LECTURE 9: China I: Early Origins

HISTORY 1130:
Themes in Global History:
Trade, Economy, and Empires

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LECTURE 9: China I: Early Origins

China I: Early Origins (PART 1)
Early Origins

Warring States

Unification and Warfare

Sun Tzu

New Imperial Dynasties
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http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/prehistory/china/ancient_china/xia.html

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#### EARLY ORIGINS:

**Xia (c. 2200 - c. 1750 BC)**

*Not much is yet known about this first Chinese dynasty.* It wasn’t until fairly recently that most historians thought that it was real. Archeological record has proven them wrong, for the most part. What little is known indicates that the Xia had descended from a wide-spread Yellow River valley Neolithic culture known as the Longshan culture, famous for their black-lacquered pottery. Even though no known examples of Xia-era writing survive, they almost certainly had a writing system that was a precursor of the Shang dynasty’s "oracle bones."

The Xia were **agrarian people**, with bronze weapons and pottery. The ruling families used elaborate and dramatic **rituals** to confirm their power to govern. The **rulers** often acted as **shamans**, communicating with spirits for help and guidance.
The Shang *dynasty*, which many scholars consider to be the first real dynasty, were the most *advanced bronze-working civilization* in the world, provide the earliest and most complete record of *Chinese writing*, scratched out on the shoulder blades of pigs for oracular purposes, and were a *blood-thirsty* pre-modern civilization. They engaged in human sacrifice. So, if a king died, then more than one hundred slaves would join him in the grave. Some of them would be beheaded first. Some of them were just thrown in still alive. Later dynasties replaced the humans with terra-cotta figures.

The center of the Shang capitals had the ruler’s palace. Surrounding this were houses of artisans. These houses were *rectangular*, using a post and beam construction and were built on stamped earth platforms. The Shang people had *bronze weapons*, *bronze* fittings for *chariots* and harnesses, and *bronze vessels* connected with worship. Everyday vessels were of earthenware, rather than bronze, because metals were scarce in China. The earthenware of this time was almost *porcelain*, only missing the glaze that would have made it porcelain. Despite being agricultural economy, the Shang had rather *primitive tools*. They did not use ploughs, favoring hoes instead, and most of the tools were made of wood and stone. They grew grains such as millet and some wheat, which were harvested with sickles.
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Western Zhou (c. 1100 - 771 BC)

The Zhou weren't as good at working bronze as the Shang. Still, it would be centuries before the West was able to cast bronze as well as the Zhou. Some, though not all, scholars believe that the Xia, the Shang, and the Zhou actually were three different cultures that emerged more or less at the same time in different areas of the Yellow River valley. And the historical record supports this view - the Shang were conquered from outside by the Zhou, as the Xia had been conquered from the outside by the Shang. China was then made up of a number of quasi-independent principalities. However, the Zhou were the most powerful principality and played the role of hegemon in the area. They were located in the middle of the principalities, giving rise to what the Chinese call their country -- the Middle Kingdom. The Zhou were able to maintain peace and stability for a few hundred years; then in 771 BC, the capital was sacked by barbarians from the west.

The Zhou also brought their religion with them (to the Shang). They banned human sacrifice. They practiced the cult of Heaven. The worship of sun and stars was the most important thing. Some of the popular Shang gods became incorporated into this system. They were lesser gods, and served as feudal lords to the Heaven-god.

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Eastern Zhou (771 - 256 BC)

Spring & Autumn Period (722 - 481 BC)

After the capital was sacked by invaders from the west, the Zhou moved east, thus neatly dividing the Zhou dynasty into eastern and western periods. As might be expected, the power of the Zhou declined somewhat. The so-called Spring & Autumn period that provides a history of that period saw a proliferation of new ideas and philosophies. The three most important, from a historical standpoint, were Daoism, Confucianism, and Legalism.
The second half of the Zhou period, the so-called Warring States Period, is so named because of the power struggle between the large states of China that were trying to gain control over the entire area. It lasted from about 475 - 221 B.C.

This time period of the Warring States is considered the classical age, it was a time of great philosophers. One of the three most important, Legalism had the most immediate effect, as it was the philosophy that the Qin, the next dynasty used as the basis of their rule. Some of the most memorable poetry and prose was also written during this time. Other advances included the writing down of the laws, an increase in market places, and a money economy. The development of iron, and tools made of iron, greatly improved agriculture and thus population exploded.
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The Warring States Period, in contrast to the Spring and Autumn Period, was a period when regional warlords annexed smaller states around them and consolidated their rule. The process began in the Spring and Autumn Period, and by the 3rd century BC, seven major states had risen to prominence. Another sign of this shift in power was a change in title: warlords still considered themselves dukes of the Zhou Dynasty king; but now the warlords began to call themselves kings meaning they were equal to the Zhou king.

Towards the end of the Warring States Period, the State of Qin became disproportionately powerful compared to the other six states. As a result, the policies of the six states became overwhelmingly oriented towards dealing with the Qin threat. Qin repeatedly exploited the strategy of isolation to defeat the states one by one.

Qin’s conquest of China:
- In 230 BC, Qin conquers Han.
- In 225 BC, Qin conquers Wei.
- In 223 BC, Qin conquers Chu.
- In 222 BC, Qin conquers Yan and Zhao.
- In 221 BC, Qin conquers Qi, completing the unification of China, and ushering in the Qin Dynasty.

Confucianism is a Chinese ethical and philosophical system originally developed from the teachings of the early Chinese philosopher Confucius. It is a complex system of moral, social, political, and religious thought which has had tremendous influence on the history of Chinese civilization down to the 21st century.

Debated during the Warring States Period and forbidden during the short-lived Qin Dynasty, Confucianism was chosen by Han Wudi for use as a political system to govern the Chinese state. Despite its loss of influence during the Tang Dynasty, Confucianist doctrine remained a mainstream Chinese orthodoxy for two millennia until the 20th century.

One theme central to Confucianism is that of relationships, and the differing duties arising from the different status one held in relation to others. Individuals are held to simultaneously stand in different degrees of relationship with different people, namely, as a junior in relation to their parents and elders, and as a senior in relation to their children, younger siblings, students, and others. While juniors are considered in Confucianism to owe strong duties of reverence and service to their seniors, seniors also have duties of benevolence and concern toward juniors. (HIERARCHY, STABILITY, IMMOBILITY)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warring_States_Period
UNIFICATION AND WARFARE:

The Warring States period featured what modern strategists might call "total war." Massive armies (half a million per army was not an uncommon figure), long battles, sieges were all common features of the Warring States battlefield.

Until the advent of modern weapons and their gradual, often blundering adoption by the world’s armies, China’s military science was, as in many other areas, whether for better or worse, virtually light years ahead of western practices. When the Greeks were struggling to escape the confining nature of the phalanx and its single tactic of the mass collision, China had already perfected numerous formations and methods of deployment, as well as an underlying hierarchical organization based upon the squad of five that, when coupled with precise training methods, allowed articulation, segmentation, and the execution of both orthodox and unorthodox tactics.

Commencing with the Spring and Autumn period, professional officers, universal conscription, barbarian mercenaries, provincial militia, personal retainers, private family and estate armies, steppe peoples, and eventually vast religiously motivated hordes—who usually proved the most brutal of all—all fought vigorously in the service of governments, revolutionaries, religious visions, and inspired zealots.

In 221 BC King Zheng united all of what is now China and renamed himself Qin Shihuangdi ("First Emperor of Qin"), although ‘united’ is rather a tranquil word to be using for the bloody conquest of the region’s small polities.

During the brief period of Shihuangdi’s rule, a remarkable testament to his control of the countryside and its resources was constructed: a semi-subterranean mausoleum complex and an army of 7,000 life-size sculpted clay terracotta soldiers, chariots, and horses.

Found in the precinct were ceramic and bronze sculptures, including cranes, horses, chariots, stone carved armor for humans and horses, and human sculptures that archaeologists have interpreted as representing officials and acrobats.
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Siege warfare became very advanced during the Warring States period:

![Image of siege warfare]

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SUN TZU:

_Sun Tzu_, fl. 4th century BC, also spelled SUN-TZU or Sun Zi, reputed author of the Chinese classic Bing-fa (*The Art of War*), the earliest known treatise on war and military science.

The book is traditionally attributed to Sun Tzu (personal name Sun Wu), a military strategist and general who served the state of Wu near the end of the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC). It is more likely, however, that it was written early in the Warring States period (475-221 BC).

The Art of War is a systematic guide to strategy and tactics for rulers and commanders. The book discusses various maneuvers and the effect of terrain on the outcome of battles. It stresses the importance of accurate information about the enemy's forces, dispositions, deployments, and movements. This is summarized in the axiom "Know the enemy and know yourself, and you can fight a hundred battles with no danger of defeat." It also emphasizes the unpredictability of battle and the use of flexible strategies and tactics.
NEW IMPERIAL DYNASTIES:

Earlier Han (206 BC - AD 8)
Wang Mang Interregnum (AD 8 - 25)
Later Han (25 - 220)

The Han dynasty plays a very important role in Chinese history. They developed (actually, it was invented by Qin Shihuangdi, but perfected by the Han) the administrative model which every successive dynasty would copy.

Why is the development of bureaucracy so important? Well, first of all, because ancient China was a LARGE country. In 206 BC, when the Han dynasty was founded, China stretched from modern Shenyang (some 500 km north of Beijing) in the north to around Guilin in the south; from the Pacific in the east to well past Chongqing in the west. It was also the most populous (60 million people at the time).

How are you going to do things like collect taxes, keep the peace, and basically run a government without bureaucracy? The Chinese bureaucratic system was based on the study of the Confucian Classics, which provide an ideological reference point for proper behavior (which was often ignored, but it worked well enough) and loyalty to the Emperor. By developing this system, the Han emperors were able to run China with a reasonable degree of efficiency.
After AD 25, the Han royal family took back the reins of power, and set up the Later Han dynasty. The later Han were able to keep it together for about 200 years; however, towards the end of their rule, they become more and more dissolute. More importantly, they were unable to deal with two factors: a population shift from the Yellow River in the north to the Yangzi in the south; and they simply could not control barbarian tribal raiders from the north, which were one reason why people were moving to the south. Eventually, in AD 220, the center had lost so much control to the provinces that it collapsed (a small rebellion in the north helped), plunging China into 350 years of chaos and disunity.
Three Kingdoms (220 - 265)

Dynasties of the North and South (317 - 589)

While there was a great deal of political activity occurring during this period, most of it, consisting as it was of various wars between different kingdoms was not terribly important to the later development of China.

This was a long period of disunity and civil war. It began with the Three Kingdoms. These kingdoms grew out of the three chief economic areas of the Han Dynasty. The leaders of the kingdoms strove to reunite the empire and were therefore at constant warfare. These three kingdoms were the Wei, in northern China, the Shu to the west, and the Wu in the east. The Three Kingdoms existed from 220-265 A.D. Buddhism began to spread throughout China during this period. It was introduced in the first century A.D. but did not really begin to spread until after the Han empire collapsed. Tea, although not as popular as it would be in later times, was discovered in the south during this period. Porcelain was also developed during this time.

http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/prehistory/china/early_imperial_china/threekingdoms.html
Ssu-ma Yen began the Chin Dynasty; he ruled from 265-289 A.D. As an emperor, he was called Wu Ti. The Chin managed to reunify China when, in 280 A.D., they conquered the Wu Kingdom, thus ending the period of The Three Kingdoms. Despite this success, they were not a stable empire. After defeating the Wu, there was no longer a serious danger of being invaded. Therefore, the emperor declared the armies should be disbanded, and all the arms returned. However, this did not occur in every region. The princes, most of whom had been given their titles due to their relationship to the emperor, declared they needed personal guards. The discharged soldiers belonged mainly to the state and didn't give up their weapons either. Instead, they sold them, mainly to the Hsiung-nu and the Hsien-pi. This was a fatal mistake of the Chin government, as it made them virtually powerless, while all their rivals and enemies gained power.

Relief of farmers plowing with oxen
Farmers in the Han dynasty (220-206 B.C.E.) began to use animal-drawn plows, as depicted here in a stone relief. Improvements in agricultural technology in Han times aided the geographical expansion of Chinese civilization and the growth of the Chinese population. *(From Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China*, 1996)*
Long-distance trade played a major role in the cultural, religious, and artistic exchanges that took place between the major centers of civilization in Europe and Asia during antiquity. Some of these trade routes had been in use for centuries, but by the beginning of the first century A.D., merchants, diplomats, and travelers could (in theory) cross the ancient world from Britain and Spain in the west to China and Japan in the east. The trade routes served principally to transfer raw materials, foodstuffs, and luxury goods from areas with surpluses to others where they were in short supply. Some areas had a monopoly on certain materials or goods. China, for example, supplied West Asia and the Mediterranean world with silk, while spices were obtained principally from South Asia. These goods were transported over vast distances—either by pack animals overland or by seagoing ships—a long the Silk and Spice Routes, which were the main arteries of contact between the various ancient empires of the Old World. Another important trade route, known as the Incense Route, was controlled by the Arabs, who brought frankincense and myrrh by camel caravan from South Arabia.
Cities along these trade routes grew rich providing services to merchants and acting as international marketplaces. Some, like Palmyra and Petra on the fringes of the Syrian Desert, flourished mainly as centers of trade supplying merchant caravans and policing the trade routes. They also became cultural and artistic centers, where peoples of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds could meet and intermingle.

The trade routes were the communications highways of the ancient world. New inventions, religious beliefs, artistic styles, languages, and social customs, as well as goods and raw materials, were transmitted by people moving from one place to another to conduct business. These connections are reflected, for example, in the sculptural styles of Gandhara (modern-day Pakistan and northern India) and Gaul (modern-day France), both influenced by the Hellenistic styles popularized by the Romans.
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Palmyra, the dominant trade center in the second century A.D.

http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/palm/hd_palm.htm#

TRADE ROUTES:

The Ambassador’s Road is a series of connected roads that crisscross over mainland China to the east coast and all the way to Burma. The Ambassador’s Road brought traders of various ethnicities to China to trade commodities such as cotton, spices, and other goods for silk, rice, jade, and other Chinese goods. The trade route stretched all the way to Korea, Beijing, Canton, Vietnam, and Burma.
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The Appian Way and the Egnation Way were sea and land routes. These two routes formed the Great East Road, which connected the Roman Empire and the Middle East. The Appian Way began in Rome at the miliarium aureum (Golden Milestone) and went south from Rome to Tarracina. It cut across the peninsula to Hydruntum (Otranto), Tarentum, and Brundisium. From the port of Hydruntum, travelers could take a sea route to either Dyrrhachium or Apollonia. From there the route crossed the Balkans to Thessalonica. From Thessalonica there were two routes that travelers could take, they could go south to Macedonia or they could go east hugging the coast all the way to Constantinople (Istanbul) or Gallipoli.

http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/history/trade/variousroutes2.htm

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Roman and Indian Trade

Merchants with goods from Rome would leave Egypt by boat sometime around the month of July so as to travel with favorable wind conditions. The summer monsoon winds blow from the southeast and the monsoon winds during the winter would blow northwest. Early sailors took advantage of their knowledge of the wind changes and learned to plan their trading schedules around these weather changes. Merchants during the summer months would sail down the Red Sea to the gulf of Aden (Southern tip of the Arabian Penninsula and Somalia), from there they either unload their goods and trade with the locals or would sail with the summer winds across the Indian Oceans to India. The Red Sea was a dangerous sea route, for there are many reefs that a ship could strike and at various time periods pirates were a serious threat. The summer monsoon winds were the most treacherous time to travel on the Indian Ocean for ancient and even modern day sailors. Yet despite these hazards sailors risked their lives and traveled this dangerous route frequently, a successful voyage meant great wealth to the sailors that survived the ordeal.

http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/history/trade/variousroutes2.htm
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SILK ROAD:

The description of this route to the west as the ‘Silk Road’ is somewhat misleading. Firstly, no single route was taken; crossing Central Asia several different branches developed, passing through different oasis settlements. Secondly, the Silk Road was not a trade route that existed solely for the purpose of trading in silk; many other commodities were also traded, from gold and ivory to exotic animals and plants. Of all the precious goods crossing this area, silk was perhaps the most remarkable for the people of the West. In practice, it is likely that silk and other goods were beginning to filter into Europe before this time, though only in very small quantities. The Romans obtained samples of this new material, and it quickly became very popular in Rome, for its soft texture and attractiveness. For this reason, the trade route to the East was seen by the Romans as a route for silk rather than the other goods that were traded. The name ‘Silk Road’ itself does not originate from the Romans, however, but is a nineteenth century term, coined by the German scholar, von Richthofen. Also, in addition to silk, the route carried many other precious commodities. Caravans heading towards China carried gold and other precious metals, ivory, precious stones, and glass, which was not manufactured in China until the fifth century. In the opposite direction furs, ceramics, jade, bronze objects, lacquer and iron were carried. Many of these goods were bartered for others along the way, and objects often changed hands several times.

http://www.ess.uci.edu/~oliver/silk.html
The art and civilisation of the Silk Road achieved its highest point in the Tang Dynasty. Changan, as the starting point of the route, as well as the capital of the dynasty, developed into one of the largest and most cosmopolitan cities of the time. By 742 A.D., the population had reached almost two million, and the city itself covered almost the same area as present-day Xian, considerably more than within the present walls of the city. The 754 A.D. census showed that five thousand foreigners lived in the city; Turks, Iranians, Indians and others from along the Road, as well as Japanese, Koreans and Malays from the east. Many were missionaries, merchants or pilgrims, but every other occupation was also represented. Rare plants, medicines, spices and other goods from the west were to be found in the bazaars of the city. It is quite clear, however, despite the exotic imports, that the Chinese regarded all foreigners as barbarians; the gifts provided for the Emperors by foreign rulers were simply considered as tribute from vassal states.
Caravan crossing Pamir Mountains

The Silk Road was a trade route linking the lands of the Mediterranean with China by way of Mesopotamia, Iran, and Central Asia. Silk Road caravans often traveled during the winter to avoid torrid temperatures that added to the hardship of humans and animals. These two-humped camels, in a caravan crossing the Pamir Mountains, have heavy coats of wool that they shed in the spring. The ratio of one camel-puller for every two or three camels indicates how much human labor, exclusive of merchants, pilgrims, and other passengers, was involved in Silk Road trading. (R. Michaud/Woodfin Camp & Associates)
It was during the year of Mongol domination that Europeans first ventured deep towards east. The earliest were probably Fransiscan friars who are reported to have visited the Mongolian city of Karakorum. The first Europeans to arrive at Kubilai's court were Northern European traders, who arrived in 1261. However, the most well known and best documented visitor was the Italian Marco Polo. As a member of a merchant family from Venice, he was a good businessman and a keen observer. Starting in 1271, at the age of only seventeen, his travels with his father and uncle took him across Persia, and then along the southern branch of the Silk Road, via Khotan, finally ending at the court of Kubilai Khan at Khanbalik, the site of present-day Beijing, and the summer palace, better known as Xanadu. He travelled quite extensively in China, before returning to Italy by ship, via Sumatra and India to Hormuz and Constantinople. He describes the way of life in the cities and small kingdoms through which his party passed, with particular interest on the trade and marriage customs.
GOODS THAT WERE TRADED:

There are two main reasons why humans began trading in salt. First with the development of agriculture, there was less salt in the diet of humans for they were eating less meat. If humans had smaller portions of meat in their diet it meant having less salt in their system. They needed to obtain salt somehow. The second reason why humans would trade in salt is the domestication of animals. Animals like humans need salt in their diets and humans needed to find a way of supplying that need.

Since salt is a commodity that no human can do without, people who had an abundance of salt could trade their surplus for goods with people that did not have a way of obtaining salt. Salt production started in China over 2,000 years ago.

Three great civilizations profited from controlling salt in various aspects: China, Egypt, and the Roman Empire. The Chinese Emperors had control over the price of salt and used the money that was raised to finance armies and public works, including the Great Wall of China. The Egyptians who had numerous ways of obtaining salt also benefited from their surplus. They could gather salt from dried salt lakes and salt deposits and from evaporating seawater from the Nile Delta. The Roman Empire controlled the prices of salt as a means of gaining public support in times of crises. They would lower the price of salt so that the lower classes could afford the market price. Salt was vital to the survival of the Roman Empire.

http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/history/trade/variouscommodities.htm

Ancient salt production in China:

Salt was very important to the Romans, and they were especially keen on controlling key production areas in the Middle East:

On salt production techniques, see: http://www.geocities.com/athens/2707/prod.html
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The Chinese traded their ample supply of silk for exotic objects such as furs, horses, woolen carpets, spices, pearls, crystals, and perfumes. The Romans traded gold, cotton, and grain for silk, spices, glass, perfumes, and slaves.

Ancient Roman silk dress:

Peppercorns (*Piper nigrum*) from India (early 1st century AD)

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SLAVERY:

In the ancient Middle East, as elsewhere, slavery is attested from the very earliest written records, among the Sumerians, the Babylonians, the Egyptians, and other ancient peoples. The earliest slaves, it would seem, were captives taken in warfare. Their numbers were augmented from other sources of supply. In pre-classical antiquity, most slaves appear to have been the property of kings, priests, and temples, and only a relatively small proportion were in private possession.

The slave population was also recruited by the sale, abandonment, or kidnapping of small children. Free persons could sell themselves or, more frequently, their offspring into slavery. They could be enslaved for insolvency, as could be the persons offered by them as pledges. In some systems, notably that of Rome, free persons could also be enslaved for a variety of offenses against the law.

Jews, Christians, Muslims, and pagans alike owned slaves and exercised the rights and powers accorded to them by their various religious laws. The slave population of the Islamic world was recruited from many lands. In the earliest days, slaves came principally from the newly conquered countries — from the Fertile Crescent and Egypt, from Iran and North Africa, from Central Asia, India, and Spain. Most of these slaves had a cultural level at least as high as that of their Arab masters, and by conversion and manumission they were rapidly absorbed into the general population.

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Five questions. Getting three right = attendance. Getting five right = automatic half a point of extra credit.


2. Which of the following is not one of the ways that Confucian philosophy attempts to create societal harmony? [A] by emphasizing the idea that the country is parallel to the family [B] by emphasizing the goodness of human nature, and seeking to promote it through education, particularly of public officials [C] by expanding the traditional feelings of benevolence toward family so that it applied to all of humanity [D] by the avoidance of violence, and the promotion of justice, loyalty, and dignity [E] by emphasizing individual freedoms

3. Trade routes were the communication highways of the ancient world – true or false? [A] True. [B] False

Any questions on today’s lecture? Anything else?