The Daoist Answer to Confucianism

The *Dao De Jing (The Way of the Tao)* is the great classic of philosophical Daoism (Taoism). Traditionally attributed to the legendary Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu (Old Master), it was probably written during the era of Confucius. This opening passage illustrates two of the key ideas that characterize Daoist belief: it is impossible to define the nature of the universe, and inaction (not Confucian action) is the key to ordering the affairs of human beings.

**The Way of the Tao**

There arises the recognition of ugliness. When they all know the good as good, There arises the recognition of evil. Therefore:

Being and nonbeing produce each other; Difficult and easy complete each other; Long and short contrast each other; High and low distinguish each other; Sound and voice harmonize each other; Front and behind accompany each other.

Therefore the sage manages affairs without action And spreads doctrines without words. All things arise, and he does not turn away from them. He produces them but does not take possession of them. He acts but does not rely on his own ability. He accomplishes his task but does not claim credit for it. It is precisely because he does not claim credit that his accomplishment remains with him.

What is Lao Tzu, the presumed author of this document, trying to express about the basic nature of the universe? Based on The Great Learning and The
Way of the Tao, how do you think the Chinese attempted to understand the order of nature through their philosophies?

than a religion; it comprised a variety of rituals and behaviors that were regarded as a means of achieving heavenly salvation or even a state of immortality on earth. Daoist sorcerers practiced various types of exercises for training the mind and body in the hope of achieving power, sexual prowess, and long life. It was primarily this form of Daoism that survived into a later age.

The philosophical forms of Confucianism and Daoism did not provide much meaning to the mass of the population, for whom philosophical debate over the ultimate meaning of life was less important than the daily struggle for survival. Even among the elites, interest in the occult and in astrology was high, and many royal courts included a hereditary astrologer to help predict the intentions of the heavenly forces. Throughout the ancient period, magico-religious ideas coexisted with interest in natural science and humanistic philosophy.

For most Chinese, Heaven was not a vague, impersonal law of nature, as it was for many Confucian and Daoist intellectuals. Instead, it was a terrain peopled with innumerable gods and spirits of nature, both good and evil, who existed in trees, mountains, and streams as well as in heavenly bodies. As human beings mastered the techniques of farming, they called on divine intervention to guarantee a good harvest. Other gods were responsible for the safety of fishers, transportation workers, or prospective mothers.

Another aspect of popular religion was the belief that the spirits of deceased human beings lived in the atmosphere for a time before ascending to heaven or descending to hell. During that period, surviving family members had to care for the spirits through proper ritual, or they would become evil spirits and haunt the survivors.

Thus, in ancient China, human beings were offered a variety of interpretations of the nature of the universe. Confucianism satisfied the need for a rational doctrine of nation building and social organization at a time when the existing political and social structure was beginning to disintegrate. Philosophical Daoism provided a more sensitive approach to the vicissitudes of fate and nature and a framework for a set of diverse animistic beliefs at the popular level. But neither could satisfy the deeper emotional needs that sometimes inspire the human spirit. Neither could effectively provide solace in a time of sorrow or the hope of a better life in the hereafter. Something else would be needed to fill the gap.
The Art of War

With the possible exception of the nineteenth-century German military strategist Carl von Clausewitz, there is probably no more famous or respected writer on the art of war than the ancient Chinese thinker Sun Tzu (SOON dzuh). Yet surprisingly little is known about him. Recently discovered evidence suggests that he lived in the fifth century B.C.E., during the chronic conflict of the Period of Warring States, and that he was an early member of an illustrious family of military strategists who advised Zhou rulers for more than two hundred years. But despite the mystery surrounding his life, there is no doubt of his influence on later generations of military planners. Among his most avid followers in our day have been the revolutionary leaders Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh, as well as the Japanese military strategists who planned the attacks on Port Arthur and Pearl Harbor.

The following brief excerpt from his classic, The Art of War, provides a glimmer into the nature of his advice, still so timely today.

Selections from Sun Tzu

Sun Tzu said:

“Thus, one who excels at employing the military subjugates other people’s armies without engaging in battle, captures other people’s fortified cities without attacking them, and destroys others people’s states without prolonged fighting. He must fight under Heaven with the paramount aim of ‘preservation.’ . . .

“In general, the strategy of employing the military is this: If your strength is ten times theirs, surround them; if five, then attack them; if double, then divide your forces. If you are equal in strength to the enemy, you can engage him. If fewer, you can circumvent him. If outmatched, you can avoid him . . .

“Thus, there are five factors from which victory can be known:

“One who knows when he can fight, and when he cannot fight, will be victorious.

“One who recognizes how to employ large and small numbers will be victorious.

“One whose upper and lower ranks have the same desires will be victorious.

“One who, fully prepared, awaits the unprepared will be victorious.

“One whose general is capable ad not interfered with by the ruler will be victorious.
The First Chinese Empire: The Qin Dynasty

**FOCUS QUESTION:** How did the first emperor of the Qin dynasty transform the political, social, and economic institutions of early China?

During the last two centuries of the Zhou dynasty (the fourth and third centuries B.C.E.), the authority of the king became increasingly nominal, and several of the small principalities into which the Zhou kingdom had been divided began to evolve into powerful states that presented a potential challenge to the Zhou ruler himself. Chief among these were Qu (CHOO) (Ch’u) in the central Yangtze valley, Wu (WOO) in the Yangtze delta, and Yue (yoo-EH) (Yueh) along the southeastern coast. At first, their mutual rivalries were held in check, but by the late fifth century B.C.E., competition intensified into civil war, giving birth to the so-called Period of the Warring States (see the box above). Powerful principalities vied with each other for preeminence and largely ignored the now purely titular authority of the Zhou court.

Thus the highest realization of warfare is to attack the enemy’s plans; next is to attack their alliances; next to attack their army; and the lowest is to attack their fortified cities. “These five are the Way (Tao) to know victory. . . .

“Thus it is said that one who knows the enemy and knows himself will not be endangered in a hundred engagements. One who does not know the enemy but knows himself will sometimes be victorious, sometimes meet with defeat. One who knows neither the enemy nor himself will invariably be defeated in every engagement.”

Q Why are the ideas of Sun Tzu about the art of war still so popular among military strategists after 2,500 years? How might he advise U.S. and other statesmen to deal with the problem of international terrorism today?
and weaving contributed much grain and cloth would be remitted [from tax and forced labor], while those who worked for peripheral profits [in trade and crafts] and those who were idle or poor would be confiscated as slaves. ... He equalized the military levies and land tax and standardized the measures of capacity, weight, and length.  

Benefiting from a strong defensive position in the mountains to the west of the great bend of the Yellow River, as well as from their control of the rich Sichuan plains, the Qin gradually subdued their main rivals through conquest or diplomatic maneuvering. In 221 B.C.E., the Qin ruler declared the establishment of a new dynasty, the first truly unified government in Chinese history.

**The Qin Dynasty (221–206 B.C.E.)**

One of the primary reasons for the triumph of the Qin was probably the character of the Qin ruler, known to history as Qin Shi Huangdi (chin shee hwang-DEE) (Ch'in Shih Huang Ti), or the First Emperor of Qin. A man of forceful personality and immense ambition, Qin Shi Huangdi had

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**MAP 3.2 China During the Period of the Warring States.** From the fifth to the third centuries B.C.E., China was locked in a time of civil strife known as the Period of the Warring States. This map shows the Zhou dynasty capital at Luoyang, along with the major states that were squabbling for precedence in the region.
Why did most of the early states emerge in areas adjacent to China’s two major river systems, the Yellow and the Yangtze?

New forms of warfare also emerged with the invention of iron weapons and the introduction of the foot soldier. Cavalry, too, made its first appearance, armed with the powerful crossbow. Cities were now threatened by larger and more competent armies. When they sought to protect themselves by erecting high walls, their opponents countered by developing new techniques in siege warfare.

Eventually, the relatively young state of Qin (CHIN), located in the original homeland of the Zhou, emerged as a key player in these conflicts. By the mid-fourth century B.C.E., it had become a major force in the contest for hegemony in late-Zhou China by adopting a number of reforms in agriculture, government administration, military organization, and fiscal policy. As a result of policies put into effect by the adviser Shang Yang (SHAHNG yahng) in the mid-fourth century B.C.E., Qin society was ruled with ruthless efficiency. In the words of Sima Qian, a famous historian of the Han dynasty:

He commanded that the people be divided into tens and fives and that they supervise each other and be mutually liable. Anyone who failed to report criminal activity would be chopped in two at the waist, while those who reported it would receive the same reward as that for obtaining the head of an enemy. . . . Those who had achievements in the army would in proportion receive an increase in rank [in the twenty-rank hierarchy in which the entire populace was rated]. . . . Those who devoted themselves to the fundamental enterprises and through their farming ascended to the throne of Qin in 246 B.C.E. at the age of thirteen. Described by the Han dynasty historian Sima Qian as having “the chest of a bird of prey, the voice of a jackal, and the heart of a tiger,” the new king found the Legalist views of his adviser Li Su (lee SUH) (Li Su) all too appealing. In 221 B.C.E., Qin Shi Huangdi defeated the last of his rivals and founded a new dynasty with himself as emperor (see Map 3.3).

**POLITICAL STRUCTURES** The Qin dynasty transformed Chinese politics. Philosophical doctrines that had proliferated during the late Zhou period were prohibited, and Legalism was adopted as the official ideology. Those who opposed the policies of the new regime were punished and sometimes executed, while books presenting ideas contrary to the official orthodoxy were publicly put to the torch, perhaps the first example of book burning in history (see the box on p. 82).

Legalistic theory gave birth to a number of fundamental administrative and political developments, some of which would survive the Qin and serve as a model for future dynasties. In the first place, unlike the Zhou, the Qin was a highly centralized state. The central bureaucracy was divided into three primary ministries: a civil authority, a military authority, and a censorate, whose inspectors surveyed the efficiency of officials throughout the system. This would later become standard administrative procedure for future Chinese dynasties.

Below the central government were two levels of administration: provinces and counties. Unlike the Zhou system, officials at these levels did not inherit their positions but were appointed by the court and were subject to dismissal at the
effectively and mobilize the peasants for military service and for various public works projects.

The Qin dynasty was equally unsympathetic to the merchants, whom it viewed as parasites. Private commercial activities were severely restricted and heavily taxed, and many vital forms of commerce and manufacturing, including mining, wine making, and the distribution of salt, were placed under a government monopoly.

Qin Shi Huangdi was equally aggressive in foreign affairs. His armies continued the gradual advance to the south that had taken place during the final years of the Zhou dynasty, extending the border of China to the edge of the Red River in modern Vietnam. To supply the Qin armies operating in the area, a canal was dug that provided direct inland navigation from the Yangtze River in central China to what is now the modern city of Guangzhou (gwahng-JOE) (Canton) in the south.

**BEYOND THE FRONTIER: THE NOMADIC PEOPLES AND THE GREAT WALL** The main area of concern for the Qin emperor, however, was in the north, where a nomadic people, known to the Chinese as the Xiongnu (SHYAHING-ROO) (Hsiung-nu) and possibly related to the Huns (see Chapter 5) or to Indo-European-speaking people in the area, had become increasingly active in the area of the Gobi Desert. The area north of the Yellow River had been sparsely inhabited since prehistoric times. During the Qin period, the climate of northern China was somewhat milder and moister than it is today, and parts of the region were heavily forested. The local population probably lived by hunting and fishing, practicing limited forms of agric-
and create the first united empire in the history of China. The capital was located at Xianyang, near the modern city of Xian.

What factors may have aided Qin in its effort to dominate the region?

emperor’s whim. Apparently, some form of merit system was used, although there is no evidence that selection was based on performance in an examination. The civil servants may have been chosen on the recommendation of other government officials. A penal code provided for harsh punishments for all wrongdoers. Officials were watched by the censors, who reported directly to the throne. Those guilty of malfeasance in office were executed.

SOCIETY AND THE ECONOMY  Qin Shi Huangdi, who had a passion for centralization, unified the system of weights and measures, standardized the monetary system and the written forms of Chinese characters, and ordered the construction of a system of roads extending throughout the empire. He also attempted to eliminate the remaining powers of the landed aristocrats and divided their estates among the peasants, who were now taxed directly by the state. He thus eliminated potential rivals and secured tax revenues for the central government. Members of the aristocratic clans were required to live in the capital city at Xianyang (shi-AHN-yahng) (Hsien-yang), just north of modern Xian, so that the court could monitor their activities. Such a system may not have been advantageous to the peasants in all respects, however, since the central government could now collect taxes more
day by day and living-producing limited forms of agriculture, or herding animals such as cattle or sheep.

As the climate gradually became drier, people were forced to rely increasingly on animal husbandry as a means of livelihood. Their response was to master the art of riding on horseback and to adopt the nomadic life. Organized loosely into communities consisting of a number of kinship groups, they ranged far and wide in search of pasture for their herds of cattle, goats, or sheep. As they moved seasonally from one pasture to another, they often traveled several hundred miles carrying their goods and their circular felt tents, called yurts.

But the new way of life presented its own challenges. Increased food production led to a growing population, which in times of drought outstripped the available resources. Rival groups then competed for the best pastures. After they mastered the art of fighting on horseback in the middle of the first millennium B.C.E., territorial warfare became commonplace throughout the entire frontier region, from the Pacific Ocean to Central Asia.

By the end of the Zhou dynasty in the third century B.C.E., the nomadic Xiongnu had unified many of the groups operating in the region and began to pose a serious threat to the security of China’s northern frontier. A number of Chinese principalities in the area began to build walls and fortifications to keep them out, but warriors on horseback possessed significant advantages over the infantry of the Chinese.

Qin Shi Huangdi’s answer to the problem was to strengthen the walls to keep the marauders out. In Sima Qian’s words:

First Emperor of the Chi’in dispatched Meng Tien to lead a force of a hundred thousand men north to attack the barbarians. He
Memorandum on the Burning of Books

Li Su, who is quoted in the following passage, was a chief minister of the First Emperor of Qin. An exponent of Legalism, Li Su hoped to eliminate all rival theories of government. His recommendation to the emperor on how to accomplish this was recorded by the Han dynasty historian Sima Qian. The emperor approved the proposal and ordered all books contrary to the spirit of Legalist ideology to be destroyed on pain of death. Fortunately, some texts were preserved by being hidden or even memorized by their owners and were thus available to later generations. For centuries afterward, the First Emperor of Qin and his minister were singled out for criticism because of their intolerance and their effort to control the minds of their subjects. Totalitarianism, it seems, is not a modern concept.

Sima Qian, Historical Records

In earlier times the empire disintegrated and fell into disorder, and no one was capable of unifying it. Thereupon the various feudal lords rose to power. In their discourses they all praised the past in order to disparage the present and embellished empty words to confuse the truth. Everyone cherished his own favorite school of learning and criticized what had been instituted by the authorities. But at present Your Majesty possesses a unified empire, has regulated the distinctions criticize it in the thoroughfare. They seek a reputation by discrediting their sovereign; they appear superior by expressing contrary views, and they lead the lowly multitude in the spreading of slander. If such license is not prohibited, the sovereign power will decline above and partisan factions will form below. It would be well to prohibit this.

Your servant suggests that all books in the imperial archives, save the memoirs of Ch'in, be burned. All persons in the empire, except members of the Academy of Learned Scholars, in possession of the Book of Odes, the Book of History, and discourses of the hundred philosophers should take them to the local governors and have them indiscriminately burned. Those who dare to talk to each other about the Book of Odes and the Book of History should be executed and their bodies exposed in the marketplace. Anyone referring to the past to criticize the present should, together with all members of his family, be put to death. Officials who fail to report cases that have come under their attention are equally guilty. After thirty days from the time of issuing the decree, those who have not destroyed their books are to be branded and sent to build the Great Wall. Books not to be destroyed will be those on medicine and pharmacy, divination by the tortoise and milfoil, and agriculture and arboriculture. People wishing to pursue learning should take the officials as their teachers.
seized control of all the lands south of the Yellow River and established border defenses along the river, constructing forty-four walled district cities overlooking the river and manning them with convict laborers transported to the border for garrison duty. Thus, he utilized the natural mountain barriers to establish the border defenses, scooping out the valleys and constructing ramparts and building installations at other points where they were needed. The whole line of defenses stretched over ten thousand li [a li is one-third of a mile] from Lin-tao to Liao-tung and even extended across the Yellow River and through Yang-shan and Pei-chia.  

Today, of course, we know Qin Shi Huangdi’s project as the Great Wall, which extends nearly 4,000 miles from the sandy wastes of Central Asia to the sea. It is constructed of massive granite blocks, and its top is wide enough to serve as a road-way for horse-drawn chariots. Although the wall that appears in most photographs today was built 1,500 years after the Qin, during the Ming dynasty, some of the walls built by the Qin remain standing. Their construction was a massive project that required the efforts of thousands of laborers, many of whom met their deaths there and, according to legend, are buried within the wall. 

**THE FALL OF THE QIN** The Legalist system put in place by the First Emperor of Qin was designed to achieve maximum efficiency as well as total security for the state. It did neither. Qin Shi Huangdi was apparently aware of the dangers of factions within the imperial family and established a class of eunuchs (castrated males) who served as personal attendants for himself and female members of the royal family. The original idea may have
been to restrict the influence of male courtiers, and the eunuch system later became a standard feature of the Chinese imperial system. But as confidential advisers to the royal family, eunuchs were in a position of influence. The rivalry between the “inner” imperial court and the “outer” court of bureaucratic officials led to tensions that persisted until the end of the imperial system.

By ruthlessly gathering control over the empire into his own hands, Qin Shi Huangdi had hoped to establish a rule that, in the words of Sima Qian, “would be enjoyed by his sons for ten thousand generations.” In fact, his centralizing zeal alienated many key groups. Landed aristocrats and Confucian intellectuals, as well as the common people, groaned under the censorship of thought and speech, harsh taxes, and forced labor projects. “He killed men,” recounted the historian, “as though he thought he could never finish, he punished men as though he were afraid he would never get around to them all, and the whole world revolted against him.” Shortly after the emperor died in 210 B.C.E., the dynasty descended into factional rivalry, and four years later it was overthrown.

The disappearance of the Qin brought an end to an experiment in absolute rule that later Chinese historians would view as a betrayal of humanistic Confucian principles. But in another sense, the Qin system was a response—though somewhat extreme—to the problems of administering a large and increasingly complex society. Although later rulers would denounce Legalism and enthronize Confucianism as the new state orthodoxy, in practice they would make use of a number of the key tenets of Legalism to administer the empire and control the behavior of their subjects (see Chapters 5 and 10).

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The Role of the Family

In Neolithic times, the farm village, organized around the clan, was the basic social unit in China, at least in the core region of the Yellow River valley. Even then, however, the smaller family unit was becoming more important, at least among the nobility, who attached considerable significance to the veneration of their ancestors.

During the Zhou dynasty, the family took on increasing importance, in part because of the need for cooperation in agriculture. Rice had become the primary crop along the Yangtze River and in the provinces to the south because of its taste, its productivity, and its high nutrient value. But the cultivation of rice is highly labor-intensive. The seedlings must be planted in several inches of water in a nursery bed and then transferred individually to the paddy beds, which
ARE ALL HYDRAULIC SOCIETIES DESPOTIC? Thus, the Qin dynasty's single-minded effort to bring about the total regimentation of Chinese society left a mixed legacy for later generations. Some observers, notably the China scholar Karl Wittfogel, have speculated that the need to establish and regulate a vast public irrigation network, as had been created in China under the Zhou dynasty, led naturally to the emergence of a form of Oriental despotism that would henceforth be applied in all such hydraulic societies. Recent evidence, however, disputes this view, suggesting that the emergence of strong central government followed, rather than preceded, the establishment of a large irrigation system, which often began as a result of local initiatives rather than as a product of central planning. The preference for autocratic rule is probably better explained by the desire to limit the emergence of powerful regional landed interests and maintain control over a vast empire.

Daily Life in Ancient China

**FOCUS QUESTION:** What were the key aspects of social and economic life in early China?

Few social institutions have been as closely identified with China as the family. As in most agricultural civilizations, the family served as the basic economic and social unit in society. In traditional China, however, it took on an almost sacred quality as a microcosm of the entire social order.

must be irrigated constantly. During the harvest, the stalks must be cut and the kernels carefully separated from the stalks and husks. As a result, children—and the labor they supplied—were considered essential to the survival of the family, not only during their youthful years but also later, when sons were expected to provide for their parents. Loyalty to family members came to be considered even more important than loyalty to the broader community or the state. Confucius commented that it is the mark of a civilized society that a son should protect his father even if the latter has committed a crime against the community.

At the crux of the concept of family was the idea of filial piety, which called on all members of the family to subordinate their personal needs and desires to the patriarchal head of the family. More broadly, it created a hierarchical system in which every family member had a place. All Chinese learned the five relationships that were the key to a proper social order. The son was subordinate to the father, the wife to her husband, the younger brother to the older brother, and all were subject to their king. The final relationship was the proper one between friend and friend. Only if all members of the family and the community as a whole behaved in a properly filial manner would society function effectively.

A stable family system based on obedient and hardworking members can serve as a bulwark for an efficient government, but putting loyalty to the family and the clan over loyalty to the state can also present a threat to a centralizing monarch. For that reason, the Qin dynasty attempted to destroy the clan
system in China and assert the primacy of the state. Legalists even imposed heavy taxes on any family with more than two adult sons in order to break down the family concept. The Qin reportedly also originated the practice of organizing several family units into larger groups of five and ten families that would exercise mutual control and surveillance. Later dynasties continued the practice under the name of the Bao-jia (BOW-jah ["ow" as in "how"] (Pao-chia) system.

But the efforts of the Qin to eradicate or at least reduce the importance of the family system ran against tradition and the dynamics of the Chinese economy, and under the Han dynasty, which followed the Qin, the family revived and increased in importance. With official encouragement, the family system began to take on the character that it would possess until our own day. The family was not only the basic economic unit; it was also the basic social unit for education, religious observances, and training in ethical principles.

Lifestyles

We know much more about the lifestyle of the elites than that of the common people in ancient China. The first houses were probably constructed of wooden planks, but later Chinese mastered the art of building in tile and brick. By the first millennium B.C.E., most public buildings and the houses of the wealthy were probably constructed in this manner. The latter often had several wings surrounding a central courtyard to provide space for several generations under one roof, a style that continued down to modern times. By the second occasionally tile roofs. But in some areas, especially the loess (LESS) (a type of soil common in North China) regions of northern China, cave dwelling remained common down to modern times. The most famous cave dweller of modern times was Mao Zedong, who lived in a cave in Yan’an (YUH-NAHN) during his long struggle against Chiang Kai-shek.

Chinese houses usually had little furniture; most people squatted or sat with their legs spread out on the packed-mud floor. Chairs were apparently not introduced until the sixth or seventh century C.E. Clothing was simple, consisting of cotton trousers and shirts in the summer and wool or burlap in the winter.

The staple foods were millet in the north and rice in the south. Other common foods were wheat, barley, soybeans, mustard greens, and bamboo shoots. In early times, such foods were often consumed in a porridge, but by the Zhou dynasty, stir-frying in a wok was becoming common. When possible, the Chinese family would vary its diet of grain foods with vegetables, fruit (including pears, peaches, apricots, and plums), and fish or meat; but for most, such additions to the daily plate of rice, millet, or soybeans were a rare luxury.

Alcohol in the form of ale was drunk at least by the higher classes and by the early Zhou era had already begun to inspire official concern. According to the Book of History, “King Wen admonished . . . the young nobles . . . that they should not ordinarily use spirits; and throughout all the states he required that they should be drunk only on occasion of sacrifices, and that then virtue should preside so that there might be no drunkenness.” For the poorer classes, alcohol in any form was probably a rare luxury. Chinese legend hints
century B.C.E., most Chinese, however, probably lived in simple houses of mud, wooden planks, or brick with thatch or that tea—a plant originally found in upland regions in southern China and Southeast Asia—was introduced by the

**The Heartland of Ancient China.** The Yellow River valley and its neighboring regions have always been viewed as the heartland of ancient Chinese civilization. Rich clay soils, known to geologists as loess and carried southward by the winds from the vast Gobi Desert, created a thick blanket of rich loam in which to plant the grain crops that sustained the Chinese people. Even the walls of the village shown in the larger photograph are constructed of this rich yellow earth. The hills in the background are pockmarked with cave dwellings (smaller photo) that have housed the local inhabitants since prehistoric times.

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mythical emperor Shen Nong. In fact, however, tea drinking did not become widespread in China until around 500 C.E. By then tea was lauded for its medicinal qualities and its capacity to soothe the spirit.

Cities

With the rise to power of the Qin, cities began to take on the central importance they would hold through later Chinese history. Urban centers were divided into neighborhoods — perhaps a forerunner of the grid pattern assumed by imperial cities under later dynasties — as a means of facilitating control over the population. As mentioned earlier, landed aristocrats, many of them former opponents of the Qin, were forcibly resettled in the new capital of Xianyang— a pattern that we shall see repeated, notably in France and Japan, in later centuries. Their villas and gardens aped the splendor of the imperial palaces, which formed the centerpiece of the urban landscape.

Under the Qin, as never before, cities became the cultural hub of Chinese society, although their residents made up only a tiny proportion of the total population. In the crowded streets, haughty nobles sought to avoid rubbing shoulders with commoners, while merchants, workers, wandering gangs, and prostitutes relentlessly imitated the mannerisms of the elite. As a poem of the time satirically noted:

In the city, if they love to have their hair dressed up high,  
Then everywhere else they dress their hair an inch higher.  
In the city, if they love to enlarge their eyebrows,  
Then everywhere else they are found with bushy eyebrows.

With all her qualifications, that clever woman  
Is but an ill-omened bird.  
A woman with a long tongue  
Is a flight of steps leading to calamity;  
For disorder does not come from heaven,  
But is brought about by women.  
Among those who cannot be trained or taught  
Are women and eunuchs.  

The nature of gender relationships was also graphically demonstrated in the Chinese written language. The character for man (男) combines the symbols for strength and rice field, while the character for woman (女) represents a person in a posture of deference and respect. The character for peace (安) is a woman under a roof. A wife is symbolized by a woman with a broom. Male chauvinism has deep linguistic roots in China.

Confucian thought, while not denigrating the importance of women as mothers and homemakers, accepted the dual roles of men and women in Chinese society. Men governed society. They carried on family ritual through the veneration of ancestors. They were the warriors, scholars, and ministers. Their dominant role was firmly enshrined in the legal system. Men were permitted to have more than one wife and to divorce a spouse who did not produce a male child. Women were denied the right to own property, and there was no dowry system in ancient China that would have provided the wife with a degree of financial security from her husband and his family. As the third-century C.E. poet Fu Xuan (foo SHWAHN), a woman, lamented:
The Humble Estate: Women in Ancient China

Male dominance was a key element in the social system of ancient China. As in many traditional societies, the male was considered of transcendent importance because of his role as food procurer or, in the case of farming communities, food producer. In ancient China, men worked in the fields and women raised children and served in the home. This differential in gender roles goes back to prehistoric times and is embedded in Chinese creation myths. According to legend, Fu Xi’s wife Nu Wa (nôo WAH) assisted her husband in organizing society by establishing the institution of marriage and the family. Yet Nu Wa was not just a household drudge. After Fu Xi’s death, she became China’s first female sovereign.

During ancient times, women apparently did not normally occupy formal positions of authority, but they often became a force in politics, especially at court, where wives of the ruler or other female members of the royal family were often influential in palace intrigues. Such activities were frowned on, however, as the following passage from The Book of Songs attests:

A clever man builds a city,
A clever woman lays one low;

How sad it is to be a woman
Nothing on earth is held so cheap.
No one is glad when a girl is born.
By her the family sets no store.
No one cries when she leaves her home
Sudden as clouds when the rain stops.

Chinese Culture

FOCUS QUESTIONS: What were the chief characteristics of the Chinese arts and writing system? How did they differ from those in Egypt and Mesopotamia?

Modern knowledge about artistic achievements in ancient civilizations is limited because often little has survived the ravages of time. Fortunately, many ancient civilizations, such as Egypt and Mesopotamia, were located in relatively arid areas where many artifacts were preserved, even over thousands of years. In more humid regions, such as China and South Asia, the cultural residue left by the civilizations of antiquity has been adversely affected by climate.

As a result, relatively little remains of the cultural achievements of the prehistoric Chinese aside from Neolithic pottery and the relics found at the site of the Shang dynasty capital at Anyang. In recent years, a rich trove from the time of the Qin Empire has been unearthed near the tomb of Qin Shi
Huangdi near Xian and at Han tombs nearby. But little remains of the literature of ancient China and almost none of the painting, architecture, and music.

**Metalwork and Sculpture**

Discoveries at archaeological sites indicate that ancient China was a society rich in cultural achievement. The pottery found at Neolithic sites such as Longshan and Yangshao exhibits a freshness and vitality of form and design, and the ornaments, such as rings and beads, show a strong aesthetic sense.

**BRONZE CASTING** The pace of Chinese cultural development began to quicken during the Shang dynasty, which ruled in northern China from the sixteenth to the eleventh century B.C.E. At that time, objects cast in bronze began to appear. Various bronze vessels were produced for use in preparing and serving food and drink in the ancestral rites. Later vessels were used for decoration or for dining at court.

The method of casting used was one reason for the extraordinary quality of Shang bronze work. Bronze workers in most ancient civilizations used the lost-wax method, in which a model was first made in wax. After a clay mold had been formed around it, the model was heated so that the wax would melt away, and the empty space was filled with molten metal. In China, clay molds composed of several sections were tightly fitted together prior to the introduction of the liquid bronze. This technique, which had evolved from ceramic techniques used during the Neolithic period, enabled the artisans to apply the design directly to the mold and thus
A Shang wine vessel. Used initially as food containers in royal ceremonial rites during the Shang dynasty, Chinese bronzes were the product of an advanced technology unmatched by any contemporary civilization. This wine vessel displays a deep green patina as well as a monster motif, complete with large globular eyes, nostrils, and fangs, typical of many Shang bronzes. Known as the taotie (TOW-tee-YUH ["ow" as in "how"]), this fearsome beast is normally presented in silhouette as two dragons face to face so that each side forms half of the mask. Although the taotie presumably served as a guardian force against evil spirits, scholars are still not aware of its exact significance for early Chinese peoples.

contributed to the clarity of line and rich surface decoration of the Shang bronzes.

Bronze casting became a large-scale business, and more than ten thousand vessels of an incredible variety of form and design survive today. Factories were located not only in the Yellow River valley but also in Sichuan province, in southern China. The art of bronze working continued into the Zhou dynasty, but the quality and originality declined. The Shang bronzes remain the pinnacle of creative art in ancient China.

One reason for the decline of bronze casting in China was the rise in popularity of iron. Ironmaking developed in China around the ninth or eighth century B.C.E., much later than in the Middle East, where it had been mastered almost a thousand years earlier. Once familiar with the process, however, the Chinese quickly moved to the forefront. Ironworkers in Europe and the Middle East, lacking the technology to achieve the high temperatures necessary to melt iron ore for casting, were forced to work with wrought iron, a cumbersome and expensive process. By the fourth century B.C.E., the Chinese had invented the technique of the blast furnace, powered by a worker operating a bellows. They were therefore able to manufacture cast iron ritual vessels and agricultural tools centuries before an equivalent technology appeared in the West.

Another reason for the deterioration of the bronze-casting tradition was the development of cheaper materials such as lacquer and ceramics. Lacquer, made from resins obtained from the juices of sumac trees native to the region, had been produced since Neolithic times, and by the second century B.C.E. it had become a popular method of applying a hard coating to objects made of wood or fabric. Pottery, too, had existed since early times, but technological advances led to the production of a high-quality form of pottery covered with a brown or gray-green glaze, the latter known popularly as celadon. By the end of the first millennium B.C.E., both lacquerware and pottery had replaced bronze in popularity, much as plastic goods have replaced more expensive materials in our own time.

THE FIRST EMPEROR’S TOMB In 1974, in a remarkable discovery, farmers digging a well about 35 miles east of Xian unearthed a number of terra-cotta figures in an underground pit about one mile east of the burial mound of the First Emperor of Qin. Chinese archaeologists sent to work at the site discovered a vast terra-cotta army that they believed was a recreation of Qin Shi Huangdi’s imperial guard, which was to accompany the emperor on his journey to the next world.
The Tomb of Qin Shi Huangdi. The First Emperor of Qin ordered the construction of an elaborate mausoleum, an underground palace complex protected by an army of terra-cotta soldiers and horses to accompany him on his journey to the afterlife. This massive formation of six thousand life-size armed soldiers, discovered accidentally by farmers in 1974, reflects Qin Shi Huangdi’s grandeur and power.

One of the astounding features of the terra-cotta army is its size. The army is enclosed in four pits that were originally intruders, and the workers applying the final touches were buried alive in the tomb with its secrets.
encased in a wooden framework, which has disintegrated. More than a thousand figures have been unearthed in the first pit, along with horses, wooden chariots, and seven thousand bronze weapons. Archaeologists estimate that there are more than six thousand figures in that pit alone.

Equally impressive is the quality of the work. Slightly larger than life size, the figures were molded of finely textured clay and then fired and painted. The detail on the uniforms is realistic and sophisticated, but the most striking feature is the individuality of the facial features of the soldiers. Apparently, ten different head shapes were used and were then modeled further by hand to reflect the variety of ethnic groups and personality types in the army.

The discovery of the terra-cotta army also shows that the Chinese had come a long way from the human sacrifices that had taken place at the death of Shang sovereigns more than a thousand years earlier. But the project must have been ruinously expensive and is additional evidence of the burden the Qin ruler imposed on his subjects. One historian has estimated that one-third of the national income in Qin times may have been spent on preparations for the ruler’s afterlife. The emperor’s mausoleum has not yet been unearthed, but it is enclosed in a mound nearly 250 feet high surrounded by a rectangular wall extending for nearly 4 miles. According to the Han historian Sima Qian, the ceiling was a replica of the heavens, while the floor contained a relief model of the entire Qin kingdom, with rivers flowing in mercury. According to tradition, traps were set within the mausoleum to prevent

Language and Literature

Precisely when writing developed in China cannot be determined, but certainly by Shang times, as the oracle bones demonstrate, the Chinese had developed a simple but functional script. Like many other languages of antiquity, it was primarily ideographic and pictographic in form. Symbols, usually called “characters,” were created to represent an idea or to form a picture of the object to be represented. For example, the Chinese characters for mountain (山), the sun (日), and the moon (月) were meant to represent the objects themselves. Other characters, such as “big” (大) (a man with his arms outstretched), represent an idea. The character for “east” (東) symbolizes the sun coming up behind the trees.

Each character, of course, would be given a sound by the speaker when pronounced. In other cultures, this process led to the abandonment of the system of ideographs and the adoption of a written language based on phonetic symbols. The Chinese language, however, has never entirely abandoned its original ideographic format, although the phonetic element has developed into a significant part of the individual character. In that sense, the Chinese written language is virtually unique in the world today.

One reason the language retained its ideographic quality may have been the aesthetics of the written characters. By the time of the Qin dynasty, if not earlier, the written language came to be seen as an art form as well as a means of
communication, and calligraphy became one of the most prized forms of painting in China.

Even more important, if the written language had developed in the direction of a phonetic alphabet, it could no longer have served as the written system for all the peoples of the expanding Chinese civilization. Although the vast majority spoke a tongue derived from a parent Sinitic language (a system distinguished by variations in pitch, a characteristic that gives Chinese its lilting quality even today), the languages spoken in various regions of the country differed from each other in pronunciation and to a lesser degree in vocabulary and syntax; for the most part, they were (and are today) mutually unintelligible.

end of the country to the other. This became the language of the bureaucracy and the vehicle for the transmission of Chinese culture from the Great Wall to the southern border and beyond. The written language was not identical to the spoken form, however; it eventually evolved its own vocabulary and grammatical structure, and as a result, users of written Chinese required special training.

The earliest extant form of Chinese literature dates from the Zhou dynasty. It was written on silk or strips of bamboo and consisted primarily of historical records such as the Rites of Zhou, philosophical treatises such as the Analects and The Way of the Tao, and poetry, as recorded in The Book of Songs and the Songs of the South (see the box on p. 28), both upper
mutually unintelligible.

The Chinese answer to this problem was to give all the spoken languages the same writing system. Although any character might be pronounced differently in different regions of China, that character would be written the same way (after the standardization undertaken under the Qin). Written characters could therefore be read by educated Chinese from one and the song of the south (see the box on p. 69). In later years, when Confucian principles had been elevated to a state ideology, the key works identified with the Confucian school were integrated into a set of so-called Confucian Classics. These works became required reading for generations of Chinese schoolchildren and introduced them to the forms of behavior that would be required of them as adults.

Music in the Confucian Era. According to Confucius, “If a man lack benevolence, what has he to do with music?” The purpose of music, to followers of the Master, was to instill in the listener a proper respect for ethical conduct. Foremost among the instruments in the Confucian era were bronze bells. Shown here is a collection of bells dating from the Zhou dynasty. At the left, a performer is playing a stringed instrument, one of many types of instruments that eventually replaced the bell in popularity. The performer in the center is striking the bells with a wooden mallet.
The Book of Songs is an anthology of about three hundred poems written during the early Zhou dynasty. According to tradition, they were selected by Confucius from a much larger collection. In later years, many were given political interpretations. The poem presented here, however, expresses a very human cry of love spurned.

The Book of Songs: The Odes
You seemed a guileless youth enough,
Offering for silk your woven stuff;
But silk was not required by you;
I was the silk you had in view.
With you I crossed the ford, and while
We wandered on for many a mile
I said, "I do not wish delay,
But friends must fix our wedding-day. . . ."
Oh, do not let my words give pain,
But with the autumn come again."

And now again, alas the day!
Back through the ford I take my way.

My heart is still unchanged, but you
Have uttered words now proved untrue;
And you have left me to deplore
A love that can be mine no more.

For three long years I was your wife,
And led in truth a toilsome life;
Early to rise and late to bed,
Each day alike passed o'er my head.
I honestly fulfilled my part,
And you—well, you have broke my heart.
The truth my brothers will not know,
So all the more their gibes will flow.
I grieve in silence and repine
That such a wretched fate is mine.

Ah, hand in hand to face old age!—
Instead, I turn a bitter page.
O for the riverbanks of yore;
O for the much-loved marshy shore;
The hours of girlhood, with my hair
Ungathered, as we lingered there.
I laughed and cried aloud for joy. The fortune-tellers, you declared, Had all pronounced us duly paired; “Then bring a carriage,” I replied, “And I’ll away to be your bride.”

The mulberry tree upon the ground, Now sheds its yellow leaves around. Three years have slipped away from me Since first I shared your poverty;

The words we spoke, that seemed so true, I little thought that I should rue; I little thought the vows we swore Would some day bind us two no more.

It has been said that traditional Chinese thought lacked a sense of tragedy similar to the great dramatic tragedies of ancient Greece. Does this passage qualify as tragedy? If not, why not?

Music

From early times in China, music was viewed not just as an aesthetic pleasure but also as a means of achieving political order and refining the human character. In fact, music may have originated as an accompaniment to sacred rituals at the royal court. According to the Historical Records, written during the Han dynasty, “When our sage-kings of the past instituted rites and music, their objective was far from making people indulge in the . . . amusements of singing and dancing. . . . Music is produced to purify the heart, and rites introduced to rectify the behavior.” Eventually, however, music began to be appreciated for its own sake as well as to accompany singing and dancing.

A wide variety of musical instruments were used, including flutes, various stringed instruments, bells and chimes, drums, and gourds. Bells cast in bronze were first used as musical instruments in the Shang period; they were hung in rows and struck with a wooden mallet. The finest were produced during the mid-Zhou era and are considered among the best examples of early bronze work in China. Some weighed more than two tons and, in combination as shown in the photo on p. 88, covered a range of several octaves. Bronze bells have not been found in any other contemporary civilization and are considered one of the great cultural achievements of ancient China. The largest known bell dating from the Roman Empire, for example, is less than 3 inches high.
By the late Zhou era, bells had begun to give way as the instrument of choice to strings and wind instruments, and the purpose of music shifted from ceremony to entertainment. This led conservative critics to rail against the onset of an age of debauchery.

Ancient historians stressed the relationship between music and court life, but it is highly probable that music, singing, and dancing were equally popular among the common people. The Book of History, purporting to describe conditions in the late third millennium B.C.E., suggests that ballads emanating from the popular culture were welcomed at court. Nevertheless, court music and popular music differed in several respects. Among other things, popular music was more likely to be motivated by the desire for pleasure than for the purpose of law and order and moral uplift. Those differences continued to be reflected in the evolution of music in China down to modern times.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Of the great classical civilizations discussed in Part I of this book, China was the last to come into full flower. By the time the Shang began to emerge as an organized state, the societies in Mesopotamia and the Nile valley had already reached an advanced level of civilization. Unfortunately, not enough is known about the early stages of these civilizations to allow us to determine why some developed earlier than others, but one likely reason for China's comparatively late arrival was that it was virtually isolated from other emerging centers of culture elsewhere in the world and thus was compelled to develop essentially on its own. Only at the end of the first millennium B.C.E. did China come into were in all respects the equal of its counterparts elsewhere. By the rise of the first unified empire in the late third century B.C.E., the state extended from the edge of the Gobi Desert in the north to the subtropical regions near the borders of modern Vietnam in the south. Chinese philosophers had engaged in debate over intricate questions relating to human nature and the state of the universe, and China's artistic and technological achievements—especially in terms of bronze casting and the terra-cotta figures entombed in Qin Shi Huangdi’s mausoleum—were unsurpassed throughout the world.

Meanwhile, another great civilization was beginning to
As the end of the first millennium B.C.E. drew near, China came into regular contact with other civilizations in South Asia, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean.

Once embarked on its own path toward the creation of a complex society, however, China achieved results that

Meanwhile, another great civilization was beginning to take form on the northern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Unlike China and the other ancient societies discussed thus far, this new civilization in Europe was based as much on trade as on agriculture. Yet the political and cultural achievements of ancient Greece were the equal of any of the great human experiments that had preceded it and soon began to exert a significant impact on the rest of the ancient world.
CHAPTER REVIEW

Upon Reflection

Q What were some of the key contributions in political structures, social organization, and culture that the Shang dynasty bequeathed to its successor, the Zhou dynasty? Does the Shang deserve to be called the “mother culture” of China?

Q What kinds of relationships did the Chinese people have with the pastoral peoples living along the frontier? How did these relationships compare with those experienced by advanced societies in North Africa and Western Asia?

Q What contributions did the ancient Chinese people make in the field of metallurgy? How do their achievements compare with developments in ancient Egypt and the Middle East?

Key Terms

Yangshao (p. 65)
Longshan (p. 65)
veneration of ancestors (p. 68)
diffusion hypothesis (p. 68)
mandate of Heaven (p. 69)


Environmental issues are explored in M. Elvin, The Retreat of the Elephants: An Environmental History of China (New Haven, Conn., 2004).

CHINESE CULTURE For an introduction to classical Chinese litera-
well-field system (p. 71)
Dao (p. 73)
Legalism (p. 77)
Confucianism (p. 77)
Daoism (p. 77)
cunuchs (p. 82)
Oriental despotism (p. 83)
hydraulic societies (p. 83)
filial piety (p. 83)
five relationships (p. 83)
Bao-jia system (p. 84)

Suggested Reading
THE DAWN OF CHINESE CIVILIZATION For an authoritative overview of the ancient period, see M. Loewe and E. L. Shaughnessy.