

## The River Civilizations of China

The last of the great early civilizations arose in China – and continues to this day. China's geography insured that it would develop apart from other cultures. It was isolated from other areas. The land lies protected by a great ocean (Pacific), huge deserts (Taklimakan, Gobi and Ordos), and high mountains (Himalayas).

Within China there are two fertile rivers, the **Huang He (Yellow)** and the **Yangtze**. Almost all the good farmland in China lies between these rivers. During the summer floods the Huang He spreads enough silt on the North China Plain to create one of the world's largest deltas. The river also creates miles of fertile marshland. About 4000 B.C. farming communities developed along the lower part of these rivers.

At one point along its journey, the Huang He makes a giant curve around the edge of the Ordos Desert. As it turns, the Huang He cuts through a hilly region which is made out of **LOESS** – a dusty, yellow soil that has been deposited. It is this loess that gives the Huang He the name of the **Yellow River**.

Loess has been a blessing and a curse to Chinese farmers. During the summer rains, huge amounts are washed into the Huang He (Yellow) river. In fact it is the world's muddiest river! When the Huang He floods the North China Plain, the silt deposits create a unique environment. This loess-silt helps farmers because it is fine, rock-free, and very fertile. Because it is so light and fluffy, however, loess is easily carried away by storms. When this happens farmers are left with poor soil.

About 3,000 years ago farmers began building earth **levees** to hold back the rivers. A levee is a wall that keeps a river within its banks. Over time, though, a thick layer of mud built up along the riverbed. As the mud deposits grew, the river eventually spilled over the farmers' levees. The ancient Chinese also built canals for irrigation, to bring water to their fields. However the loess caused problems: it constantly clogged the canals and had to be cleared away.

All settled people had to contend with barbarians who lived in the hills and raided frequently. To protect themselves, the villagers build moats around their settlements. Because the farmers' were successful the populations grew. More farm land was needed for growing food. Farmers had to clear land for these fields and in many cases caused severe **erosion**. If too much of the fertile soil was washed away by erosion then **famines** were caused. Constant strife was part of the early Chinese way of life. As communities grew larger, some became dominant over others, and the first Chinese **dynasties** appeared.

## Crops grown in the Chinese River Valley Civilizations

**South** – Warm and moist – Rice

**North** – Dry, Central Highlands – Millet, Wheat, Rice, Fish and Meat (including domesticated pigs and dogs).

According to Chinese tradition, around 3000 B.C. a sleek cloth called **silk** was made from the threads of worms that ate mulberry leaves. Items made of Bronze (cups, containers, even chariots) have been found that date back to 2000 B.C.

Early Chinese writing is similar to cuneiform. It looks like pictures of objects. Over time the characters became simpler. Symbols could stand for objects or ideas. Many of the old records were written on bamboo or silk but unfortunately none have survived. Any samples of early Chinese writing are found on bronze pots or stone. In one ancient city, Anyang, writing has been found on “dragon bones” – which really are bones from cattle and sheep. They were used by special priests who claimed they could predict the future. These “Oracle Bones” were heated over a fire until they cracked and the pattern of the cracks was used to predict the future!

### Development of Chinese Writing

TO FISH

TURTLE

HORSE

SHANG DYNASTY  
ORACLE BONE  
CHARACTERS  
(1700-1400 B.C.).

MODERN  
CHARACTERS

MODERN  
SIMPLIFIED  
CHARACTERS



## **Confucianism**

China's most important thinker was Jung Fu Zi who was better known as Confucius. He lived from 551 to 479 B.C. He taught that people were good. Honesty, hard work and caring promoted harmony. However, Confucius believed that people had a specific place in society and they had to accept this fact. Older people were superior to younger people, husbands were superior to their wives. Respect for one's parents was the most important duty. Confucius believed that a ruler should set a good example to the people. They must take advice from educated men. This resulted in education advancing within Chinese society, but only to the leaders.

Confucius' teachings did not have much influence while he was alive. After his death his book called The Analects began to take hold in China. Confucius taught that there are Five Relationships between ruler and subject, parent and child, elder brother and younger brother, husband and wife, and friend and friend. If each relationship is handled properly then life will be good. There will be harmony between people, and also between people and Heaven.

Confucianism is not an organized religion. It is a moral code that reflects two basic areas of Chinese life: the family and the government.

### **The Major Beliefs (Five Relationships) of Confucianism**

<b>NATURAL ORDER</b>	There is a natural order in the universe, and in human relationships. Each person has a place in society, which reflects his or her position in the universe
<b>ROLE OF EACH PERSON</b>	Each person has a role in society, as well as obligations. If everyone fulfills these roles and obligations, people and society will be in harmony
<b>RELATIONSHIPS</b>	In each relationship, there is a <b>superior</b> and <b>inferior</b> . The superior must show love and responsibility, while the inferior must show loyalty and obedience
<b>MANDATE OF HEAVEN</b>	If the ruler benefits the people and provides them with food and protection, then the people will obey him and he will continue to hold the Mandate of Heaven
<b>EDUCATION</b>	Education is essential for government officials, so that they will govern for the benefit of the people

Confucius used his teachings as a tool for making changes in the world around him. His goal was that people would act effectively in the world. He taught his followers how to get along with each other.

Below are some of the sayings taken from The Analects, written by Confucius:

**To know what you know and know what you do not know is the characteristic of one who knows**

**Learning prevents one from being narrow-minded**

**A gentleman blames himself, while a common man blames others**

**A man committed to a mistake and does not correct it is committing another mistake**

**When asked, what do you think of repaying evil with kindness, Confucius replied: Then what are you going to repay kindness with? Repay kindness with kindness but repay evil with justices**

**A man who does not think and plan long ahead will find troubles right at his door**

**Do not criticize other people's faults, criticize your own**

**A man who brags without shame will find great difficulty in living up to his bragging**

1. Which saying do you most agree with?
2. Which saying do you least agree with?

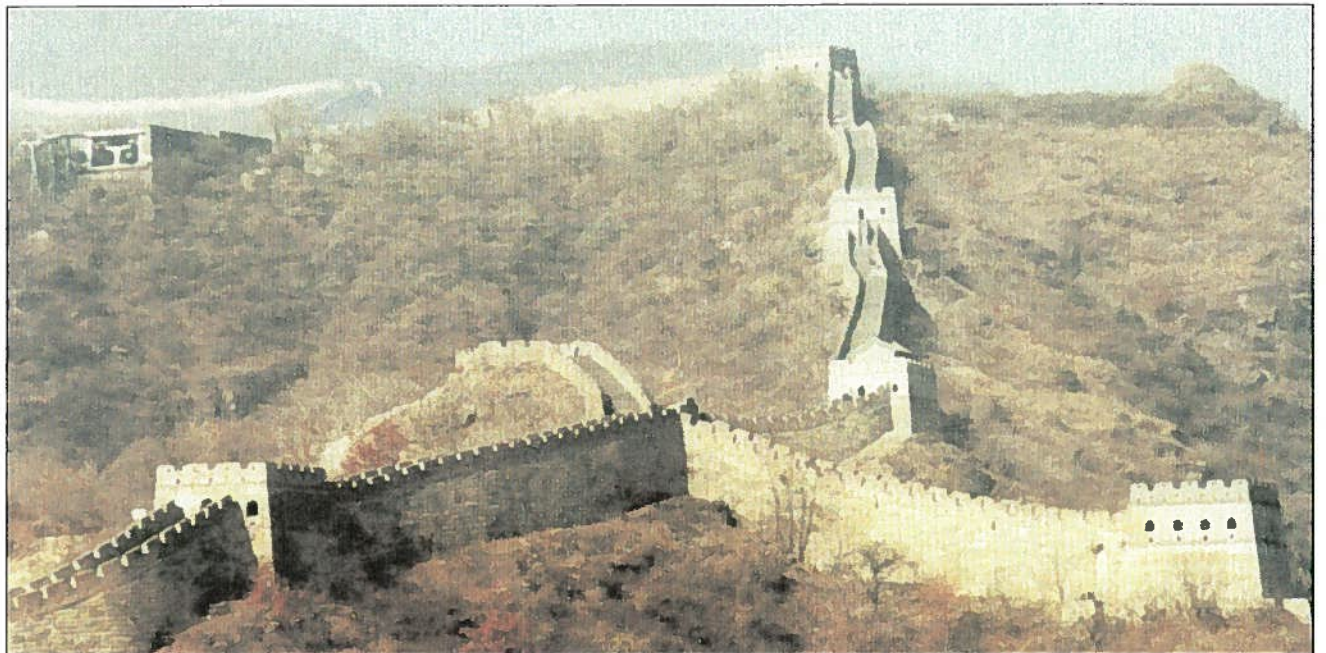


## **Qin Dynasty 221 B.C. to 206 B.C.**

Shi-Huangdi ( Shih Huang-ti) was a king in northwestern China who began a new dynasty and became the first Chinese ruler to call himself an emperor. His kingdom was called Ch'in (spelt Qin) and it is from his rule that we now know the country as China. He believed that all power should rest in the hands of a single, absolute ruler. Huangdi believed that people were not necessarily good and needed a strong government to punish those who committed bad acts.

(Under whose philosophy did he follow?)

Shi-Huangdi established a central administration and built roads to unite distant parts of China. Uniform systems of writing, weights, and measurements were established throughout the empire. He also joined together several existing walls to form the **Great Wall of China**. This was to protect his empire from invasion by nomadic peoples in the northwest. The Great Wall stretches 1,500 miles. It is 22 feet high, 15 feet thick and took thousands of laborers many years to complete. The Great Wall of China still stands today!



## The Clay Army

In 1974, workers digging a well near the city of Xi'an (once known as Hsienyang) discovered an army – an army of clay soldiers. These were not toy soldiers but life-sized statues of men and horses that lay buried in a large underground chamber. At one time thousands of soldiers stood four abreast in the chamber but most of them lay in pieces when the workers discovered them.

No two soldiers or horses looked the same. Some of the soldiers wore armor, some belted robes. Some warriors had braided hair, tied in a knot on top of their heads. The clay army was armed with real weapons. The soldiers had swords, spears, bows and crossbows. The wooden parts of these weapons had rotted away. However the bronze arrowheads, swords and crossbow fittings were in good condition. Archaeologists also found four horse-drawn chariots each with a driver and a personal bodyguard. Altogether there were between 7,000 and 8,000 figures of men and horses. The clay army was supposed to protect, in some magical way, the tomb of Shi-Huangdi.



## Han Dynasty 206 B.C. to 220 A.D.

Following the death of Shi-Huangdi the Chinese people rebelled against his harsh style of ruling. Once again, after several years of civil war a new dynasty emerged. The Han emperors kept China unified for over four hundred years.

The Han emperors established official examinations to select candidates for imperial service. Candidates were tested on their knowledge of Chinese history and Confucianism. Although tough these examinations were open to anyone. This meant that through education, a person could quickly move up the social ladder. This system was used for nearly 2,000 years.

The Han emperors weakened the power of the nobles and encouraged the spread of Confucian ideas. Han China was the most advanced civilization of its time. The Han learned to make paper out of wood pulp. They invented the wheelbarrow, the fishing reel and the ships rudder. They used acupuncture to reduce pain. They built beautiful temples, palaces and pagodas. Artists carved jade and ivory.

Han rulers established overland trade routes through Central Asia to the Roman Empire and Mesopotamia. China exported silk, iron and bronze in exchange for gold, linen, glass, ivory, animal hides, horses and cattle.

These trade routes became know as **The Silk Road**.

