Chapter 7 – Early China

Section 1: China’s First Civilizations

Map of Asia with labels:
- China
- Russia
- Mongolia
- Korea
- Japan
- India
- Afghanistan
- Iran
- Iraq
- Saudi Arabia

Oceans labeled:
- Pacific Ocean
- Indian Ocean
Section 1: China’s Geography

The **Huang He**, or **Yellow River**, flows across China for more than 2,900 miles. It gets its name from the **rich yellow soil it carries from Mongolia to the Pacific Ocean**.
Like rivers in early Mesopotamia and Egypt, China’s Huang He flooded the land. The flooding was good and bad for the Chinese. When the river overflowed, many people drowned and many homes were destroyed. As a result, the Chinese called the Huang He “China’s sorrow.”

The river, however, also brought a gift. When the river flooded, it left behind rich topsoil in the Huang He valley. Farmers could grow large amounts of food on very small farms.

China’s other great river, Chang Jiang, or the Yangtze River, is even longer. It flows for 3,400 miles east across central China where it empties into the Yellow Sea. The valley of the Chang Jiang also has rich farming soil.
Even though China has rich soil along its rivers, a little more than $\frac{1}{10}$ of China’s land can be farmed. Mountain and deserts cover most of the land. The towering Himalaya close off China to the southwest.
The Kunlun Shan and Tian Shan are mountain ranges on China’s western border.
The Gobi Desert (vast, cold, & rocky) makes China’s central northern border.

The Takla Makan Desert lies between the Kunlun Shan and Tian Shan mountain ranges.
These mountains and deserts shaped much of Chinese history. They were like a wall around the Chinese, separating them from most other peoples. Over time, the Chinese people united to form one kingdom. They called their homeland “the Middle Kingdom.” To them, it was the world’s center and its leading civilization. The Chinese developed a way of life that lasted into modern times.

Little is known about how Chinese civilization began. Archeologists have found pottery in the Huang He valley dating back thousands of years. These artifacts show that the **Huang He valley** was the **first center of Chinese civilization**.
China’s first rulers were probably part of the Xia (SYAH) Dynasty. Little is known about the Xia. We know more about the next dynasty, the Shang.

The Shang Dynasty

The Shang kings ruled from about 1750 B.C. to 1045 B.C.

Archeologists have found huge walls, royal palaces, and royal tombs from the time of the Shang. They show that the Shang may have built the first Chinese cities. One of these cities is Anyang (AHN-YAHNG) in northern China. Anyang was China’s first capital from which the Shang kings ruled the early Chinese people.
The people of the Shang dynasty were divided into groups. The most powerful was the king and his family. The first Shang king ruled over a small area in northern China. His armies used chariots and bronze weapons to take over nearby areas. In time, the Shang kings ruled over most of the Huang He valley.

Later, Shang kings chose warlords to govern the kingdom’s territories. **Warlords are military leaders who command their own armies.** However, the king controlled even larger armies who defended the kingdom’s borders. The king’s armies helped him stay in power.
Under the kings, the warlords and other royal officials made up the upper class. They were the aristocrats, nobles whose wealth came from the land they owned. Aristocrats passed their land and their power from one generation to the next.

In Shang China, a few people were traders and artisans. Most were farmers. They worked the land that belonged to the aristocrats. A small number of enslaved people captured in war also lived in Shang China.

People in Shang China worshiped gods and spirits. Spirits were believed to live in mountains, rivers, and seas. The people believed that they had to keep the gods and spirits happy by making offerings of food and other goods. They believed the spirits and gods would get angry if they were not treated well.

Angry gods and spirits might cause farmers to have a poor harvest or armies to lose a battle.
People also honored their ancestors, or departed family members. Offerings were made in the hope that ancestors would help in times of need and bring good luck. To this day, many Chinese still remember their ancestors by going to temples and burning small paper copies of food and clothing. These copies representing things that their departed relatives need in the afterlife.

Shang kings believed that they received power and wisdom from the gods, the spirits, and their ancestors. Shang religion and government were closely linked – just like in Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt. An important duty of Shang kings was to contact the gods, the spirits, and ancestors before making important decisions.
The kings used oracle bones to do this. They would scratch questions on the bones. Then hot metal rods were placed inside the bones causing them to crack. They believed the pattern created by the crack formed answers from the gods. The priests would interpret the answers and write them down for the kings. **Scratches on oracle bones are the earliest known examples of Chinese writing.**
The scratches on oracle bones show how today’s Chinese writing began. However, the modern Chinese language is much more complex.

Like many other ancient languages, early Chinese writing used pictographs and ideographs. Pictographs are characters that stand for objects.

Ideographs join two or more pictographs to represent an idea.

Harmony
The Chinese use some characters to stand for sounds (like the English alphabet) but most characters still represent whole words. The characters are vertical columns read from top to bottom.
The people of Shang China developed many skills. Farmers produced silk, which weavers made into colorful clothes. Artisans made vases and dishes from fine white clay. They carved statues from ivory and a green stone called jade.
The Shang are best known for their works of bronze. Artisans made clay molds in several sections, carved detailed designs into the clay, then fit the pieces of the mold tightly together and poured melted bronze. When the bronze cooled, the mold was removed. A beautifully decorated work of art remained.

Shang bronze objects included sculptures, vases, drinking cups, and containers called urns. The Shang used bronze urns to prepare and serve food for rituals honoring ancestors.
Zhou Dynasty

During the rule of the Shang, a great gap existed between the rich and the poor. Shang kings lived in luxury and began to treat people cruelly. As a result, they lost the support of the people in their kingdom. In 1045 B.C., an aristocrat named Wu Wang (WOO WAHNG) led a rebellion against the Shang. After defeating the Shang, Wu began a new dynasty called the Zhou (JOH).
The Zhou ruled for more than 800 years – the longest in Chinese history. Zhou kings ruled much like the Shang rulers. The Zhou king was at the head of the government. Under him was a large bureaucracy – appointed officials who are responsible for different areas of government.

The Chinese considered the king their link between heaven and earth. His chief duty was to carry out religious rituals. The Zhou kings introduced a new idea - that the kings ruled China because they had the Mandate of Heaven. A mandate is a formal order. Because the king was chosen by the heavenly order to rule over China with his talent and virtue so it was called the Mandate of Heaven.
The mandate worked in two ways –

1. the people expected the king to rule according to the proper “Way” called the Dao(DOW). His duty was to keep the gods happy. A disaster signaled he had failed in his duty. People then had the right to overthrow and replace the king.

2. It gave the people important rights. The people had the right to overthrow a king who didn’t do his duty. It also made clear that the king was NOT a god himself.

Of course, each new dynasty claimed it had the Mandate from Heaven.

For thousands of years, Chinese farmers depended on rain to water their crops. During the Zhou dynasty, the Chinese developed irrigation and flood-control systems. The result was that farmers could grow more crops than ever before.
Irrigation – ancient China

Flood-control was done by dredging or diverting water to flow naturally downward.
Improvements in farm tools also helped farmers during the Zhou dynasty. By 550B.C. Chinese farmers were using iron plows. The increase in food supply led to the increase population. During the late Zhou dynasty, China had a population of about 50 million people.

Trade and manufacturing grew along with farming. Silk was a very important Zhou dynasty trade item. Pieces of Chinese silk have been found throughout central Asia and as far away as Greece – suggesting that Chinese trade was far and wide.
Over time, the local rulers of the Zhou territories became powerful. They stopped obeying the Zhou kings and set up their own states. In 403 B.C. fighting broke out. For almost 200 years, the states battled each other. Historians call this time period the “Period of the Warring States.”

The Period of Warring States was a time of violence that eventually made the people look for ways to restore order. Instead of nobles driving chariots, the warring states used large armies of foot soldiers. Laws were made forcing peasants to serve in the army in order to get enough soldiers. They fought with swords, spears, and crossbows.
As the fighting went on, the Chinese invented the saddle and stirrup.

These let soldiers ride horses and use spears and crossbows while riding.

In 221B.C. the ruler of Qin (CHIHNN) (one of the warring states) used a large cavalry force to defeat the other states and set up a new dynasty.
The Role of Women
Zheng Zhenxiang was China’s first female archaeologist. In 1976 she found the tomb of Fu Hao, China’s first female general. In the tomb were more than 2,000 artifacts from the Shang dynasty – weapons, bronze vessels, jade objects, and bones with Chinese characters on them.
Fu Hao, the wife of the King Wu Ding, was given a royal burial. She was famous for her strength, martial arts skills, and military strategies. She often helped her husband defeat their enemies on the battlefield. Fu Hao was the first female in China’s history to receive the highest military rank. Her tomb and its artifacts reveal the grand civilization of China’s Shang dynasty.
Section 2: Life in Ancient China

Chinese society had three main social classes—people who share similar position in society:

- landowning aristocrats
- peasant farmers
- merchants

Chinese aristocratic families owned large estates in early China. The land was divided among the sons. The sons and grandsons owned much less property than their fathers and grandfathers owned. They relied on farmers to grow the crops that made them rich. About 9 out of 10 Chinese were farmers. Farmers lived in simple houses inside village walls. In the north, they grew wheat and grain called millet. In the south, the warmer weather allowed the growth of rice. The farmers paid the landowners for the use of the land with part of their crops.
Merchants were the lowest class of Chinese people. They included shopkeepers, traders, and bankers. They lived in towns and provided goods and services to the landowners. Many merchants became quite rich – but they were still looked down upon by the farmers and landowners.

Most farmers also owned a small piece of land where they grew food for their family. The farmers had to pay taxes and work one month each year building roads and helping on other big government projects. In wartime, the farmers served as soldiers.

Chinese leaders believed that government officials should not be concerned with money. As a result, merchants were not allowed to have government jobs.
The Chinese family was the basic building block of society. Because farming requires many workers, the Chinese had large families to help them produce more and become wealthier. Even the young children of the family worked in the fields. Older sons raised their own crops and provided food for their parents. Chinese families also took care of people in need – the aged, the young, and the sick. Chinese families practiced **filial piety** – the children had to respect their parents and older relatives. Family members placed the needs and desires of the head of the family before their own. The head of the family was the **oldest male**, usually the father. However, a son could take on this role, and then even his mother had to obey him.

Men and women had very different roles in early China. Men were respected because they grew crops. They went to school, ran the government, and fought wars. The Chinese considered these jobs more important than the work that women did.
Chinese women could not hold government posts. However, women in the royal court could influence government decisions. Wives of rulers or women in the royal family often convinced men in power to see things their way.

As the Zhou kingdom weakened in the 500s B.C., violence became common. During the Period of the Warring States, rulers sent armies to destroy enemy states. Whole villages of men, women, and children were beheaded. Many Chinese began looking for ways to restore order to society.

Three Chinese philosophies, Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism, grew out of a need for order.
Confucius
Confucius was ancient China’s first great thinker and teacher. He wanted to end the problems in China. **Confucianism** promoted a peaceful society.

Confucius believed that people needed to have a sense of duty. They needed to put family and community needs before their own. Each person owed a duty to another person.

Parents owed their children love, and children owed their parents honor. Husbands owed their wives support and wives owed their husbands obedience.

Above all, rulers had to set good examples. If a king ruled for the common good, his subjects would respect him and society would prosper.
Confucius believed that if each person did his or her duty, society as a whole would do well. He urged people to be good and to seek knowledge.

To Confucius, the best way to behave was similar to an idea known as the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would want others to do unto you.” Confucius urged people to “measure the feelings of others by one’s own” for “within the four seas all men are brothers.”

Over time, Confucius won many followers who honored him as a great teacher. They wrote down his sayings and carried his message. After Confucius died in 479 B.C., his saying spread throughout China.

Confucianism taught that all men with a talent for governing should take part in government. Of course, this idea was not popular with aristocrats, and few leaders listened.
Kong Qui

Historians believe Kong Qui was born in the small state of Lu to poor parents who at one time had been wealthy. One record says that Kong was 3 years old when his father died. Another record describes him as an orphan so his mother probably died when he was young as well.

As a teenager, Kong was a talented scholar with strong, fixed beliefs. He devoted himself to learning and mastered literature, history, music, and arithmetic. He served as an apprentice to a bookkeeper and a stable manager but really wanted to obtain a government position. When he was 19, Kong married and had a son and a daughter.

He finally obtained a government job and wanted to use his position to improve society. He wanted everyone to return to the beliefs and rituals of their ancestors, because he felt that would teach them how to live together peacefully. Government officials in Lu were not interested in his ideas, so at age 30 he left politics and began his teaching career as Confucius. He devoted the rest of his life to improving society through learning and teaching. Confucius did not write down any of his ideas, but his followers put together a book of his sayings called the Lun Yü (Analects).
Sayings by Confucius

I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.

Forget injuries, never forget kindnesses

When anger rises, think of the consequences

If you think in terms of a year, plant a seed; if in terms of ten years, plant trees; if in terms of 100 years, teach the people.

It is easy to hate and it is difficult to love. This is how the whole scheme of things works. All good things are difficult to achieve; and bad things are very easy to get.

Success depends upon previous preparation, and without such preparation there is sure to be failure.

To know what is right and not to do it is the worst cowardice.
Daoism

Daoism is another Chinese philosophy that promotes a peaceful society. Daoism is sometimes called Taoism. It is based on the teachings of Laozi (LOWD – ZOO). Laozi, or the Old Master, lived around the same time as Confucius and is the founder of Daoism. Scholars don’t know if Laozi was a real person or not. But the ideas credited to him became popular between 500B.C. and 300B.C.

The ideas of Daoism are written in Dao De Jing (The Way of the Dao). Like Confucianism, Daoism tells people how to behave. Daoists believed that people should give up worldly desires. They should turn to nature and the Dao – the force that guides all things.

“Higher good is like water: the good in water benefits all, and does so without contention. It rests where people dislike to be, so it is close to the Way. Where it dwells becomes good ground; profound is the good in its heart, benevolent the good it bestows.”
In some ways, Daoism is the opposite of Confucianism. Confucianism taught people to work hard to improve the world. Daoism called on people to give up their concerns about the world. It said they should seek inner peace and live in harmony with nature.

Many Chinese followed both Confucianism and Daoism.

Some legends state that Laozi rode his water buffalo westward into a great desert and disappeared after writing *Dao De Jing.*
Legalism

Legalists did not agree with the idea that honorable men in government could bring peace to society. They argued for a system of laws. Legalism or the “School of Laws” was developed by a scholar named Hanfeizi (HAN fay DZOO) during the 200s B.C.

**Hanfeizi taught that humans were naturally evil.** He believed that they needed harsh laws and stiff punishments to force them to do their duty. **Followers of legalism believed** that a strong ruler was needed to keep order in society and **that harsh laws and punishment were needed to make people live rightly.**

Many aristocrats liked Legalism because it favored force and power, and did not require rulers to show kindness or understanding. Its ideas led to the cruel laws and punishments often used to control Chinese farmers.
Section 3: the Qin and Han Dynasties

The Zhou kings were being ignored while the Chinese states were fighting amongst themselves. One of these states was called Qin (CHIN). Its ruler took over neighboring states one by one. In 221 B.C. the Qin ruler declared himself Qin Shihuangdi (Chihn SHEE swahng dee) meaning “the First Qin Emperor.” The Qin ruler made changes in China’s government that would last for 2,000 years.

Qin based his rule on Legalism. He had everyone opposed to him punished or killed. Books opposing his views were burned. He made the central government stronger than ever before. Qin appointed censors to make sure government officials did their jobs.
Second in power to the central government were provinces and counties. Under Zhou kings, officials who ran these areas passed onto their posts to sons or relatives. Under Qin, only he could fill these posts.

Qin unified China. He created one currency, or type of money, to be used throughout the empire. He also ordered the building of roads and a huge canal. The canal connected the Chang Jiang (Yellow River) to what is today the city of Guangzhou (GWAHNG JOH).

The Qin dynasty’s canal was used to ship supplies to his troops in far-off territories.
Northern China was bordered by the vast Gobi Desert. The Gobi Desert is a cold, rocky desert east of the Kunlun Shan and Tian Shan Mountains. Much of the Gobi is not sandy but is covered with bare rock. Other parts are grassy and permit wildlife (like yak) to graze. Winds cause the Gobi to reach extremes of temperature ranging from $-40^\circ C$ (-40°F) in winter to $+50^\circ C$ (122°F) in summer. Today, nomadic people herd animals in the Gobi desert.
Nomads lived in the Gobi. The Chinese knew them as the Xiongnu (SYEHN NOO). They were masters of fighting on horseback. They often attacked Chinese farms and villages. Several Chinese rulers in the north built walls to keep out the Xiongnu.

Qin forced farmer to leave their fields and work on connecting and strengthening the walls. **Qin built and extended** what was known as **the Great Wall to keep out the Xiongnu**. It was made with stone, sand, and piled rubble. However, Qin did not build the wall that we know today. It was built 1500 years later.
Many Chinese viewed Qin as a cruel leader. Aristocrats were angry because he reduced their power. Scholars hated him for burning their writings. Farmers hated him for forcing them to build roads and the Great Wall. Four years after the emperor died in 210 B.C., the people overthrew his dynasty. Civil war followed, and a new dynasty soon arose.

**Qin Shihuangdi**  
259-210 B.C.

At the age of 13, Ying Zheng became the leader of the Chinese state of Qin. It was already very powerful with a well organized government and military. With the help of his generals, young Zheng defeated Qin’s six rival states and by 221 had united all of the Chinese states under one rule.

To mark the new beginning for China and to show his supremacy, Zheng gave himself the title of Qin Shihuangdi – “The First Qin Emperor”

He divided his land into 36 districts with their own governors and a representative that reported directly to him. He made uniform laws and taxes throughout the country. Throughout China, he had his achievements inscribed on stone tablets.
Although Qin DID strengthen and organize China, many people disliked him because of his harsh laws and punishments. Many disliked how he spent lavish amounts of money to build palaces and a gigantic tomb for himself.

He made an entire lifelike army – over 60,000 soldiers and horses – built of clay and placed in the tomb.
Three attempts to kill the emperor were made during the last years of his life. Qin grew fearful and searched for a magic potion that would give him everlasting life. The court doctors and alchemists concocted a number of potions, many of them containing "quicksilver" (mercury),

A large meteor fell in Dongjun in 211 B.C. - an ominous sign for the Emperor. To make matters worse, someone etched the words "The First Emperor will die and his land will be divided" onto the stone. Since nobody would fess up to this crime, the Emperor had everyone in the vicinity executed. The meteor itself was burned and then pounded into powder.

Nevertheless, the Emperor died less than a year later, while touring eastern China in 210 B.C. The cause of death most likely was mercury poisoning, due to his immortality treatments.

Each soldier was an individual, with unique facial features (although the bodies and limbs were mass-produced from molds).
The Han Dynasty

In 202 B.C. Liu Bang (lee-OO Bahng) founded the Han dynasty. Liu Bang, who was once a peasant, became a military leader and defeated his rivals. He declared himself Han Gaozu – “Exalted Emperor of Han.” Although Han Gaozu threw out the harsh policies of the Qin dynasty, he continued to use censors and also divided the empire into provinces and counties.

The Han reached its peak under the leadership of Han Wudi (HAHN WOO-DEE) which means “Martial Emperor of Han.” He ruled from 141-87 B.C.

Wudi wanted talented people to fill government posts, job seekers had to take long, difficult tests to qualify for openings in the bureaucracy. Those who scored highest scores got the jobs.

In time, Wudi’s tests became the civil service examinations. This system for choosing officials remained part of Chinese civilization for 2000 years. The system was supposed to help anyone with the right skills get a job with the government. However, it actually favored the rich because only wealthy families could afford to educate their sons.
Students preparing for these tests learned law, history, and the teachings of Confucius. They began to memorize the works of Confucius at age seven. Students were not allowed to do physical labor or play most sports. After many years of schooling, the students took their civil service examinations. Only one in five passed. Those who failed taught school, took jobs as assistants of officials, or were supported by their families.

A large bureaucracy was needed to rule the rapidly growing empire. The population had grown from about 20 million under Han Gaozu to more than 60 million under Han Wudi. Because farmers had to divide their lands among more and more sons, the average farmer owned only about one acre of land.

With so little land, farm families could not raise enough to live. As a result, many sold their land to aristocrats and became tenant farmers—farmers who work land owned by someone else and pay rent in crops. The aristocrats now owned thousands of acres. They hired armies to force more farmers into selling their land and working as tenants.
China’s empire grew in size as well as in population. Han armies added lands to the south and pushed Chinese borders westward. The Han dynasty also made the country more secure. Wudi’s armies drove the Xiongnu back into the Gobi Desert. After Wudi’s death, the Chinese lived in peace for almost 150 years.

The Era of Invention

New inventions during the Han dynasty helped the Chinese workers produce more than ever. Millers used newly invented waterwheels to grind more grain, and miners used new iron drill bits to mine more salt. Ironworkers invented steel. Paper was another Han invention.
Chinese medicine also improved under the Han. Doctors discovered that certain foods prevented disease. They used herbs to cure illnesses and eased pain by sticking thin needles into patients’ skin. This treatment is known as **acupuncture**.

The Chinese also invented the rudder and a new way to move the sails of ships. These allowed the Chinese merchants to sail into the wind and could now travel to the islands of Southeast Asia and into the Indian Ocean – trading as far as India and the Med. Sea.
Chinese merchants made a lot of money by shipping expensive goods to other countries. Silk was the most valuable trade product. Some of it went by ship to Southeast Asia. However, most went overland on the Silk Road – a network of trade routes that extend from China to southwest Asia. This network stretched 4,000 miles.

Han Wudi sent out a general to explore areas west of China. After 13 years, he returned with amazing stories. He told of a mighty empire to the west with large cities full of people “who cut their hair short, wear embroidered clothes, and ride in very small chariots” – the Roman Empire.

Merchants used camels to move their trade West on the Silk Road. They crossed deserts & mountains and made it all the way to the Med Sea.
Traveling on the Silk Road was expensive because of the danger and difficulty involved. Merchants had to pay taxes to kingdoms as they moved west. Therefore, they only carried high-priced goods such as silk, spices, tea, and porcelain.
Major Changes in China

Merchants and teachers from India brought Buddhism to China during the A.D. 100s. At first, only a few merchants and scholars were interested in the new religion. In time, however, Buddhism became very popular. Mainly because of the fall of the Han Dynasty.

The Han emperors after Wudi were weak and foolish. The central government lost respect and power. The Aristocrats began grabbing more land and wealth. Dishonest officials and greedy aristocrats caused unrest among the farmers. Wars, rebellions, and plots against the emperor put an end to the Han dynasty.

In A.D. 190 a rebel army attacked the Han capital, Luoyang (loo-WHO-YAGNG) plunging China into civil war. The nomads from the north chose this time to invade the country, as well.

These events frightened the Chinese people. The felt unsafe. **Buddhist ideas helped them cope with the stress and their fear.** Even followers of other religions admired Buddhist ideas. By the 400s, Buddhism had become popular in China.
flows from Mongolia to the Pacific Ocean

Qin built and extended it to keep out the Xiongnu

A network of trade routes that extend from China to southwest Asia

-- used a large cavalry force to conquer their neighbors and set up a new dynasty

-- taught that people needed harsh laws and punishment to make them live rightly

-- drove the Xiongnu back into the Gobi Desert

-- made sure that government officials did their jobs

Qin

Censors

Huang He River

Silk Road

Great Wall

Legalism

Han Wudi
Taught that people should put family and community needs above their own

--practice that requires children to respect their parents and older relatives

-Taught that if each person does his or her duty, society as a whole will do well

-Stopped many harsh Qin practices

-A cold, rocky desert east of the Kunlun Shan and Tian Shan Mountains

-Site of the first Chinese civilizations

-Wanted the best minds to work in government

--first examples of written Chinese language
Helped people deal with stress and fear of unstable government - Buddhism

A Chinese family was usually headed by the - Oldest man

This was a period of violence that made people looked for ways to restore order - The period of the Warring States

How much of China’s land is good for farming? 1/10

Military leaders and their armies - Warlords

Who was the founder of Daoism whose name means “the Old Master”? Laozi
The Zhou dynasty claimed this principle gave them the right to rule. Mandate of Heaven

Huang He River is also called the Yellow River

Hanfeizi taught that humans were Naturally evil

Acupuncture is an example of Chinese medicine