



The First Dynasties Even before the Sumerians settled in southern Mesopotamia, early Chinese cultures were building farming settlements along the Huang He. Around 2000 B.C., some of these settlements grew into China's first cities. According to legend, the first Chinese dynasty, the Xia (shyah) Dynasty, emerged about this time. Its leader was an engineer and mathematician named Yu. His flood-control and irrigation projects helped tame the Huang He and its tributaries so that settlements could grow. The legend of Yu reflects the level of technology of a society making the transition to civilization.

About the time the civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Indus Valley fell to outside invaders, a people called the Shang rose to power in northern China.

The Shang Dynasty lasted from around 1700 B.C. to 1027 B.C. It was the first family of Chinese rulers to leave written records. The Shang kings built elaborate palaces and tombs that have been uncovered by archaeologists. The artifacts reveal much about Shang society.

Early Cities Among the oldest and most important Shang cities was Anyang (ahn•YAHNG), one of the capitals of the Shang Dynasty. Unlike the cities of the Indus Valley or Fertile Crescent, Anyang was built mainly of wood. The city stood in a forest clearing. The higher classes lived in timber-framed houses with walls of clay and straw. These houses lay inside the city walls. The peasants and craftspeople lived in huts outside the city.

The Shang surrounded their cities with massive earthen walls for protection. The archaeological remains of one city include a wall of packed earth 118 feet wide at its base that encircled an area of 1.2 square miles. It likely took 10,000 men more than 12 years to build such a structure. Like the pyramids of Egypt or the cities of the Indus Valley, these walls demonstrate the Shang rulers' ability to raise and control large forces of workers.

Shang peoples needed walled cities because they were constantly waging war. The chariot, one of the major tools of war, was probably first introduced by contact with cultures from western Asia. Professional warriors underwent lengthy training to learn the techniques of driving and shooting from horse-drawn chariots.

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