority of hereditary ministers over ones chosen by ruler for their merit
- Mencius came out strongly on the positive side, stressing human potential for goodness
- *Mencius* book is like the *Analects* a collection of the philosopher's conversations

Xunzi (c.310 – c.220 BC)

- Had more political and admin experience than either Confucius and Mencius
- Argued for a humanistic and rationalist view of the cosmos – where Confucius had declined to discuss gods, portents and anomalies
 - Heaven as being impartial and human affairs result from human efforts
- Interested in ritual, believed educated men should continue traditional ritual practices i.e. divining before major decisions and praying during droughts
- Directly attacked Mencius' argument that human nature tends towards good, claiming inborn human tendencies are wayward and require curbing through education

Daoism (Laozi – Classic of the Way and Its Power/ Zhuangzi)

- Argued against government and belief that people benefited from this authority
- Defended private life, and affirmed the Way or *Dao* indivisible, immaterial force or energy that is the source of all that exists or happens

- Where Laozi was concerned with protecting each person's life, Zhuangzi searched for a conception of man's place in the cosmos that would reconcile him to death
- Confucians used 'Dao' as a key concept to refer to the ethically correct way for humankind to live while Daoists use it to refer to the way of nature

Legalism

- Advisors argued strong government depended on effective institutional structures
- Concentrated on proposing political solutions to disorder and techniques for the accumulation of power
- Lord Shang, chief minister of state of Qin – abolished aristocracy substituting hierarchy of military titles
- To attract migrants, new settlers were offered lands and houses, serfdom abolished and farmers able to buy and sell land
 - Thus, farmers were freed from domination of local nobility but were instead under direct control of the Qin state
- Ordinary residents had heavy obligations to the state for taxes and labour service and could not travel without permits
- Fullest exposition of Legalist thought written by Han Feizi who had begun as a student of the Confucian master Xunzi
 - Feizi analysed situations from perspective of the ruler: 'when the ruler trusts someone, he falls under that person's control'
 - Believed ruler could not afford to be candid with his queen, consorts or concubines but instead manipulate them by controlling competition among them
 - Disproved of the Confucian notion that govt. should be based on virtue and ritual, instead hierarchal relations should be based on power to reward and punish
 - Urged rulers to make laws and prohibitions clear, with the result that the 'state will get rich and the army strong. Then it will be possible to succeed in est. hegemony over other states'
 - Belief that the common people held little understanding of what is good for them 'he uses means that will lead to peace, but the people are not happy'
- In legalist thought, there was no law above and independent of the wishes of the rulers, no law that might set limits on their actions in the way natural or divine law did in Greek thought

Other schools of thought

- Theorists of yin and yang: **yin** associated with feminine, dark, receptive, yielding negative and weak; **yang** with masculine, bright, assertive, creative, positive and strong
 - Integral to the processes that generate the natural order
 - Rhythmic movement from day to night and from summer to winter result from interaction of yin and yang
- **Mozi** (active c.420BC)
 - Expert in the construction of scaling ladders and weapons used for war and defence
 - Laid out his criteria for judging practices and institutions
 - Argued against aggressive war saying territorial gain was not worth loss of life, advocating instead for mutual concern for all, no favouritism for relatives and neighbours
 - Questioned utility of traditional ritual practices such as mourning and austerities

- Mourning as interruption of work and injuring of health
- Contrasted to Confucians, favouring promotion of the able and worthy regardless of status over hereditary office

Music

- Music believed by early thinkers to have great moral powers – Confucius distinguished between different sorts of music
 - Shao dance considered a positive force, bringing people into harmony
 - Music of state of Zheng dangerous leading to wanton thoughts
- Music written with the same characters as ‘enjoyment’, led Xunzi to posit a connection between the two: ‘Music is joy, an emotion which human beings cannot help but feel at times. Unable to resist feeling joy, they must find an outlet through voice and movement’
- Archaeologists unearthed instruments such as stone chimes, bronze drums, stringed lute-like instruments, bamboo flutes and sets of bells
 - Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng: found 124 instruments, including drums, flutes, mouth organs, pan pipes and 64-piece bell set (bearing inscriptions that indicate the pitches)

Silk

- Used for writing in a culture where the written word retained a sacred quality
- Symbolic of wealth: worn by the wealthy, bolts of silk used as a currency from Zhou times to Tang dynasty
- Pieces of silk fabrics unearthed from late Zhou tombs in central China show an extremely high level of technical skill had been reached by this time
- Production requires cultivation of mulberry trees and tending of silkworms
- Women were traditionally associated with all stages of sericulture, division of labour summarised by: ‘Men plough and women weave’ dating back to Zhou period

State and ethnic identities

- Period of division allowed for development of ideas about cultural and ethnic identity
- Major states came to have a distinct identity, tied to its own history and distinctive features of its culture
- People identified with the states they came from though loyalties were not narrowly focused on states
 - Free movement of people and technological innovations and art motifs spread rapidly
- Advancement of diplomatic alliances through intermarriage between states
- Idea of a broader realm on one central axis counterbalanced identification with home states ‘All Under Heaven’ (tianxia) or ‘Central States’ (zhongguo)
 - All Under Heaven as not an undifferentiated space or population but focused on the true king: Son of Heaven
 - Central States referred to states along the Yellow River, a region that had been central to the Xia and Shang, standard against which outsiders could be judged deficient
- Degree to which outsiders were held to be deficient made by distinction between Hua or Xia people (ethnic terms for Chinese) and barbarians (Yi, Man, Di, Rong)
 - Concept of barbarian not invested with what we would call racial characteristics but rather strange beliefs and practices according to **Mozi**: Yue people dismembered and ate the first born son

- Evidence in the late Zhou that those who had once been considered barbarian or quasi-barbarian became full members of the Chinese world
- Early Zhou, southern half of modern China was considered barbarian
- State of Chu began to expand rapidly, defeating and absorbing fifty or more states, controlling a territory as extensive as Shang or Western Zhou at their heights
 - Held a great deal of wealth evidenced by large number of Zhou tombs found within its sphere
 - Borrowed northern styles of art and added distinctive elements not present elsewhere: antlered cranes, motifs that connected to distinctive religious ideas
- The Chu ruling elite proved an innovator of bureaucratic methods of govt. and use of infantry armies
 - Daoism associated with Chu as well as the ‘thinker’ Zhuangzi
- Preference of Daoists for private life and desire of Confucians and Mohists for a moral transformation of humankind can be seen as a response to the brutality of the era
- School of thoughts recorded in books and the ideas expressed became detached from historical and geographical context, shaping development of Chinese culture
 - Chinese education involved deep immersion of these texts
 - The books however, did not provide a common set of understanding about the world and the people who live in it
 - As education spread so did the basic elements of cultural orientation constituting of contemporary ‘Chinese culture’

The Creation of the Bureaucratic Empire:

The Qin and Han Dynasties 256BC-AD220

- Qin victory meant that China became an agrarian empire
- Centralised bureaucratic monarchy and form of government characterising the rest of Chinese history created by Qin
- Ideology of state incorporated legalism, Daoism and Confucianism though officials who administered the state came to be identified with Confucian learning

Unification by Qin (221BCE and fell in 206BCE)

- Was originally a royal domain assigned task of raising horses but expanded its territory and power after the fall of the Western Zhou
- Strengthened their state by recruiting advisors, strategists and diplomats from territories of their rivals
 - Arrival of Lord Shang (361BC) marked launch of legalist measures; by 3rd century people had become law-abiding, agricultural production increased and direct taxation brought revenue to the king
 - Xunzi upon visiting remarked on the awe of the people for officials who were serious and sincere
- Emperor Zheng rose to the throne in 247 as a boy aged nine and with aid of two ministers, Lu Buwei and Li Shi, led Qin to one military victory after another
 - Later Chinese historians did not celebrate him as great conqueror but a cruel, arbitrary, suspicious megalomaniac
 - Emperor was determined to impose uniformity on China
 - Criticism of govt. not tolerated by the Emperor who ordered books to be burnt because past records denigrated emperor's policies and undermined public support

The First Qin Emperor: Accomplishments

1. Methods of Rule

- Establishment of bureaucratic government in place of the feudal system: no vassals
- Establishment of counties as administrative units
- Implemented a mutual responsibility system
- Developed a system of laws which were taken very seriously
- Completely legalist

2. Unification Policies

- Unified currency, 'strings' of cash
- Unified weights and measures
- Standardised cart axles
- Standardised written language used for govt. documents - though archaeological discoveries reveal otherwise

3. Public Works Projects

- Opened up irrigation canals, built roads
- Created portions of the Great Wall
- Tomb-building - partially excavated at Mt. Li near Xi'an: containing terra cotta warriors, full excavation postponed until preservation technology further advances

4. Notorious Deeds

- Book burning
- Execution (live burial) of Confucian scholars
- Endless quest for immortality
 - Associated with cutting off tradition
 - Confucian martyrdom

- Hundred thousands of subjects conscripted to build a new palace complex in 212 BC and more drafted to build the Great Wall and then, a tomb containing thousands of lifesize terracotta figures of armed soldiers and horses
- Erected stone tablets inscribed with accounts of his exploits, and empire at sacred places
- First Emperor became obsessed with avoiding death and discovering secret to immortality sending a delegation of young men and women out to sea to search for a mythical land of immortality

Han Government

- Ruled by Liu Bang or Gaozu who parcelled out domains as early Zhou had but then realised that dispersed power meant danger to the power of the emperor
- Han dynasty retained Qin's principal weapon against the old aristocracy: direct admin of localities by officials appointed by court for merit not birth
- Powers of officials included: judgement of lawsuits, collection and dispatch of taxes, performed ceremonies of religion, commandment of troops, management of local economy and education
- **Wudi** key figure in strengthening of Han, he curbed power by confiscating domain and centralising power
 - Was above the law, an autocrat with theoretically unlimited power
 - Made use of Confucian notions of moral basis of superior-subordinate relations and legalist notions

Western Han Dynasty

- Western Han (206BCE-9CE) - capital at Chang'an
- Xin Dynasty (9-23): Wang Mang regarded as an usurper by Confucian scholars, policies led to economic turmoil
- Eastern Han (25-220) - Capital at Luoyang

The Steppe and the Silk Road

- Chinese silk in high demand because superior quality to its neighbours – often neighbours also had goods they could offer in exchange: timber, horses, sheep and cattle
 - Raiding also a common alternative to trade; non Chinese groups who found that they could acquire goods they wanted by force had less incentive to trade
- Nomads of the steppe near china had skills as horsemen and hunters, ability to shoot arrows while riding horseback made them a potent military striking force
 - Typical social structure of steppe nomads was tribal, with family and clan units held together through loyalty to chiefs selected for their military prowess; a structure that could be exploited for efficient military mobilisation

Myth, Magic and the Marvellous

- Han government rich in art and literature in reference to spirits, portents, myths, the strange and powerful, the death-defying and the dazzling
- *Huainanzi*, Daoist influenced compilation of texts contains lore of mountain gods, some with human faces and dragons' bodies, describing magic realm of the Kunlun mountains where immortality could be attained
- Fate of the dead was similarly a subject of intense concern in Han times

- Soul conceived of two aspects: the lighter, more heavenly part would ascend to the clouds and possibly enter the realm of the immortals, more earthly would stay in or near the grave and benefit from food and other goods placed in the grave
- Furnishing grave an act of good will but also a way for the living to protect themselves from anger of dissatisfied ghosts
- During Han period, hope for deathlessness or immortality found expression in the cult of a goddess called Queen Mother of the West
 - Her paradise was portrayed as a land of marvels where trees of deathlessness grew and rivers of immortality flowed
 - People of all levels expressed devotion to her, and shrines were erected under govt. sponsorship

The Agrarian Economy

- Agriculture advanced, improved methods included planting two crops in alternate rows and planting a succession of carefully timed crops
 - Han ploughs featured advanced struts that could be adjusted to control the depth of furrows and reduce friction
 - Use of oxen to draw ploughs became common, allowing farmers to cultivate larger fields
 - Better irrigation achieved through state-sponsored canal projects
 - Development of wheelbarrow
- Han empire census stood at 58 million, larger than the Roman empire
- Land tenure, inheritance practices and govt. fiscal policies characterised fragility of the economy
- Rapid mobility between wealth and poverty
- Han dynasty introduced custom whereby family property was divided equally among all sons
 - Also came about because of the decline of feudal tenures and the spread of free buying and selling of land
 - Chinese family as remaining patrilineal, patrilocal and patriarchal but no longer favoured eldest son in the transmission of property
- Han government did not want to burden its farmers to promoted irrigation works to enhance production, responded to bad harvests with tax reductions and direct relief and lent seeds to induce them to return
- To pay for military campaigns, Wudi took over the minting of coins and confiscated lands of nobles, sold offices and titles and increased taxes on private business, disrupting development of the private commercial sector of the economy
 - During first century of Han, the prosperity of this sector had led to growth of towns and cities and increased specialisation in trade and manufacture

Confucianism, the State and the Educated Elite

- Han Confucianism fortified itself with precepts and philosophical concerns drawn from what had been competing philosophical schools – did not entail the eradication of other ways of thinking
- Gaozu (Liu Bang), found Confucian scholars useful as formulators of court rituals that would elevate him above his companions and keep them from getting rowdy in court
- Wudi recognised advantages of Confucian scholars in his court since they had: self-restraint, concern for others, love of ritual, devotion to principle and loyalty to superiors

- Confucian scholars devoted energy to the reconstruction of the books destroyed by the Qin govt.
- Not bureaucrats in the modern sense because their relationship with the ruler was in terms of moral – though they retained their status as critics of govt. and resisted automatic compliance with the policies of their superiors.
- Invention of paper during han times, promoted education and an increase in the supply of books

Colonising the South

- Qin-Han period as great territorial expansion southwards – settlers pushed indigenous population further south or into more marginal areas
- As the Chinese presence increased, local officials controlled indigenous population by assimilation or military force

The Fall of the Han

- During second century AD, Han court politics turned nasty as eunuchs gained control and placed a child on the throne that they could manipulate
 - Eunuchs staged a coup and attacked non-eunuch officials
 - Young and weak emperors become a puppet to government officials
- Han govt steadily deteriorated along with its govt. revenue and could no longer provide relief during bad harvest
 - Yellow River flooded, natural disasters and government budget shortfalls
- Han imperial institution did not recover from the outbreak in 184 of a rebellion by religious cult Way of Great Peace inspired by Daoist beliefs
- Then, thousands of zealots attacked local govt offices simultaneously killing magistrates – suppressed within a year but proved difficult to contain and defeat future rebellions
 - Yellow Turban rebellion
- Generals sent to put down rebellions instead amassed for themselves power and war lord who gained control of the capital then slaughtered 2000 eunuchs and made emperor his own pawn
- Aims of Qin legalism was direct rule by the emperor of everyone in society – goal of uniform administration reaching down to each household
- State and capital did not totally dominate life in local communities – conciliatory approach used, officials sent out to gain support of local elite