AN OUTLINE HISTORY OF EAST ASIA TO 1200



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An Outline History of East Asia to 1200 (Schneewind)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Licensing

1: East Asia to 1045 BC

- 1.1: Myths and Nations
- 1.2: Food and Progress
- 1.3: Cultural Variety and Teleology
- 1.4: Jewelry, Trade, and Hierarchy
- 1.5: Three Bronze Age Imports
- 1.6: Was There a Xia Dynasty?
- 1.7: The Shang Period (1554-1045 BC)
- 1.8: Shang State and Society
- 1.9: Violence and Ritual
- 1.10: Oracle Bone Divination
- 1.11: Sources
- 1.12: Section 1.1 Figures

2: The Zhou Period (1045 – 256 BC)

- 2.1: A Violent Transition
- 2.2: The Feudal State
- 2.3: The Zhou Aristocracy
- 2.4: Did Kija Move Eastwards to Found Old Chosŏn?
- 2.5: Relations with Other Peoples
- 2.6: The “Hegemon” System of the Spring and Autumn Period (771-476 BC)
- 2.7: Ritual Changes in the Spring and Autumn Period
- 2.8: Confucius
- 2.9: Sources

3: From Warring States Two Empire (480 BC -207 BC)

- 3.1: From Bronze to Iron
- 3.2: Horses and Walls
- 3.3: The Feudal State of Qin Edit section
- 3.4: Shang Yang’s Legalist Policies in Qin
- 3.5: Iron and Water
- 3.6: Meritocracy and Bureaucracy
- 3.7: Taxation
- 3.8: Earned Social Rank
- 3.9: Surveillance and Law
- 3.10: Inventing Empire
- 3.11: The Information State
- 3.12: Sources

4: The Han Empire and Its Neighbors

- 4.1: The Fall of Qin
- 4.2: From Commoner to Emperor

- 4.3: Empresses
- 4.4: The Bureaucracy
- 4.5: Commoners
- 4.6: Enslaved People
- 4.7: The Silk Roads and the Xiongnu War
- 4.8: Outflanking the Xiongnu on the East
- 4.9: The Han Commanderies
- 4.10: Early Proto-states in the Peninsula + Manchuria
- 4.11: The Yayoi Period on the Archipelago
- 4.12: Source

5: Religion and Society in Han (206 BC – AD 220)

- 5.1: The Queen Mother of the West
- 5.2: Rivals to the Confucians at Court
- 5.3: Confucians at the Han Imperial Court
- 5.4: Confucius- Sage and Mage
- 5.5: Han Marriage and Family
- 5.6: The Rise of the Clans
- 5.7: Wang Mang's "New" Dynasty, AD 9-23
- 5.8: Han Clan Ideology and Organization
- 5.9: Daoism and the Fall of Han
- 5.10: Sources

6: A World of Many Powers (AD 200 – AD 580)

- 6.1: Dividing and Uniting
- 6.2: Koguryŏ's East Asia
- 6.3: The Mainland- Aristocracy Returns
- 6.4: The Peninsula and Archipelago Before Writing
- 6.5: From Chiefs to Queen and Kings in the Archipelago
- 6.6: Buddhism in Diplomacy
- 6.7: Sources

7: Consolidating Unified Regimes (c. 500-780)

- 7.1: Written Chinese and Government
- 7.2: The New Sui Order
- 7.3: Reunification through Pluralism- Sui and Tang
- 7.4: The War Against Koguryŏ
- 7.5: Yamato Centralization
- 7.6: Sources

8: Tang and Silla

- 8.1: Ethnicity
- 8.2: Tang Social Structure
- 8.3: Tang Government Structure
- 8.4: The Tang Civil Service Examinations
- 8.5: Silla Villagers and their Farms
- 8.6: Poetry in Aristocratic Society
- 8.7: Buddhism

- 8.8: The Queen Mother of the West
- 8.9: The Fall of Tang
- 8.10: Sources

9: Hei’an Japan

- 9.1: Hei’an Government 794-1185
- 9.2: The Balance of Weakness in the Economy and the Fisc
- 9.3: An Isolated Aristocracy
- 9.4: Whence Came the Samurai?
- 9.5: Warriors or Lawyers?
- 9.6: Sources

10: The Commercial Revolution

- 10.1: From Silla to Koryŏ
- 10.2: Hybrid States in Northern China and the Steppe
- 10.3: Song Economy, State, and Society (960-1276)
- 10.4: Sources

Index

Glossary

Detailed Licensing

Acknowledgements

Bibliography

Epilogue

Licensing

*A detailed breakdown of this resource's licensing can be found in **Back Matter/Detailed Licensing**.*

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

1: East Asia to 1045 BC

1.1: Myths and Nations
1.2: Food and Progress
1.3: Cultural Variety and Teleology
1.4: Jewelry, Trade, and Hierarchy
1.5: Three Bronze Age Imports
1.6: Was There a Xia Dynasty?
1.7: The Shang Period (1554-1045 BC)
1.8: Shang State and Society
1.9: Violence and Ritual
1.10: Oracle Bone Divination
1.11: Sources
1.12: Section 1.1 Figures

Thumbnail: Shang bronze personal ornament of a bird-shaped hairpin finial, approx. 2” x 1.5”. Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public Domain.

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1.1: Myths and Nations

Pan Gu was the first born. When he died, he was transformed. His breath became the wind and the clouds. His voice became the thunder; his left eye became the sun and his right eye became the moon; his arms and legs became the four poles or directions and the five parts of his torso became the five sacred mountains; his blood and semen became the water and rivers. His muscles and veins became the earth's arteries; his flesh became fields and land. The hair on his head and his beard became the stars. The hairs on his body became plants and trees. His teeth and bones became metal and rock. His marrow became pearls and jade. His sweat became the streaming rain. And the small lice that ran about his body were touched by the wind and turned into people.

It is easy to see that a myth like this is just a story. But there are other **myths** that seem to us rational. Every nation today relies on an ideological foundation of myth for its cohesion. As historian Kim Byung-Joon writes, "All countries are prone to harbor a few illusions about their ancient history. They like to assert that their history began at the earliest date possible, and tend to characterize it as a grand and splendid history, uniquely distinct from all others."[1] The United States of America, for instance, presents itself as the land of opportunity and freedom, although its prosperity began with land stolen from Native Americans and labor stolen from African slaves. These myths, like the nations themselves, have been constructed and elaborated by people over time. They are neither purely imaginary nor purely factual. Often they contradict historical knowledge for which there is firm evidence.



Figure 1.1. A woodblock-printed image of Pan Gu as imagined in the seventeenth century. Source: Wang Qi, *Sancai tuhui* 三才圖會 [Collected Illustrations of the Three Realms], 1609. Public Domain.

The two Chinas, the two Koreas, and Japan all have such myths. Chiang Kaishek, the first leader of the Republic of China on Taiwan, and Xi Jinping, the current President of the People's Republic of China, agree that Chinese culture has been uninterrupted for more than 5,000 years and has been absorbed into the Chinese "bloodline." But the figure of four or five thousand years is pure invention: made up by a foreign missionary in the late nineteenth century.[2] Against the myth of an unbroken, pure Chinese heritage, historian Wang Hui writes, "Under the surface of the idea of China's unified imperial system, there have always been changes wrought by differences within and between state organizations, social groups, regions, ethnic groups, and religious faiths… The so-called pure Han nationality and the image of its imperial culture has always been a fantasy."[3] Because of China's long written and archaeological records, this variety and change are well-attested. The chapters to come give some examples.

Tangun, the father of the Korean people, supposedly lived around what we call 2333 BC. That was about 2,200 years before the merest scraps of writing extant from the peninsula. Historian Hyung Il Pai judges that "Korean studies that address topics such as the emergence of ancient Korean civilization, statehood, religion, and identity are inexplicable without reference to a complex jumble of contradictory narratives filled with Tangun fiction, competing dynastic myths, and hypothetical invasions of tribes, as well as unaccountable archaeological data. This state of confusion has rendered it virtually impossible to distinguish fact from fiction in studies on ancient Korea."[4] With no way to know whether Tangun existed, we must consider the idea that the Korean people descended from him a myth.

As for Japan, myth holds that the imperial family descends in an unbroken bloodline from Emperor Jimmu. A descendent of the sun-goddess Amaterasu, Jimmu conquered all the islands of the archipelago in about 660 BC. But no-one there had such power at the time: the first sign of advanced weaponry in the archaeological records of the archipelago is one bronze arrowhead made after 440 BC. Further, the earliest written records in Japan date from about 1200 years after Jimmu's supposed expedition. Historian Kitagawa writes that "Most scholars dismiss the historicity of the official Japanese accounts before the fifteenth emperor, Ōjin." Ōjin lived about AD 400.[5] There is no real way to know about individuals much further back than that.

Myths deserve study. They show how people thought about themselves and the past. But a scientific study of history depends on **primary sources** of information: texts written close to the events. Those primary texts may be **preserved** – that is, they may have come down to us on the original medium, be it bone, stone, silk, bamboo, or paper. Or they may have been **transmitted** – copied from one generation to the next onto different media – in which case they must be used with caution, for transmissions often include errors or changes. A scientific study of history also depends on **secondary sources**, the work of scholars writing later than the events recorded. Secondary sources are most valuable when they **cite** their primary sources, and demonstrate a commitment to the pursuit of truth by reporting the complexities that characterize lived reality.

The "historical" period, and the work of the historian – "history proper" – begin when written texts survive. But often, matters people took for granted were not written down, and few people wrote. So to understand the past, historians draw on other sources of information too, such as "**material culture**" – objects, buildings. And since historical societies grow from those without writing, historians need to take prehistoric times into account, often relying on archaeologists.

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1.2: Food and Progress

East Asia shares its most ancient past experiences with the rest of humanity. By about 200,000 years ago, *homo sapiens sapiens* (the species of primate to which all humans now belong) had evolved in Africa. We were almost wiped out about 70,000 years ago by a volcano and an ice age, leaving about 2,000 people in all. But we survived. By about 50,000 (or, new evidence suggests, even 70,000 years ago[6]), we had moved out of Africa, and some of us had travelled to Southeast Asia, and then to East Asia. To think about how long ago that was, let's say a human generation is around 20 years – that's roughly how long a person lives before having children, in other words. That means that there have been humans in East Asia for at least 2,500 generations. Starting about 10,000 years ago, those people figured out how to make good stone tools, and the Neolithic age (New Stone Age) began.



Map A. Prehistoric Asian regions referred to in the text, with the Yellow River and its distinctive hump, the Wei River, and further south the Yangzi (Yangtze) River; the Shandong peninsula and early rice producing settlement of Hemudu, and the current cities of Beijing and Lanzhou for reference. East of Shandong is the Korean peninsula. East of that again is the Japanese archipelago.

Most basically, human civilization rests on a steady supply of food. People have assured that supply in various ways, sharing some technology from place to place and developing other techniques independently, so there is no single timeline or progression of civilization. The New Stone Age included the Agricultural Revolution, which occurred in East Asia about 10,000 years ago, or 8,000 BC: about the same time as in other parts of the world. Once people had figured out how to make better stone tools, they could supplement hunting and gathering activities. With their sharp stone axes they could clear trees and shrubs to create fields; they could burn the fields over and with their stone hoes prepare the ground for planting; and with their stone sickles for most grains, and reaping knives for rice, they could harvest efficiently. In the northern mainland areas people figured out how to keep and plant millet seeds. They domesticated rice further south, at Hemudu and along the Yangzi at about the same time. Working with natural wetlands where rice was native, people also dug ditches to assure water flow. Some time after that, people domesticated dogs (from wolves), then pigs (from wild boar), and then chickens.

A varied and reliable food supply led to further changes in culture and social organization. Control of grain and fields, and investment in wells and ditches, meant that some people settled down in pit houses (pits dug into the earth, walled, and roofed) grouped into stable villages. Techniques of growing millet and rice appear in the Korean peninsula in about 2,000 BC, presumably imported from the mainland. Another thousand years later people in the Japanese archipelago adopted domesticated rice, tutored by people from the peninsula. This path eastward from the Chinese part of the Asian continent (which I will call "the mainland") to the Korean peninsula to the Japanese archipelago – carried many people, ideas, and objects, as we shall see.

Since grain cultivation started there so much later, it is tempting to think of the peninsula and archipelago as being "behind" the mainland. But what grain offered was a steady food supply. And long before they grew rice, people on the archipelago had made a plentiful, reliable living by gathering acorns, walnuts, and chestnuts in their luxuriant forests and seaweed and fish from the long coastline. Maedun cave in eastern, inland South Korea recently yielded fourteen limestone "sinkers," stones with grooves carved into them so they could be tied to the bottom of nets as weights, in order to catch small fish in shallow streams. The sinkers date to 27,000 BC, still in the Old Stone Age (Paleolithic). Nets with sinkers worked very well: archaeologists found fossilized bones

belonging to fish and other animals, as well as stone tools and flakes, inside the Maedun cave. Fishing hooks made of the shells of sea snails have been found on Okinawa (to the south of the main Japanese islands) dating to 23,000 years ago. An excavated building from 9,000 BC was so full of salmon bones that archaeologists consider it a processing plant that would swing into action at the proper season every year. Once processed, the salmon was stored in pottery jars decorated with snakes and frogs. Rather than a single timeline on which civilizations are “ahead of” or “behind” each other, people develop and adopt technology at different times for complicated reasons.

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1.3: Cultural Variety and Teleology

Not only is there no single line of "progress" that puts one culture ahead of or behind another, but also, within the areas that now house the modern nations of China, Korea, and Japan, prehistoric tribes had a variety of lifeways and ideas. No straight line can be drawn from any one prehistoric culture to any modern nation.

Archaeologists in early twentieth century first conceived of "Chinese civilization" as a unified and continuous tradition that spread out from a small "nuclear area." But excavations disproved this view. Instead, archaeology shows that by about 4000 BC, the Neolithic mainland housed many different tribes and villages. Their lifeways that could be categorized into six larger regional cultures, not just one. They did have relations with one another, so the six were said to form an "interaction sphere."

Still, archaeologists looked for the contributions that each local culture made to later "Chinese culture." For instance, like later Shang and Zhou people, the Yangshao people living along the Yellow and Wei Rivers, up to around today's Beijing and west to today's Lanzhou, made clothing out of hemp and silk, cooked using tripods and steamers, ate millet and offered it in rituals, and domesticated pigs and vegetables from the cabbage family. A Yangshao temple of 3,000 BC has nine clay pots laid out in the shape of the Big Dipper, a constellation that remained important in astrology and religion. The Dawenkou culture of Shandong had vessels shaped exactly like Shang bronze *dou* (casserole on a stand) and *ding* (square tripods). The Daxi culture of the middle Yangzi had dragon designs inlaid in the ground with stones. The Xinle culture of Manchuria made very sophisticated jade objects as far back as 3000 BC. Looking back from the perspective of later Chinese civilization, scholars have tended to select such familiar elements out of early cultures and argue that, in archaeologist K.C. Chang's words, "By 3000 BC, the Chinese interaction sphere can properly and appropriately be called China, as it became the stage where Chinese history began to play out, with its clearly defined actors, events, motivations, and story lines."[7]

But to look at only the elements of the past that seem connected to the present approaches "**teleology**" – the myth that events and developments are heading towards a pre-determined end. In order to claim, as K. C. Chang did, that the six regional cultures with their many different lifeways were the embryo of Chinese culture, determining its future shape, scholars had to ignore lifeways that did *not* continue. For instance, the Hemudu people built their houses up on piles above the ground, and cooked food by suspending it in an oven, instead of steaming it. The Yangshao people represented shamans as simultaneously male and female. Scholars have neglected these facts because they lack clear echoes in later Chinese civilization. To study the past scientifically, we have to set aside what we know (or believe) about the end of the story. We must look at *all* the facts we can get, and think about how the past could have gone differently, in order to see why it worked out the way it did.



Figure 1.2. Yangshao pottery jar, c. 2300-2000 BC, depicting cowry shells. What do you think vessels of this shape were used for, and why? Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art, collection website. Public Domain.



Map B. Cities and areas mentioned in the text, including present-day city of Turfan; the Xia site of Erlitou; the present-day city of Zhengzhou; the Shang site Anyang, and the Zhou sites Zhouyuan and Feng. You should recognize the three rivers now. Practice putting information on your own blank maps.

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1.4: Jewelry, Trade, and Hierarchy

One thing clearly links us with the people of the deep past: our love of adornment. The salmon-eating Jomon people of 13,000 BC on the archipelago made earrings of talc stone and jade pendants, and their imaginative clay figurines of people also wear jewelry. They travelled between the islands and the peninsula in dugout wooden canoes to trade shell bracelets and hard, shiny obsidian (volcanic glass). People everywhere have always treasured jewelry, preferably made of exotic materials that were beautiful and hard to obtain. Indeed, current theory holds that the Agricultural Revolution was motivated by trade: People wanted to settle down in places along natural trade routes, particularly navigable rivers, and they wanted to be able to support artisans who could make things to trade for things from elsewhere. Trade and travel, fundamental drivers of history, have spread objects and ideas across Eurasia and North Africa for 20,000 years. Often, as we shall see, trade objects reinforced or led to social inequality.



Figure 1.3. Jomon objects, bone and clay. Net sinker, fishhook, two figurines, two body ornaments, and a hairpin. Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public Domain.

The trouble with owning nice things from far away, and storing fish or grain to last over the winter, is that someone can take those things away. By 2000 BC, Neolithic villagers in the Yellow River area were building rammed-earth walls around their villages, some 20 feet high and 30 feet thick. To coordinate defense, some villagers took on leadership roles, so social hierarchy began to appear. Archaeologists trace the growth of inequality among members of a community through burials. In Yangshao cemeteries, about 4500 BC, people buried each dead person with roughly equal quantities of utensils and food. One little girl's grave in Banpo village contained three well-polished balls for playing with. Sacrificial pits ringed the whole area, suggesting that sacrifices were made to the dead as a whole group, for the good of the whole living community. By two millennia later, however, in a Longshan culture cemetery from about 2500 BC, 600 small graves with few or no objects in them clustered around 80 medium-size graves and only six large tombs. The dead in the medium-size graves had wooden coffins, pottery vessels, ornaments of various materials, and ritual objects (*cong* tubes and pig mandibles). The large tombs contained whole sets of pottery vessels and musical instruments made out of wood, crocodile skin, and copper, and their walls were painted with murals. All this means that in the late Stone Age mainland some villagers had more power and prestige than their neighbors.

Likewise, by 2,000 BC, large towns with massive protective walls built by thousands of workers were made possible by the irrigated rice agriculture of the central Yangzi (Hunan), where the state of Chu developed. In the peninsula and archipelago, dramatic social differentiation came later, accompanying the use of metals: bronze technology reached the peninsula only in about 700 BC, initially in the form of mirrors and daggers from the mainland; and in the archipelago bronze and the later iron technology arrived about the same time, 300 BC. Metal came to the peninsula and archipelago from the mainland, like domesticated rice. But that was only the easternmost end of a much longer travel route.

Metallurgy had reached the mainland from the west, from Persia (Iran and Afghanistan) and Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan). Sometimes the route is called “the steppe bridge,” because it crossed the flat plains of Central Asia, Mongolia, and Manchuria. Sometimes it is called “the Silk Road(s),” a term invented by German scholars in the nineteenth century.8 The Silk Roads also connected East Asia with South Asia (also called “the subcontinent,” i.e. India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh). Apples and apricots originated in Central Asia, and many of our foods – including wheat, millet, oats, grapes, almonds, tea, melons, lentils, dates, pistachios, and peaches – travelled across the Silk Roads.9 The area provided East Asia with luxury items like gold and jewels, and ideas including various kinds of technology, religion, and artistic styles from at least 3000 BC onwards. The steppe route shaped East Asian history, as we shall see over and over again.

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1.5: Three Bronze Age Imports

At the beginning of East Asian history proper, three key imports propelled the Shang people to dominance, both before and at the precise moment when they began to write things down. They were bronze, domesticated horses, and chariots.

Bronze was a key characteristic of Shang civilization; in fact, the Chinese bronze age involved *more* bronze than anywhere else in the world. To make bronze, you locate copper ore, separate it from other elements, combine it with some tin and/or lead, and either pour it into a mold or pound it to create weapons, tools, ornaments, and vessels. Copper melts at a lower temperature than iron, so humans used it earlier. Starting in the Middle East, the technology travelled across the steppe highway. We know that because the earliest bronze in what is now China was made in around 2800 BC in Gansu: a knife of copper alloyed with tin. Gansu is in the western part of the mainland (look at the map). Metallurgy travelled eastwards slowly, so that bronze vessels for ritual offerings were made by the Erlitou culture from about 1900 BC to 1600 BC. The large bronze workshops of the Erligang culture, called the Shang dynasty (1554 BC 1045 BC), used coal for fuel. Reflecting the technology's importation from the steppe zone, Shang bronzes included imported styles, as well. For instance, mirrors – round bronze disks flat and polished on one side – were made in steppe style until about 650 BC. (Remember this: mirrors will come up again.) Bronze vessels and mirrors created awe. Bronze swords and spears enabled the early Shang, from around 1500 BC to 1300 BC, to achieve a loose domination over the many different cultural groups along the Yellow River and down to the Yangzi River.

We know that the Shang had some kind of pre-eminence among the regional cultures of the interaction sphere partly because, alongside their own local pottery styles, these groups had some bronze vessels, used for ritual sacrifices, that are exactly like those of the Shang. For a century or so Shang dominance slackened, as the local cultures imitated their organizational successes; again, we know this because regional bronze styles appear from about 1300-1200. Innovations include huge bronze bells produced by the cultures along the Yangzi, which added music to make ritual more moving and impressive. By this time, mainland culture already included elements from the Central Asian steppe and from a variety of northern and southern peoples.

Around 1200 BC, the Shang reasserted their predominance, again through imports: chariots drawn by horses. In the Near East, wheeled carts drawn by oxen were invented by about 4000 BC, and by about 1350 (at the time of Tutankhamen) they had spoked wheels (making them light enough to be fast enough for war). In about 1200 BC, under King Wu Ding, the Shang began to use chariots for warfare. They are almost exactly the same as chariots used earlier in the Caucasus, and they must have been imports, because until that time, there is no evidence in East Asia of wheeled vehicles or of vehicles pulled by animals. Shang relied first on outside equestrian experts, perhaps from Central Asia, who brought domesticated horses (there had been wild horses in North China, which native water buffalo in the south went extinct10) and taught Shang people how to rear and manage them as well as how to build and fight from chariots. Horseback riding came a couple of centuries later.11

Chariots were made of wood with bronze fittings and with spoked wheels for lightness. They were covered with lacquer ornamentation. The floors were of wood or sometimes (as also in Egypt) of plaited leather to absorb some of the shocks. It is quite clear that the chariot, and the skills to manage its horses, came into China from the Middle East via central Asia. The word for chariot *che* 車 was **klyag* and comes from old Iranian, which came from Indo-European **kwel* and also led to Greek-derived words in English like "cycle," "wheel," and "vehicle." (At the same time, Chinese inventions and the words for them were going west: silk, old Chinese **sye(g)* → *serikos* and China was known as the land of the Seres, the silk-makers.)

Archaeologists have even found some of the people who might have served as intermediaries. Naturally mummified corpses dating to 2000-500 BC in the Turfan area have light-colored or even blonde hair, high noses, pale skins, and full beards. A baby buried with blue glass placed over its eyes may have had blue eyes. Some (about 1000 BC) wore plaid. They may have been the ancestors of Central Asian Tokharians, who spoke a language is related to Celtic and other European languages. The theory is that ancestors of Celts and Tokharians started somewhere between China and Europe and travelled in both directions. By 400 BC they were in Ireland.

The Central Asian experts may also have brought the idea for the fourth new technology: writing. Some Yangshao pottery had incised signs that look a little bit like Shang characters for 五five, 大 big, 井 water-well, 日sun, and 田field, and others. Scholars are still debating whether they gave rise to the full-sentence inscriptions of the reign of the twenty-first Shang King, Wu Ding, in about 1200 BC.12 Probably Shang scribes did write on materials other than bone, such as silk, but no such writings have survived.

In any case, it is only with those longer, legible texts on the oracle bones that we can begin to do history, supplementing our study of words with knowledge of material culture drawn from archaeology and art history.

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1.6: Was There a Xia Dynasty?

Before we get there, let's go back to consider how we can know whether there was a dynasty before Shang, called Xia. Before the development of scientific archaeology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, people sometimes stumbled upon or purposely looted old tombs with ancient bronze ritual vessels. Collectors in Song times and later adored the vessels, but had no way to scientifically analyze them. Knowledge of the deep past came from a small set of transmitted texts that were copied and recopied and eventually – beginning after about AD 800 – printed, and then turned into electronic copies.

The most useful transmitted text for understanding antiquity was Sima Qian's (145-86 BC) *Shiji* (*Records of the Historian*), a history of the known world up to his time. Sima Qian's ancestors had been scribes keeping records for rulers, and his father Sima Tan served the Han dynasty as an astronomer and archivist. Tan began the *Shiji*, and his son finished it in about 90 BC on the basis of research in the Han archives, travel throughout the empire, interviews with knowledgeable people, and written records that no longer exist today. The *Shiji* has five parts:

- the Basic Annals of events under each ruler;
- tables of genealogy and chronology;
- treatises on ritual, music, the calendar, astronomy, transport, and finance;
- the "Hereditary Houses," about the feudal states of Zhou times; and
- categorized biographies of men and women of all kinds, as well as the earliest accounts of Korea and Japan.

Later dynasties adopted this format, without the "Hereditary Houses," for the official histories each compiled about the preceding dynasty. Historians today still rely on Sima's work, and the next few chapters will refer to it often.

Alongside the *Shiji*, readers before the age of archaeology learned about the past from the Five Classics. Like the Bible, the Classics were compilations of oral knowledge and written texts of many different ages. People both read and memorized them at various times, and they became the shared heritage of the East Asian countries.

- The *Book of Odes* includes 305 poems of all kinds, composed and eventually written down from about 1000 BC to 400 BC.
- The *Book of Documents* or *Classic of History* includes genuinely old speeches from about 1045 BC along with three other chronological layers of text, the last set written as late as AD 400.
- Three books on ritual, which get lumped together as one classic, took shape only in the Han period.
- The *Book of Changes* is an extremely strange guide to divining the future (or understanding the present). The oldest part of it may go back to around 1000 BC, with additions going up through about 100 BC.
- Finally, the unreadably dull *Spring and Autumn Annals* of the state of Lu acquired commentaries that included lots of great stories of the politics of the era from 722 BC to 481 BC.

In addition to the Classics, the writings of the philosophers of the Hundred Schools of Thought (about 550 BC to 139 BC) also commented on the past.

The Classics and philosophers discuss an antique golden age of three dynasties: Xia, Shang, and Zhou. Golden-age governance began with Yao, a virtuous ruler who chose a filial man called Shun to replace him; Shun likewise chose Yu. When Yu died, this meritocratic succession ended, for Yu's son founded the Xia dynasty and the whole tradition of inheritance of the throne. People throughout in East Asia read the Classics and philosophers and believed that the Xia kings had indeed ruled for 400 years, declining in virtue until the Shang founder overthrew the wicked last Xia king. But in the early twentieth century, Chinese scholars studying the Classics from a linguistic perspective began to doubt the very existence of Xia and Shang. Gu Jiegang and others, could see that the Classics had been written down starting at least five hundred years after the end of Xia and beginning of Shang. At that time, there was no independent evidence for the first two dynastic regimes, outside of these transmitted texts.

Very shortly after the emergence of the "doubting antiquity school," however, as the next section will discuss, archaeology provided evidence of Shang – its bronze vessels, oracle bones, building foundations, and tombs. Columbia University historian and archaeologist Li Feng has argued recently that when we put transmitted texts, preserved texts, and the archaeological record together, it makes sense to equate the Xia dynasty with the Erlitou culture, which was in the right time and place.

The Erlitou culture had bronze weapons and vessels, demonstrating wealth and organization. Their state organization (government) could not have been as highly developed as the transmitted legends of Yao, Shun and Yu claim, but earlier sources do talk about

Great Yu's work on flood control, including a bronze vessel that may be authentically from about 900 BC. 13 So the myth, at least, of Yu controlling floods existed by then. Sima Qian's *Shiji* and a text from two centuries earlier both recount a complete lineage of 16 kings of the Xia dynasty, beginning with Yu and ending with Jie, who was overthrown by the Shang. Since Erlitou left no texts, we will probably never know for sure whether they called themselves Xia or what their kings said and did. But Li Feng's work suggests that we should neither accept the transmitted sources wholesale nor reject them entirely, but combine them with archaeological knowledge.



Figure 1.4. Shang bronze personal ornaments. Left: bird-shaped hairpin finial, approx. 2" x 1.5". How do you think this would have been attached to a hairpin? Right: appliqué in the form of a dragon, approx. 2" x 3". What might it have been attached to? Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public Domain.

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1.7: The Shang Period (1554-1045 BC)

The early twentieth century doubters of antiquity had no archaeological evidence of the Shang dynasty: so they were right to doubt. But as it happened, in 1899 some people in north China dug up a cache of bones, all stuck together in a clump of mud; when soaked and washed, they turned out to have what looked like writing on them, although in a form that no-one could read. An antique dealer snapped them up and sold them to a couple of scholars who collected inscriptions on bronze and stone. Scholars like Wang Guowei began to figure out how to match the characters to modern ones, and realized that they were indeed primary texts from the Shang period.14 Divining the future by means of heating animal bones (pyro-scapulimancy) had been practiced in Mongolia and Siberia from about 3500 BC onwards, and in the archipelago from about 300 BC (where deer, boar, and dolphin bones were used). Shang divination using "oracle bones" fell squarely in this tradition, but they added something.

The Shang innovation in pyro-scapulimancy was to record the questions about the future, and sometimes their outcomes, in writing on selected bones, after the ceremony. The ritual itself was carried out orally, and the inscriptions were made afterwards. Approximately 73,000 inscribed bones and shells have been excavated, and many more with no words. Once the characters on the oracle bones were recognized as the ancestors of today's Chinese characters (and Japanese and Korean writing systems), archaeologists began to dig. They found sites that included not only troves of oracle bones, but also royal tombs, walls, and buildings, and beautiful bronze vessels whose making had required a high level of skill and organization and a vast command of resources. Just when the doubters had cast a shadow on it, the Shang sprang back to life. Since Shang written records are still limited, our picture of Shang society relies heavily on archaeology, as well as on reasonable inferences drawn from comparisons with other Bronze-Age cultures.

The first Shang king, we know from the *Shiji* and the oracle bones, established the dynasty in 1554 BC. (**Dynasty** properly refers to the royal family through time, so I will use **period** to refer to the years during which a given dynasty ruled.) Twenty-two generations of kings followed, with the throne often passing from elder to a younger brother, then back to the elder brother's son. The Shang royal family controlled only a small area of North China. Like the early Yamato kings we will meet later they moved fairly frequently, and archaeologists are still discovering new Shang cities. The last capital, and the one best understood, was Anyang. Palaces and houses for the elite; ancestral temples; workshops for making bronze vessels and weapons, chariots, jade, and other things; pit dwellings for workers; and villages where farmers lived covered about 9 square miles (slightly smaller than Berkeley, CA) – tiny, but 45 times larger than any other settlement of its time.[15]

From the capital, Anyang, the Shang king travelled around a great deal, up to six or seven months out of the year. He traveled up to 200 miles away, but usually only about 125 miles away, and by late in the period normally only a dozen miles from Anyang. The diameter of his sphere of travel represented the area of his most direct control: a network of small settlements spread over an area about one-third the size of California, but with far fewer people, and more trees and animals. The Shang drew materials from much further away, as far as the Yangzi delta and Sichuan. But in no way did Shang constitute a territorial state with firm boundaries; its warriors dominated the more than 30 other groups around them through an unstable mix of war, trade, raiding, and alliance. The southern cultures remained quite different from and independent from Shang, even after adopting bronze for their own styles of bells, ritual vessels, and weapons. Even the closer network of towns and villages that shared more aspects of Shang culture were not necessarily under its control. There was already some specialized regional production: Shang ale may have come from Taixi, 125 miles away.[16] Historians routinely consider the Shang the first historical Chinese dynasty (Xia had no writing). But their small area and loose control were only two of the ways in which they differed dramatically from later ruling families.

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1.8: Shang State and Society

Shang society and state were both aristocratic. **Society** refers to the organized collectivity of all people in a certain place-time; in an **aristocratic society** almost all people remain in the social stratum, or rank, into which they are born. There is little **social mobility** up or down the social scale. People's proper roles and life possibilities are largely determined by their family's **rank**, in combination with their gender and rank within the family and other factors. The upper ranks of the social hierarchy, the "**nobility**" (confusingly also called "**the aristocracy**") openly say, write, and believe that they are intrinsically, essentially better than others because of the families into which they were born. In particular, noblemen across the world insist on their own superiority not only to poor, low-ranking people (whom they hardly considered worth talking about) but also, and especially, to wealthy, low-ranking people. Wealth may attend rank in an aristocratic society, but in itself it does not grant high social standing. (**Wealth** – the ownership of the means of production – determines **class**, not rank, and class-based societies appear later in East Asian history than rank-based ones, as we shall see.) People of lower ranks may or may not have agreed about who was better; but few sources tell us what they thought.

The **state** is the imagined entity that holds the right to control people and territory. It does that through changing government institutions that manage society and its resources, and in an **aristocratic state** political power exercised through government is inherited by families. Got it?

The aristocratic society and state of Shang was a monarchy. It centered on the king (*wang* 王). The king had a retinue of hundreds of people, the nobility or aristocracy, collectively called the *zhong* 衆. (This word changed its meaning over time.) The nobility comprised clans (patrilineal descent groups) called *zu* 族. They were closely linked to the king. Oracle bone inscriptions record that the king reported to his ancestors on the noble clans' activities, asked whether they would be lost in battle, and offered sacrifices to assure that his royal ancestors would protect them. The nobility made up his court and his support, often travelling with him.

As well as the king's own clan, there were those of his uncles and cousins; those that provided the king with consorts (royal wives); clans of diviners; and clans who managed the Shang farms and mines and other resources. Each noble clan had its special skills – mining,

farming, weaving, making pottery, jewelry, rope, fences, etc. – in which its children were trained, to provide those skills to the kings, generation after generation. Archaeologists have found people of the same surname, indicating a craft, buried in cemeteries together. Although only royal oracle bones were inscribed with texts, other people both at Anyang and quite far away, both of the elite and ordinary people, continued to practice bone divination.[17]



Figure 1.5. Two vessels from about 1300-1100 BC. Left: bronze, about 9 inches tall. Right: earthenware, about 8". Why do they have three legs? How was their ornamentation done? Can you guess at their contexts of use? Metropolitan Museum of Art. www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/ Public Domain.

Socially ranked beneath the noble clans, and with no special ties to the king and no political power, were another kind of people called the *ren* 人 (ordinary people). They did the hard work of all kinds under the direction of the clans, and their lives were fairly grim. They might live on a clan estate, or in an isolated village amidst the forest. They were not slaves, because they were called up for work, usually in winter, in groups of a thousand or three thousand, and then sent back home to their farming, which relied on Neolithic-style tools of wood with blades of stone, bone, or clam shells. A few bronze spades and pickaxes have been found, but the king did not waste bronze on farmers, nor ask his ancestors about their welfare in the oracle bones.

Let’s map these three social groups – the royal family, the other aristocratic clans, and the ordinary people – onto the landscape. Anyang, the king’s capital, was surrounded by fields cultivated from spring to autumn to feed the royal family. Not far away, the noble clans had their own estates, the fields cultivated by their people. Beyond and between them was a hinterland of more isolated settlements under lesser Shang chiefs, with fields around them. All the dwellings and fields were set in lots of forest. Beyond the core area centered on Anyang were the settlements of the unrelated chiefs with whom Shang alternately allied and fought.

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1.9: Violence and Ritual

Shang wealth and power stemmed from violence. Historian and archaeologist Li Feng calls the Shang regime “hegemonic” rather than “legitimate,” because of the reliance merely on violence or the threat of violence. They had no *ideology* – no set of ideas that justified their dominance, or that could bind the other groups to them voluntarily and for a long time.18 All Shang activities involved force. For defense they had walls of pounded earth, which meant that workers had to dig out huge quantities of soil with shovels of stone and wood; carry it to the site; cut down trees with stone axes to make planks to hold the dirt in place; and pound it down, layer after layer, inside the plank forms, until it was so hard that the walls can be excavated today, clearly different from the soil surrounding them. For the four-mile long wall encircling Zhengzhou, built in about 1450 BC, one archaeologist estimated it took 10,000 laborers twelve and a half years to build it. Someone with a sharp weapon was overseeing them.



Figure 1.6. Shang bronze axe, c. 1200 BC, with taotie mask on blade and inlaid pattern on haft. Can you figure out how the wooden handle was attached? Source: Metropolitan Museum. Public Domain.

With their bronze weapons and chariots, the king and the noble clans spent much of their time in raiding the little villages and in wars against the other communities. The largest Shang armies numbered 3,000 to 5,000 men, but these were not well-organized armies with clear hierarchical control. Rather, each aristocrat had his or her own chariot and his own warriors surrounding the chariot. If a nobleman thought a battle was going poorly, he might withdraw to save his footsoldiers, whom he fed from his own estate. When Shang warriors defeated others in war, or simply raided their territories, new scholarship on the isotopes in bones suggests that captives were brought into Anyang and its suburbs as slaves. They were worked as hard as possible on a meager vegetarian diet, until they either died naturally or were sacrificed.

Hunting used the same bronze weapons. Nobles and their soldiers chased deer and wild boar; and of course even ordinary people could hunt birds and rabbits with wood and stone as they had been doing since long before the Agricultural Revolution. Occasionally the hunt encountered leopards, tigers, elephants, and rhinoceros. Big hunts also used fire to encircle animals; the fires helped destroy forest and open new fields for farming. Most meals were stews of boiled millet (a grain with smaller seeds than wheat) with a few vegetables and maybe a bit of meat thrown in. (People ate twice a day, at about 9-10 in the morning and 4-5 in the afternoon.) Besides being everyone’s basic food, millet was made into ale. Ale is safer to drink than plain water, because fermentation kills germs. It also enhances sociability (when drunk in moderation), so it played a central role in the shared clan sacrifices to royal ancestors on which Shang aristocrats lavished time and resources, including an average of 65 human sacrifices a year.

Human sacrifices accompanied another ritual activity that has left traces: funerals. Long before a king died, construction of his tomb began. When he died, a hundred or more people were killed with and for him – some as noble “accompaniers in death,” each with his own burial goods and human sacrifices, and some war captives, slaughtered without honor. Looters found nearly all of the tombs long ago, but the intact tomb of one queen, Lady Hao or Fu Hao, yielded to archaeologists an amazing wealth of grave goods, including steppe-style bronze mirrors, weapons, earrings, and large numbers of bronze ritual vessels. The royal tombs were deeply buried, meant never to be disturbed. The funeral may have been political theatre demonstrating the wealth and power of the deceased king or his successor, but a belief that the ancestor needed those things and people in the afterlife must also have motivated the lavish tomb goods.

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1.10: Oracle Bone Divination

Offerings to the ancestors went along with asking for their advice and help. These divination rituals guided every Shang royal action and required a lot of work. Historian David Keightley roughly calculated the number of hours of labor that went into one set of turtle plastrons that were used to figure out King Wu Ding's military strategy for one season, and then re-used ten days later to ascertain who was causing his toothache. Oxen had to be raised (cattle had come to the Yellow River Valley from the Middle East in about 2,300 BC), and turtles caught or farmed and transported to Anyang, from as far south as the Yangzi river. The bones or plastrons had to be cleaned of flesh, dried, and polished (10 hours of labor). It took 80 hours to make hollows in them so they would be ready for heat-cracking. If producing each crack took only one minute (which seems too fast), counting the cracks for the divinations recorded on these bones would have taken two full hours. After the divination ritual was over, it would have taken five hours to carve and color the inscriptions. So, this one plastron set cost at least 100 hours of labor, about 20 hours per plastron. On average, Shang royalty used at least one shell every day and Keightley estimates that at least fifty hours of work per day were spent on preparing for, doing, and recording royal bone divinations during the last century and a half of the Shang period.

Routine divinations occurred every other day. In order to keep track of the ancestors and not leave anyone out, the Shang developed a system of "ten heavenly stems and twelve earthly branches" – which combined into sixty pairs. (The same pairs later counted hours, months, and years, as well. The 1911 revolution is called "the Xinhai Revolution," because it occurred in a *xinhai* year.) Unscheduled divinations asked the ancestors about military campaigns, illness, childbirth, the harvest, and other concerns. Diviners kept their exact process secret, Li Feng has concluded, for the approximately 2,500 divinations done for a prince (*zi* 子) south of Anyang, with the same ancestors as the King, the style was quite different.19 That suggests that the king really was consulting ancestors about decisions. He was not just doing ritual theatre, nor was he doing political theatre for any public wider than very close family members.



Figure 1.7. Oracle Bone Fragments. Left: each measures roughly 1.5" x 1". Right: measures 3" x 7". Can you recognize any words? Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public Domain.

For us to read the inscriptions on oracle bones also requires a lot of scholarly work. After scribes wrote the questions on the bones, Shang people buried them. Since the early twentieth century, archaeologists have been excavating them, and universities and museums collecting them. Specialists clean them and fit broken fragments together. Scholars make rubbings so that they can copy and study the glyphs on the bones. Slowly, they have figured out how the glyphs relate to modern Chinese characters; slowly they have figured out the grammar and translated the inscriptions into modern Chinese, Japanese, English, and other languages. These translations are collected and published, and scholars use them to understand Shang society, along with other archaeological evidence.

In this process, as in all historical and other intellectual work, scholars made decisions about how to understand the data. Later, with more evidence and different questions, other scholars may revise that knowledge. An *assumption* is an idea that has not yet

been proven but that scholars accept; a *hypothesis* is an idea that someone proposes and tests against the evidence. For instance, the Shang bones include a figure called “Di.”

On the bones, Di looks like this: [20]

Scholars figured out that this is the word that came to be written 帝 and pronounced in Mandarin “di,” (fourth tone). Scholars knew that later, in the Zhou period, there was a top god and that this word was one way to refer to it. They capitalized “Di” in English to express the assumption that “Di” was a single, top god. But there are no capital letters in bone-writing or in modern Chinese characters, and no difference between plural and singular in the inscriptions. A historian named

Robert Eno questioned the **assumption** that “Di” referred to *one* being. He noticed that everywhere the term occurs, it could refer to a *group* of beings. He **hypothesized** that it referred to a group of royal ancestors, not necessarily the same group every time. He found **additional evidence** for this hypothesis in the inscriptions:

Di commands natural forces, but no chain of command.

Di’s powers are like ancestral powers.

Ancestors received scheduled sacrifices. *Di* did not.

Di appears in parallel with other plurals.

Di is added to some ancestors’ names.[21]

Shang was not highly organized – each aristocratic family had its own land and its own soldiers, and Shang had many independent allies and rivals. So this interpretation of Di as a group makes more sense. There is no reason to think that Shang had a high god.

The Shang royal family thought of their ancestors as powerful, able to help or harm their descendants. More: it seems likely that although other aristocratic clans worshipped their own ancestors, they agreed that the Shang royal ancestors held great power. To openly challenge a royal family that had lasted 500 years, through twenty-three generations, would take courage and a strong coalition. Like the bronze and chariots that had strengthened Shang, both the courage and the persuasive argument needed to put together such a coalition came from Central Asia, as the next chapter will explain.

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[16] Li Feng, *Early China*, 83.

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1.12: Section 1.1 Figures

Parts of Fig 1.3



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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

2: The Zhou Period (1045 – 256 BC)

One reason that we know Shang dominated the other groups in the mainland is that it was Shang whose conquest the Zhou dynasty celebrated. Like the Shang elite, Zhou aristocrats defined themselves by war, sacrificial ritual, and hunting. But they also moved beyond violence to invent ideology and history. They wrote the poetry and prose, and debated the philosophical ideas, that formed the foundation of East Asian civilization. The structure of the Zhou monarchical, aristocratic state was feudal, which permitted great expansion outwards and across ranks, and the absorption of many lifeways into Zhou culture.

2.1: A Violent Transition
2.2: The Feudal State
2.3: The Zhou Aristocracy
2.4: Did Kija Move Eastwards to Found Old Chosŏn?
2.5: Relations with Other Peoples
2.6: The “Hegemon” System of the Spring and Autumn Period (771-476 BC)
2.7: Ritual Changes in the Spring and Autumn Period
2.8: Confucius
2.9: Sources

Thumbnail: A book written on bamboo strips, dating to the Warring States Period and held at the Shanghai Museum. The strips would have been tied together with a cord wrapping around each strip and its neighbor. In other cases, strips had holes punched at the top (or top and bottom) and were threaded together that way. The book is a Confucian discussion of the *Book of Odes*. (Public Domain; Shanghai Museum via Wikipedia).

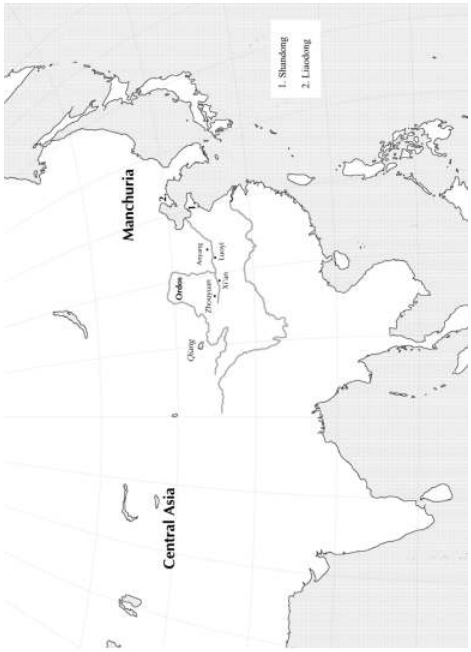
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2.1: A Violent Transition

In the twelfth century BC, the Zhou people were one of the communities whom Shang alternately allied with and fought against. The later thinker Mencius called them “western barbarians.” They seem to have moved several times, and according to later written records, in about 1125, a leader named Danfu settled the Zhou people in the Wei River Valley to the west of Shang at a place called Zhouyuan (see Map C). His son Jili died in a battle against Shang in 1099, and Shang also captured Jili’s son Chang. When they released him, they gave him some bronze vessels, and entrusted him with guarding their western flank against a Central Asian group called the Qiang (who spoke languages related to Tibetan): very dangerous enemies who often appear in the oracle bones as human sacrifices.

As allies in the loose Shang political order, Chang and the Zhou people began to take on many aspects of the impressive Shang elite culture. They adopted 亞 *ya*-shaped Shang-style tombs, and Shang-style sets of bronze vessels. They used and eventually began to bury chariots as the Shang did. They made buildings of pounded earth, but they added tile roofs: a big improvement over wood or thatch. They did turtle-shell divinations – using a different shape of pre-drilled hollow from Shang – and began writing in Shang characters, but very small and in a careless style, with a different syntax. Turtle shell divination fragments excavated 30 miles west of today’s Xi’an record that Chang sacrificed to the Shang royal ancestors, including recently dead kings; and the Shang king visited the Zhou homeland. So both sides worked to maintain the alliance.

But Chang was ambitious. Taking on these Shang forms of culture made sense as a political strategy to increase his prestige and power among his own people and the other groups in that area. The Shang had developed an impressive rulership culture and had dominated others for hundreds of years. The things they made and the rituals they did, by this time, *in themselves* carried authority: they both symbolized and created power. In order to increase his own power, Chang took on those symbols. Zhou men also married or claimed to have married women from the Shang and even Xia royal families, to enhance their own legitimacy. In 1056, Chang renounced the alliance, took the title “King Wen,” and renewed Zhou attacks on Shang. Zhou military power rested on an alliance of a number of different tribes from the mountains and valleys around them. King Wen and other Zhou leaders had to work extremely hard to maintain their coalition, as we know from the speeches recorded in the *Book of Documents*.



Map C. Regions, peoples, and sites mentioned in the text, including present-day Xi’an city for reference.

The conquest of Shang was bloody and difficult. In about 1053 King Wen’s armies were directly threatening Anyang when he died. His son King Wu (Martial or Military King) mourned his father for three years, and then set out on a campaign eastward in the 12th month of 1046 BC. He arrived at the outskirts of Anyang in the first month of 1045, and there he and all the allied tribes of western mountains and valleys fought all the armies of the tribes and clans living on the eastern plains, the Shang and their allies. The battle on the field of Muye lasted for an entire day and into the night. Muye was a vicious battle: so many people were wounded and

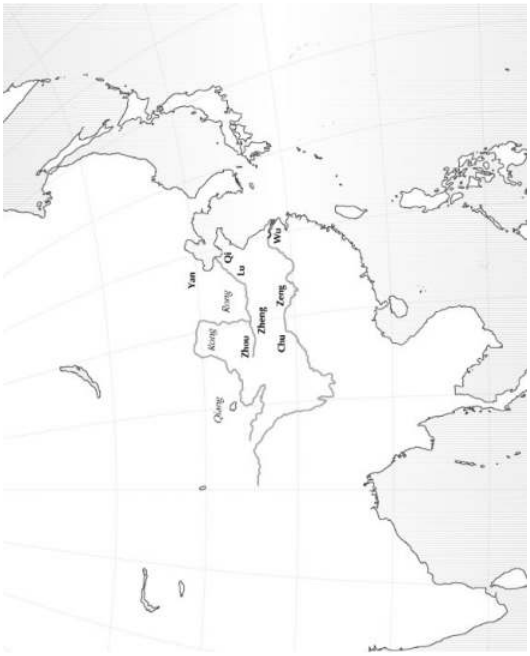
killed that heavy items like stone pestles were washed away in the blood (we are told). Once King Wu had defeated the Shang, Zhou leaders celebrated by killing about a hundred Shang aristocrats whom they had taken prisoner.

How do we know that the battle of Muye occurred in 1045 BC? Transmitted primary sources list the Xia, Shang, and Zhou kings in order; Sima Qian's *Shi ji* put all but one of the Shang kings in the correct order, as the oracle bones – which he did not have – confirm. But no one knew exactly how long each early Zhou king had reigned until, in 1976, archaeologists excavated a group of Zhou bronze vessels with long inscriptions that together provided a complete *relative* chronology of the Zhou kings. Then all that was needed to know the *absolute* dates of each king was a starting point. Astronomers can calculate when events such as lunar and solar eclipses and planetary conjunctions occurred in the past, and like all ancient people the Shang and Zhou observed such events closely, and recorded some. By coordinating the relative royal chronology with astronomical events, historian David Nivison set the Zhou conquest at 1045.[1] Particularly useful was the report in the transmitted sources that in the 41st year of the reign of King Wen, "The Five Planets gathered in [the constellation] Room." This refers to a syzygy: all five visible planets lined up. In this case, the line pointed down towards a gap in the hills where the Zhou were settled.

As well as providing a definite date for the Zhou conquest, the syzygy also answers the questions: How did King Wen and King Wu come by the courage to take on those powerful Shang ancestors? How did they convince the allies to join them in a confederation against Shang? The courage came from their faith in a new god, imported from Central Asia: Heaven (Tian 天). This sky god was no-one's ancestor. The Zhou also claimed divine ancestors, but each tribe had its own ancestors. Heaven, by contrast, was for all peoples – like the sun, moon, and stars. Zhou heard about this god from their neighbors further west. When all the planets lined up, for the first time in over 500 years, dramatically pointing right down at the Zhou homeland, it must have seemed as if the sky god was sending a message – an order: Heaven's Mandate.

(Later propagandists and historians further developed this "Mandate of Heaven" ideology, and used it to legitimate dynasties and explain their rise and fall. Heaven selects a virtuous man to rule the world. As long as his descendants are personally virtuous and attend to ritual; listen to wise advisors; and assure the people secure lives and livelihoods, they will hold the throne with the approval of Heaven. But if a ruler becomes wicked, heedless, and extravagant, Heaven will first warn him with signs like earthquakes, comets and droughts, and eventually choose a new virtuous leader. Invented to justify the rebellion of the Zhou against the Shang, this ideology faded in Zhou times, was revived in the middle of the Han period, and lasted until at least 1911.)

With a new sense of mission, the Zhou leaders also had a powerful way to convince others to join in a full-scale attack on Shang. Everyone could see the sign in the sky. Before and after the conquest, Zhou leaders made speeches and songs hammering home the idea that a Heaven, a deity above all ancestors, supported them. They argued that when Xia became wicked, Heaven mandated Shang to conquer and replace it; and when Shang became wicked, Heaven chose Zhou. Eventually scribes incorporated the speeches into the *Book of Documents*, and the songs into the *Book of Poetry*. Whereas Shang power had rested on organized violence, Zhou added **ideology** – ideas that justify power. Over the years, with repetition, the propaganda story of Heaven's support for the Zhou helped whitewash the bloody conquest.



Map D. Places mentioned in the text, including the royal domain Zhou; feoffs Zheng, Zeng, Yan, Qi, and Lu; neighboring peoples Qiang and Rong; and neighboring southern states Chu and Wu. You have already seen one Chu object, on the cover of the book. Find Chu on the map to see that the Zhou world's "southern mainland" did not reach the current southern areas of the People's Republic of China.

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2.2: The Feudal State

Immediately after the victory at Muye, King Wu established an eastern capital at Luoyi as well as maintaining his homeland capital in the Wei valley, to better control that area. He established a temporary occupation regime by putting two of his brothers in charge near the Shang capital. Leaving some Shang descendants alive, he assigned them to a domain to the east to continue offerings to their ancestors. When King Wu died, his son Cheng was 16, and his uncle, the Duke of Zhou, served as "regent," ruling until King Cheng could take command. The remnant Shang and two other Zhou uncles rebelled almost immediately, and it may be that the process of chasing down the rebels took Zhou forces further than planned, offering a new conception of what was possible. For Zhou designed a system to control more territory more closely than Shang had dreamed of. We know a good deal about it, because in addition to the transmitted sources in the Classics, museums hold 12,000 excavated Zhou bronze ritual vessels, many with inscriptions saying who made them, why, and when. (Clans of scribes that had served Shang still served the Zhou in composing and calligraphing documents and inscriptions.)

We call the Zhou monarchical **state**, or overarching government structure, "**feudal**" in English, translating *fengjian* 封建, even though it differed greatly from the much later European feudal system. In Chinese Communist discourse, "feudal" refers to the whole period from Zhou through the end of Qing in 1911. That is not useful for historians: to call everything "feudal" ignores the dramatic difference between the Zhou system and the imperial, **bureaucratic** system imposed by Qin in 221 BC (next chapter). The basic structure of the feudal system was that that Zhou king assigned relatives and allies to lands (**domains** or **feoffs/fiefs**) both inside and outside the area of his capital in the Wei River valley. Inner enfeoffment was called *feng* and distant enfeoffment was called *jian*.

First, inner grants of *feng* lands and serfs rewarded noblemen serving at court. An inscription on a bronze vessel cast in 981 BC records, for instance, that a royal officer named Yu, grandson of a man who had served the Zhou founders, had just been appointed to an important military office. The inscription quotes from the king's order to Yu, which would have been recorded more fully with ink on bamboo strips. King Kang said to Yu:

"I award you a vessel of sacrificial wine, a hat, a cloak, a pair of knee pads, slippers, and a horse and chariot. I award you the flag of your late grandfather, the Lord of the Nan clan, to use in hunting. I award you four Elders (local clan heads) from the Zhou domains along with 659 serfs ranging from charioteers to common men. I award you thirteen Elders of foreign origin who are royal servants, along with 1,050 serfs."

The king paid Yu (like others) with prestige objects and real wealth in land and labor, which Yu could pass down to his descendants and share with his own followers. Yu served the King well: another, later vessel commemorates how he defeated a non-Zhou leader and brought to the king captured chiefs, men, horses, oxen, and chariots, and the severed ears of enemies. The trouble with this system of rewards was that by giving away lands, the king diminished his own holdings. Sometimes he took away *feng* from one family to give it to another, causing conflict in the royal domain.



Figure 2.1. An inscription cast into a bronze vessel. Source: Metropolitan Museum. Public Domain.

Second, grants of outer *jian* domains expanded the Zhou sphere of control as a whole, but over long centuries they, too, reduced the Zhou king's power, as we will see below. The Zhou leadership set up *jian* domains centered on armed and manned settlements all over North China, far beyond the former reach of Shang control. They carefully planned out the garrisons in threes, so that Zhou lords could support one another as they conquered and held territory extending control eastward from the Wei valley homeland. Garrisons were placed along routes that were easy for military marches and the transport of goods, but also in the best places for

long-term agricultural settlement: close enough to rivers for a water supply, but not so close that flooding would be a problem. The settlements with their warriors were nodes in a network supporting one another; they relied on the conquered villagers in the countryside around them for work and food, but these hinterlands stretched out only a little way from the garrisons at first, with lots of unfarmed land and people not yet under Zhou control around them, and certainly no clear borders between them. The garrisons did not even have walls.

Feudalism meant that although there was just one king, he shared his authority. Li Feng calls the Zhou system a "settlement-based state with delegation" to kin and allies. The Duke of Zhou, regent for King Cheng, enfeoffed sixteen of his brothers descended from King Wen, four of his nephews descended from King Wu, six of his own sons (one son represented him in his own fief of Lu, so that he could stay by King Cheng's side), and a number of men related to the royal clan by marriage, especially from the Jiang clan. (In any **aristocratic** system, even if descent is calculated through the father's family (**patrilineally**), the mother's family matters for rank, prestige, and power.) Authority was really shared, for the lord of a domain could run it as he liked, unless the king specifically forbade him to do something. He owed the King some tribute, and military support in far-ranging campaigns, but he received military support from others in return, as well as prestige objects like bronze vessels. And he passed his domain on to his son or sons, although theoretically the king could take it back. Fiefs were hereditary and largely independent in day-to-day matters. (Remember that: bureaucracy will change it.)

By 1030 BC, 15 years after the conquest, the major domains were in place. Their borders were not as clear as lines on a map: they overlapped, and there were spaces amongst them not in Zhou control, but there were no more major challenges. Another generation later, by about 1000 BC, the peripheral boundary around all 60-70 Zhou domains was secure, and further expansion took place, carried out by both the domains themselves and by their armies at the command of the Zhou king back in his capital. Zhou expanded westwards into the lower Ordos region (the bump under the Yellow River) – there are Zhou tombs as far west as Ningxia – and eastwards to include the whole Shandong peninsula. Zhou tombs include many beads of carnelian and faience from India and Central Asia, but those came from trade, not conquest: the Zhou successfully fought their way down to the Middle Yangzi area, but King Zhao was defeated and killed there by the southern state of Chu, losing nearly half of the Zhou's military force.

That defeat came in 950 BC. It allowed non-Zhou people in the west to increase attacks on the western capital, and moreover led various branches of the royal family to contend for the throne. The challenge to Zhou unity came not only from King Zhao's failure, but also as a natural result of success. For the first few generations, a century or so, the feudal lords had been few and closely related. The small size of early Zhou bronze vessels, and the large number used to heat wine (as well as others for food) suggest that the royal family was still relatively small and close, practicing emotionally intense rituals in which the king and his family communicated with the ancestors with the help of wine and sacrifice. But after four or five generations, there were too many sons and cousins for close rituals, and competition for resources heated up.



Figure 2.2. Short sword and sheath with crouching feline at the top of the handle, 10th – 8th century BC, northeast China. Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art metmuseum.org/art/collection/search. (Lots more to see there!) Public Domain.

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2.3: The Zhou Aristocracy

The Zhou leadership responded with reforms to keep the elite together and loyal to the king, even when he no longer regularly met them face to face. Based on the styles of Zhou bronze vessels, archaeologist Jessica Rawson thinks the reform occurred between about 950 and 850 BC, while Li Feng places it later, when the Zhou had disintegrated further.[2] Instead of giving all sons and cousins equal status as before, the ritual reform distinguished "trunk" (senior) and "branch" (junior) patrilines. The eldest son by the primary wife – probably from the highest ranked family – headed the trunk lineage and retained the father's status.

King					Generation I
Son 1↓	Son 2↓				
King	Lord				Generation II
1↓	1↓	2↓			
King	Lord	Minister			Generation III
1↓	1↓	1↓	2↓		
King	Lord	Minister	High Officer		Generation IV
1↓	1↓	1↓	1↓	2↓	
King	Lord	Minister	High Officer	Knight (*shi*)	Generation V

Younger sons had a critical role to play. They maintained their lineage's ties to the Zhou king, because they could serve at the royal court, while the eldest son inherited rulership and ritual duties to ancestors in the fief itself.[3] But despite their important role, in terms of rank, younger brothers were relegated to heading "branch" lineages, slipping down one notch in the hierarchy, until after five generations younger sons were only low-ranking officers or "knights" (*shi*). The younger sons of the knights might still bear arms and participate in the Six Arts of Zhou – rites, music, archery, charioteering, composition (mainly oral until about 400), and calculation – but they were no longer officially ranked as aristocrats.

Violence was still fundamental. The aristocracy defined membership by kinship and by participation in war, hunting, and bloody sacrifice to ancestors.[4] Each rank had its ritual privileges in family worship and in burial. The senior line at each level worshipped the lineage founder on behalf of all, and the trunk ancestors five generations back. Each branch worshipped only its ancestors going five generations back. Other ancestors received offerings as a group, so they were still fed.

Grand burials for the higher Zhou ranks continued. In the Zeng domain, for instance, 106 tombs have been found, the grand ones along the ridge, and others on the hillside. The site includes two pits with complete chariots and many horses. Burying horses and chariots – the machines of war – showed that the descendent had enough and to spare: he was a power to be reckoned with. Likewise, Marquis Qi of Zeng was buried with 25 bronze vessels.[5] Human beings were still sacrificed to accompany lords in death, too – sometimes buried alive.[6] Such funerary display of prestige goods shored up power based on heredity and violence.



Figure 2.3. Ritual bronze altar table and thirteen ritual vessels, c. 1000 BC. Reportedly excavated from a Western Zhou aristocratic tomb in Shaanxi province. Notice that the vessels were not created as a perfectly matched set. Can you figure out what each might have been used for, food or wine? Source: Metropolitan Museum. https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/ Public Domain.

Economically, each elite lineage had its own estate with serfs who worked as servants, farmers, artisans, and shepherds. Estates and royal workshops might specialize in certain types of goods: leather, for instance, or chariots, jade ornaments, or tiles. Such goods, and small parcels of land and serfs were not sold, because there were no markets, nor was there any money (cowrie shells, used as money elsewhere in the world, were exchanged for display but did not operate as coins). But goods and lands could be exchanged. Since the king still nominally owned all land, property rights were unclear, so when lands were exchanged conflicts easily arose. Zhou farmers had tools of stone, bone, and shell; to irrigate fields they could divert small streams. They grew soybeans and millet, a little wheat and rice. Millet was made into ale. As well as silk for the ruling class they made hemp cloth for themselves. The ruling class ate pigs, chickens, and dogs, and sacrificed oxen and sheep (and ate the sacrifices in feasts). Scholars disagree about whether most farm labor was done collectively, under overseers, or by clans of serfs – probably it varied – and about exactly what kind of relation the working people I have been calling "serfs" (bondmen? slaves?) had with their lords. They certainly were not free people, however, even when they were highly skilled artisans.[7]

In addition to the titles of the feudal lords themselves, within the aristocracy and within aristocratic families, there were many, many ranks. Older sons and daughters outranked younger ones; primary wives outranked secondary wives (also called concubines); members of the senior branch of a family outranked the junior branches; old people outranked young people. All these factors intersected in any given relationship between two people to produce a highly complex internal ranking system – as in any aristocracy. Rules of etiquette that were part of ritual governed these relations; the classics speak of "three hundred major and three thousand minor rules of ritual." The rules disciplined aristocrats to create ruling class coherence, reinforcing their sense of themselves as inherently better than the people they dominated. As a form of organization, the rules of rank also contributed to ideology.

Zhou **state and society** were both highly aristocratic: most people were born into their place in life, and political power lay in the hands of a tiny elite dominating serfs who worked their estates, and whose sense of superiority was supported by their possessions, their rituals, and their kin connections. Fed by the work of many farmers, fishermen, and herders with wood and stone tools, this was a world dominated by noble men and women who inherited status, political power, and wealth.



Figure 2.4. Knife-spoon, first half of the 1st millennium BC (1000 BC – 500 BC), northeast China. Why do you think this is harder to date than other bronze objects? Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public domain.

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2.4: Did Kija Move Eastwards to Found Old Chosŏn?

Those aristocrats did not necessarily stay put, however. The *Book of Documents* preserves a long lecture that marks one of the starting points of Korean history. The last Shang king had several advisors who tried to correct his alleged wickedness; one was Prince Ji (Jizi), or Kija in Korean. Kija left the area after the Zhou conquest and later returned to lecture the Zhou king, giving him "The Great Plan" for governance. A thousand years after the conquest, Chinese texts include stories that when Kija left Zhou, he established or was enfeoffed in a domain in the Liaodong peninsula or southern Manchuria, founding a dynasty there, called Chosŏn.[8] The last Korean dynasty, established in A.D. 1392, named itself Chosŏn and identified even more with Kija, and some prominent families claimed descent from him in the late nineteenth century. But did Kija really establish a state called Chosŏn? Did he move to Manchuria? Did he even exist?

Just as Chinese scholars began to doubt the existence of the Xia and Shang in the early twentieth century, Korean scholars started to question the transmitted records about Kija in the *Book of History* and later accounts. They found that by AD 1100, the Koryŏ dynasty had established official Kija worship, probably for reasons similar to the Zhou adoption of Heaven, that is, to justify its attempt to conquer Manchuria. Koryŏ looked back to the glorious Koguryŏ, whose people were said to have worshipped Kija in about AD 500 – but the first report of that comes from four centuries later. Korean doubters of antiquity proposed that perhaps Kija had been enfeoffed elsewhere in Zhou, and that then the Qin and Han regimes invented the story of his eastern migration to justify their attacks on southern Manchuria.

Historian Jae-hoon Shim has recently argued that the preserved records – oracle bones and bronze vessel inscriptions that the early twentieth century scholars did not have – show that Kija indeed existed, really did ally with Shang, and moved somewhere eastward with his people in the early Zhou. But he had no relationship to "Chosŏn," which appears in texts only from about 400 BC, as a tribe northwest of the Liaodong peninsula. Han-period scholars invented the legend that the Prince Ji went east and founded Kija Chosŏn; some peninsula+ regimes adopted it to legitimate military campaigns; and Korean scholars in about AD 1000 avidly adopted it to claim a close connection with the great tradition of the Classics and Confucians. But there is no evidence of a "Kija Chosŏn" that gave birth to the Korean nation. Rather, the Manchurian area included a number of different groups of people for a long time.[9] It played an important role in East Asian history.

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2.5: Relations with Other Peoples

But did that mean that they thought of people to the north as “barbarians”? Textbooks and historians use this English term to translate many different words in Chinese, which has the effect of naturalizing the supposed ethnic unity of “the Chinese” as distinct from “barbarians.” As the feudal lords built up their domains and swallowed up their neighbors, they began to call their domains “**states**,” and as a group, the “central states” 中國. Those states managed political rivalries and alliances within a very mixed, multi-ethnic world.

The northern Di and western Rong groups, for starters, lived over a wide area in northern Shanxi, Shaanxi and Hebei, normally scattered but sometimes allying with one another (see Map D). Some Zhou texts, including the *Zuo Commentary*, say they are like animals, or wolves, and unlike the “Xia” people – the Zhou states. But each case of rhetoric about Di or Rong sub humanity occurs in a particular political conflict *between* Zhou domains with Di or Rong as allies of one side. Just as diplomats made speeches referring to kinship among the states in order to achieve some alliance or other aim, so they also talked about the wolvish characteristics of the non-Xia groups. In fact, they described Zhou domains in the same way at times. People with different lifeways were identified as foreign, but their interactions with the Zhou domains – now becoming independent states – did not occur along clear Us vs. Them lines.[11]

Rather, relations on the northern frontier were pragmatic. Defense and survival on the one hand, and aggressive expansion on the other, both required ever more resources as the warfare among the Zhou states ramped up. Zhou states took three practical approaches to northern groups. First, where possible, you should conquer the non-Zhou to expand and enslave them. Second, if that would be too expensive or dangerous, or if you need allies, make peace with them. Third, if you are able, incorporate them the administrative structure of your state, in order to effectively use them for fiscal and military purposes – just as you do other people. When a state chose one or another approach, they couched it in moral terms for publicity, but that does not mean the choices were made for moral principled reasons.

In 770 the Rong people attacked the western Zhou capital and forced the Zhou king to move east, but Zhou states continued to ally with the Rong and Di groups as often as they fought with them. For instance, in 721 BC the state of Lu (where Confucius lived two centuries later) made a covenant with Rong. Such treaties, when made among Zhou states, typically specified ending fighting, being good neighbors, helping each other, and allying against a common enemy. Treaties were made with the Rong or Di on the same terms and through the same diplomatic and ritual steps that governed Zhou states’ relations with one another: negotiations in visits to each other’s courts, with gifts, followed by ratification in a ceremony in which blood covenants were made. The blood covenant as reconstructed by Mark Edward Lewis involved the participants purifying themselves through fasting while workers erected an altar and dug a pit. A sheep would be sacrificed in the pit, its ear cut off and placed in a vessel, and the blood caught in another vessel for the participants to drink (yum!).

The alliances with Di and Rong were real, and even oaths between Zhou states were broken, in the realpolitik context of competition among Zhou states against for resources – farmers, soldiers, land. Then end result, by 500, was the full integration of Di and Rong people as military forces into Zhou states. Having eliminated the buffer zone, the Zhou states found themselves facing the much more formidable mounted Northern Zone nomads.

Nomadism had developed on the Central Asian steppe around 1500 BC, about the same time as the Shang got their start. They lived by nomadic pastoralism, a method of production in which people moved herds of animals through the landscape as the seasons changed, seeking pasture. The society and culture of nomads diverged from those of agricultural people as the two modes of production diverged from their shared prehistoric roots: domestication of grain and small animals. In about 1000 BC, people learned to ride horses. By about 900 BC, nomadism had migrated from the steppe highway east to Manchuria: archaeologists have found large numbers of buried horses, horse fittings, and weapons. Instead of the immensely heavy bronze vessels of the agricultural zone, the warriors who formed the steppe elite marked their status with portable art in the shape of animals and elaborate horsegear. From about 600-300 BC, concurrent with the Warring States period, the steppe culture of warriors who dominated herders and farmers spread all along the northern frontier of the Zhou states, developing local cultures that interacted with each other and to some extent with the Zhou states.



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2.6: The “Hegemon” System of the Spring and Autumn Period (771-476 BC)

Big changes set in after the Rong attack forced the Zhou king to move to his eastern capital in 771 BC, but not because of that attack. Rather, the basic dynamic was that domains along the outer Zhou periphery had more resources. As they grew, their independence from the King increased, and they began to attack and take over other Zhou domains, now states. Those who were stuck in amongst their brethren were vulnerable to attacks from all sides, and could not expand as easily into new territory. New territory meant a domain could exploit new natural resources and the labor of populations not already under Zhou control.

The first powerful state was Qi, located in northwestern Shandong. From Bohai Bay it drew fish, and produced large amounts of salt (archaeologists have discovered salt-production sites there going back to Shang times). Salt is a valuable commodity because everyone needs it to live, especially if they do not eat much meat. Qi also produced a purple dye made from shells that was used for prestige garments. Qi annexed two smaller states and controlled the whole peninsula, so that the groups who had been known as “Eastern Barbarians” (*dong yi*) were now their subjects. Qi could feed large armies, large enough to rescue its neighbor to the north, Yan, from a Di attack in 664; and large groups of workmen, large enough to build a line of fortresses along the south bank of the Yellow River all the way from its debouchment into Bohai to the royal capital at Luoyang, in order to defend the “Central States” from future northern attacks.

Because of these contributions, Duke Huan of Qi won a declaration from all the other Zhou domains that he was “hegemon” (*ba*): not the king, but the legitimate protector of the king, whom others should follow. The other major states, whose battles with one another hurt the small states as well, were also along the periphery of Zhou: Jin to the north of the Zhou royal domain, Chu to the south, and eventually Qin to the west.

Later ideologues suggested that kingship was legitimate, and the hegemon was not. The status of the hegemon was, indeed, not the same as that of the king; it was based on military power rather than descent, and changed hands accordingly. Nevertheless, the hegemon’s status was institutionalized, and the covenants and ritual involved conferred legitimacy on the hegemon. The system represents a creative attempt to shore up the Zhou order and prevent all-out warfare.

The conferences that designated hegemons included broader principles of managing ruling-class interactions. The five ranks of duke, marquis, earl, viscount, and baron were systematized to regulate how much tribute the hegemon could claim from states of different sizes. The conferences also established family rules – which made sense since Zhou power was justified by kinship, and peace was made through personal alliances. For instance, the first conference agreed that a concubine, or secondary wife, could not be elevated to the status of primary wife, in order to diminish factional conflicts at their courts.[12] After all, if a wife sent to solidify an alliance between two states was displaced by a woman from a different state, the alliance would fall apart. The hegemon system, with both organization and ideology, recognized the need for new institutions that would continue the feudal states, with the Zhou king as figurehead. It proved a failure, but it is still part of history.

In fact, if iron technology had not been imported from Central Asia, the hegemon system might well have succeeded. The Central States (*zhong guo*, now used to mean “China”) might have wound up looking more like medieval Europe: a large number of states with inter-related monarchies, and some shared high culture, but with different local languages and lifeways. The next chapter will talk about why iron mattered, but let’s look one more time at bronze.

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2.7: Ritual Changes in the Spring and Autumn Period

Since ritual was so central to political life, changes in relations of the Zhou feudal lords were echoed in and affected by the ritual realm. Around 600, ancestral ritual among the aristocracy changed from an intimate family rite to something more like a performance. There were musical changes: group singing was replaced by loud bell music played by performers. In addition, aristocrats adopted rituals that were inappropriate to their hereditary status, in order to show off and increase their power that way. In other ways, too, political ambition was on display. Tombs of great lords, instead of being underground, were built up into high, imposing layered towers. Instead of the ranked aristocracy being closely connected with one another, over time the rulers of some big states were exalted far above the rest of the nobles in their states – their relatives. The gap between the lords and everyone else became enormous.



Figure 2.6. Cast-bronze bell, fifth to third century BC. Bells were made in sets that played different pitches. This one is two feet high. Source: Metropolitan Museum. Public Domain.

At the same time, ancestral ritual focused more on the living and less on the ancestral spirits. The feudal lords had bronze ritual vessels made bigger, with more dramatic designs appropriate for viewing from afar, which suggests larger audiences. Here are key changes:

Western Zhou, before about 600 BC	Eastern Zhou, after about 600 BC
Smaller bronze vessels	Larger vessels
More delicate decoration	More dramatic decoration
Focus of the ritual is ancestors: offering wine, honor, and food in exchange for blessings.	Focus of the ritual – sometimes explicitly – is the living community.
Inscriptions say the vessel is for use in sacrifices to a specific ancestor (dedicatee).	Inscriptions say the vessel is for the use of the donor who commissioned the vessel.
"Statement of past merit" section is excerpted from official documents of the service to the king or other patron that earned the donor the right to cast the vessel.	"Statement of past merit" section recites a list of glorious ancestors to show them off – to *others*.

As shared ritual tended toward performance, the lower-ranking members of aristocratic families were relegated to the back of the room. There they developed a critical habit of mind, historian Edward Shaughnessy has argued. While early hymns in the *Book of Odes* praised the Zhou rulers and feudal lords, later poems also criticize lords. Poets developed ways to observe the complex interactions of animals and plants in the natural world and used such images to

display their observations of the complex emotions and relationships of the human world. Such critiques brought new salience to the individual intellectual's mind, and those thinking people observed ritual more clearly. From the back of the room, those

carrying out ritual looked more like actors than worshippers.

Insincerity became thinkable. Whereas the Shang King's duties had been external – he had to read bones, kill the calf, spill bones, etc. – there were now the beginnings of a concern with the mindset of the ritual practitioner.[13] Divisions among the elite created a new kind of individual consciousness, an explicit focus on interior sincerity as well as exterior performance.

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2.8: Confucius

Into this world was born the first of the philosophers. **Confucius** or Kong Qiu (551-479 BC) was born in tiny Zhulou, a few miles south of Qufu, the capital of the domain of Lu. Lu already controlled Zhulou by that time, but for another thousand years, until the sixth century AD, sources call it a non-Zhou, "barbarian" (Yi 夷) culture.[14] Confucius had to learn Zhou ritual as an outsider, but when he did, he loved it, and lamented its decay. He thought that elite families should follow the old rules about who could properly make offerings to which spirits and how, as well as the old aristocratic etiquette of daily interactions. After all, ritual expressed the divinely-appointed human hierarchy of the Zhou system! (We have seen already that ritual changed over time.) But as Confucius aged, he made a different argument: that rituals had to be based in sincere human emotion. This focus on sincerity meant both that some change in ritual was acceptable, and that rituals expressed and shaped human emotion, rather than being primarily ways to manipulate the spirit world. A man who strove for both sincerity and correctness in ritual would cultivate his own moral nature and thus his spiritual power. (Confucius says very little about women and had no female students.)

The life of Confucius has been imagined in many ways. Sima Qian's *Shiji* has the first biography, presenting a man who made his difficult life harder by being a know-it-all who fairly consistently alienated people in power. According to Sima, Confucius was the illegitimate child of an elderly lower-level official in Lu, who learned who his father was only when his mother died. He spared no expense to bury his mother with his father, asserting his claim to be a low ranking aristocrat – a *shi* 士 – as his father had been. He managed to learn a lot about ritual, gathered some students, and got hired by one of the so-called "Three Families," ministerial families just about to usurp the power of the Duke of Lu, inventorying grain in the granary of the Ji clan and then managing their sheep and cows. For long years he travelled around to the neighboring states, seeking influence with both legitimate and illegitimate rulers –over the objections of his disciples to the latter. He was fired as often as he was hired.

Confucius's success in office came sometimes came from knowing all kinds of odd facts about the past; sometimes from his knowledge of ritual, still important to Zhou aristocrats (or they would not have bothered to abuse it); sometimes from hard-headed diplomacy; and sometimes from policies that benefitted the economy and brought order. At the age of 56, he became a local 'justice of the peace' in his home state, executed one of the usurpers, and began to turn Lu into an honest and thriving community. He was foiled on the brink of success by the rich and powerful neighboring state of Qi, which sent gifts of eighty beautiful girls and one hundred beautiful horses to the Duke of Lu. The gifts successfully distracted the entire court with sex and hunting, and Confucius quit in disgust. He retired for eight years to edit the Five Classics – says Sima Qian. In old age, Confucius acquired a little humility, learning to consult with his disciples and listen to others. He learned to care less about what others thought of him and to be at ease in just doing and teaching what he thought was right.[15]

Sima's Confucius was not an extraordinary person who perfectly embodied learning and morality from day one. He was a flawed mortal of relatively lowly status (like Sima Qian himself) who made plenty of mistakes of judgment and even of ethics, but who learned from his mistakes and from other people. He slowly cut and polished his own character, and taught others.

The Hundred Schools

Confucius and his disciples opened the door to theorizing in rational and ethical terms about governing and individual roles. Until about the time of Confucius, very few people even among aristocrats – mainly the scribal clans – were literate, and "texts" were transmitted orally. That is why the *Analects* record pieces of conversations, not extended considerations of complex philosophical questions. After the *Analects*, some schools produced longer essays. As they parlayed the new ease of writing into longer and more complex arguments, all later thinkers had to agree or disagree with Confucius (or both); they could not just ignore Confucian thought.

The "Hundred Schools" – meaning "schools of thought" or communities of like-minded thinkers – center on various "masters." Conventionally, we talk as if the different schools of thought were born dogmatically divided. But in the ancient intellectual world, as people freely debated a wide variety of questions, all schools drew on old texts, like the speeches of the early Zhou rulers and other texts that were being (at the same time) gathered into the Classics, and on stories of sage-kings and other mythical and historical figures. If one debater came up with a pithy anecdote, someone else would borrow it, perhaps to make a different point. The thinkers also shared knowledge of ritual and present-day politics, and their debates both drew on the distant past (real, imagined, or falsified) and were directed at current power struggles and conditions. We have only a fraction of what they wrote down, although new texts are being excavated, and still less of what they said.



Figure 2.7. A book written on bamboo strips, dating to the Warring States Period and held at the Shanghai Museum. The strips would have been tied together with a cord wrapping around each strip and its neighbor. In other cases, strips had holes punched at the top (or top and bottom) and were threaded together that way. The book is a Confucian discussion of the *Book of Odes*. Even if you can read Chinese characters, this might be hard for you! You can find what it says at the (Public Domain; Shanghai Museum via Wikipedia).

We conventionally attribute the writings of the Hundred Schools to single teachers or authors, like Confucius, Mencius, and Laozi. But like the Classics, they were composed or compiled by numerous people. As one historian explains, "It has long been recognized the most of the received classical texts from ancient China are composite texts that were built up in layers over decades or centuries, passing through the hands of numerous copyists, compilers, and editors, some of whom also fulfilled the role of pseudo-authors."[16] Each began as a collection of sayings or conversations or thoughts, put together by a group of people discussing and debating. Then someone who wanted to finalize the text and close the conversation, would invent an author (perhaps using the real name of a teacher), and tell of his death or departure. But often that did not succeed in finalizing the text, because the community was still thinking and talking. More stories would arise about the author, and they, along with more sayings and thoughts, might be incorporated into later versions of the text. This means that the author and the text were co-created by a community of thinkers, even if there was an actual teacher or author who started things off. Rather than the intentions of one person, the text reflects the shared understanding (including disagreements) of the group of like-minded people talking to (and about) each other, over time.[17] It is conventional to treat each text as written by or about one central figure.

The various schools of thought share the idea that a loyal minister is one who keeps reminding his lord of his flaws, preferring honesty that supports the long-term well-being of the state to flattery that supports the current lord's ego.[18] Confucius's disciple Mencius, in particular, comes across as unafraid to speak truth to power. Mencius also argued against another thinker, Mozi (c. 480-390), who explicitly opposed Confucians in several ways. First, Confucius had urged the nobles not to skimp on the rituals appropriate to their station, to carry them out fully; but he also criticized those who demanded too much grain from their subjects. Mozi pointed out that all the money spent on ritual came from the working people, so that these two aims were contrary. Funeral rituals and other kinds of ceremonies were just a waste, he thought; they should be cut back or ended. Second, the Confucians saw familial love as the foundation of morality. It was natural and right that a son should love his parents more than someone else's parents, and by nourishing that feeling through ritual he could extend his concern to other people's parents. Mozi saw family love as selfish: we should love everyone alike, not favoring our own children or parents. Finally, Confucius focused on the ethical development of the individual, and so each of his 70 or so disciples carried on his teachings in different veins, thinking for themselves. Mozi, on the other hand, did not value individuals. What mattered was the material good of society: peace, high population, plenty to eat.

Mozi was so committed to his message that he once walked for ten days and nights to stop a war, binding up his sore feet with strips torn from his robe as he walked. He demanded the same level of commitment from his followers. They all had to subscribe to the exact same doctrine, and follow the orders of a leader who assigned them to work for certain lords when the opportunity arose (often they specialized in defensive warfare). The leader taxed their official salaries and disciplined them to stick to the party line, even by death. Perhaps this is why Mozi's movement ultimately failed: smart people rarely like being bossed around. But Mozi's

ideas were influential: for instance, it was he who made the strongest argument for **meritocracy**: that that the most qualified man should be put in office.

Daoists opposed ritual on other grounds, but also opposed elevating worthy men to office. At least, those are the surface messages of the texts *Dao De Jing*, and *Zhuangzi*. The *Dao De Jing* (Classic of the Way and Power) is associated with a possibly mythical figure named Lao Dao and called Laozi, "Master Lao," or "Old Master." It contains many layers of material: poetry and prose, proverbs and rhymes. On the surface, its message seems political, or perhaps anti-political and pro-nature, but it is also an esoteric spiritual teaching about meditation and other practices. In the Warring States period, Daoist adepts pursued longevity and special powers like flight, whether into realms of alternative consciousness or real realms beyond the human. The *Zhuangzi* is more discursive, telling stories and making arguments.

Confucians, Daoists, and Mohists all opposed offensive war, the basic condition of their time. Even a thinker/school closely associated with war, Sunzi, argued that warfare was so destructive that it was best to gain one's end more cheaply if possible. But victory required knowing everything about a situation: the terrain, logistics, the weather, the capacities of troops and spies, but also how to manage psychological things like fear, punishment, and morale. The *Sunzi* makes great reading (find it on ctext.org) and was appreciated by military commanders at least since Cao Cao, who wrote its first surviving commentary as he gathered together the threads of leadership after the fall of Han in AD 202. Many of the Legalists, on the other hand, promoted warfare, but they enthusiastically echoed Sunzi's drive for information.

Legalism arose as a practical result of interstate competition. Guanzi, for instance, wrote about what kinds of information should be collected on working households to make the most of their labor. He included the directive to "Inquire about the men and women who possess skills: how many can be usefully employed to make sturdy equipment? How many unmarried women remain at home engaged in domestic labor?"[19] A book attributed to Qin advisor Lü Buwei recommended that state track "slaves, clothing, maps, bows, chariots, carts, boats, oxen, palaces, wine, wells, mortars (for grinding), physicians, and shamans," as well as omens.[20]

Legalism gathered theoretical strength in essays written by Xunzi (3rd century BC). A disciple of Confucius, Xunzi was criticized or neglected by later Confucians. He argued that rituals were not timeless expressions of the ways of heaven and earth; rather, they were manmade and purposely deployed by rulers. If rituals could be deployed for government, rather than valued for themselves, then other means of managing people could also be justified: laws and punishments. Laws and punishments were not new; what was new was the idea that they were the best, or only, way to create social order. Xunzi's student Han Feizi (d. 233 BC), who worked for Qin, wrote that the idea of governing by virtue and ritual was nonsense as the chaos of the times showed. The only way to keeps people in line is firm, unavoidable punishment for breaking the law. And the law is established not by precedent, like ritual; nor by agreement among high-ranking men; but only by a supreme ruler, set above all others. Punishment for breaking the law should be as certain as it is that molten gold will burn your hand.

The next chapter will show how Legalism contributed to bringing down the system that Confucius cherished, and recombining all the feudal domains into a new mode: the empire.



Figure 2.8. Belt hook in the shape of fantastic animal. Cast bronze inlaid with gold and silver. Third to second century BC. About 5½ inches long. Source: Metropolitan Museum. Public Domain.

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2.9: Sources

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[9] Shim, "A New Understanding of Kija Chosŏn as a Historical Anachronism."

[10] Shim, "A New Understanding of Kija Chosŏn as a Historical Anachronism," 297.

[11] Excavated tombs show how much the Rong and Di shared with Zhou, including spectacular burials of horses and chariots. http://www.kaogu.cn/en/Special_Events/Archaeology_Forum_2017/2018/0129/60889.html

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

3: From Warring States Two Empire (480 BC -207 BC)

3.1: From Bronze to Iron
3.2: Horses and Walls
3.3: The Feudal State of Qin Edit section
3.4: Shang Yang’s Legalist Policies in Qin
3.5: Iron and Water
3.6: Meritocracy and Bureaucracy
3.7: Taxation
3.8: Earned Social Rank
3.9: Surveillance and Law
3.10: Inventing Empire
3.11: The Information State
3.12: Sources

Thumbnail: Some of the clay soldiers in one pit at the tomb of the First Qin Emperor. The figures were mass produced, piece by piece. (Public Domain; Robin Chen via Wikipedia)

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3.1: From Bronze to Iron

Competition among the Zhou fiefs had reduced them from sixty or so to only twenty by 480 BC. By 300 BC, there were only seven large and a few small ones left. The dukes one after another took the title of “King.” No longer feudal domains, they were territorial states with clear boundaries demarcated by long walls – walls that were not even meant to stop the fighting. For the point of the territorial state was to acquire more land and labor, usually through war. From 535 BC until 286 BC the Zhou states saw 358 wars, more than one a year. Different large states – Wei, then Qi and Qin -- rose to the dominant position and then fell, while small states desperately maneuvered between the horizontal strategy (allying oneself with one great power) and the vertical strategy (many small states allying together). Meanwhile, members of the ruling class within each state quarreled more and more violently with one another. As the rulers built themselves enormous above-ground tombs, their earthly power far outstripped that of their kinfolk. Another complication was that in many domains, ministerial families usurped thrones, and lords hired talented knights instead of assigning government positions according to heredity.

The fiefs had become states, and the basics of war changed. Until about 500 BC, war ran on bronze weapons, chariots, and warriors organized by aristocratic clans, in armies no larger than several thousand soldiers. Late in the Warring States period Qi, Qin and Chu could each field a million men, and 100,000 to 200,000 soldiers might take part in a single battle. Chariots surrounded by foot soldiers were replaced with cavalry and huge infantry units, carefully ranked and with specialist commanders. Instead of compound bows there were deadly crossbows, along with swords. Instead of wounding an enemy, or chasing an army back, the objective was to kill.

Along with walls, iron, horses, and slaughter, another great change was the slow appearance of a new social rank: commoners. In the feudal system they had been only an unnamed residual category of no political importance, a motley array of serfs working on the Zhou aristocratic estates, sixth-generation feudal sons cast off by the aristocracy, people who had been living in the Zhou lands before the conquest, and incorporated Di and Rong people. Now the kings were courting them to work new lands in the counties, and serve in ever-larger armies of infantry. Commoners began – slowly – to emerge into political view. A key reason for their rise was that iron weapons could arm far more soldiers.



Figure 3.1. Knife with iron blade and hollow bronze handle, 1st millennium BC, mainland. Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public Domain.



Map showing the approximate border of the Qin empire at its height and places mentioned in the text, including the present-day region of Xinjiang and city of Chengdu for reference. Check the other places on the map against the text to be sure you understand where the capital and the other regions mentioned were. Can you spot the spelling error? (Hint: Zhou was wiped out in 256 BC.)

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3.2: Horses and Walls

Zhou lords had been raising horses to pull chariots for hundreds of years, as shown by spectacular burials that include up to 14 horse skeletons along with a chariot. But fighting from horseback is a completely different skill, developed later in world history. Warring States armies learned about cavalry from their northern neighbors, the Hu. These nomadic clans headed by mounted archers lived in the upper Ordos area (under the bump in the Yellow River). They first appear in Zhou records in 457 BC. The Hu sold or granted to the Zhou states horses, other animals, furs, and wine and millet made by the farming people they dominated. In return, Zhou states sent gold and silver items, belts with precious shells, pearls, sometimes a matched team of four horses, and silk. And women: as with relations between Zhou states, the exchange of wives signaled and solidified political alliance, for children would then be descended from both sides. Northern excavations have found gold plaques with characters recording their weight, and hoards of coins. The coins signal an extensive monetized trade, as the mounted aristocrats of both the Zhou and the Hu added control of trade and production to their rule by violence.

Zhou states were willing to pay for horses because they were the new war machines of the day. In 307 BC, the king of Zhao was expanding northwards. He wanted to train his armies in mounted archery, which meant wearing trousers instead of the traditional gown. When the aristocrats of Zhao objected to adopting foreign clothing, the king reminded first them of the long practice of deploying foreigners against other states, and second that sage-kings and former rulers had changed their ways to suit the times. Third, the Zhao king argued that it was not right to condemn other cultures – an important perspective, since the various Zhou states themselves were increasingly diverging in culture. Fourth, he argued that tools must fit the need; just as one uses boats on rivers, so to fight in hilly lands one needs horses. To implement his policy, he relied on northern locals in his new territory: men who knew neighboring nomads from trade and other interactions – and men who could ride. As cavalry warfare spread, the commercialized northern frontier, with horses to offer, became strategically important to its neighbors.

Both the Central States and non-Zhou tribes built long walls of packed earth. Closely hugging the high ground, the walls allowed soldiers to look far and wide for enemy movement. Large numbers of soldiers manned the walls, supported by garrisons (of which archaeologists have found evidence), roads and beacon stations, couriers and postal systems for communication. Contrary to the common view, the long walls did not mark a clear cultural boundary between steppe and sown (agricultural land), for there is plenty of steppe land, with nomadic sites, to the south of the walls, and some agriculture north of them. Nor were walls built to defend against invasions from the north. Yan, Zhao, and Qin built walls *after* they had expanded their states northwards, deep into nomad lands. The walls were forward offensive lines meant to hold new territory. Zhao, for instance, continued to expand beyond its wall, both as a matter of state policy and simply because soldiers raided for booty. Far from being effective defenses, walls enclosed new territory, and as territory grew, defense became more difficult.[1]

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3.3: The Feudal State of Qin Edit section

Qin was one of the expanding Zhou border states. Its history falls into four stages, hazier the further back we go, of course: early origins; as a Zhou feudal domain (800-380 BC); as a rising state beginning in 384-338 BC under Dukes Xian and Xiao and culminating in its defeat of all the other states in 221 BC; and as ruler of the unified empire for fifteen years.

The Qin ruling family (surnamed Ying) may have begun as eastern supporters of the remnant Shang rebellion against Zhou right after 1045 BC, who were then exiled out West. Or they may originally have come from the western Rong people. They may have claimed they were descended from high ancestors (*di*) who had served sage-kings Shun and Yu, and the Shang dynasty. Both texts and archaeological finds have been interpreted to support all these views.

Whatever their start point, the Qin lords were enfeoffed along the western edge of the Zhou world in about 771 BC, after wresting the area "within the passes" from the Rong and Di tribes who had invaded the Zhou capital. The Zhou king entrusted them with fending off further attacks from the west. That meant they controlled the route to Sichuan, which as we shall see underlay their final victory. Sima Qian treats Qin mainly as barbarians themselves, but the material record shows that they were fully a part of the Zhou ritual-cultural world. The dukes of Qin intermarried with the Zhou royal house: a bronze vessel excavated in the 1980s recorded authoritative speeches by a Zhou royal princess who married Duke Xian of Qin in about 700 BC. Relations were close; even after Zhou kings had ceased making royal inspection visits elsewhere, they continued to visit Qin. Qin demonstrated its adherence to Zhou ritual norms by retaining the shapes and sets of its bronze vessels.

But Qin dukes also developed their own burial customs: they replaced real bronze vessels with miniature versions in other materials for grave goods, and made up for this parsimony by building much bigger tombs than other feudal lords. One of the excavated Qin ducal tombs included the bones of 186 human victims, 20 with no coffins (some of these also had no heads), 94 with small coffins, and 72 with large coffins. Those with coffins may have been killed by poison, since their hair contained high levels of arsenic and mercury.[2] That scale of ritual human sacrifice, including the probable murder of people high-ranking enough to merit their own big coffins, suggests that the dukes of Qin exerted an impressive degree of control.

They expressed their confidence in words. An excavated Qin bronze tureen cast perhaps around 600 BC has an inscription inside it that says:

> The Duke of Qin said: "Greatly illustrious were my ancestors. They received Heaven's Mandate and tranquilly dwelt in [sage-king] Yu's tracks… They reverently respected and greatly revered Heaven's Mandate, protected and regulated their [domain of] Qin, and vigilantly cared for the Man [non-Chinese] and the Xia [Zhou-world people]."[3]

No other state made such a claim to centrality. In standard ideological terms, the Mandate was held by the Zhou royal house, not by its vassal lords in the domains. Qin's cockiness may have come from its easily defensible position in the west, similar to that of Zhou when it planned its conquest of Shang. In time, Qin created a society totally organized for war, and one that weakened the aristocrats below the dukes to a previously unimaginable extent.



Figure 3.2. Seventeenth-century rubbing of an inscription by a Qin duke, c. 450 BC, on the Ten Stone Drums, recording a successful hunt. Can you read it? Source: Metropolitan Museum. Public Domain.

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3.4: Shang Yang's Legalist Policies in Qin

The key figure in reorganizing the Qin state and society for war and against aristocracy was Legalist thinker Shang Yang (d. 338 BC), a Wey prince who had worked for Wei and then immigrated to Qin. There were other reformers before and after him, but his biography in the *Shi ji* and the record of policies in *The Book of Lord Shang* most clearly illustrate key changes. Duke Xian (r. 384-362 BC) appointed him Chief Minister of Qin. All other schools of thought looked back to an ideal distant past, but like other Legalists, Shang Yang rejected taking the past as a model. Shang Yang pointed to evidence in the Classics that as conditions had changed in the past, so had institutions: that the sage-kings Yao and Shun had different institutions from the Zhou kings, for instance. He told Duke Xian, "A wise man creates laws, but a worthless man is controlled by them; a man of talent reforms rituals, but a worthless man is enslaved by them." The Duke let Shang Yang totally reorganize the Qin state to increase ducal power.

Shang Yang drew on practices that had been developing in Qin and other states, on the new possibilities of iron technology, and on Legalist ideas, to overturn the feudal order in Qin and create a **bureaucratic** state and social structure. His reforms undermined, abolished, and destroyed the Zhou feudal aristocracy in the state of Qin and then everywhere else. They increased the control of revenue and labor of the Qin King and his central government. They finalized the creation of a new class, commoners, who were no longer serfs on feudal estates, but worked their own small farms. And they introduced meritocracy, which made it possible for those ordinary people to win honor, wealth, and even power based on effort and talent. The Qin regime's power came precisely from its commoners, who served as soldiers and laborers.[4] Would-be autocrats across East Asia returned again and again to the strategy of recruiting lower ranking people to work in government, in order to circumvent high-ranking men and women with sufficient social clout to oppose the ruler. Socially weaker people were more likely than aristocrats to obey the ruler and serve his interests.

As I present Shang Yang's reforms, I will also glance back at their longer-term origins. After 221 BC, Qin promulgated bureaucracy across the Zhou world to create the unified empire. Shang Yang's reforms provided a model for all subsequent East Asian governance.

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3.5: Iron and Water

First, technology and production. The critical technological factor in the intensifying warfare of the period from about 500 to 200 BC was iron. Bronze is made of mainly of copper, which is relatively easy to extract and work. Iron is harder to get at than copper, and melts at a higher temperature, so it postdates bronze in human technological history. But it is much more common in the earth, so once the technology was developed, it meant that more people could have metal tools and weapons. Ironworking first came to Central Asia in about 1000 BC (and reached Africa about the same time).[5] Small iron objects have been excavated from today's Xinjiang in the far west of China from about 900 BC, and iron-smelting had come to Zhou lands by about 800 BC. After about 400 BC, iron replaced bronze in weaponry, and was used for tools. Iron was cheaper and tougher than bronze. It meant higher productivity of land and labor: that is, fewer people could grow more grain on the same amount of land, cut down trees more quickly, and so on. Iron tools meant that the population of commoners grew, and more soldiers could be fed; iron weapons meant that more soldiers could be armed. Both developments contributed to the increasing warfare of the time.

Qin was, in archaeologist Arthur Cotterell's words, "exceptionally apt" at picking up and promulgating the production and use of iron, as well as other technology.[6] In 350, Qin moved its capital eastwards to Xianyang, right in the center of the Guanzhong plain, and encouraged people to clear new farmland and create irrigation canals.[7] Key to Qin's conquest were the work of laborers and the brains of an engineer, Li Bing. As a Qin official in Sichuan, from about 250- 240 BC, Li Bing persuaded Sichuan natives and Qin colonists to construct a remarkable irrigation system in which a levee divided the Min river into two halves. One of the two streams acted as a flood channel and carried boat traffic; the other branched into numerous small streams and canals that carried water into a network of thousands of tiny irrigation ditches. Li harnessed a natural force to push water through the irrigation system: he knew that where a river bends, the water on the outside of the curve will travel faster than on the inside. The system, now called Dujiangyan, turned the Sichuan basin around Chengdu into a bread basket that fueled the Qin conquest and is still working today.

Dujiangyan requires annual upkeep by the families and communities of the area, but compared with its benefits the work is minimal, and it has been done century after century. In the Han period (in 2 CE), because the system made the area so wealthy, more people lived in Chengdu than anywhere else except the imperial capital, Chang'an. One source listed Chengdu's products in the Han period:

> The earth grows the five grains; the sacrificial victims include all six domestic animals. Mulberry trees, silkworms, hemp, ramie, fish, salt, bronze, iron, cinnabar, lacquer, tea, and honey; the divine turtle, the great rhinoceros, long tailed pheasant, silver pheasant; shimmering golden fabrics and bright cosmetics – all these they offer as tribute."[8]

A twelfth-century scholar marveled at the prosperity Li Bing's system still brought the Chengdu plain:

> There are grand houses in the City of Pi; every house has running water and tall bamboo… There are thousands of big bamboos, dripping thick and green… Early in the morning I made a brief stop at Ande Town… In one direction the river divides and flows into all the [irrigation] ditches with a thunderous sound, curling up like snow, as the beautiful fields fill the eyes.[9]

Because of Sichuan's wealth, it often became a kingdom unto itself as imperial dynasties faltered. The system still feeds people now. It rebounded from destruction in the 1640s and the Great Leap Forward in the 1950s, but present-day urbanization and larger farms are challenging its health. The Dujiangyan system gave Qin, a northern state, access to southern rice with which to feed its many soldiers, armed with iron.

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3.6: Meritocracy and Bureaucracy

Second, Shang Yang replaced the inheritance of state power with *meritocratic* recruitment. The idea that the best man for a government job should be chosen for it, rather than a person being born with the right to hold a certain government position was not entirely new. Early Zhou Mandate of Heaven propaganda, for instance, claimed that Heaven chose King Wen and King Wu to replace the wicked Shang King Chow because of their merit. Although appointment by heredity was the norm, within the Zhou royal domains (not out in the fiefs) an elite man might be appointed to a government post based on his ability, and promoted on the basis of his accomplishments. As the feudal lords developed their domains economically and their regimes politically, they drew on low-ranking knights who had good ideas to offer them. But most Zhou political power was inherited. It was revolutionary to follow Mozi's idea that the ruler should reject his kin and other aristocrats, and select totally unrelated, perhaps not even noble, men to govern.

Third, the new meritocratically-recruited personnel staffed a new kind of state structure. *Bureaucracy* replaced feudalism. Feudal lords had mainly ruled their domains as they saw fit, unless the Zhou king had specifically forbidden something, and they passed their domains on to their sons. Bureaucrats (or officials), by contrast, could do only what the ruler or his laws specifically instructed. Officials served for limited terms and their descendants did not inherit their positions. Bureaucracy had been invented in the rich and powerful middle-Yangzi area (Hunan) state of Chu. By about 500 BC, in areas he had just conquered, the Chu king had set up 130 units conceived of as "hanging" (*xian*) from the basic feudal structure: ruled differently from most of Chu under its feudal lord, but not replacing their feoffs. The king of Chu wanted to draw as much grain and military service as possible from the free people (i.e., not serfs) living in the area, so instead of enfeoffing his kinsfolk there, he set magistrates over the people for only short periods. He recruited them from among the knights (*shi*) who did not have their own land, and dismissed or executed them if they disobeyed him. Much easier than punishing a high-ranking lord with his own land and warriors!

Other states adopted counties too. Counties enhanced royal power and eroded the power of other feudal clans in three ways. First, they reorganized land the feudal lord took away from aristocratic clans who lost factional battles at court. Second, under the management of knights empowered as county magistrates, counties produced grain and supplied labor directly to the king. By about 350, knights held about two-thirds of the offices in the various states; since they did not have their own land, they could be put in charge of counties. Third, commoners could be lured away from the feudal estates by promises that they would be taxed but not required to do additional labor, or even that their county land would be tax-exempt for a certain time. In fact, some commoners worked their way up into the knightly class – for this period Li Feng translates the term *shi* as "man of service" to stress that the knights' developed a shared moral commitment to administration and a shared sense of identity. Confucius came from the *shi* rank, and some of his *shi* disciples, like Zengzi, began as commoners. When young, Zengzi grew melons.[10]

Shang Yang expanded the Chu model. He organized all of Qin territory into counties (*xian*), each headed by a magistrate responsible directly to the Qin ruler. Magistrates had to follow Qin laws and administrative regulations, and they served in each place for only a short term, nor did they pass the job on to their sons. Officials managed population registration and taxation, military affairs, and justice – settling disputes and strictly punishing crimes according to the law. The center appointed, dismissed, promoted, or demoted them based on their performance. (Needless to say, the system was not carried out precisely as it appeared on the books. No system is.) Officials replaced the Qin aristocracy in government as ministers, high officers, and advisors, too. After the conquest, Qin put into practice the "law of avoidance," which prohibited officials from serving in their home areas. The law of avoidance and frequent transfers assured that an official would neither favor his relatives nor be able to use his position to build up a power base that could threaten the throne. After the conquest, some counties were also grouped into commanderies that dealt with military conscription.

This Chu and Qin invention, called the commandery-county (*junxian* 郡縣) system, became the cornerstone organizing principle of the Chinese government, carried on by later dynasties in different ways but on the same principles, and adopted by other East Asian regimes as their kings centralized. When Zhou fell, monarchy continued and even gained in strength, but administration purely by those born to a certain rank was over, and some commoners even had a chance hold power as government officials. For the time being…

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3.7: Taxation

Fourth, along with the implementation of meritocratic personnel recruitment and bureaucratic state structure came new fiscal policies. Shang Yang completed a new way for the state to collect resources from society. His reforms claimed all land in the Qin state for the Qin

King. Taking away the aristocratic estates, he measured every foot of farmland, and cut farmland up into uniform parcels, just large enough to support one nuclear family (about 5 acres). A grid of footpaths marked the boundaries between them. He took a census, counting and registering the entire population, and gave out the small parcels of land to farming families as their private property. This destroyed the economic base of noble power and set up the foundation for a new fiscal arrangement between state and society: taxation.

Former serfs became taxpaying "commoners," and were granted surnames. The term "hundred surnames" (百姓), which had earlier referred to the aristocracy as a whole, now meant taxpaying commoners. Each family received the amount of land that one adult male could work, with an adult female partner to manage other household production. Qin farmers were not permitted to sell their land. The state remained active in many areas of production, including keeping some agricultural land that was worked by convicts for the state directly, and managing markets for buying and selling goods. Each married couple owed duties in return for their land: labor service and military service, tax in grain (about 10% of the harvest – the husband's responsibility) and tax in cloth (the wife's responsibility.) If there were two adult sons, Shang Yang first required that one set up on his own; later, he required that even just one adult son leave his parents' house. (Daughters normally married out.) Families that insisted on staying together owed double the tax on each adult. (Excavated texts show that some adult fathers and sons *did* continue to live together, however.) Property was divided among all sons.

In this system, farmers with small holdings gained a kind of autonomy. They were citizens themselves, not serfs on feudal estates. But empowering them and dignifying them was not the aim. Rather, smallholders like this were easier to control than the feudal nobility with their many relatives and great estates, and the amount of grain, cloth, and labor available to the Qin government increased.

Excavated Qin population registers list names, marital status, and the labor service owed by the household head. They list the names of the wife, children, and slaves. Initially, the heights of men were listed to determine whether they owed military service, but as the documentary record built up, ages were listed. Registers also recorded household clothing, tools, and animals, how big the house was, and whether the roof was tiled. In ideal Legalism, recorded in *The Book of Lord Shang*, women were also subject to military conscription, but Qin apparently conscripted women only for labor. Ordinary people now contributed directly to the state.

As Qin conquered more territory, it gradually took in and then displaced local elites, turning them and their subjects into taxpayers. The process had to be gradual, because to meet resistance with overwhelming force would be to undermine the tax base. Negotiation meant variation. For instance, as Qin expanded in Sichuan, it put one local clan in charge of all the people there, and Qin women were sent to intermarry with this lordly Ba clan and begin a process of cultural mingling. The Ba clan had to pay Qin 2,016 copper cash every year and an additional 8,200 cash every three years (the latter was called a "loyalty tax"). But this was not a feudal system, for each household of commoners also paid taxes directly to Qin: 82 feet of a local kind of cloth, and chicken feathers. (How many chicken feathers? The weight of 30 arrowheads.[11]) Gradually, but never completely, local powers and cultures melded with imperial culture.

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3.8: Earned Social Rank

Fifth, along with creating a tax base of smallholders, reforms changed the social hierarchy. Since at least the time of Confucius, around 500 BC, the feudal ranking system had been challenged, as ministerial families took over dukedoms and high-official families took over ministerial slots. People claimed ranks and privileges to which they were not entitled. But now Shang Yang in Qin systematically eliminated aristocracy altogether (except for the royal family). Each man in the whole population was assigned to one of 17 ranks, based on military service. Footsoldiers began at the bottom rank. Cutting off one enemy head in battle earned a one-step rank promotion and five acres of land. A soldier who surrendered to the enemy, if recaptured, would be executed. All his property would be confiscated. Each earned rank came with privileges – the right to wear certain clothes, additional land and houses, the right to hold a number of convict slaves to work the land.

But unlike feudal rank, these social ranks came with no political authority, nor were they permanent. The central government could demote a person, or someone convicted of a crime one could trade in a level of rank to avoid punishment. Sons inherited rank at least one degree lower, and inherited rank was more steeply reduced for higher ranks. The only exception was that if a man died heroically in battle, his eldest son would inherit not only his rank but his promotion for that battle. In peacetime, a higher rank could be earned based on how much grain and cloth one produced for the state. Rank still formed a part of people's conception of state and society, but social rank and political rank were severed, and family and individual rank were almost severed. Meritocracy was challenging the aristocratic idea that some families were just better than others.

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3.9: Surveillance and Law

Sixth. Taxation and labor duties formed one major nexus of interaction between state and society; earned social rank another; and Qin further built on earlier practices in the states to create new arrangements for state control over population and crime. The warring states had developed written laws (some have been excavated, written on strips of bamboo), legal processes, concern with accurate records of population, etc. Each county magistrate in most states had to submit an annual report, carved on a wooden block, that included field measurements; numbers of people of each age, generation, and occupation; granary holdings; and the details of security arrangements. These reports were not used only to control the working population, but also to monitor the weather and harvest. The Qin *Statutes on Agriculture* decreed:

> Whenever the rain is beneficial and affects the grain in ear, a report in writing is to be made concerning the favored crop and the grain in ear, as well as the acreage of cultivated fields and areas without crops. Whenever it rains when the crop is already fully grown, the quantity of rain and acreage affected should still be reported in writing. Likewise, in cases of drought and violent wind or rain, floods, or hordes of grasshoppers or other creatures that damage the crops, the acreage concerned is always to be reported in writing. Nearby commanderies: have lightfooted runners deliver the letter! Distant commanderies: have the courier service deliver it! – by the end of the eighth month.[12]

Reporting also closely monitored officials. The state structure included supervisors and inspectors, and standards of salary (in kind, not in cash), promotion, and demotion. In theory, Qin officials had to report in detail every single thing they did. Excavated (preserved) primary sources show that four separate signatures were required for grain coming *in* to a granary.

The Zhou king's control had stopped with the feudal lords, but the Qin central government aimed to control each individual citizen, making everyone adhere to the same code of law. Even before Shang Yang, Qin had put people into mutual responsibility groups, called "groups of five." They were responsible for watching one another, and reporting crimes in the group. This was a war on crime – as Sima Qian explains of Shang Yang's reforms:

> 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. Anyone who actively hid a criminal would be treated the same as one who surrendered to the enemy.

(Do you remember the reward for a head and the punishment for surrender?) People had to request official permission to move or change their occupation. Merchants, because they moved around and did not produce, were highly suspect, and Qin registered merchants and deported them from towns to serve as soldiers on the frontiers.

Was Qin really able to control people this closely? Not in every case – there was a lot of variation in practice, as always. But the level of control was impressive. For instance, travelers were required to show identification at a number of points along the roads, and actual travel permits for Qin citizens have now been excavated, including one for a five-year-old. Excavated tax accounts show that local headmen tracked exactly whether each group of 2-5 households had paid taxes and done their labor service, along with how much of the tax in hay they had paid in cash instead of in kind. Population registers were so widespread and effective that they entered the realm of religion: gods tracked the deeds of the living and the souls of the dead.

Qin punishments were harsh. They included death by boiling in a cauldron, and bodily mutilations such as cutting off the nose, branding the head, tattooing the face, and removing ribs. One could be flogged for littering in the streets of the capital. A person's relatives were held guilty alongside him, as were his "group of five" if they had not reported his crime. Another punishment was penal servitude, which provided a lot of labor for the state; one register from the year 213, after the conquest contains a list of 4,376 bondservants in one place, male and female. Such state violence was brutal, indeed.

But besides harshness, there is another side to Qin law that underlines the revolutionary nature of the reforms. First, the laws were the same for everyone (except the royal family), former aristocrat and commoner alike. Second, the legal process aimed at fairness and impartiality. That is confirmed by laws and regulations written on bamboo strips have recently been excavated from Qin graves.[13] Third, Qin law valued human life. Unfilial behavior was a capital crime, but so was maiming or killing a child. That makes sense: parents and children were both state assets. Likewise, Qin edicts express values like 'caring for the people' and protecting them from too much state exploitation, and values like 'sincerity' and 'benevolence' appear in officials' seal-names. Even the Legalist Qin needed the idea of virtue to hold the system together. We will see that no regime can last long without *both* organization *and* ideology.

When the Duke Xian of Qin, Shang Yang's patron, died in 338, the nobles' bitter hatred for Shang Yang erupted. They accused him of making trouble for the state and he fled. He sought shelter for the night in a tiny backwoods inn. The innkeeper did not recognize him, but turned him away: the new laws set up by Lord Shang, he said, forbade admitting a man without a travel permit… Shang Yang raised troops from his own estate to oppose the central armies he had worked so hard to build up, but he was defeated. His corpse was tied to four chariots and torn apart as the horses were driven in opposite directions, and his entire family was killed.

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3.10: Inventing Empire

The Zhou order had worked through the King sharing honor and authority with the feudal lords. As Qin adopted Legalist policies and relied on commoners, aristocrats were still in power across the rest of the Zhou world, overseeing reforms that were similar, but less radical. Their values were slow to change. Among other things, they tended to fight in such a way that they and their opponents could live to fight another day. As a Duke of Song, according to the *Zuo Commentary*, explained when refusing to attack enemy forces fording a river, "A gentleman does not inflict a second wound. He does not capture those with graying hair… I will not drum to attack when they have not drawn up ranks." Defeated armies went home, and defeated states were not wiped out. The cohesion of the ruling class sharing authority was still strong. It took a second key advisor to change that, and invent the unified, centralized empire.

Fan Sui (d. 255 BC) came to Qin from the state of Qi to work as an advisor to the Qin rulers. It was he who energized them to follow through on their aim of uniting all the Zhou states. Fan insisted on direct royal rule, he attacked every attempt to parcel out new territory as fiefs instead of counties, he insisted on constant expansion, he developed professional troops to supplement the conscripts and replace all aristocratic soldiers, – and he demanded that Qin not only seize territory, but also kill people. No longer content to win battles, Qin slaughtered defeated soldiers. At the battle of Changping in 260 BC, for instance, Qin forces supposedly killed 400,000 Zhao soldiers. That may be an exaggeration, but the policy made conquest final. The Qin duke, now calling himself "king," aimed at being the supreme ruler – the only man in all the states with a hereditary right to rule. Supreme rulership was built both on the productive and military labor of the common people, as organized by Shang Yang, and on their pitiless slaughter, instigated by Fan Sui.

The Qin war machine gobbled up one state after another, "as a silkworm devours a mulberry leaf," in the words of Sima Qian. In 256 Qin, shockingly, took over the tiny remaining Zhou royal domain. King Zheng, the "tiger of Qin" led his forces to victory after victory, bringing down the state of Hann in 230 BC, Zhao in 228, and Wei in 225 BC. In 223, he defeated his most impressive rival, the southern state of Chu; the northern state of Yan fell in 222; and with the fall of Qi the next year, the new empire was complete. King Zheng credited his ancestors with his victory and began a grand ancestral cult to them. Qin had won the arms race by relying on iron and water, destroying the feudal system, creating meritocracy and bureaucracy, and registering every bit of data it could; and now it had created the empire.

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3.11: The Information State

Having created the empire by organization and force, Qin further took control of the economy of all the former Zhou domains. The whole country was divided up into commanderies and counties. Land was measured. Every family was registered, put into a mutual-responsibility group, ranked, and given land to provide labor, military service, grain, hay and animal fodder, and cloth to the state. Recommendation processes drew competent men in to serve the state, and the former aristocrats were stripped of their titles. The central state took control of the means of production, including iron foundries, mines, all kinds of workshops, forests, and pastures for herds. It controlled labor directly, as well as through the small households, by sentencing criminals to 1-6 years of hard labor: construction for men, husking and grinding grain for women, farming for both. It controlled animal labor, creating huge stud farms and registering ownership of all animals. Local officials were not allowed to let animals graze on private land, but people were also not permitted to cut wood in forests or hunt in game preserves owned by the state.

The Empire was a new kind of political organization, with a new social and fiscal base. It required new forms of ideology and legitimation reaching new audiences. Qin is often said to have "burned all the books" and to have buried scholars alive, but this is not accurate. In accordance with the Legalist doctrine that only the emperor can determine right and wrong, the Qin did limit free discussion and outlaw some books. At the suggestion of his advisor Li Si, the First Emperor required that privately-held copies of the *Book of Odes*, the *Book of Documents*, and the various philosophers' works be burned. Scholars who continued to talk about them – especially to criticize Qin – would be executed. The aim was to deny scholars an appeal to an external moral standard to criticize the emperor. Li Si, therefore, specifically exempted from destruction the historical annals of Qin itself, agricultural manuals, books on divination and medicine. Even outlawed books were carefully preserved in the imperial library for scholars were working for the emperor to consult them; students could learn from these official scholars. (The real destruction of the written record of the past came in the civil war at the end of Qin, when the imperial library was burned.)

Instead of primarily limiting knowledge, historian Charles Sanft has argued that Qin's focus was on creating a new knowledge. Qin worked hard to communicate to everyone that a new kind of authority was running a new kind of polity. That knowledge could create cooperation, as more and more people expected of one another that they would act in accordance with knowledge of the powerful center. As we look at some Qin policies, what appears is, first, that Qin drew on and revised some older forms of ritual display aimed at the elite to communicate with the whole public; and second, that some policies can be interpreted both as practical and as contributing to communication with the public. How did the Qin undertake to turn its power based on violence and surveillance into widely-accepted authority?

First, the First Emperor toured the empire to display, not himself as the Shang kings had done (for he worried, with reason, about being assassinated), but his vast entourage to as many people as possible. He stopped at old sacred places to offer sacrifices, again to impress and win the support of both the humans and the spirits of the territory. By sacrificing at Mount Tai, he carried out what are known as the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices to claim the support of Heaven (*Tian*) – but outside of Mandate theory, because he claimed that his empire would last forever. But in addition to these kinds of propaganda efforts, the first Qin emperor made changes to the landscape he passed through *just to change things* – he knocked down walls and built new altars just to make people sit up and take notice, and talk about the change, irrespective of any rational argument about whether the new government was good or bad, divinely supported or not.

Second, Qin initiated grand building projects, even grander than the tombs of the late feudal lords and pre-conquest Qin. Laborers were forced to build enormous palaces in the capital, Xianyang, as well as the famous tomb of the First Emperor. The capital city was designed as a microcosm, a copy of the whole universe: the palace was shaped like the Big Dipper, and enormous statues made of the metal of the weapons of the conquered states stood in for the constellations (some scholars argue that they were inspired by Greek statuary). To symbolize all places on earth, the former feudal aristocratic families, stripped of their rank and privileges, were moved to replicas of their former palaces, built in the Qin capital.



Figure 3.3. Some of the clay soldiers in one pit at the tomb of the First Qin Emperor. The figures were mass produced, piece by piece. Photo by Niall Chithelen, 2019. Public Domain.

Some construction projects tied the whole empire together, such as canals, and 4,000 miles of roads. Carts were required to have a standard axle length, so that the ruts in the road would be appropriate for all (like having a standard gauge for railroads). Archaeologists recently found two enormous wooden Qin-era bridges over the Wei river in the middle of the Qin capital of Xianyang, each 300 yards long and 200 yards across. Roads, bridges, and canals seem purely practical, and the feudal lords had built plenty of them to speed their messengers and soldiers on their way. But Qin roads also communicated. Some were walled or elevated – the emperor could move on them without being seen, but their presence put him in everyone's mind. "The Direct Road" ran six hundred miles from Xianyang out to a site sacred to the Qin's greatest enemy, the Xiongnu in the northwest; but its name also advertised that Qin followed the "straight way," – the ideal of fairness to all. Finally, the 4,250 miles of roads going in all directions from the Qin capital, made of packed-down earth and carried over trestles and bridges where necessary, each had three or five lanes. The outside lanes were for the public, going in opposite directions; the next two for officials. A person who used the wrong part of the road would be banished and his cart and ox or horse confiscated. The lane down the middle (as you have probably guessed) was reserved for the emperor: even when he was *not* travelling on the road, he would be present in people's consciousness.

Third, Qin created another kind of public text. A tiny number of people saw the Shang oracle bones; Zhou bronze inscriptions were read aloud to a larger group of elite family members. Now, enormous stones and even mountainsides were inscribed with long texts praising the Qin emperor. One scholar describes them as inside-out bronze vessels.

Fourth, the first Qin emperor, King Zheng of Qin, needed a new title, so as not to be just one of the kings. The word we translate as "emperor" is *huangdi* 皇帝. *Huang* means "shining" or "august, elevated," and *di* – remember? – originally referred to the Shang ancestors as a group and then to a high god, sometimes equivalent to "Heaven." Calling himself "Shining Di" or "Splendid Di" meant that the Qin emperor was a kind of super-Daoist adept, who could bring order to the universe. One mountain inscription says: 皇帝明德經理宇內 "The bright potency of the Splendid Di aligns and arranges all within the universe."[14]

Fifth, over the long Zhou period each state had developed its own coinage, writing, laws and customs, and language. Now Qin – it is said – created a uniform script, with no regional variants permitted; a uniform coinage; uniform law; and uniform weights and measures. But Qin was not able to impose a uniform currency before it collapsed.[15] Samples of Qin writing show that characters varied quite a lot, although scholars disagree on whether the differences are only such as we find with different fonts.[16] Different fonts – different fonts – different fonts. Old systems of measurement may have persisted locally, but the hundreds of excavated Qin weights and measures are indeed fairly uniform: even when made in different materials they vary only a little. Still, there was more to it than that. Every single measuring scoop and every single weight, whether made of bronze, iron, or pottery, is inscribed:

> In the 26th year of his reign, the emperor completely unified all the various feudal lords of everything under the sky. The black-headed ones (i.e. the common people) found great peace. He established the title "emperor." Now he commands Chancellors Zhuang 狀 and Wan 綰: "As for the laws and units of measurement that are different or doubtful, clarify and unify all of them."[17]

Charles Sanft concludes that the inscription was the main point of the widely-dispersed weights and measures. The new state wanted everyone to know that it was in charge, that it was in charge everywhere, and that its officials carried out its laws, the same everywhere.



Figure 3.4. Rubbing of the inscription on a Qin imperial weight, translated above. Fair Use.

The bronze plaques affixed to the weights were cast in clay molds. With molds, only one person in any workshop making these plaques had to be able to write, to create the clay mold in the first place. In fact, if you look carefully, you can see that the workers must have stamped the words into the clay molds. (Find the clue to that before you turn the page, then look for the *.) If they first cast a bronze stamp or seal, even those who made the clay molds to cast the plaques did not need to be able to write. They only had to keep the stamps in order. This plaque would have needed 10 seals (can you see why?), so I guess that they were numbered 1 to 10 on the handle of the stamp. Molds and stamps increase standardization and were widely used in decoration of bronze vessels late in the Warring States period and to decorate Han tombs.

Indeed, stamps are a simple form of printing, which would not be invented for another eight centuries or so.*

Qin had successfully ended centuries of bloody warfare to create a unified empire in which – even without printing – the central government knew of every person, and every person knew of the central government. What could possibly go wrong?

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3.12: Sources

[1] di Cosmo, *Ancient China and its Enemies*, chapter 4, pp. 128-153.

[2] Thanks to Yanxing Liu for these specifics. She cites Huang Zhanyue 黃展越, 古代人牲人殉通論 (*On Ancient Chinese Immolation*). The royal palace in the state of Qin, inhabited for nearly 300 years, the Dazheng palace, was also discovered by archaeologists in 2012, so we may learn more soon.

[3] Li Feng, *Early China*, 234-35

[4] Lander, "Environmental China and the Rise of the Qin Empire," 252.

[5] Camara, *Is There a Distinctively African Way of Knowing?*, 9.

[6] Cotterell, *The First Emperor of China*.

[7] Lander, "Environmental China and the Rise of the Qin Empire," 243-6.

[8] Translated in Kleeman, *Great Perfection*, pp. 119-120, note 15.

[9] Quoted in Whiting, "A Long View of Resilience in the Chengdu Plain, China," p. 261.

[10] Li Feng, *Early China*, 171-75.

[11] From *Hou Han Shu*, quoted in Kleeman, *Great Perfection*, p. 119, note 14.

[12] Hulsewé, *Remnants of Ch'in Law*, first page of the translation.

[13] Sanft, "Notes on Penal Ritual and Subjective Truth under the Qin."

[14] Sima Qian, *Shi ji* 6/241; Puett, *To Become a God*, 225.

[15] Von Glahn, *The Economic History of China*, 99-100.

[16] Galambos, "The Myth of the Qin Unification of Writing in Han Sources" and Charles Sanft, personal communication.

[17] Sanft, *Communication and Cooperation*, 59, but my translation based on his.

*

I hypothesize that the straight lines and corners here were left by the edges of stamps used to stamp the characters into the clay molds. Each seal apparently held four characters.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

4: The Han Empire and Its Neighbors

4.1: The Fall of Qin
4.2: From Commoner to Emperor
4.3: Empresses
4.4: The Bureaucracy
4.5: Commoners
4.6: Enslaved People
4.7: The Silk Roads and the Xiongnu War
4.8: Outflanking the Xiongnu on the East
4.9: The Han Commanderies
4.10: Early Proto-states in the Peninsula + Manchuria
4.11: The Yayoi Period on the Archipelago
4.12: Source

Thumbnail: Han bronze mirror with diagram of cosmos. Outermost rim: the waves of the cosmic ocean; inside that is the circular heaven, with the animals of the four directions around the square earth. The “TLV” markings – see them? – also appear in the game of liubo. Source: Metropolitan Museum. Public Domain.

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4.1: The Fall of Qin

With the Iron Age, the common people burst onto the stage of history. The Qin had built its power on the sheer number of soldiers its farmers could feed, as well as on its willingness to kill the soldiers of opposing armies. It named, armed, and granted land and rank to the common people, creating a new social force to support the emperor. It contributed to the world the Legalist idea that the state was a public possession, and a bureaucratically-organized government to realize that idea.

After the death of the First Qin Emperor, laborers in Chu rebelled. Prime Minister Li Si (c. 280-208 BC), a long-time advisor, warned the Second Emperor:

> The reason for all this rebellion is the bitter burden of garrison duty, building and transport service, and heavy taxation. We propose calling a halt to the work on the Apang Palace, and reducing transport duties and garrison service."

The Second Emperor replied:

> According to Han Feizi, "[Sage-kings] Yao and Shun neither polished their oak rafters nor trimmed their thatched hut, and they ate and drank from earthen bowls, so that no gatekeeper could have lived more frugally. When [sage-king] Yu cut a channel... to let the Yellow River flow to the ocean, he carried his tools himself, and worked till he rubbed all the hair off his legs. No slave could have toiled harder."
>
> But what is splendid about possessing an empire is being able to do as you please and satisfy your desires. [As I learned from Han Feizi] By stressing and clarifying the laws, a ruler can stop his subjects from doing evil and so control the land within the seas. If rulers like Shun and Yu, exalted as the Son of Heaven, have to lead poor, arduous lives to set an example to the people, what use are laws?

The Second Emperor has misinterpreted Legalism to mean he can do whatever he wants. Even the old lords of the Warring States had had to make allowances for the popular temper and grant grain and money to desperate producers. They were called "loans," but no repayment was expected. Qin, too lent grain, draft animals, tools, money, and slaves to farmers. But driven by a new reality created by its obsessive accounting, its tracking of everything, Qin demanded repayment. Even convicts were punished if they broke state tools. Poor families suffered, and turned against the state. Former aristocrats, still bitter, joined in rebellion.

It was a commoner who finally won the civil war. Liu Bang (256 – 195 BC) had held office under Qin, passing a test to become a police chief. He was a rough, tough brawler, and his wife and partner Lü Zhi (241-180 BC) was no more genteel. Still, Liu Bang was more honorable than Xiang Yu, the aristocratic leader of a coalition of rebels. They had all agreed that whoever captured the Qin capital would become the next king of that desirable region – no-one was planning to continue the unified empire, which had only lasted for 15 years, after all. Liu Bang and his troops captured the area, but rather than immediately claiming his prize he honorably sealed up the Qin treasuries until Xiang Yu arrived. When Xiang Yu did arrive, instead of honoring the agreement, assigned Liu to a rule an area a bit further south, on the Han river. Liu Bang turned against Xiang Yu, defeated him, and went on to win control of rest of Qin territory. He named his empire after the river: "Han." As well as its territory, the Han dynasty (202 BC – AD 220) inherited Qin's Legalist state system. Han political theory recognized the support of commoners as the sound basis of the state; in the Western or Former Han (202 BC – AD 9) in practice, in the Eastern or Latter Han (AD 23-220) only in theory.

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4.2: From Commoner to Emperor

Most immediately, however, Liu Bang (now Emperor Gaozu) had a problem: his supporters. First, they wanted rewards. Liu Bang gave about 850 of his relatives and supporters lands and titles. Some were even called “kings” and governed fiefs on the old feudal model. Fearing a return to warfare, the central government later retook some kingdoms by force. It used the crimes of about half of the other nobles as an excuse for removing them, demoting some to commoners, while others served terms as convict laborers. Another 170 were stripped of their titles for no crime, and the rest simply failed to produce heirs. On average, the noble families lasted just over two generations, so not a single descendent of those Liu Bang had ennobled still held a title by 86 BC. The Han dynasty had embraced and completed the Qin destruction of aristocracy.

There was a second problem with Liu Bang’s followers. Before Han, every single lord or ruler had been born an aristocrat. Only a few of the Zhou aristocratic families survived into Han, but the idea that only people born to old, high-ranking families deserved reverence was still powerful. Liu Bang could claim no noble lineage whatsoever. In fact, he could not remember his father’s name and labelled his ancestral temple “Tai gong,” which is just a respectful term for an old man. Liu used stories of supernatural events to create a sense that Heaven’s Mandate could close that social gap (such as a case of clouds indicating his presence when his followers were looking for him), but his generals saw themselves as his comrades and equals, if not his betters. Sima Qian tells us:

> *Liu Bang’s followers were given to drinking and brawling over which of them had accomplished the most in the conquest. When in their cups, some would shout wildly and others would draw their swords and hack at the pillars of the palace. Liu Bang became distressed over their behavior.*

Sensing an opportunity, a Confucian, Shusun Tong, suggested that he and others from Confucius’s home state of Lu design some court rituals to tame the generals. Liu Bang hesitated. He already had advisors who were fiscal experts, military experts, engineering experts, experts in interpreting omens, experts in health, experts in calendrical calculations of lucky and unlucky days, and so on. These were practical skills. Confucians, on the other hand, were known as eccentrics who wore antique clothing and practiced ancient rituals. A follower of Mozi described them this way:

> *They bedeck themselves with elaborate dress… They strum and sing and beat out dance rhythms to gather disciples. They proliferate rites… to display their decorum. They labor over the niceties of ceremonial gaits and flapping gestures to impress people.*

Another writer records that even when Liu Bang had surrounded Lu and was about to capture Xiang Yu, “the Confucians in the state continued to discourse upon the Way, to chant their lessons and practice the rites. The sounds of their strumming and singing never stopped [throughout the battle].”[1]

So Liu Bang hesitated. He asked, “Can you make the rituals not too difficult?” Shusun Tong reassured him (taking a leaf out of the Legalists’ book): “The five emperors of antiquity all had different types of court music and dance; the three founders of the Shang, Zhou and Xia dynasties did not follow the same ritual… They did not merely copy their predecessors. I intend to pick a number of ancient rituals and some Qin ceremonies, to make a combination of these.”

“Well, see what you can do!” said the emperor. “But make it easy to learn! Keep in mind that it must be the sort of thing I can handle.”

Shusun and thirty scholars from Lu worked out some rituals and practiced for a month. Then they called the emperor in to watch. “I can do that all right!” said Liu Bang. He and all the generals and officials practiced their roles. At the New Year formal audience, every man trembled with awe and reverence; during the feast, no-one dared to quarrel or misbehave. Liu Bang declared “Today, for the first time, I know how exalted a thing it is to be an emperor.” Confucian scholars had made a bargain with Legalist imperial power and won a toehold at court – a toehold, not much more. The Han court never endorsed Confucians’ interpretation of the classics as the state orthodoxy, but allowed them to design many rituals exalting the emperor.

Architecture, ritual, and clothing differentiated the emperor from other humans in every sphere of life. He lived in the inmost part of a large walled palace in the capital, with his consorts and family. Eunuchs and palace women served them. Special gateways and towers symbolized his power, and isolated him; officials could visit only the outer part of the palace. Specialists prepared his food

and he ate alone, solemnly served with many more dishes than he needed, in a set order. Even his sexual relations were ritualized and overseen by eunuchs and officials. The emperor's clothing was unique to him; he had to wear certain robes at certain times of year and for particular ceremonies, and the robes were of ritually prescribed cloth and color, with embroidered symbols. He spent much of his time as cosmic intermediary, preparing for or carrying out sacrifices to Heaven (after about 40 BC), Earth, Soil and Grain, stars, weather forces, imperial ancestors, etc. Emperor and Empress together carried out purifying rituals, fertility rituals, cosmological rituals, and ceremonies of investing officials with authority. Sometimes they traveled to sacred sites to worship important mountains.

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4.3: Empresses

Sima Qian wrote that “The bond between husband and wife is the most solemn of relationships.” He gave historical examples of how wives had helped dynastic founders, and of how rulers who slighted aging wives to favor concubines had lost their thrones.[2] He thought Liu Bang and his wife Lü Exu a fit couple: Both were uneducated and unrefined, prone to cruelty when afraid, but Empress Lü’s strength, resolve, and good judgement had helped Liu Bang establish stability. As they aged, Liu favored Beauty Qi and leaned toward making her son heir apparent in place of Lü’s son, who was younger. In the end, as the son of the primary wife, Lü’s son ascended the throne as Emperor Hui. His mother married Hui to her granddaughter (Hui’s sister’s child), but the couple had no children, and Hui died at 28. Two of his sons by concubines succeeded him, but they were babies. How did the fledgling Han dynasty survive?



Figure 4.1. Han bronze mirror with diagram of cosmos. Outermost rim: the waves of the cosmic ocean; inside that is the circular heaven, with the animals of the four directions around the square earth. The “TLV” markings – see them? – also appear in the game of liubo. Source: Metropolitan Museum. Public Domain.



Figure 4.2. Two people playing liubo. Earthenware with paint, bone gamepieces, c. 100 BC – AD 100. Dice or flat sticks were thrown to determine the moves. Many game sets have been excavated, but the rules are lost. See the TLV patterns in the “roads” on the board? Source: Metropolitan Museum. Public Domain.

Han survived because Empress Lü was the real second Han ruler, from 195 to 180 BC.

Sima Qian wrote a “Basic Annals” recounting the events of her reign. He commented that under her:

> the common people succeeded in putting behind them the sufferings of the age of the Warring States, and ruler and subject alike sought rest in non-action (*wu-wei*). Therefore Emperor Hui sat with folded hands and unruffled garments, Empress Lü as a female ruler conducted the business of government without ever leaving her private chambers, and the world was at peace. Punishments were seldom meted out and evildoers grew rare. The people devoted themselves to planting and harvesting, and food and clothing became increasingly abundant.”[3]

Empress Lü was a legitimate authority. She was legitimate as wife and partner to her husband, and as mother and generational superior to her son and grandsons. She had earned authority because it was widely recognized that she had helped in the conquest – a family enterprise like any other – and she earned more authority because she ruled well. As ruler, she issued edicts and communiques to foreign regimes in her own name, and stamped them with fine jade seals carved with dragons and tigers – a kind of seal supposed to be used only by the emperor. She openly received officials herself, and got a copy of every report submitted to

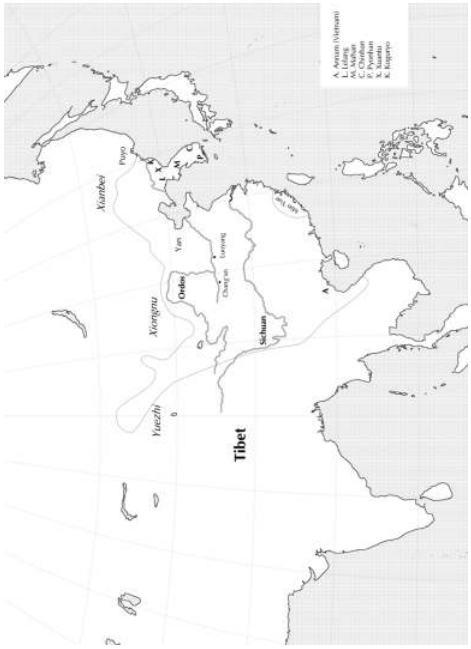
the emperor. She oversaw some important measures, including lifting the Qin ban on books of political theory, so there could be free debate. Officials of all kinds worked for her, and the government ran smoothly. Nonetheless, she had enemies at court.

When Empress Lü died, her opponents killed almost all her relatives. But her daughter in-law Empress Dou reigned with her husband Emperor Wen, and as regent for her son Emperor Jing, and her grandson Emperor Wu (Wudi). Wudi reigned for 53 years (more on him below), but later emperors were mostly children dominated by their mothers and their mothers' families, officials, or eunuchs. The Han court was rife with accusations of witchcraft and murderous factional struggle. A clan that lost a bid to provide the empress might well be exterminated. For example, a triumvirate running child emperor Zhao's government (r.87-74), included Huo Guang. Huo married his daughter to the emperor and packed the upper bureaucracy with his family. When the next emperor chose an empress from a different family, the Huos poisoned her and put in another Huo daughter. In the end, public opinion turned against the Huos, and the whole clan was wiped out.

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4.4: The Bureaucracy

But while Huo was in office, he had made decisions about governing.[4] In Han times, dynastic property was distinguished from public, government property, and most governance was in the hands of the bureaucracy. Recruitment of government officials in Han times was nominally, and in practice partly, meritocratic. Senior officials in the commanderies and kingdoms were ordered to send talented or virtuous men to the capital for evaluation and appointment. Initially this was an *ad hoc* proceeding, but by about 50 BC there was a set quota: for every 200,000 inhabitants, the governor of a commandery (a group of counties) was to send in one candidate who was locally admired for his virtue and filiality and 6 to 10 who understood literature. Upon arrival at the capital, the recommended men went through some kind of assessment, possibly an examination testing reading and writing. Those who passed joined a pool of men – at times a thousand of them – awaiting appointment to a vacant position. When a post opened up, one would be appointed, perhaps assigned duties in a capital ministry of the central government, perhaps sent out thousands of miles away to take over a county.



Map G. The Han empire at its greatest extent, about 50 BC, with peoples and places mentioned in the text.

The officials of the central government consulted with the emperor or empress to determine policy. Along with senior advisors, two top officials coordinated government, receiving reports from below (memorials) and sending out orders (edicts) in the emperor's name to manage the nine ministries and numerous smaller offices that made up the structure of government. The ministries were responsible for: superintending the imperial household; setting up and carrying out sacrifices to the various deities and ancestors, observing stars and other astronomical phenomena and creating the calendar to regulate agricultural production; writing law and administering punishments for crime; foreign relations; collecting and recording tax revenue; maintaining granaries, armories and treasuries; determining expenditures on public works projects, defense and other so on; and maintaining records of the hundreds of members of the imperial family with their titles and lands and the degrees of precedence. These were the central ministries.

The whole territory of the empire as it was conquered was divided, eventually, into about 100 commanderies and about 1300 counties headed by a centrally-appointed magistrate, who in turn appointed officials to assist in managing the 10,000 to 2,000,000 people of a county. County magistrates, closely supervised by the central government, arrested and punished criminals, deserters, and those who sheltered them, according to the standard legal code; collected a standard amount of tax in grain, cloth and cash; called up labor gangs as needed for public works; drafted soldiers; maintained roads, canals, and granaries; and kept up the postal system so that orders and reports could go back and forth from locality to capital.

All together, the Han government included about 130,000 bureaucrats on salary – ten times the number of officials in the contemporaneous Roman empire – plus their staffs of 10-20 men, also on salary. Officials were promoted and demoted on the basis of their achievements and honesty. They were paid according to the rank of their post, in grain, silk, cash. They rested one day in

five, and could take sick leave; those who served for a long time might get a pension. They were also rewarded with high-status displays, since they represented imperial authority. Each rank had a set color for its special robes and caps. Their offices were large compounds of buildings, walled and symmetrically arranged. Their comings and goings were marked by bells and drums, and the streets were cleared for them to pass. They interacted with one another according to strict rules of protocol, and were entitled to deference from the population, and to respect from the emperor as well. These rituals at the county level echoed those at court, and continued, with variations, throughout the imperial period.

Since the government was a public possession, no longer held by feudal lords, the concept of "corruption" – taking what belonged to the public, or unjustly deciding criminal cases – became thinkable. Many officials benefited from opportunities to corruptly feather their own nests – especially in the southern port of today's Guangzhou, far from central control, and which welcomed a maritime trade in pearls, rhinoceros horns, sea turtles, and elephant tusks and other exotic goods. Port officials in the south, far from capital control, could profit immensely. But other officials wore themselves out in the service of government, allowing the Han to last for 400 years despite shenanigans at court.

Han continued the Legalist ideology of equality before the law (except for the royal family), as well as its harsh punishments. In 206, having taken the capital, Liu Bang announced:

> Elders, you have long endured the brutal Qin laws. The entire families of those convicted of slandering the emperor were killed, and those convicted of plotting were executed … [Now] the Law will have only three sections: one who kills another will die, and one who harms another or steals will pay recompense for the crime. The rest of the Qin laws are all done away with.[5]

Such simple laws, however, could not possibly manage a whole empire, so in 195 BC, the Qin code was restored, with just a few changes. Likewise, thirty years later, Emperor Wen replaced mutilating punishments – facial tattooing, cutting off the nose, or amputating a foot or hand – with beating or penal labor. This was good for his reputation, but in fact more people died from beatings than from the older punishments. Still, in contrast with the feudal distinctions by rank at birth, the law applied to all.



Figure 4.3. Latter Han silk textile woven with animals climbing cloudlike mountains and textual inscription honoring the lord of a palace. Warp-faced compound plain weave, about 9" x 18". Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public Domain.

Commoners could petition about mistreatment by officials. A government branch called the Censorate or Ministry of Investigation kept an eye on all branches of government, up to and including the emperor himself. Justice for commoners could even be upheld against the emperor himself. One day, Emperor Wen's cortege was passing, so a commoner hid under a bridge to obey the law that the roads be clear. Unfortunately, he popped up before the carriage had passed and startled the horses. Emperor Wen told the Minister of Justice to handle the case, but when the minister only levied a fine, the emperor angrily demanded a heavier punishment: he might have been hurt! The minister insisted that he had to follow the law. If the emperor could command an official to override the legal process, everyone would hear of it and they would no longer respect the law themselves.

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4.5: Commoners

Liu Bang's first act upon taking Xianyang was to secure the empire's population registers. As the territories of Chu, the Yue kingdoms of the southwest, and the northern peninsula were conquered, new commoners, too were registered as in Qin times, on slips of bamboo that excavations since the 1980s have been turning up. People who had to leave home to escape flood or famine were initially required to return, but from about 50 BC, Han policy encouraged them to settle down in the new location. Han also moved large groups of people to settle in newly-conquered areas. State power over land and labor was real, and local communities were being broken up.

The Qin and Han regime invested a lot of energy in fiscal and legal uniformity. But not cultural. When Qin defeated the other states, it outlawed their currencies, scripts, and laws, but the facsimiles of each palace in Xianyang symbolically incorporated them, and historian Mark Edward Lewis has argued that the glory of empire was thought to lie precisely in the variety it incorporated. The Han left local marriage and burial practices, cults, lifeways, and languages alone. Elite families shared written language, literature, and other lifeways, but as historian Charles Holcombe puts it, "The Qin and Han dynasties were both therefore significantly multicultural and multiethnic empires."[6]

Most commoners faced a life of unending toil just to feed and clothe the family, and produce a little extra to buy iron and salt and other necessities. And then there were taxes. Historians disagree on how heavy the tax burden really was in the first part of the period. Land taxes were lowered from Qin rates, so that by 155 BC a farming couple paid only 1/30th of the crop, plus a tax in cloth. Each adult also owed demanding labor service – work on roads, canals, imperial tombs, and other state infrastructure; pregnant women and nursing mothers were exempt for three years. Until 31 BC, the state also demanded military service from each adult man; then the draft was commuted to a fee. Merchants without land – who throve in Han times, engaged in all kinds of trade – paid a set amount of tax per person, plus taxes on sales, and artisans paid income tax. Some argue that the state collected more than it really needed, so the emperor could improve his reputation from time to time by tax amnesties.


Mill: Grindstone and grain-pounder.


House with courtyard and people.


Sheep-pen with six rams.


Stove with ?chimney.


Wellhead and bucket.

Figure 4.4. Han grave goods, made of clay, each about six inches to a foot high or wide. Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public Domain.

Using that public funding, the Han state took a number of measures to support the small working families it relied on. The government provided some famine relief in times of starvation, so that farmers would not have to sell their land to survive. It provided seed grain when needed. Symbolically and ritually, the emperor signaled the importance of farming with a spring plowing ceremony, and the empress ceremonially wove to honor textile production. Magistrates honored and rewarded farmers in seasonal ceremonies, and productive farmers were granted rank in the lower rungs of the 20-rank system. Some farmers even won the right to travel on the special lane in the middle of highways that was reserved for the use of the emperor, carrying a staff with a bird on top to signal their right to be there. Officials were not permitted to demand labor during busy farming seasons. And magistrates managed public markets, so that farmers could sell extra grain or cloth or vegetables or meat and buy manufactured things they needed – salt, oil, iron tools.

Artisans, as well as contributing labor service, could earn wages in private or state workshops. Private factories made ale, processed food, leather, silk cloth, dye, lumber, pottery, bronze mirrors and other items (sometimes with fake state ‘brand names’), iron tools, carts and carriages, lacquerware dishes, etc. In state workshops, some weaving was done by men, but many artisans making luxury goods like silk and lacquer were women; the high wages supposedly made them reluctant to marry.

What do you think is going on here?

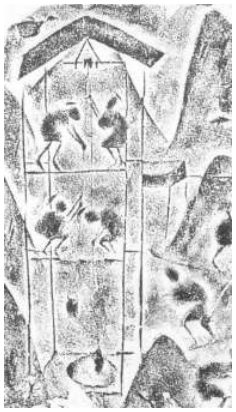


Figure 4.5. Rubbing of Han-era representation of deep drilling for natural gas and salt brine. The gas, in bamboo pipes, was used to boil off the water and create salt, which people needed for food preservation and for nutrition. Source: Robert Temple, *The Genius of China*, p. 57. Fair Use.

The active participation of commoners in all areas of manufacturing and the state freed up human creativity. Han inventions and developments of earlier practices included some that much later spurred the world's creation of the modern formation of mass production based on mineral energy. We all know about paper and the north-pointing compass, but Han people also figured out, among many other things, how to drill deep into the earth for salt water (as the picture shows), pump it up into shallow pans, and make salt by piping up the natural gas in those same wells and using it to boil off the water.

The goods listed above were often made in factories where labor was divided, with each worker specializing in one stage of production. This principle was adopted by Josiah Wedgewood (1730-1795) as a cornerstone of Britain's industrial revolution, and was made more efficient by American automobile producers through the use of the moving assembly line. The conveyor belt that made the assembly line possible was a development of another Han invention, the chain-pump used for irrigation, which was developed into a power-transmitting chain drive in Song times, and then eventually into the conveyor belt.*

Commoners indeed had great opportunities in early Han times, because of meritocracy. Men from ordinary families, if known for virtue and learning, could be recommended for office, and nobodies could rise dramatically. An example is one Gong Yu. He was a farmer who tilled 130 *mou* (1 *mou* is about .2 of an acre, but it varies a lot) of land, valued at less than 10,000 copper cash. But he also studied and earned respect for his learning, and was recommended for office. In order to pay for the trip to the capital, he had to sell all but 30 *mou* of his land, but his first, middle-ranking post paid 9,200 cash per month. Gong Yu won promotions until he earned 12,000 cash per month, more than the whole value of his original farm.[7] Men who rose from rags to riches under Emperor Wu include a swineherd who only began to study the Classics at the age of 40, but was then selected for high office; a vagabond who worked for a general and came up with a plan for eliminating the remaining feudal kingdoms; a shepherd who earned enough money to help substantially with the Xiongnu war (see below) and was rewarded with office; and a shopkeeper's son who was put in charge of provisioning the army. He represented the court in a famous debate with Confucians, who opposed the government monopolies on salt and iron that were funding the war. Women, too, could rise: Wudi married, and raised to primary wife and empress, a singer and dancer who was the daughter of a slave.

* Temple, *The Genius of China*. This book presents, with lots of pictures, some findings of the enormous multi volume project began by Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, available in English and Chinese.

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4.6: Enslaved People

For there were indeed slaves in Qin and Han society. Some were owned by the government, others privately. Some criminals and their families became government slaves; sometimes the families were pardoned after a dozen years or more. An executed criminal's family and even their descendants might be permanently enslaved, their faces tattooed. Other government slaves were war captives, or had been offered as tribute. Aged government slaves were sometimes freed, sometimes cared for, but sometimes sold or resold to private owners. The government confiscated the slaves of criminals along with other property. Government slaves worked mainly in dangerous places like mines and iron foundries. Gong Yu – the farmer turned high official – in 44 BC decried the fact that 100,000 convicts were at work in such government enterprises.[8]

Privately-owned slaves were those who had been sold or had sold themselves when families were starving, or who were kidnapped and sold illegally. The famine and destruction that attend war often brought enslavement for children; in 205 BC, Liu Bang permitted people to sell their children (or move to Sichuan) for food, and three years later he declared all such people free again. Children might also be pawned, and if not redeemed within three years would become slaves; or they could be put up as collateral for a loan and be lost that way. A child born to two slave parents was enslaved from birth, but it is not clear whether just one enslaved parent made the child a slave. Private slaves could be freed or buy themselves out of slavery, but stealing them was a crime. Some merchants specialized in training youngsters as singers and dancers and selling them, and some sources report young slaves dressed up in silk and displayed for sale in pens. In one case "several tens" of these were sent for sale together. Freed slaves were commoners, with no permanent taint. Han slaves included Koreans, Iranians, Turks, Tibetans, Uighurs; and Han subjects were sold as slaves in foreign countries.[9]

Han commoners fell into slavery in part because of state monopolies on iron and salt (why would salt be a good government monopoly?), and because they were required to pay the "poll tax" – a per capita fixed tax – in cash. Farmers could not easily raise cash. Since the main crops in any place come ripe at the same time, if sold on the market then they are worth little. The monopolies and cash poll tax, squeezing smallholders, were introduced at the same time as a tax on wealth (not income) that taxed goods at twice the rate of land. Wealthy families were looking to convert other kinds of wealth into land. They quickly bought up the fields of their desperate poorer neighbors, and even their children. Those families now had to work for others. High taxes compromised the Han fiscal base and its political claim to be supporting smallholders.

And why did Emperor Wu want all that tax money? To fight the Xiongnu.

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4.7: The Silk Roads and the Xiongnu War

To understand the origins of the immensely expensive Han-Xiongnu war, we have to go back a bit. Travel and trade across the steppe highway of Central Asia had intensified from about the middle of the fourth century BC when Alexander the Great (356 – 323), of Macedonia in Northern Greece, conquered Central Asia and northern India. Connections stretched across Eurasia. Once the Han had established peace in the former Qin territory, millions of workers, mainly women, settled down to weaving the lush, patterned silks the rest of Eurasia desired.



Figure 4.6. Model of watchtower. Han burial item. Earthenware with green lead glaze, about a yard high. It looks as if one of the guards has a cross-bow. Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public Domain.

It was not an irreconcilable culture clash between steppe and sown that led to the Han conflict with the Xiongnu. Rather, as with the Rong, the Di, and the Hu in the Zhou period, the two sides were very much operating in the same political world. Although nomads moved around more than farmers, taking herds to new pastures every year or season, in other ways their productive lives were similar to the Shang and early Zhou, and to much of Han territory before central government really took hold. Life centered on kinfolk and clans or tribes for production, migration, and war. A stratified aristocracy dominated farming and herding commoners. Mounted aristocrats led war and large hunts; others might fight just to raid a neighboring tribe. Succession to tribal leadership was hereditary, but rather than the first son, the heir was the son with the widest popular and aristocratic support, based on proven success in leadership. The balance of production and consumption on the steppe was so delicate that even high-ranking people had to work, like the elite in Shang times.

Steppe people did rely more on animals for food than their southerner neighbors, but the steppe economy also included grain, crafts, and trade. Meanwhile, Han subjects did consume dairy products, and Han doctors considered milk a medicine, good for digestion, and urged patients to consume dairy foods every day. One early Han manuscript says that fermented mare's milk lengthened life.[10]

The key difference between the Xiongnu and Han regimes lay in their political structure: confederation of tribes versus centralized empire. The first record of the nomadic Xiongnu (we do not know what language they spoke, by the way) comes when they joined a horizontal alliance of the five eastern Zhou states against Qin in 318 BC. In 214 BC, Qin General Meng Tian led an enormous army to capture the Ordos region, a flourishing Xiongnu center of trade and pastureland they needed for production. To consolidate the territory he captured, he built a Great Wall (not the one we know today). At the same time, nomads from the east were also attacking the Xiongnu. In defense against this twin threat, the tribes formed a confederation.



Figure 4.7. In this rubbing of a scene decorating a tomb, people are milking a cow, a goat, and a mare. One has a small problem with the horse, despite extra precautions. On the far left, a filial son is offering his aged mother a cup of milk. How do we know she is old?[11]

There was a standard way to do this in nomadic society: one man, accepted as khan, creates an honor guard of top warriors (*kesig*) that support him; a council of aristocrats called "kings," with their own fiefs and troops; and an army under his control to stop internal fighting, subordinate surrounding peoples, and collect tribute in both prestige luxury goods and staples like grain. The khan distributes that tribute to his royal clan and close supporters, who pass some on to their dependents. In this case, to coordinate defense against Qin and the eastern Yuezhi, the chiefs ceded some authority to a khan named Modun (r. 209-174), who claimed a

divine mandate. With an existential threat behind them and the promise of loot before them, the Xiongnu troops, under this centralized command, retook the territory Qin had taken. Aided by the fall of Qin, they kept going until they had conquered as far east as the Liaodong Peninsula, and as far west as today's Shaanxi.

Recall that that Liu Bang, the Han founder, had initially set up some independent "kingdoms" or fiefs to settle kin and allies. In 198 BC, one of those kingdoms (confusing called Hann), under attack by the Xiongnu confederation, decided to ally with the confederation. Liu Bang personally led 320,000 infantrymen to suppress the rebellious kingdom and attack Xiongnu, but they trounced him. The Hann kingdom joined in raiding imperial Han territory. To try to keep peace along the border, Liu Bang and his successors recognized the Xiongnu as a military superior and political equal. One ruled the settled people who wore hats and sashes; the other ruled "the people who draw the bow." Since plenty of Han people also drew bows, and anyone can put on a hat and a sash, you can see that this was not a deep-seated ethnic distinction. The two sides created a marriage alliance, meaning that children were descended from both. Han presented tribute annually of silk and other cloth, millet, gold, and other goods. The two sides recognized the Qin Long Wall as the border between their territories, and respected one another's larger spheres of influence over smaller states and tribes.

What Modun and his successor khans needed to hold authority and keep the confederacy together was a steady flow of goods to pass down to their followers. The khan's authority over the chiefs extended only to coordinating warfare; he could not stop Han defectors and lesser nomad chiefs from raiding. The Han side understood that quite clearly. They opened more markets along the border, ignored smuggling, and kept the tribute flowing no matter what, along with other signs of authority. They hoped to strengthen the khan enough that he could maintain the bipolar world with its clear line of division. Yet, as historian Nicola di Cosmo puts it, "no amount of Chinese support could change the core structure of nomadic society."

The Xiongnu, on the other hand, did force change on Han government structure. Since defense in the north required skilled cavalry, the Han ended a keystone policy of legalist government, the universal male draft, and hired professional soldiers from the border areas.



Figure 4.8. Xiongnu metal plaque depicting two animals fighting (can you tell what they are?), c. 150 BC. Source: Museum of Far East Antiquities in Stockholm. Public Domain.

The mutual recognition agreement between Han and the Xiongnu confederation lasted from 198-133 BC. Han emperor Wu (Wudi) violated the treaty by sending an official, Zhang Qian, to make an alliance with another nomadic group in 139 BC; the understanding that this was his sphere of influence accounts for the Xiongnu khan's great rage when Zhang was intercepted. The khan wrote to the Han court in outrage: "The Yuezhi lie to the north of us – how can the Han send their envoys there? If I wished to send envoys to Viet [in the far south], would the Han allow me to do so?" The Xiongnu held Zhang Qian for 10 years. He spent the decade learning all he could about Central Asia, so that when he finally escaped he was able to travel to present-day Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan, bringing back to the Han court in 126 BC word of the outside world as far as Rome – and in particular of the vast potential market for Chinese silks. Meanwhile, frustrated with the constant raids coming on top of tribute payments, Wudi launched a series of attacks on the Xiongnu, initially presented as defensive.

As the war continued, Wudi sent soldiers ever further west. He saw that until he controlled the trade routes across Central Asia, the Xiongnu could always be resupplied and keep fighting. So, over the objections of courtiers, Wudi sent troops right through the Gobi Desert up to Ulan Bator in Mongolia, and eventually set up military commanderies and civil counties in the oases that had supplied the Xiongnu. Supplying the troops was difficult and stupid leaders did not help: one commander insisted on setting up a kickball field (the game was used for training), even though his troops were hungry.[12] Settlers from inside Han were sent out West from about 60 BC onwards.[13] The war cost hundreds of thousands of lives and horses, and about 189 trillion copper cash. Wudi

raised it through new taxes on merchant inventories, and government monopolies on mining, on minting cash, and on making and selling iron, salt, and alcohol.



Figure 4.9. Handle in the form of a dragon that looks like a horse. Latter Han dynasty, gilt-bronze with traces of red pigment, about six inches long. Source: Metropolitan Museum. Public Domain.

Confucian officials like Jia Yi and Sima Qian opposed not only the spending of that cash on war but also the way monopolies undermined free trade and hurt ordinary families. Envisioning a society built on strong married couples, they opposed both the hiring of young women to work in government silk factories and the expenditure of manpower on the Wudi's never-ending military campaigns. The first pulled young women away from the family by allowing them to delay marriage, living on their wages; and the second pulled young men away from the family by sending them out into the deserts to fight.[14] Wudi paid no attention.

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4.8: Outflanking the Xiongnu on the East

As we have seen, an early Han fief or kingdom had initiated the war by defecting to the Xiongnu. A similar occurrence on the peninsula kicked off a very slow process of political development. There, a large number of tribes lived in relative peace, if for no other reason than that bronze and iron – with their superior capacity for wounding and killing – arrived there together only in about 300 BC. Before the Qin unification, **Chosŏn** was one of a number of tribes northeastern of today's Beijing, near the state of Yan. The Chosŏn people were defeated by Qin, but not eliminated.

In 195 BC, a Han feudal king in Yan allied with a Xiongnu leader. One of the king's subordinates, Wei Man (Wi Man in Korean), headed northeast (the precise location is debated). He worked for the Chosŏn chief, and then took over in 180 BC. This regime, called "Wiman Chosŏn," provided a haven for Han dissidents, and played middleman in trade and diplomatic relations between the Han empire (perhaps represented by a small office in the Liaodong peninsula) and the various tribes of Manchuria (including the Xiongnu) and the Korean peninsula.

Wudi could not tolerate a power-broker supplying the Xiongnu from the east, so in 109 BC, he sent one army across the Bohai Sea and one overland to attack the capital of Chosŏn. Wi Man's grandson, Ugŏ, by strength and guile, held off the Han army and navy for over a year. Then a second campaign and Ugo's murder by his own ministers brought Han victory. The dynasty had lasted 72 years: far longer than united Qin. This is the first regime we know of in the Korean peninsula and Manchuria. It was only later in Han times that writers claimed the easternmost part of Chosŏn as Kija's refuge after the Zhou conquest, and later historians added detail after detail to extend Chosŏn history backwards.[15] This is a clear sign of myth: for how could later ages know more than earlier ones, before scientific archaeology?

To incorporate the area into the Han empire, commanderies were set up in the northern peninsula in 108 BC, at the same time as in Vietnam and in Xiongnu territory. Two of the commanderies lasted only 25 years, but Lelang became the center of the vibrant trade Wudi wished to control, a Yellow Sea trading circuit formed a century or so earlier.[16] The trade ran from the southern peninsula far up into Manchuria, which produced hardwoods, furs, fish, salt, and grain; by land to the mainland and the steppe route to the Middle East and Europe; and by sea over to the archipelago (a short hop by boat) and along the coast of the mainland to southeast Asia. Individuals rarely travelled the whole way (although one Chinese emissary, Ganying, did go to the Persian Gulf); but objects, techniques for making them, and sometimes the ideas behind them, crossed the whole of Eurasia. Indian and Roman coins, beads, rings, and so on have been found in Vietnam from at least the second century AD, and Roman glass has been found in Silla tombs on the peninsula from about 500 AD.[17] Gold, flowered Silla-style crowns have been found in Afghanistan. And once paper was invented (some time before 80 BC), it passed to the Middle East and then Europe, so that by the twelfth century paper was being made in Moorish Spain...

But that is getting ahead of the story. The point is that Korea was in the middle of a vibrant trade. Lelang's purpose may have been not only to outflank the Xiongnu, but also to protect its state monopoly of salt and iron, threatened by coastal trade carried out by the peninsula's boatmen.

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4.9: The Han Commanderies

Once under Han control, Lelang people produced silk, lacquerware, and jewelry, and made carriages out of parts imported from the mainland. In exchange for raw materials, Lelang provided local chiefs with prestige goods, especially bronze mirrors (originally a steppe product, remember?, but by now thoroughly identified with elite Chinese culture).

The commanderies on the peninsula were ruled much like the rest of the empire: with officials appointed by the center and local staff members, who counted and registered people and demanded taxes and labor service. Some household registers on wood tablets have been excavated. According the census of Lelang in 45 BC, about 15% of the population had recently come from the mainland. Mainlanders were not treated *better* by the government; in fact, locals were given preferential treatment, with each 30-40 households placed under local chiefs and assigned lighter tax and labor burdens. This was to assure acceptance of the new government. Mainlanders intermarried with local elite families, who learned to read and write in Chinese, and began to study the classics and write their own poems, as recent excavations have shown.

When Huo Guang was ruling Han in 82 BC, he retreated from Wudi's expansionist mode by closing the commandery in Vietnam and two short-lived commanderies on the peninsula, and moving the Xuantu commandery to a safer location. Even before that retreat, the Han commanderies' control was limited and tenuous. The local population continued to fight. (Indeed from 25-30 AD, a local rebel took over Lelang, and allied with others in Shandong province until Latter Han defeated them all.) To fight effectively, they had to improve not only weaponry but organization, and several different polities slowly developed. Their elite were pure warriors, who never farmed themselves, but (like the Shang, Zhou, and Xiongnu) dominated the local farming and gathering people by force of arms.

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4.10: Early Proto-states in the Peninsula + Manchuria

Farthest north, in the Sungari River valley of Manchuria, was Puyŏ, which had formed in reaction against expansion by the state of Yan in about 300 BC.[18] Once the commanderies were set up in 108 BC, Puyŏ allied with Han. Some tribes confederated to oppose the Han-Puyŏ alliance, forming Koguryŏ around 37 BC. Koguryŏ King T'aejo (53-146?) later expanded his territory, subjugating the Okcho tribes on the eastern coast of the peninsula. But as he conquered new territories, he left the chiefs in place to rule the local people; he did not create a centralized state.

To the south were three loose confederations dating back to about 100 BC: Mahan, Chinhan, and Pyŏnhan: together, the Samhan ("Three Han" 三韓). Mahan's 54 named towns lay immediately south of the Lelang commandery, on the western coast of the peninsula. It had the richest farmlands. Chinhan's 12 towns lay on the southeastern coast, and Pyŏnhan's dozen towns clustered at the southern end of the peninsula. The walled towns of the three confederations held about 500-1000 households (2500-5000 people). Each town's hinterland of fields (growing millet or rice) and wilderness averaged about 22 miles in diameter, roughly onefifth of the area the late Shang kings had directly controlled.



Map H. The four main islands of the Japanese archipelago (Kyushu, Honshu, Hokkaido, Shikoku) and tiny Tsushima); the Samhan of the peninsula (Mahan, Chinhan, Pyonhan); the Lelang commandery; the Ye and Okcho peoples; the states of Koguryŏ and Puyŏ; and the present-day city of Pusan for reference.

The chief of each tiny town or "statelet" governed independently. Many were wealthy enough to be buried with bronze belt hooks and mirrors, acquired through trade with the commanderies, as well as iron objects. By about AD 150, the towns were rich enough to lure immigrants from the commanderies (as we know from their wooden-chamber style tombs), whose expertise furthered economic development and political consolidation. The Samhan chiefs sought and welcomed recognition from the commanderies, in the form of seals and official robes and caps. Chiefs could display those status symbols to increase their social status over their neighbors, and recognition from Han meant the right to trade in the commanderies.[19]

Not long ago, King Kwanggaeto's stele of 414 was the earliest extant Korean text. As archaeology progresses, however, earlier writings are being excavated, including wooden or bamboo strips or tablets called 木簡: *mujian* in Chinese, *mokgan* in Korean, *mokkan* in Japanese. The first such texts are from the Han colonies in the northern peninsula. Most record population, such as a census of Lelang Commandery for the year 45 BC showing that under Han dynasty command there were 280,000 people in 45,000 households. But two excavated tombs have 76 Chapter 4, p.20 yielded parts of the *Analects* (books 11 & 12). One of the tombs held a Han royal prince, Liu Xiu, who died in 55 BC. The North Korean government has not revealed the details of the second tomb, which held 39 strips of *Analects*, shown here:[20]

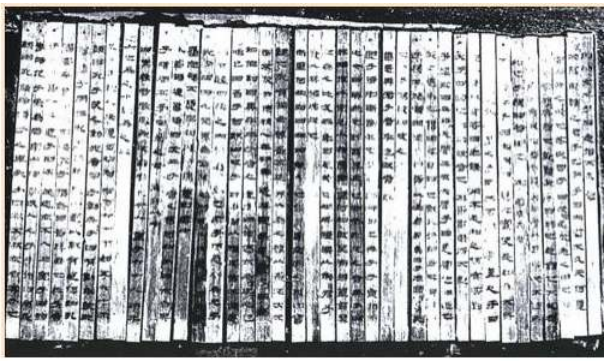


Figure 4.10. A excavated manuscript copy of part of *The Analects*, written on bamboo strips. Source: Early Korea Project, "A Bamboo Strip Edition of the Lunyu." Original: Yonhap Press Agency. Fair Use.

The writing in the population registers is mainly Chinese characters, but the characters are used to represent Korean language in complicated ways. Aspects of Korean grammar appear alongside Chinese grammar, characters are used to represent sounds rather than the words they represent in Chinese, and Korean characters are created by combining or reducing Chinese characters. The later peninsular kingdoms of Silla and Paekche developed different methods of notation, and both influenced Japanese writing: Paekche before 660 and Silla thereafter.[21]

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4.11: The Yayoi Period on the Archipelago

Before you continue: can you read one or more of the characters on this seal?



Figure 4.11. Copy of rubbing of the gold seal dating to AD 57, discovered in Japan in 1784. Source: David B. Lurie, *Realms of Literacy*, p. 73. Used by kind permission of the author.

The Lelang commandery also managed Han imperial relations with the archipelago. The *History of Latter Han* records an embassy from Wa on the archipelago, that arrived in Lelang in 77 Chapter 4, p.21 AD 57. (A second Wa embassy came in AD 107.) In 1784, a Korean farmer discovered on his land a gold seal with a knob on top in the form of a snake. Scholars mainly agree that it was the very seal that the Han court sent in AD 57 to the head of a small state in the archipelago. The seal says: "漢倭奴國王 Han-designated King of the Na Country of Wa." Historians do not know exactly where Na was in the archipelago, – and neither did the Han government.

It is no surprise that Wa chiefs in the archipelago knew about the new wealthy elite power on the peninsula, because they were closely connected with tribes at its southern tip, who had already been part of the trading circuit for a century or more. From the northern coast of Kyushu in Japan to Pusan in Korea is about 150 miles, and from Pusan one can see Tsushima Island, halfway between the two. Since at least 10,000 BC, a few people had been making the trip by boat, carrying jewelry and useful things in distinctive styles, like shell fishing hooks and shell beads with faces carved into them.[22]

In about 600 BC (according to archaeologists) or 300 BC (according to historians), a regular stream of peninsular people, mainly from the far south, made the journey to Tsushima Island, and then to Kyushu. They may have been escaping climate changes that had made it harder to grow rice in the peninsula. Over several hundred years they kept coming, settling in with the Jōmon people of Kyushu, intermarrying and thus sharing customs like the style of graves, grave goods, enclosure of settlements by a moat, the shape of houses. They brought the knowledge of how to grow rice (riziculture), and they brought domesticated pigs.



Figure 4.12. Iron model of a cookstove, about 26" long. From a Koguryŏ tomb. Source: National Museum of Korea. Korea Open Government License permits free use, unchanged, regardless of commercial use.

Once the Han commanderies had initiated an iron industry in the southern peninsula, immigrants and trade brought iron from Chinhan and Pyŏnhan to Kyushu, for useful things like large, flat, iron axeheads. They brought the technology of enclosed cookstoves of clay and stone that not only used less fuel to cook than an open hearth, but also heated a house with clay pipes that carried the smoke and heat around the inside walls of a house. Even a house that was just a pit in the ground with some kind of roof could be warmer and more comfortable with such a 78 Chapter 4, p.22 hypocaust. The enclosed cookstoves made it from Kaya to northern Kyushu in the late AD 200s.[23] Some coastal communities grew enough surplus rice that their members could spare the time to make extra agricultural tools – first stone, then iron – to trade further south in Kyushu.

By the second century AD, some Wa chiefs had formed statelets 10 to 12 miles apart from one another along the Kyushu coast. The chiefs claimed predominance over their neighbors with elegant, imported bronze daggers and mirrors; when imports slowed, they made them in their own styles. As happened in the New Stone Age on the mainland, what had been egalitarian communities (shown

by shared ritual bronze caches) were now dominated by local chiefs (buried with their own bronzes). Fighting began in Kyushu, perhaps when the various clans faced climate changes.[24] And trade routes to Shikoku and Honshu linked chiefs there to the goods and techniques of the mainland. By AD 200, competition within communities and between statelets was becoming violent.

Immigrants from the peninsula, bearing knowledge from the mainland funneled through the commanderies, made a lasting impact on the archipelago: the outermost wave of the impact of Wudi's war against the Xiongnu confederation.

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[1] Nylan, *the Five Confucian Classics*, p. 25.

[2] Van Ess, "Praise and Slander," 228.

[3] Sima Qian, "The Basic Annals of Empress Lü," in *Records of the Grand Historian of China, Vol. 1*, trans. Burton Watson, 340, with some changes following van Ess, "Praise and Slander," 236.

[4] Kwon, "The History of Lelang Commandery," 86.

[5] Sanft, *Communication and Cooperation*.

[6] Holcombe, *A History of East Asia*, p. 60.

[7] Cho-Yun Hsu, *Han Agriculture*, p. 53.

[8] Von Glahn, *The Economic History of China*, 146.

[9] This section is based primarily on Wilbur, "Slavery in China during the Former Han dynasty.

[10] Brown, "Are Chinese Lactose Intolerant? Traditional Chinese medicine says otherwise." mudadong.wixsite.com, accessed June 8, 2019. Used by kind permission of the author.

[11] *Ibid*. Original from: 中國畫像石全集 vol. 5: Shandong: Meishuguan chubanshe, 2000.

[12] Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China*, 147.

[13] This section is primarily from Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and its Enemies*, with Li, *Early China*, 299.

[14] Tamara Chin, *Savage Exchange*.

[15] Shim, "A New Understanding of Kija Chosŏn," pp. 302-03.

[16] Lee Jaehyun, "Interregional Relations and Developmental Processes of Samhan Culture," 91.

[17] Tian Shouyun, *Ancient Glass Research Along the Silk Road*, 175 ff.

[18] Byington, *The Ancient State of Puyŏ*, 306.

[19] Yi Hyunhae, "The Formation and Development of the Samhan."

[20] Early Korea Project, "A Bamboo Strip Edition of the *Lunyu* Excavated at Chŏngbaek-tong in Pyongyang." https://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~ekp/n...yu-strips.html

[21] Lee SeungJae, "Old Korean Writing on Wooden Tablets and its Implications for Old Japanese."

[22] Byington, *Early Korea-Japan Interactions*, 6-7.

[23] Woo, "Interactions between Paekche and Wa," 213.

[24] Iwanaga, "Interaction Between the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese Archipelago."

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

5: Religion and Society in Han (206 BC – AD 220)

5.1: The Queen Mother of the West
5.2: Rivals to the Confucians at Court
5.3: Confucians at the Han Imperial Court
5.4: Confucius- Sage and Mage
5.5: Han Marriage and Family
5.6: The Rise of the Clans
5.7: Wang Mang's "New" Dynasty, AD 9-23
5.8: Han Clan Ideology and Organization
5.9: Daoism and the Fall of Han
5.10: Sources

Thumbnail: This is the Taijitu (太極圖), with black representing yin and white representing yang. It is a symbol that reflects the inescapably intertwined duality of all things in nature, a common theme in Taoism. No quality is independent of its opposite, nor so pure that it does not contain its opposite in a diminished form: these concepts are depicted by the vague division between black and white, the flowing boundary between the two, and the smaller circles within the large regions. (Public Domain; Gregory Maxwell via Wikipedia)

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5.1: The Queen Mother of the West

The Queen Mother of the West 西王母 was an old and high-profile god, but only one of a large and ever-growing Daoist pantheon, or hierarchy of gods, in Han times. That she was called a "monarch" or 王 could mean "spiritually powerful" or just "one of the gods."[1] Shang oracle bones refer to deities called Western Mother and Eastern Mother. By the time of Confucius and Laozi, there were various figures called Queen Mother of the West: a teacher, a directional deity, some mountain spirits, a divine weaver, a shaman, and a star god. Probably each of these was a different local cult, and it was Daoism that brought them all together. The *Zhuangzi* lists her as a "Great Instructor," said to have attained the Way and to be seated on a mythical Western mountain.

The *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, with texts on geography, ethnography, and myth dating back to 400 BC, but compiled by the Han scholar Liu Xiang, says:

> To the west is a mountain called Jade Mountain. This is the place where the Queen Mother of the West dwells. Her appearance is like that of a human, with a leopard's tail and tiger's teeth. Moreover, she is skilled at whistling. In her disheveled hair she wears a *sheng* headdress. She presides over the constellations "Grindstone" and "the Five Sherds" or "Five Destructive Forces."

How should we understand this? The headdress may represent part of a loom or a crown of stars, or it may have been adopted from images of the Syrian goddess Kybele, who also sits facing front, seated on a throne entwined with animal figures, and wearing a curious headdress, and who is portrayed on coins from Kushan, in modern Afghanistan. Whistling represents Daoist breath control. Her hair is disheveled because of the ecstatic dance of her shamanic communion between humans and spirits, and her body or costume include a leopard's tail and tiger's teeth, a shaman's costume representing the ability to change into or be like a powerful animal.

Organized Daoism tamed the Queen Mother of the West during the Han period, bringing her ancient and imported characteristics together with local cults. This Daoist Queen Mother of the West was associated with *yin*, appeared to humans, and ruled over a western paradise, while keeping her headdress and shamanist associations. Pictures show her being served food by birds and attended by nine-tailed foxes, a white hare with a mortar and pestle for pounding an immortality elixir, a dancing frog, a three-legged crow, a tall figure holding a halberd, and sometimes with the primordial serpent-tailed brother and sister Fuxi and Nuwa.

The contradictions never had to be resolved. The very fact that the tradition had so many elements allowed it to appeal to all kinds of people. As one art historian puts it, the Queen Mother of the West "was both of and beyond this world; she lived in lands west of the Chinese Empire yet symbolized the delights of everlasting life in an otherworldly realm of immortality, the ideal afterlife pursued by the people of the Han."[2] Wudi worshipped her, and tried to attract Daoist transcendents from her paradise by constructing high buildings and an earthly paradise including a lake converted from its purpose of training the navy to sail multi-storied ships.[3]





Figure 5.1. Eastern Han tile from Sichuan, showing the Queen Mother of the West and her companions. Can you identify them? Top: a rubbing of the tile. Bottom: a photograph of the tile. Public Domain.[4]

Wealthy families worshipped her on altars, and wishing to enter her Western Paradise had workmen put her on their coffins and tombs, bronze mirrors and roof tiles. There she was portrayed with symbols of immortality like magic mushrooms, and also with symbols of cosmic balance, like the sun and moon. Sometimes she was paired with a male god, the King Father of the East, a late and uninteresting god invented to satisfy Han ideas of balance or even female subordination. But Han poems portray her with no spouse, as a powerful god who dwelt in heaven, controlled other deities and access to immortality, and promised ecstatic flight through space. Han poet Sima Xiangru (c. 179 -117 BC) wrote of a "mighty man" who flew heavenwards in a trance:

> Looking westward to the hazy Kunlun mountains,
>
> I ride straight forward to the Mountain of Three Perils.
>
> I push though Heaven's Gate and enter the palace of Di on high
>
> I carry the jade maid home with me.
>
> Stretching at Cool Wind,
>
> I sway, but collect myself.
>
> I soar high like a bird, before a sudden stop.
>
> Hovering low over the winding yin mountains.
>
> I see the Queen Mother of the West today with my own eyes.
>
> Wearing her sheng on her white hair and living in a cave,
>
> She is fortunate to have a three-legged bird for errands…[5]

Among ordinary people, a huge millennial cult expected the imminent arrival of the Queen Mother of the West. Hysteria peaked in 3 BC, as reported by Ban Gu in the *Han History*:

This kind of popular excitement and hope for salvation was only part of what Daoism had to offer in Han times.

Some Daoists were hermits, cultivating their own spiritual insight and physical longevity and health. They turned away from society, for instance, by connecting *Zhuangzi* with shamanic traditions in an ideal of communicating with awesome and beautiful nature spirits, and transcending the ordinary world to live in beautiful paradises in the sky. The Queen Mother of the West lived in one such paradise, presiding over a court of great beauty. Transcendents (*xian* 仙 sometimes called immortals) who had refined their *qi* energy could travel on clouds to the Western paradise, and even an ordinary person might get a peek at a paradise on earth, on a high mountain or in an isolated valley. But Daoists were also a very real power at the Han court.

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5.2: Rivals to the Confucians at Court

Historians used to think that the Han dynasty rejected Qin Legalism and established Confucianism as its state orthodoxy. But this view is wrong, and indeed, some scholars refuse to use the term "Confucianism" to refer to anything before the mid-nineteenth century. This book uses it mainly to underline the great variation and change over time among thinkers who looked back to the Classics and took Confucius as a model. As for Han: Confucius would hardly have approved of Liu Bang and Lü Exu, while Wudi worshipped the Daoist deity Queen Mother of the West and sought Daoist transcendence. Confucius was widely revered, but imagined in very strange ways. The first state cult to Confucius was established only after the Han fell. Finally, the Confucianism of Han times had nothing to do with the family lives of ordinary people. Han was, indeed, the age in which Confucianism as an ideology – a set of ideas justifying power – came into being. But that happened through a fractured process with internal contradictions.

Even after Shusun Tong helped Liu Bang tame his unruly generals, Confucians had to compete with many other kinds of experts, and members of the inner court, for rulers' attention. All Han schools of thought accepted *yin-yang* cosmology – the idea that complementary energies in the universe rise and fall – and a more complex theory of Five Phases (*wuxing* 五行) that constantly replaced one another. They and their cycles were associated with elements (Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, Water), seasons, colors, musical tones, smells, tastes, organs of the body, stars, and so on. Harmonizing oneself with whatever phase was in the ascendant was a way to assure health for self, society, and nature. Qin, for instance, claimed that it represented the Water element (black), and so was able to extinguish the red Fire of Zhou. Correlative cosmology held that the state, people, and the whole natural world, including animals, plants, heavenly bodies, and spirits all resonated with each other, so that harmony in one meant harmony in the others and disturbance in one disturbed the other.[7] Portents like eclipses could predict political trouble, and omens like the appearance of a unicorn could signal the presence of a good ruler. This way of thinking continued into the twentieth century.

Among other rivals at court, Confucians faced competition from Daoist magicians (*fangshi*). Daoists advised the imperial family on personal health and spirituality. But Daoists also developed Five Phases theory into methods of governance sponsored by Empress Dou and others and compiled a vision of Daoist government in the *Huainan zi* in 139 BC. Emperor Wen (r. 203 – 157 BC) – perhaps adhering to his Empress Dou's Daoist laissez-faire principles – eliminated restrictions on the amount of land and number of slaves a household could own, a dangerous revision to Legalist practice that helped undermine the small farmer class. Magicians also offered very practical services to both the court and the wider community: interpreting dreams, reading horoscopes and faces to discern fortunes, divining with the *Yijing* to help people decide what to do next, teaching gymnastic exercises, bringing rain through prayer, and healing illnesses with herbs, massage, acupuncture, charms, rituals, and exorcism of demons.[8] The visions and services Daoists offered seemed to many both more practical and more appealing than what strait-laced Confucians buried in old texts and rituals had to offer.

Confucians and other officials wanting to influence policy also had to work against, with, or around imperial family members. As well as empresses and their kin, imperial princesses held great influence at court – the emperor's aunts, sisters, and daughters. They passed their royal status, their titles, and their Liu family membership on to their children matrilineally. Royal princesses were not punished with their husbands' families; only the emperor himself could punish princesses and their children. They often maintained very good relations with their brothers: Wudi, for instance, lavished farmland, money, and slaves on his sisters. Furthermore, as women, princesses could go freely into the inner chambers of the palace, so they mediated between the inner court of the royal family and the outer court of officials. Royal princesses often ran their husbands' families; their status made them officially the head of the family. (In the Period of Division after Han, there were even princesses who demanded a harem of secondary husbands.) Royal women could be formidable rivals.

Other intimates of the emperor also wielded considerable influence. A wetnurse, hired to nurse a royal baby, often stayed with the prince or princess for her whole life. They educated their charges and protected them, sometimes with their own lives, in the murderous factional disputes of the Han court. Their grateful charges loaded wetnurses with wealth and honors, mourned like family members at their deaths, and sometimes asked their advice in ruling.[9] Second, a bureaucracy of palace ladies organized into carefully delineated formal ranks with specific duties managed the affairs of the thousands of people living in the palace. Third, eunuchs, chosen from poor families so that they would be loyal to the emperor, served the imperial family, who rewarded them with political power at court, land, and salaries. In the Latter Han, eunuchs put Emperor Shun (Shundi) on the throne in 125, helped

Huandi remove a powerful general in 159, and independently eliminated a Confucian (Dou Wu) who had tried to have the leading eunuchs executed as part of his family's struggle for power.

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5.3: Confucians at the Han Imperial Court

Scholars used to believe that the Han established Confucianism as its state orthodoxy. But it was beginning only in the reign of Yuandi (48-33 BC) that officials frequently quoted Confucius and the dynasty adopted the Mandate of Heaven as a legitimating model. The first imperial edict that invoked Confucius was issued by the Grand Empress Dowager Wang Zhengjun, in AD 1. There was no state cult to Confucius until after the fall of Han. Even the most basic practice of filial piety – mourning parents for three years – was not required of officials (let alone anyone else), or even encouraged during the Former Han.[10]

Confucius had promoted ritual correctness and opposed changes in inherited status, but as Confucians fought for a place in the legalist state, they underlined that those who inherited power were responsible for the people's livelihood, and they underlined meritocratic recruitment as their own way to power. They defined "merit" as filiality and book-learning.

Still, famous Han Confucians gained little influence in their lifetimes, and are known now for their writings. Emperor Wen brought Jia Yi, famous for his rhetorical attack on Qin, to court as a Classics master, but disregarded his policy recommendations, preferring to heed his Daoist consort, Empress Dou. Sima Qian's father Tan, as Grand Astronomer, was responsible for the calendar and for recording court events, but Emperor Wu treated him disrespectfully, "like a jester or entertainer," as his son put it. Daoist *fangshi* took his rightful place at the imperial rituals at Mt. Tai, and he died of chagrin. Qian himself was castrated, and his history regarded by the Han court as subversive.

Another now-eminent Confucian, Liu Xiang (77 – 6 BC), joined a faction trying to rein in the consort families of his time; he was kept out of office for 15 years, until Chengdi (r. 33-7) came to the throne, began collecting scholars, and set Liu Xiang to working on the first Han library project. As he catalogued its holdings, he also compiled stories from various sources to create the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, *Strategies of the Warring States*, and *Biographies of Exemplary Women*.

Finally, Dong Zhongshu (179-104 BC) constantly advised Emperor Wu to cut his military spending, and to support small families by measures such as limiting the amount of land any one person could own. Wudi ignored him, and Dong Zhongshu had to accept a low-ranking government position. He spent his time teaching and writing. Nevertheless, his work had a lasting effect. For he was the key creator of a systematic anti-female strand in Confucian thinking.

When Wudi became emperor, he was only a teenager, and his grandmother, Grand Dowager Empress Dou (d. 135 BC) was still politically active. Empress Dou blocked the appointment of scholars who openly promoted Confucianism, and required the emperor and all the members of her own family to study Daoism. She wished to make it the official doctrine of the government, and many copies of the *Dao De Jing* and related texts have indeed been found in burials from her reign.

To counter-attack, Dong Zhongshu reworked old concepts. One example is the *yin-yang* pair.  In the *Book of Odes* and other early sources, yin and yang referred simply to dark and light, shade and sun, in the natural world. The diagram represents how the seed of each force grows within its complement; nature goes through transformations just as day gives way to dusk and night to dawn. The natural alternation, which was acted out (by the way) in the game of kickball, did not map to "male" and "female." In Han theories of health, yin and yang were two complementary types of *qi* (energy), both present in both men's and women's bodies, which should balance harmoniously within each person's body for good health, naturally waxing and waning. It was Dong Zhongshu who wrote that "yin and yang can be called male and female." To underline that point, Dong proposed that in a drought, men should stay inside and women should go out in public. The specific proposal was new, but it made sense within correlative cosmology.

The next step was to denigrate the yin, making it the worse of the two, instead of yang's equal complement. Dong Zhongshu identified yang (now meaning men) with the Confucian virtue of humaneness or benevolence (ren 仁), and yin (women) with emotion and greediness. He turned the complementarity of yin and yang into a hierarchy: yang, the active force, the force of sunlight and maleness was and ought to be superior. Harmony of equals (和) was replaced with unity enforced by the superior (合). Yin, which Dong labelled inferior and female, had to be kept under control or the cosmos would go haywire. In order to attack imperial and palace women who competed with them at court, Confucians need not speak of specific persons, but could talk loftily of cosmic forces. They could say they feared too much yin at the capital, where the emperor was holding the cosmos together.

The Five Classics (see Chapter One) were taking their final form in Han times, so new ideas were embedded in supposedly old texts: for instance, the *Record of Ritual (Li ji)* claimed that if women disobeyed men, lunar eclipses and other disasters would

result.[11] Mencius had spoken of five reciprocal human relationships: parent and child shared affection, ruler and minister interacted with propriety, husband and wife had different parts to play in the family, elder and younger brother observed age order, and friends shared good faith. Dong spoke instead of the "Three Bonds." In the "Three Bonds" formulation, command by the superior and obedience by the inferior replaced complementarity and reciprocity. Initiated as a way for Confucians (*Ru*, meaning "the weak ones") to attack rivals at court, the formula demanded absolute obedience and sacrifice from the child (and daughter-in-law), loyalty-to-the-death from the minister (and subject), and fierce devotion of the wife (or widow), with no reciprocal obligations on the part of parents, rulers, or husbands. Dong's anti-woman rhetoric was ideological – a way for Confucians to compete for against imperial women. We will see below how far removed from most Han people's reality it was.

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5.4: Confucius- Sage and Mage

In Han times many scholars, like Liu Xiang and Sima Qian, worked to recover historical records, ritual regulations, poems, and other texts that had been hidden away from the Qin prohibitions or destroyed when the imperial Qin library was burnt down. Texts were recited from memory, retrieved from walls and pits, collected, edited, and compiled into the Five Classics and philosophers as we have them today. Despite this activity, Han scholars claimed that Confucius had written or compiled all of the Classics. They relied on Mencius, who had said that Confucius compiled the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, a terse year-by-year account of the twelve rulers of his home domain of Lu between 722 BC and 481 BC.

The *Annals* entries are so short, so bafflingly dull, that their existence and transmission required explanation. The explanations led from Confucius being a historian, to his being an uncrowned king, a master of arcane knowledge, a prophet, and a god.

First, a legend arose that in recording what happened at the Lu court, where the moral and ritual order established by the Duke of Zhou five centuries earlier was falling apart, Confucius either could not (for fear of reprisal) or would not (out of loyalty to the Dukes) mention openly actions that reflected badly on them. So he encoded moral judgments on each event he reported in very subtle wording that only good and thoughtful readers could understand. It's hard to see this in entries like

> Autumn: the king under heaven dispatched his minister, Xuan, to come return grave gifts to the late Duke Hui and his duchess Zhongzi.

But according to the legend, Confucius realized that in his unpropitious time no-one could restore the Way. Instead, the terse entries of the *Annals* recorded a whole program of government. In code, Confucius criticized the rulers of Lu and by extension others like them, and turned his critique into a program for moral government. For instance, for the entry above, the commentary explains

> The use of the word 'return' indicates approval that is should be so. That which Heaven and Earth give birth to cannot be the property of a single family: Those who have and those who have not should be interchangeable.[12]

Since no-one could actually see a government program in the text, two commentaries drew on oral traditions to explain what Confucius had meant, and a third text, the Zuo commentary, probably not originally related to the *Annals* at all, told good stories about the intrigues of those times.

Further, the existence of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* meant that Confucius himself held the Mandate of Heaven, but it was not recognized on earth. To understand the twisted logic here, we have to remember how deeply aristocratic the Zhou feudal system had been. In the feudal system, a lowly *shi* had no business writing a history and passing judgment on the feudal lords: that would have been deeply improper. But Confucius *had* written a history, and since he definitely would not have done anything improper, he must *actually* have been a ruler. Thus, Confucius must have been a king in the eyes of Heaven. Popular songs from Lu talked about Confucius caring for the people and wearing royal clothing: these songs were omens that confirmed the idea of Confucius as an uncrowned king.

But there's more.

To write so subtly, Confucius must have had (Han people concluded) extraordinary insight into people's actions and the cosmic Way. Stories arose demonstrating how his great insight enabled him to detect causes on the basis of bizarre clues. Once Confucius was in the state of Chen when another state attacked. In the course of the siege, a hawk with an arrow shot through it landed inside a fort. Confucius identified the hawk as having come from very far away, and then examined the arrow. Based on the type of wood and the style of the flint arrowhead, he recalled that back in early Zhou, five centuries earlier, King Wu had received this sort of arrow from the distant Shushen people. He gave the Shushen arrows to his daughter when he married her to the first Duke of Chen. So Confucius predicted that the arrows would still be there in Chen's arsenal, and he was right. This arcane knowledge came with a moral/political message: Heaven must have sent the hawk to remind Chen to remember its old loyalty to the royal Zhou house. Confucius was an unsurpassed master of strange knowledge that gave clues to great mysteries.

For someone who can see great mysteries in small things, it is no trick to foretell the future, since the future, like the past, moves in patterned ways. Confucius was credited with compiling the *Book of Changes*, which was used for divination. In Han times, stories arose in which Confucius foretold what would happen, and the greatest of his prophecies was the rise of the Han empire itself. The Han victory had been a shock to many people, because Liu Bang, whose social status was even lower than that of Confucius

himself, not only overthrew the great Qin empire (whose ruler had been a Zhou duke), but also defeated the aristocrat Xiang Yu. To have foretold that three centuries earlier would have been awesome, indeed.

An awesome human is not much different from a god, in the old, pre-ethical East Asian way of thinking that in Japan, after the arrival of Buddhism, was labelled "the Way of the spirits/gods" or Shinto (神道). With such extraordinary insight and the ability to foretell the future, Confucius became a god. A story grew up that Confucius's mother had become pregnant after praying to a local hill god, or that she had dreamed of meeting a "Black Lord" in a dream; or that his birth was announced by black ravens that were the totem of the Shang royal clan, or that he was found in a hollow mulberry tree, also associated with the Shang. The birth was painless, and yet his mother abandoned him in the wilderness, where animals tended him. He grew to be eight feet tall, with a hill-shaped bump on his forehead (representing where his mother had prayed, and referring to his name Qiu, which means hillock or mound), a square face, a nose like the sun, ears like a river, the forehead of a dragon, and lips shaped like the Big Dipper constellation. He had the body of a water sprite, the spine of a tortoise, the paws of a tiger, and long forearms. His eyebrows had 12 colors; his eyes had 64 veins. There were designs on his palms and an inscription on his chest that said, "He will create the evolutions of the Mandate as set forth by celestial tallies that are to fix the future ages." (One can understand why his mother abandoned such a weird-looking baby.)[13]

Confucius as uncrowned king, mage, prophet, and god: these seem strange to us. Many people now think that Confucius in *fact* was a diehard authoritarian who demanded absolute, unthinking loyalty to one's ruler and absolute, unthinking filial obedience to one's parents. But that Confucius, too, was invented in Han times. To understand why, we must first understand a bit about family life in Han law and practice.

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5.5: Han Marriage and Family

Jia Yi (c. 200 – 169 BC) vividly described Shang Yang's reforms in Qin as a Confucian nightmare: they divided brothers and undermined filial affection to such a degree that

> If someone lent his father a rake, hoe, staff, or broom, then he put on airs of great generosity. If a mother took a gourd dipper, bowl, dustpan, or broom, her children immediately scolded her. Wives suckled infants when their fathers-inlaw were present, and if wife and mother-in-law did not get along, they snarled and glared at one another.[14]

People loved their young children, while despising their parents. But Qin was gone, and Jia Yi's point was to lament that Han continued to value the nuclear family, maintaining Legalist policy.

Most people, in Han times and thereafter, lived in families of roughly five people at any one time.[15] Han from 186 BC permitted adult sons to live together, but it encouraged family division. Han policies forced women to marry by increasing their labor taxes fivefold between the ages of 15 and 30 if they did not. The family centered on the conjugal pair (sometimes called "one husband, one wife," sometimes "a farmer and a weaver"), because the hard work of both partners was needed to feed, clothe, and house a family and pay taxes. The husband-wife bond was understood as so important to the household economy that Han law allowed either husband or wife to initiate divorce. Han women frequently did divorce husbands who were poor or sick or had mean parents. After divorce or if one spouse died, remarriage was the usual practice, to assure that everyone had a working partner.

Work roles were gendered to some extent. Each commoner household produced grain and cloth. On family farms, everyone pitched in for planting or harvest. Moreover, each 23- year-old man spent a year in military training, retrained each autumn, and could be called up for the next 30 years of his life. Men's labor service could be far from home (women did their labor service in the local area), so wives had to do farming tasks when husbands were away. But weaving involved highly-specialized knowledge, and apparently in the Han period men absolutely did not work with textiles; they were excluded from a high-status, remunerative field of labor. Since gender mattered to people in other areas of life, daughters may naturally have emulated their mothers, learning their work, while sons learned work from their fathers. Over time the different kinds of work became badges of gender identity, so women who could do so proudly stuck to textile and household work, passing "men's work" off to servants and junior family members of both sexes. Even wives who also farmed could mark themselves as virtuous women by producing cloth, and agricultural rituals had roles for women, including empresses. But both men and women worked as servants, as other kinds of artisans (in imperial workshops most lacquer objects were made by women), as merchants large and small, and as healers, both doctors and shamans.

Normally, a wife moved to her husband's home and land, although there was some uxorilocal marriage (*uxor* means "wife"). A person's surname or family name was that of his or her father, but surnames were not permanent, and people might change to the mother's surname until about AD 200 or so. Wives kept their own surname (so we speak of Empress Lü, the wife of Liu Bang, and of Ban Zhao, who married into the Cao family.) When a wife died, inscribed over her coffin were her natal (birth-family) surname and her order of birth among her sisters, not her place in her husband's family. Connections were social resources, and part of the function of marriage, perhaps especially among wealthier commoners, was precisely to ally families. We might call this an ambilineal system: social being was determined by both the father's and mother's kin. And people cared most about their immediate family, the five or six people they lived with.

In Han practice and law, husband and wife also shared rights to property, in different forms. The wife often managed the household budget, which remained true throughout the imperial period. Even if the husband managed the budget during his lifetime, the wife's right to do so when he was incompetent or dead was legally and social recognized. That right did not pass to the son while his mother was still alive; of course, he was supposed to have moved out and started his own establishment, but she was still his senior. Women owned land and could contest a man's claim to land ownership in a lawsuit in court. Both men and women paid poll tax, which assumes that each had an income. When a family married a daughter out, she took with her a dowry, both as kind of retirement insurance for her parents (she would assist them as they aged) and to show her status as a beloved child and representative of her natal family. The wife's dowry remained her property, both in law and in custom – this too was true throughout most of the imperial period. If she died the dowry went to her children, not to her husband's other children. A widow could inherit her deceased husband's property in her own name, as did one fabulously wealthy female owner of cinnabar mines. If a son died before his mother, she could also dispose of his property, even granting it to her children by other husbands. An excavated

tomb-contract from AD 5 records: Zhu Ling's mother had married three times and had six children, and when her final husband died, she changed her will several times, in the end settling his estate and hers on all of her children – even on one convicted of a crime.[16]

From the fiscal point of view, laws that gave both husbands and wives rights and responsibilities were aimed at preserving a tax-base of small, productive, easy-to-control households. From the economic point of view, each household needed to grow grain and vegetables and raise chickens and pigs, and to raise hemp or ramie or silkworms to make cloth, not to speak of cooking, cleaning, and caring for the young and the old. A strong husband-wife partnership was the key to a healthy family economy and state fisc.

This partnership had cultural implications. First, loyalty and property rested with the nuclear family. When one man funded his son and his nephew equally, the son's wife complained that this was not the norm: "Each one has his own family! How can we continue on like this?" Second, matrilineal kin were just as close – or just as distant – as patrilineal kin. For instance, Dowager Empress Wang (70 BC – AD 13) had two full brothers, and six half-brothers by the same father. She made her two brothers marquises and gave them the income produced by about 8,000 households; she gave her half-brothers lower titles and less than half the income, showing that she – like most Han people – valued her mother's line. She had another halfbrother by her mother, by a different father, and she wangled him lucrative government posts; again, she was thinking about her mother's descent line. The *Han History* reports that her various relatives "took advantage of their opportunities and were extravagant, competing with one another in their equipages and horses, music and women, idleness and gadding about." Another half-brother had unfortunately died before the Empress's handouts. His son, Wang Mang, was totally ignored by his luckier wealthy cousins. They offered no help: they did not see the patrilineal clan connection as meaning that they should support him.[17] Ultimately, it was his connection with his maternal aunt, although it was emotionally distant, that gave him a stepping stone to power – we will see below with what result.

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5.6: The Rise of the Clans

The Han government had understood from the beginning the danger of wealth. In 64 BC, officials who wanted more grain in government storehouses proposed that some criminals be permitted to commute physical punishment to a fine in grain. But other officials objected: The rich would be able to pay and the poor would not, so punishment for the same crime would be unequal, violating a fundamental Legalist principle. If poor people ate less themselves, scrimping to rescue a relative from a beating, in effect more people would be punished. The relationship of mutual support between the emperor and the people would be damaged.[18] Over the course of Former Han the court constantly reconfigured policies on taxation, mercantile activity, state production and so on, trying to find the right balance.

Finding the right balance was hard, probably impossible, and in the end, the smallholding class was destroyed. Free trade, including the long-distance trade in luxuries, meant that some smart or lucky merchants and farmers made vast profits, which some used to distort the legal process and buy influence. It was harder to tax merchants' property (land cannot be hidden, but bales of silk can), and so Han efforts to mitigate the great wealth of a few merchant families failed. Within each county, some families outcompeted others in farming, in free trade, and in the competition to hold government office. A small initial advantage could become much larger over time.

The fundamental vulnerability of farmers everywhere is that they live on a yearly cycle: the harvest comes in fall, and is eaten up over the winter. In spring, grain is needed for planting, and if it has been a long winter, farmers may need to borrow seed grain. In Han times, if the state did not provide seed, poor farmers borrowed it at exorbitant rates of interest from wealthier neighbors. That could lead to a spiraling cycle of debt. A family that was too deep in debt, or whose crucial worker had suffered an injury or died, would be unable to meet its tax obligations or pay its creditors, and might have to sell its land to a wealthier neighbor. Family members – their land gone – became share-cropping tenants, servants, house-slaves, or outlaws. The free market meant opportunity and success for some and disaster for many.

In each county, the families who bought up their neighbors' land translated that wealth into local power. They hired thugs. They made loans to neighbors in trouble and took their land when they couldn't pay them back. Demanding other kinds of service from neighbors they undermined equality, turned them into servile dependents. Some these clans could muster a thousand kinsmen and retainers for a fight, even two or three thousand. How could small families maintain their independence? Next, power over neighbors translated into influence over local government. In order to keep taxes low, the Han tried to avoid paying too many officials. That meant that county magistrates and their staffs had to work with people in the locality to collect taxes, maintain roads and granaries, raise troops, etc. Naturally, they worked with those who had influence locally to get things done, and naturally those people asked for favors in return – including illegal tax breaks. If a county's wealthy families did not pay their taxes, the magistrate had no choice but to impose the tax burden on their poorer, weaker neighbors. The wealth gap increased again.

Finally, local political power could translate into national political power. The normal route into office in Han times was a meritocratic one. Magistrates had to recommend a certain number of men as officials. A magistrate would of course recommend the men he had been working with: members of the big clans. That put more clan sons in office, earning more salaries, but more importantly it gave them power over policy at the central level. Any reformer hoping to mitigate the wealth and influence of the big clans now faced members of those clans at court. The clans also married daughters into the imperial family, so they came to include wives and mothers, fathers-in-law and grandfathers of emperors.

A small initial advantage could translate into a big difference in wealth and power in the local area over time. An estate of a thousand *mou* or more, worked by tenants, would produce not only pigs, chickens, and sheep; millet, wheat and barley; but also pickles, vinegar, and sauces, and ale. It might have its own mill to grind wheat, and family members, servants, and slaves also made silk and hemp cloth and clothing, candles, and other items to be used or sold for cash to buy speciality goods. Compared with feudal domains, or the estates of lesser Zhou nobility, or the estates of the great European nobility later, the Han clans' holdings were not very large. Any one family could not raise an army, make allies, and threaten the throne. But a clan or group of intermarrying clans could dominate a local area, and the clans working together as a **class** (class is based on ownership of the means of production), holding office in the imperial state, could block policies that threatened their wealth. So it proved with the unlucky nephew whose father missed the handouts of the Empress Dowager Wang.

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5.7: Wang Mang's "New" Dynasty, AD 9-23

Han Wudi had reigned for half a century; over the next half century, his policies were retracted, then put back in place, but the rich steadily got richer and the poor fell into tenancy and even slavery. In AD 9, the nephew of Empress Dowager Wang Zhengjun, Wang Mang, took the throne, declaring a "New" (Xin) regime. Wang was both too radical and not radical enough to succeed. On the one hand, he issued some measures for environmental conservation, and he tried to redistribute land and outlaw slavery, for a reboot of the smallholder economy. That won him the determined enmity of the wealthy clans, who by that time also held many bureaucratic positions. On the other hand, he lost popular support by enslaving thousands of people, including innocent families and members of mutual responsibility groups, as punishment for the desperate measures some had taken when a terrible frost destroyed crops in AD 21. Han had used the mutual responsibility groups only administratively, not arresting people for the crimes of other families; Wang Mang revived this quintessentially Legalist system – which does not stop historians from describing him as a Confucian.

Wang Mang was talented and hardworking, so his regime might have lasted, nevertheless, had it not been for an unavoidable environmental catastrophe. The Yellow River carries an enormous amount of silt from the Gobi desert and the mountains: hence its name. Its bed constantly rises, and high dikes keep it in the channel. What with the expenses of the Xiongnu war, even Wudi had not really maintained the dikes, and the regimes after him had still less money, as the big clans stopped paying taxes. In AD 3, the river flooded so dramatically that it shifted to debouch into the sea south of the Shandong peninsula, rather than north. This geological shift that happens about once every 600 years. Wang Mang's regime was hit with flooding, refugees, disease, and famine. Rebels, including one called "Mother Lü" and a group called the Red Eyebrows, caused further suffering. Then the rain stopped and drought set in. Like the Second Qin Emperor, Wang refused to take advice, and became increasingly bizarre. Han loyalist troops and the Red Eyebrows battled it out in the capital when Wang died in AD 23.

The winner was – or claimed to be – a distant relative of the Liu imperial line.[19] If he had not chosen to re-use the Han dynastic name, we would consider the Latter or Eastern Han as separate from the Former Han as the Former Han was from Qin.

In the re-established Eastern Han, Emperor Guangwu released all those whom Wang Mang had enslaved – but not those enslaved by the former Han. Eleven million people had died or dropped off the population registers, but wealth reform was dead, too. In Latter Han times, the clans dominated local society as landowners, and they dominated the central state by sending sons into office. This was a new kind of power – rather than rank power based on birth, it is class power, based on the ownership and control of capital, of land and labor. A new kind of power requires a new ideology and new forms of organization. The clans needed ideology and organization to hold their clan property, the basis of their power, together. They needed a system of beliefs to counteract the legal and common values associated with family division and to justify their power to the state, their neighbors, and themselves. They turned to reimagining Confucius, and created a new kind of Confucianism.

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5.8: Han Clan Ideology and Organization

In order to hold their property together, and assure that clan members cooperated with one another both locally and at court to promote shared interests, clan leaders had to counter the norm, embedded in the law, that the nuclear family and husband-wife bond were most important. To create a clear line of command within the large number of families making up the clan, they had to fight the norm of equality embedded in the law. They could not just say, "We reject all the changes since Qin," because as commoners for their power they relied on the Qin and Han institutions of private property and meritocracy. So they adopted and revised old feudal ideas and attributed them to Confucius, drawing on and reshaping the ritual classics. They adopted from the Zhou aristocracy the neat scheme of the ritual reform that traced a patrilineal descent line from father to sons over generations, distinguishing elder from younger sons. They associated with this patrilineal ideal a number of other demands on family members, which I will explain below.

First, the big clans made ancestors important again. Most people in Han times just did not think much about their ancestors at all. Biographies in the *History of Former Han* (written by Ban Gu (AD 32-92) and his sister, Ban Zhao) recount a man's own titles and accomplishments, but rarely give even the names of his forefathers. Historian Hou Xudong writes,

> In the Western Han period, Chinese as a whole lacked deep concern about the names of their ancestors. Few people could remember the names of their grandfathers, to say nothing of ancestors deeper in the past.[20]

Around the end of Former Han, the rising clans started to think more about ancestors; Wang Mang promoted this trend, and the first excavated epitaph that records five generations of patrilineal ancestors was carved in 165 AD. (By the way, this epitaph also claimed that the deceased was distantly descended from the Kija.)[21] Surnames, originally given to commoners in order to register them as taxpayers, now tracked patrilineal ancestors, their achievements, and perhaps the power they could draw on to help descendants. "What are surnames for?" asked Ban Gu. "They are the way that we honor contributions and virtue/efficacious spiritual power (*gongde* 功德) and discourage mere cunning and force."

Second, not all ancestors were equal. Surnames passed patrilineally, and matrilineal kin began to be denigrated. Sociologist Pan Guangdan argues that the ritual system of mourning grades in the ritual classic *Book of Etiquette and Propriety* (*Yili* 儀禮, completed in Han times and a key test of patrilinealism) did not record actual ancient practice. Rather, it argued *against* normal practice, recommending that fathers and paternal kin *should* be mourned more deeply than mothers and maternal kin.[22] Even among patrilineal kin, the clan ideologists created hierarchy modelled on the Zhou feudal lines. One senior or "trunk" line carried on the worship of the ancestors, and outranked "branch" or junior lines stemming from younger brothers.

Third, the patrilinealists set new priorities and a chain of command. They argued that the clan was more important than the individual or the nuclear family. Older clan members of the family, members of senior generations, and members of senior lines were more valuable – they argued – than younger and junior people. They created a clear chain of family rank and command. No two people within the family were equal. Gender, age, generation, birth order, and line membership all figured into a person's family rank. Men dominated women within the same level of hierarchy and same generation, but mothers commanded sons and other juniors. In this patriarchal system, filial piety meant the sacrifice of juniors to seniors in all dimensions. Stories told of virtuous aunts who sacrificed their own sons to save their nephews in the senior line. Wives should sacrifice their own interests to obey their parents-in-law, younger brothers obey elder brothers and protect their children first, and so on. The ranking facilitated clear lines of command as the clan grew.

Fourth, to keep the clan property intact for maximum power, the clan ideologists argued that divorce was ethically wrong. For women to remarry after being widowed was also wrong. Recall that in a divorce or when a widow remarried, by law she took her dowry, her husband's property, and her children with her. In order to keep top-down "harmony" within the family by preventing friendly or amorous relations now that clan members were spending more time together, maybe even living together in extended families, the clan ideologists promoted the separation and differentiation of the sexes, and ritualized relations between them. For similar reasons, they promoted monogamy, meaning that each man had only one primary wife. If he insisted on marrying a concubine (secondary wife), the wife outranked the concubine, and had control of how she spent her time. A concubine could never be promoted to primary wife, even if the primary wife died. A concubine had no importance outside of her relationship with her husband; even her children belonged to the primary wife, and the concubine might even be buried with her husband when he died, against her will. Again, the differentiation of types of wife assured that was it clear who outranked whom. Finally, procreation was

declared to be a key duty of sons, who had to carry on the line. These ideas the clans linked with Confucius, inventing the new *Classic of Filial Piety* to put words in his mouth, and associating the *Zuo Commentary* with its attention to surnames with the *Spring and Autumn Annals*.

Patrilineal ideology empowered senior wives, as well as senior husbands. A very wellknown argument for this style of Confucianism was written by Ban Zhao, who finished the *History of Former Han* for her brother. Her instructions are often called *Lessons for Women* and in the early twentieth century came to be understood as betrayal, teaching women to simply obey men. But 女誡 could be also be translated "A Warning for Wives," and interpreted as advice about how to avoid being legally divorced; or as "A Warning about Women," arguing that they ought to be educated; or as "Lessons for Wives," promising a set of good outcomes to the wife who follows the Confucian path of family duty, ritual, and learning. It could be translated "Advice for Daughters," in which Ban addressed teenagers, using their wish for love and worries about their looks to convince them to follow the Confucian path. If translated "A Warning from a Woman," it could constitute a way for political women *and* men to stay safe at the dangerous Han court. Finally, given that Ban Zhao educated royal women and advised Empress Deng, who promoted Daoism, the title "Feminine Advice" could lead us to look for Daoist elements.

Patrilineal ideology and organization reinforced the clans' power as landholders. Filial piety stories aimed at indoctrinating juniors. Tomb carvings portrayed filial exemplars alongside or instead of the usual pictures of Daoist transcendents, spirits, deities, and martial heroes. For the first time, filial piety came to mean absolute obedience to parents and seniors, and abnegation of the self. (But it could clash with other values in the new code. Confucian scholar Xun Shuang (AD 128-90), urged his widowed daughter Cai to remarry and live a full life. But Cai thought remarriage was wrong, and committed suicide rather than obeying her father.)

Filial piety stories also advertised the clan. The Han government, you will recall, recruited candidates for office through recommendation by county officials on the basis of virtue and learning. The filial sons of clans with the resources to allow them to study *The Analects* and *The Classic of Filial Piety*, and then the Five Classics, would naturally be recommended for office. The *Classic of Filial Piety* overtly connected family virtue with utility to the state:

> As one serves one's family, so one serves one's mother, drawing on the same love. As one serves one's father, so one serves one's prince, drawing on the same reverence… If one serves the prince with the filiality one shows one's father, if becomes the virtue of loyalty. If one serves one's superiors in office with brotherly submission, it becomes the virtue of obedience. Never failing loyalty and obedience, this is how one serves one's superiors. Thus may one preserve rank and office and continue the family sacrifices. This is the filiality of the scholar official…[23]

So much for the idea that the truly loyal official was like Mencius: one who told the ruler unpleasant truths when necessary. The new Confucianism, ever more prominent in Latter Han as members of the clans served as officials and married emperors, promised rulers obedience.

But this promise was not kept. For the emperors of Latter Han, after Guangwu, were weaklings who took the throne as babies or children and died before they were 40. They married members of the clans, and their mothers and fathers-in-law, along with court eunuchs, bossed them around instead of obeying them. The consort kin collected as much as wealth they could, and tried to secure their positions by slaughtering their rivals. The court had collected less and less public income, and with public conscription over, military power passed to the heads of commanderies – also of course from the clans – who created private armies. Some villages moved up into the hills to escape the disorder, a practice poeticized by Tao Yuanming (365?-427) in "The Peach-Blossom Spring," but others fell under the control of the clans.

The growing power of great clans rested on a number of things, as the example of the Cui clan of Boling illustrates. First, they owned land and were respected leaders in the local community at Boling in Hebei. They attended to relations and social prestige there, visiting neighbors, maintaining good relations with other, less-wealthy respected people, providing charity to needy neighbors, and serving as local intermediaries with officials. Second, they were *asked* to hold office and often accepted for brief periods. In the Han period, few of the Cuis chose to hold government office for very long; Cui Yin argued that attending to family ritual was a legitimate occupation in itself. In the Period of Division, Daoism legitimated the choice not to serve.

Third, clan members were well-educated (at home) in the classics and literature; some families specialized in particular texts that they owned, with family traditions of interpretation. They wrote elegant essays and poems. Fourth, they knew how to act properly at funerals and towards their elders. Fifth, they held clan members together in large numbers and over generations, through attention to patrilineal principles and family ritual, and through economic savvy. They managed farmland, tenants, and slaves, and

saved money, investing it in enterprises such as brewing. They accrued enough wealth to profit by buying low and selling high. And sixth, when necessary they fortified and armed their estates to protect themselves.[24] Clans like this also displayed their Confucian virtue through tomb art in a dramatically different style from that of royalty, eunuchs, and wealthy mercantile families that did not pursue the same strategies.[25]

The clans' power increased after the fall of Han. They came to consider themselves truly, and naturally, different from and better than others in society. They became a new hereditary elite, an aristocracy.

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5.9: Daoism and the Fall of Han

This Han Confucianism was only for the elite. Daoism, by contrast, both incorporated aspects of popular religion and served ordinary people, especially as Han governance fell apart. Popular religion included three types of spirits: cared-for ancestors; neglected dead people who became hungry ghosts or demons; and nature gods like those of Shinto, imagined as somewhat like people or animals. Confucian texts like the *Record of Rites* presented spirits as formless. But most people thought of deities like Heaven and Earth anthropomorphically, while rain spirits looked like dragons, local spirits of trees or streams often looked like snakes, and birds, foxes, bears, and other animals could be good spirits or demons who could make trouble.



Figure 5.2. Bronze and iron plaque in the form of a demon. Latter Han. About 4" wide. Why do you think most sources don't talk much about demons? Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public Domain.

People had long pacified spirits and demons with blood sacrifice, contacted them in shamanistic trances, and assured fertility of field and womb with orgiastic rituals. Daoists rejected blood sacrifice, replaced trance and orgy with written charms and petitions, exorcised demons and brought them into a pantheon, a hierarchy of all gods. They also added new types of spirits: transcendents with their purified *qi* and special powers and Lord Lao (the deified Laozi, supposed author of the *Dao De Jing*), who embodied the Dao. Don't forget the Queen Mother of the West! Daoists won adherents by promising transformations of the increasingly chaotic real world, and building communities that protected people.[26]

The Great Peace (Taiping) movement, beginning in roughly AD 145, taught that the cosmos encompassed heaven; humans of nine sorts from transcendents down to slaves; and earth (the realm of nature spirits and the dead). All were made of cosmic *qi*, which needed to flow smoothly to prevent natural disaster and political corruption. Followers abstained from alcohol and meat, meditated, made vegetarian offerings to ancestors and spirits, and purified themselves in expectation of a new age. Beginning in the next *jiazi* year (using the old Shang counting system, AD 184 by our count), they believed, the whole world would experience the proper flow of cosmic *qi* so that everyone would be healthy, long-lived, good, and happy. A leader named Zhang Jue and his brothers in 175 organized disciplined units to spread the word, and in 184 about 360,000 followers wearing yellow headscarves rebelled against the "blue heaven" of Han to bring in the "yellow heaven" of a new, better age. The "Yellow Turbans" were defeated, but the militarization required to defeat them led to the fall of the Han dynasty.[27]

A second Daoist community survived the fall of Han. A *fangshi* magician named Zhang Daoling, searching the mountains of Sichuan for a special ingredient, had a trance-vision in which Lord Lao appointed him "Celestial Master," gave him healing powers, and told him that the world would soon end. He should gather followers and teach them to purify themselves to serve as "seed-people" for a new epoch. Celestial Master Zhang and his successors taught that Lord Lao ruled the whole cosmos through a heavenly bureaucracy of spirit generals who could conquer the demons that caused sickness, misfortune, and death. The Celestial Masters organized whole households of their followers into districts, headed by officials (both men and women) recruited and promoted on the basis of merit. In return for paying a tax of five pecks of rice or the equivalent in silk, pottery, or other goods, adherents won protection from demons by a whole list of spirit generals called a "register" and carried in a sash around the waist. Individuals who had committed sins, however, were still vulnerable to demon attack. A sick person would be isolated to identify those sins in their own minds; then a senior master would write them down in triplicate and burn them, petitioning the heavenly bureaucracy to erase them from the record.

A strong sense of community came from practices probably influenced by Buddhism (regular recitations of the *Dao De Jing* and ethical commandments, and detailed rules about daily life) and festival banquets for all, with wine and meat served as a break from

normal practice. Initiation into higher levels of the hierarchy (meaning one could call upon greater and greater registers of demon-quelling spirit generals) involved ritualized sexual intercourse, a violation of ordinary norms that may have bound members more tightly together against the outside world. Community members also cooperated in offering services to that wider world: maintaining roads and bridges, for instance. The Celestial Masters submitted to post-Han warlord Cao Cao, who dissolved their tight organization. But the sect still exists today, and many of their ideas and values were also absorbed into the underlying popular religion.[28]

Legalist government practice was so widespread after four centuries that it had reshaped popular religion. Confucianism was by no means the only ideology or religion in Han times. Han Confucianism comprised disparate strands. It created dignity for emperors and enabled officials to argue against war and state monopolies. Officials deployed it to oppose female dynastic power. The clans developed it as an ideology to shore up their organization and keep property together. As they became a new aristocracy, they relied on Confucianism as a family practice that set them apart from the commoner class they had sprung from.

Confucianism's victory was not inevitable. Anthropologist Eugene Anderson points out that at the court of the king of Huainan, Liu An (d. 122) scholars focused on practical Daoist economic thought. Elsewhere a scholar recorded controlled experiments in research on agriculture that were sponsored by the government, and gave practical advice on farming. If Liu An, or someone else with his interests, had ruled the Han empire instead of Wudi, Anderson asks, would serious agricultural science have developed?[29] A mixture of Daoism with practical economics and science would have led to a very different kind of civilization, and the impact of Buddhism – which the next chapter will discuss – would have taken different directions, too.

Note: In China today, the whole past up into the nineteenth century is called "ancient." In American and European usage, the "ancient" period ended with the fall of Han, and the "medieval" or "middle period" of Chinese history began.

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5.10: Sources

[1] Goldin, “On the Meaning of the Name Xiwangmu,” 83-5.

[2] Lullo, “Female Divinities in Han Dynasty Representation,” p. 260.

[3] Tseng, *Picturing Heaven*, 265.

[4] https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Queen_Mother_of_the_West,_unearthed_from_Chengdu,_Sichuan,_Eastern_Han_dynasty,_25-220_AD,_tomb_tile_-_Sichuan_University_Museum_-_Chengdu,_China_-_DSC06292.jpg

[5] Translated in Tseng, *Picturing Heaven*, 214, with some modifications.

[6] This quotation comes from and this section is based on Cahill, *Transcendence and Divine Passion*, chapter 1.

[7] Archaeologists recently recovered over 4,500 wooden and bamboo strips with writing from the Former Han in a tomb in Jingzhou, Hubei, including calendrical charts, annals, laws, day-books, medical treatises, and so on. The annals support the records in the *Shi ji*. Wood slips found in a tomb in Chengdu include laws about poll taxes, stabilizing prices, etc., and records of cases of witchcraft. So we will soon understand Han ways of thinking even better.

[8] Kohn, *Daoism and Chinese Culture*, chapter 3.

[9] Jen-der Lee, “Wet Nurses in Early Imperial China.”

[10] Brown, *The Politics of Mourning In Early China*, 24-32

[11] This section is based on Hinsch, *Women in Early Imperial China*, and Wang, “Dong Zhongshu's Transformation of ‘Yin-Yang’ Theory.

[12] Robert Eno, “Early Chinese Thought Course Readings,” chinatxt.sitehost.iu.edu/Thought/Chunqiu.pdf, accessed August 7, 2020.

[13] This section is drawn from Michael Nylan and Thomas Wilson, *Lives of Confucius: Civilization’s Greatest Sage through the Ages*.

[14] Lewis, *The Early Chinese Empires*, 42.

[15] Most of this section is drawn from Hinsch, *Women in Early Imperial China*, and von Glahn, *The Economic History of China*.

[16] Hou Xudong, “Rethinking Chinese Kinship,” 40-1.

[17] Hou Xudong, “Rethinking Chinese Kinship,” 35, 39-40.

[18] Sanft, *Communication and cooperation*, 137.

[19] For more on Wang Mang see John Wills, *Mountain of Fame: Portraits in Chinese History*.

20 Hou Xudong, “Rethinking Chinese Kinship,” 51.

[21] Hou Xudong, “Rethinking Chinese Kinship,” 52.

[22] Hou Xudong, “Rethinking Chinese Kinship,” 37-8, 43.

[23] Xiaojing (Classic of Filiality) translated in de Bary, et al., eds, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, second edition, volume 1, p. 327.

[24] Ebrey, *The aristocratic families of early Imperial China*.

[25] Powers, *Art and Political Expression in Early China*.

[26] Poo, *In Search of Personal Welfare* and Kohn, *Daoism in Chinese Culture*.

[27] Livia Kohn, *Daoism in Chinese Culture*, 67-68

[28] Livia Kohn, *Daoism in Chinese Culture*, 68-80.

[29] Anderson, *The East Asian World-System*, section 4.2, p. 104

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

6: A World of Many Powers (AD 200 – AD 580)

Long divided, the empire will surely unite; long united, it will divide.

分久必合，合久必分*

* Opening of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (Sanguo yanyi).

6.1: Dividing and Uniting
6.2: Koguryŏ's East Asia
6.3: The Mainland- Aristocracy Returns
6.4: The Peninsula and Archipelago Before Writing
6.5: From Chiefs to Queen and Kings in the Archipelago
6.6: Buddhism in Diplomacy
6.7: Sources

Thumbnail: Haniwa earthenware horse's head, Japan, sixth century. About a foot long. Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public domain.

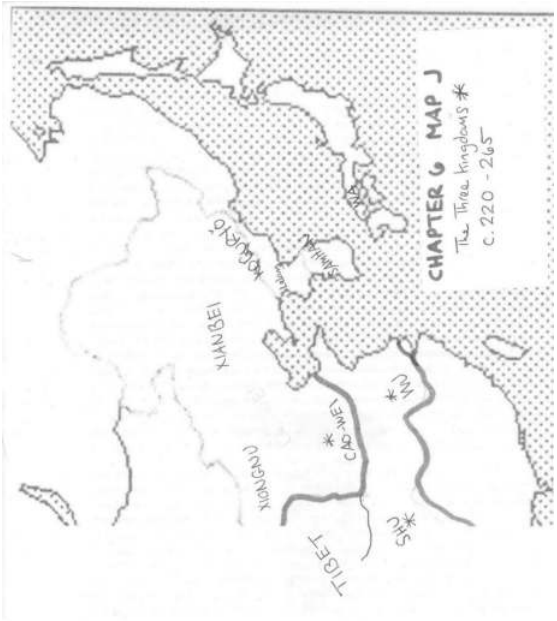
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6.1: Dividing and Uniting

Both nationalist politicians and scholars commonly say that China has experienced impressive political unity. Yet there are many reasons to complicate this trope. Shang controlled only a small area. Zhou was larger, but its feoffs began to divide after three centuries. Qin and Han were the first to control any area west of the Ordos or south of the Yangzi. Ming and Song never attained the same size as Han. From the end of Han until the fall of Qing in 1911, what had been Han territory was politically united for only about 525 years, so it was divided about two-thirds of the time. Qin and Sui, the great unifying dynasties, both fell in the second generation. Every other major dynasty experienced a major rebellion or crisis halfway through: the Zhou with the sacking of its capital in 771, the Han with the Xin dynasty, the Tang with the An Lushan rebellion of 755, the Song with the loss of the North in 1127, the Ming with the Tumu incident of 1449, and the Qing with the Taiping Rebellion of 1850-1862. Political unity may have been the ideal, but it was not the norm.

Historian Chen Sanping writes that although the written record takes for granted the existence of a core "China" even after Han control splintered, such a core cannot be located in anything concrete.[1] Northern and Southern governing methods and cultures diverged, while in the peninsula and archipelago communities and clans were consolidating polities for the first time by selectively adopting and adapted mainland riziculture, metallurgy and other technology, governing techniques and ideology, and Chinese written language and literate culture. As Japan and Korea, and Vietnam, adopted the written tradition, they contributed to it as well. It cannot be considered purely Chinese.

As mainland regimes split, regimes on the archipelago and peninsula + Manchuria consolidated. Individuals, clans, communities, and polities across East Asia interacted with one another: angling for precious, exotic prestige goods and useful iron, jostling for advantage in trade and war, immigrating to escape trouble, intermarrying, and sharing skills. Twentiethcentury scholars, to whom nations looked natural, saw interactions in terms of national domination. But as historian Wang Zhenping writes, "Admiration, importation, and consumption of Chinese values and institutions, however, did not necessarily translate into political subservience… Cultural and political borrowing were merely a means to facilitate system building at home."[2] More substantial than ethnicity or nation were inherited rank and violent elite domination of workers.



Map J. The Chinese "Three Kingdoms" and their neighbors, about AD 220-265

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6.2: Koguryŏ's East Asia

On the mainland, the military commanders who defeated the Yellow Turbans did not disperse their armies, but became warlords. In 191, one looted and burned the imperial capital at Luoyang, including its imperial and private libraries. Five years later, thirteen warlords had carved up the Han empire. One of them, Cao Cao, acting for the Han heir, won control of north China – about half of empire's people – and managed a reasonable semblance of governance. When Cao Cao died, his son deposed the Han monarch and declared his own dynasty, the CaoWei (220-265). Two other regimes formed: the Shu-Han (221-263) in Sichuan, and the Wu (222-280) centered on Nanjing on the Yangzi River.[3] These are the (Chinese) Three Kingdoms.

The Han empire and the Xiongnu confederacy had always developed in tandem. As the Han imperial bureaucratic order broke up, so too the Xiongnu confederation shattered into clans and tribes. Qiang Tibetans moved into Han territory, and settlers in the West abandoned by the Han regime joined them. A new nomadic power, the Xianbei, arose in northeastern Manchuria. Changes in the steppe sent mounted warriors out from bases in Central Asia and the northern steppe into the Yellow River area and down towards the Yangzi. The horsemen clashed and cooperated with the sedentary agricultural aristocracy developing out of the Han clans.

The longest lasting dynasty in the period was the first and largest of the (Korean) Three Kingdoms, **Koguryŏ** (c. 37 BC - AD 668). Koguryŏ chiefs had clashed with the Han empire and subjugated the people along the eastern coast of the peninsula. In AD 200 Koguryŏ built a capital in the upper Yalu River valley (now Jilin province in China), and by expanding along the Yalu, threatened Cao-Wei in two ways. First, Cao-Wei had occupied the Lelang and Daifang commanderies in 236-38 to benefit from trade with the southern peninsula, but Koguryŏ now controlled trade routes. Second, Koguryŏ established diplomatic relations with Cao-Wei's southern-mainland rivals, Wu and Shu. As we will see below, Cao-Wei welcomed an alliance with Queen Himiko of Wa in the archipelago, and in 245, its soldiers destroyed the Koguryŏ capital. The fifty years it took for the regime to recover gave its rival confederacies in the peninsula, the Samhan, a breathing space.

Twenty years after the Cao-Wei victory over Koguryŏ, in 265, a general usurped the CaoWei throne, founded the Western Jin, and defeated Wu and Shu. Western Jin unified much of the former Han territory (but not the far west); and took over Lelang and Daifang on the northern Korean peninsula, but shifted its entrepot for East Asian trade westward to the Liaodong peninsula. With the trading center further away, the Samhan turned to diplomacy: Chinhan and Mahan sent a dozen missions to Jin between 276 and 291, for instance, each including between three and twenty-nine of the towns that made up the Samhan confederations. It may have been precisely to gain leverage in trade that the town chiefs acquiesced in increasing centralization. The Samhan confederations became kingdoms. By 372, King Kŭnch'ogo was offering tribute to Eastern Jin as the monarch of Paekche, not the confederation head of Mahan. Ten years later Maripkan Naemul offered tribute to Eastern Jin as the monarch of Silla, not just the head of the Chinhan confederacy. (If he existed at all. Naemul is traditionally said to have reigned from 356 to 402, but he may be a myth constructed out of a scrap of a text preserved in Tang sources.)[4]

Did I say offering tribute to *Eastern* Jin? Yes – for the general who had founded Western Jin failed to create a stable regime. Rather than reestablishing a meritocratic system of recruiting officials, he appointed 50 members of his own clan to government. Naturally, upon his demise, they began viciously fighting one another. All sides hired professional cavalry – men who had grown up with horses, within and along the Han northern border. So it is hardly surprising that in 304, a Xiongnu general declared an independent state in north China. Over the next 12 years he captured both the old Han capitals of Luoyang and Chang'an, and the Western Jin leadership fled south. (Since the general's mother, he claimed, descended from Liu Bang in one of the many Han-Xiongnu diplomatic marriage alliances, he initially called his new state "Han.") Eastern Jin held only the area south of the Huai River. The Gongsun family, ensconced in the Liaodong peninsula, took over the Lelang commandery and divided it to form the Daifang commandery in about 189. From then on, warfare was endemic, and court politics became more murderous than ever. From about 300 to 589, for three and half centuries, thirty-seven mainland dynasties named in the histories came and went, twenty-two of them from the steppe and Manchuria, -- not to speak of many clans who evaded control entirely, or who strove for dominance but quickly failed. No dynasty held power for long.

In this dangerous situation, the northern regimes worried about Koguryŏ, and the southern regimes welcomed diplomats from afar as signs of their legitimacy. Koguryŏ had re-emerged under King Mich'ŏn (r. 300-330). He annexed Lelang and Daifang, the remaining former Han-imperial commanderies, in 313. From then until 668, it was Koguryŏ military pressure that gave urgency to East Asian alliances and state formation in the peninsula and archipelago. Archaeologists have found over 300 Korguryŏ in Liaoning, including the Liaodong peninsula: 70 mountain fortresses, over 200 tombs, and even a stone quarry.[5] Like the Zhou

warring states, the various polities alternately allied and fought with one another at the same time as their chiefs fought for supremacy among one another and for control of land, labor, and prestige goods.

Koguryŏ King Kwanggaet'o (r. 391— 413) expanded the realm considerably. Imitating mainland rulers, he took a reign name (Yŏngnak 永樂 "Perpetual Happiness"). (Kwanggaet'o's full title was 國岡上廣開土境平安好太王.) We know about his achievements because his son, Changsu "The Long-Lived" (r. 413-499) recounted them on a stele, an inscribed stone monument he set up in 414. Kwanggaet'o fought a regime further north in Manchuria; then to support Silla fought Wa troops (probably allied with Kaya) and Paekche; and then fought the northern regime of Puyŏ, where legend claims his ancestors had come from.

Kwanggaet'o's aggression stimulated alliances and state formation. Paekche developed in the Mahan area. After building quite a large walled city (recently excavated), it first appears in a written record when King Kŭnch'ogo contacted the Jin state in 372. In 396, when Koguryŏ took 58 Paekche forts and was besieging the capital, Paekche King Asin sent his son directly to Wa, a regime in the archipelago, to request assistance.

In about 400, Koguryŏ demolished one Kaya regime, and conquered northern Paekche, enabling King Changsu to move the Koguryŏ capital further south from the Yalu River valley to Pyongyang on the peninsula. There, riziculture fed a larger army, which pushed Paekche yet further south. Paekche and Silla allied against Koguryŏ in 433, and from about 400 to 500, Silla and Wa also joined forces. Once Silla had gained enough strength to push Koguryŏ back up the coast, it dropped Wa, which allied with Paekche instead. Each regime also sought diplomatic support from the various mainland dynasties. Kaya, for instance, sent a mission to Southern Qi on the mainland in 479. The shifting alliances alone make one's head spin.

But it is still more complex than that. Until about 1600, Korean historians assumed that the Samhan confederations of towns (Mahan, Chinhan, and Pyŏnhan) had developed into the Three Kingdoms (Koguryŏ, Paekche, and Silla): a nice, simple, storyline, but wrong: it was the Kaya states (not counted as one of the Three Kingdoms) that developed in the Pyŏnhan area. The confusion was natural, because borders changed frequently, as kings fought one another and struggled to command local chiefs and groups. In what historian Park Cheun Soo calls the "mutual interaction model," many small chiefs traded and fought and allied, across the water and up and down the peninsula. Pressure from Koguryŏ's powerful armies led independent chiefs to seek alliances.

Texts cannot trace the process of state formation accurately, because most were written far away or long afterwards, and some tell outright lies. King Kwanggaet'o's stele dates to 414, and for a long time was the earliest extant text directly associated with Korean history. It is a good primary source for him, because it was written immediately after his death. (That does not mean we have to believe everything it says.) But for Koguryŏ's earlier history, we must rely on archaeology and mainland written sources. Silla was supposedly founded in 57 BC, but there is no archaeological or mainland evidence for that. The earliest extant stone inscription from Silla was carved in 501; the first steles to mention that there was a Silla founding ancestor date to 568; and that ancestor only gets a name on a stele carved another century later.[6] The first substantial narratives of Korean history were written (in classical Chinese) in 1145 ("History of the Three Kingdoms" *Samguk sagi* 三國史記, with "sagi" being the Korean pronunciation of Sima Qian's *Shiji*), and 1279 ("Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms" *Samguk yusa* 三國遺事).

Although Japan's process of state-building started later, its written records survive from earlier, starting with the "Record of Ancient Affairs" (*Kojiki* 古事記) of 712 and the "Chronicle of Japan" (*Nihon Shoki* 日本書紀) of 720. These histories did draw on some earlier texts (now lost), but used in isolation they are not reliable. For instance, the *Nihon Shoki* records that one "Empress Jingū" conquered the Kaya states in the fourth century AD, creating a colony called Mimana ("Imna" in Korean). An immense amount of ink has been spilt on this idea that "Japan" conquered part of "Korea." Hideyoshi's invasion of Chosŏn in 1592, and the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910, make the debate emotionally and politically charged. Some Japanese and Korean scholars now agree: "the Japanese commandery of Mimana" was an administrative office for Wa envoys visiting one of the Kaya statelets.[7] Without clear written records, it is hard to know exactly how the chiefs were interacting with one another in their quest to become more powerful kings.

For centuries there was no one "Japan," and no one "Korea," any more than there was one "China" after the fall of Han. Nor was there one clearly-bounded Chinese, Japanese, or Korean ethnicity or culture. Rather, armed and mounted elites dominated local producers, and pushed and shoved at each other in many configurations. Archaeology provides data that are difficult to interpret but cannot purposely lie, and those data make it quite clear that the chiefs and states of East Asia interacted in numerous ways and across numerous routes, for a long time.

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6.3: The Mainland- Aristocracy Returns

The Period of Division

The mainland saw many dynasties and would-be dynasties – those that did not even make it to a second generation – come and go. Many ruled only a small area. The convention of naming periods after the dynasties that governed "China" during a set of years, therefore, does not work well. Beginning in the tenth century, the term "Wei-Jin and Northern and Southern Dynasties" was used to mean the years 220 to 589. Within that, "The Three Kingdoms" (CaoWei, Shu Han, and Wu) means 220-280. "Jin" means 265-420. "Six Dynasties" normally refers to southern regimes, 222 to 589, but sometimes to a different set of northern regimes. And so on. What is most productive is to think about their shared dynamics of state formation and disintegration, social change, cultural variation, and interactions among rulers.[8]

Just one more term: "The Sixteen Dynasties" refers to 23 mostly very short-lived regimes formed in various parts of the north and Sichuan between 304 and 439. They were founded by nine different ethnic groups. One example is the Ba state in Sichuan (304-349). The Ba people worshipped a tiger spirit, specialized in hunting and boating, and followed Celestial Master Daoism. Back in the Warring States period, they had had their own script.

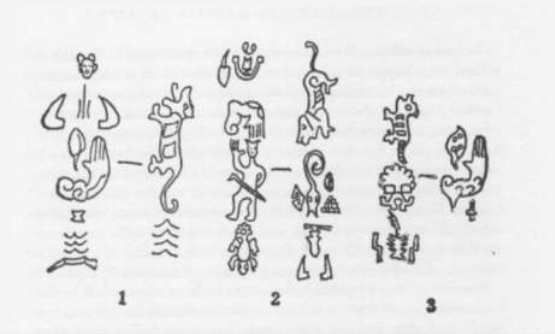


Figure 6.1. Example of Ba writing from the Warring States period. Once the idea of writing had been imported from the Middle East, people could invent new writing systems to represent their spoken languages. But this one has not been deciphered; it may not be a writing system at all! What elements in these examples make it look like it is or is not? Source: Terry Kleeman, *Great Perfection*, 38. Fair Use.

But they adopted Chinese characters, spoke a variety of Chinese, fought for Liu Bang and Lu Exu in founding the Han dynasty, worked for the Han state as soldiers and officials; and then rebelled frequently in the Latter Han period, before founding their own state. Ba families took on different degrees of Han practices and beliefs. 9 The Ba are only one of the many groups on the mainland who moved in and out of independence, changing and intermarrying all the while.



Figure 6.2. Excavated "Cheng-Han yong" 成漢俑 statues that may represent Ba people. Chengdu City Museum. Photograph by Terry Kleeman, used by permission.

The Northern Dynasties

As the Korean Three Kingdoms (Paekche, Silla and Koguryŏ) and Wa on the archipelago were learning how to control more people and territory, so on the mainland each dynasty tried out new ways to control land and labor. Both wealth-based class and violence-

based domination increasingly cloaked themselves in hereditary rank. In contrast to Qin and Han times, people were increasingly born into a status in life they could not escape.

The **Cao-Wei monarchy** (220-265) was no more able than Han to end great-clan power and return to a Legalist-style meritocratic, bureaucratic state. So it invented new institutions that could provide the state with soldiers, grain and cloth, and personnel, while reinforcing clan landownership and power. First, on the military side, the Cao-Wei assured a supply of soldiers by making that occupation hereditary: a brother or son would replace each soldier or commander who died or could no longer fight. Military families were granted farmland, and permitted to marry only into other military families. Essentially, soldiers became a separate caste. This separation occurred even before the formation of warrior dynasties that sprang from the steppe.

Second, with respect to labor, the Cao-Wei state took over direct ownership of land that had been laid waste by war, or whose owners had fled or died. Landless people and war captives worked that land as tenants, paying rent directly to the government. Most Northern regimes both organized vast state plantations to tightly control the common people's labor, and parceled out land and labor to officials. Beginning with the disarray of late Han, the great clans had been gathering refugees as their personal troops and dependents, sheltering them in fortified villages in exchange for half of the harvest. The central state of Cao-Wei, inheriting from Han, no longer had a direct relationship with these people; it could not count, let alone command them. Third, with respect to taxation, although Han had collected some taxes in money, repeated debasements and counterfeiting had undermined faith in copper coinage. So Cao-Wei taxed families on their wealth, stopped producing coins entirely, and assessed taxes in fine silk cloth. For centuries, silk would be used as money.

Fourth, to staff the government, the Cao-Wei continued to recruit men of good reputation and learning. But whereas in Han individual men recommended from localities were graded and posted by the center, now local inspectors graded men into nine ranks of quality. The power of some clans meant that rank, and even office, began again to become inherited. A man's family determined his rank, and the upper ranks held the highest offices. Furthermore, noble families (*shi* 士, the old word for Zhou knights) were exempt from some taxes, as well as from labor for the state, and were legally superior to commoners (*shu* 庶). The Qin and Han equality under law was gone.

A century or so after Cao-Wei fell to Jin, a Xianbei clan established themselves as the Tuoba Wei or Northern Wei dynasty (386-534). They reunified north China as far as the Gansu corridor. Like Koguryŏ, Tuoba Wei moved its capital several times, and combined agriculture with hunting and herding; state herds had millions of head of sheep, horses, cattle and camels. Tuoba Wei herded people, too, relocating to their new capital near Datong in Shanxi a million people from Manchuria, the northern mainland, and the northern peninsula, including 100,000 skilled artisans. These war captives were granted to generals, officials, and aristocrats, and they and their children served in hereditary occupations as clerks, weavers and artisans, musicians and actors. The regime also succeeded in turning steppe clans into a loyal military caste. And it employed as officials the highly-educated members of the clans, experienced in governing.

But even Tuoba Wei could not control the clans' estates. To try to turn the clans' workers into taxpayers, Tuoba Wei eventually developed the "equal fields" system, parceling land out to farmers according to household labor power. The grain land could not be sold or inherited, but went back to the state when the household head died; land used for hemp or mulberry was not reclaimed by the state. Tax was collected in grain and hemp-cloth, and men were liable for military service. To expand the tax base, Tuoba Wei designated as many people as possible free commoners (labelled "respectable people" 良民) eligible for land grants, and restricted the category of "mean" or "base" people (賤民) to slaves, convicts, and their families. But since the regime could not really wrest control of land and labor away from the big clans, that only meant that the clans either dominated nominally free people and their land allocations, or claimed more allocations themselves on the basis of their labor power in the form of slaves and oxen. As free people moved to the wasteland the central state *could* really hand out, the big clans turned even more to slave labor. Owning and managing land themselves gave the elite a stake in producing knowledge about farming, such as an encyclopedia called *Knowledge Needed by Ordinary People* (Qimin yaoshu).[10]

The distinction between noble families and commoners, and increasingly fine distinctions among aristocratic ranks, became ever firmer in state practice and in elite thinking. (We don't know what the non-elite thought.) Even when Dowager Empress Feng (r. 466-90), for instance, encouraged intermarriage among Xianbei nobility and nobility of the big clans dating back to Han times, she also required that people marry only into families of the same rank.[11] Rank was real; ethnicity was changeable. The warrior and former-Han elite learned one another's ways and languages, wrote poetry, studied the Classics, and practiced family ritual as well as warrior arts. The cultural convergence went too far for some soldiers' taste, and a mutiny brought down the Wei, but it was

replaced by other warrior regimes that also cooperated with the settled aristocracy. The connections of later northern dynasties reached even further: Empress Ashina of the Northern Zhou in the 560s may have been related to a wife of one of the Sassanid emperors of Persia about the same time, and to the later Empress Theodora, wife of the Byzantine Emperor Justinian II a century later.[12]

The Southern Dynasties

Although never able to control over land and labor to the degree that Qin and Han had done, the northern regimes did centralize more than those that conquered the south. The area below the Huai and Yangzi rivers had been lightly touched by Qin-Han governance. ("South of the River" or Jiangnan, which later referred to the area around the Yangzi delta, for Sima Qian in the *Shiji* meant "South of the Huai River," 150 miles further north.) Where fertile wetlands abounded, rice farming had been combined with fishing, hunting, and foraging for wild foods. Southern groups varied widely in their family patterns, languages, religions, and degree of organization.[13]

When starvation, warfare, and disease slammed North China in the late Han period, millions of ordinary people fled south. Seizing land for farming, they pushed some of the original southerners up into the hills to scratch out a living. The Wu dynasty (222-280) forced other natives to serve as soldiers or tax-paying farmers. A second invasion of the South came when Xianbei and Xiongnu generals captured the old capitals of Chang'an in 306 and Luoyang five years later, pillaging and murdering. The Western Jin aristocratic clans fled south – perhaps 60% of the elite – accompanied by their many dependents, tenants, slaves, and servants, and whatever property they could carry. Heartily disdaining southern food, culture, language, and people, they planned to stay for only a while to keep alive the flame of true civilization: the written and ritual tradition of Zhou and Han.

But they stayed. And they changed. Initially, these northern refugees dominated the south, drawing on their experience in governance. But over time more locals learn to read and govern. Clan succeeded clan in a series of short-lived dynasties centered on today's Nanjing. Living in a fertile land whose waterways provided some protection against cavalry from the north, the southern clans had little reason to give up power to a centralized state. This new aristocracy had little interest in restoring Qin/Han-style empire, but regarded the north as a foreign land. Historian Andrew Chittick has labelled the southern courts "the Jiankang Empire" to stress their full autonomy. As historian Hugh R. Clark writes, "North and south, in short, had gone separate ways. 'China' was not one."[14] The southern courts and clans focused on trade, and on deploying workers to clear, drain, and plant ever more land for rice agriculture.

Southern aristocrats did study the Classics and histories, and practice family ritual, like their northern counterparts. But they poured their energy into elegant conversation, literature, calligraphy, dance, music, and painting. Aristocrats made beautiful things themselves, and patronized artists and craftspeople. The surplus from riziculture commercialized luxury production. Around Hangzhou bay, paper was made, and hundreds of kilns produced beautiful ceramics. Artisans who designed and created bronze mirrors were so prized that some were recruited to migrate even to the archipelago. The Southern dynasties collected commercial taxes as traders from Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East carried goods back and forth from as far away as the Mediterranean. The largest port may have been near Hanoi. By 500, the southern capital housed over a million people. Aristocrats not only consolidated the social value of rank, but also benefitted from commerce. Wealth became less and less equally distributed.

Birds and Bears

At the level of high culture, much was shared across the mainland. But at the level of everyday life, variation was greater. Since ordinary people lived intimately with the elite as servants and nannies and wetnurses, they taught them their local stories, songs, languages, and foodways. Customs in cooking, clothing, song and dance, rituals of birth, marriage, and coming of age and the like have left little trace; the clearest place to see cultural divergence is in n burials, because archaeologists can find and examine tombs.

To give just one example of local culture, more than 200 pottery jars have been excavated from tombs in the Jiangnan area (roughly Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces, around the mouth of the Yangzi River). Each one is unique, but share with features not found elsewhere. They have five mouths – a custom that developed in Han times (see Figure 6.2). But the Jiangnan jars from the period of division also flaunt many decorations. Supernatural animals on the jars include like dragons, the single-hearted double bird, the *qilin*, and others. Natural animals include dogs, sheep, turtles, monkeys, chickens, slugs, crabs, lions and others -- and lots of birds. Especially in Western Jin times, birds replaced most of the other animals (see Figure 6.3), except for what scholars have called

bears. Scholars searching in the great written tradition have argued that the birds represent the human soul, flying up to heaven, but then why so many? And why do birds also appear on objects not made specifically for burial? And what about the bears?



Figure 6.2. Latter (Eastern) Han *hunping*" a "five-linked jar." Held by Ningbo Municipal Museum. Source: Keith Knapp, "The Meaning of Birds." Used by permission of the author & photographer.



Figure 6.3. Western Jin *hunping*, excavated in Ningbo, Zhejiang, and held at the Ningbo Municipal Museum. What and whom does it depict? Can you see its relation to the five-linked jar? Source: Keith Knapp, "The Meaning of Birds." Used by permission of the author and photographer.

Recently, historian Keith Knapp has interpreted the funerary jars in terms of local culture. Jiangnan legends tell that soon the first humans were starving. The gods ate rice, but they would not share it. Sparrows pitied people, stole rice from heaven, and brought it down to earth, and rats helped distribute it. Birds therefore symbolized grain, and fertility: childless couples would pray to the "God who Delivers Grain" and the husband would eat a male sparrow. The jars also include miniature imitation stone steles, saying things like: "Wealth and Happiness, may there be dukes and lords, many sons and grandsons, long life, and may there be no misfortune for a thousand hundred-thousand ten-thousand years." The jars brought good luck for the living, so someone could tend the dead. Birds on funerary jars brought blessings in Jiangnan culture.[15]

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6.4: The Peninsula and Archipelago Before Writing



Map K. The Korean "Three Kingdoms" of Paekche, Silla, Koguryŏ, and the Kaya States; the Han commanderies on the peninsula Lelang and Daifang; and three (2½ really) islands of the archipelago.

Prestige Objects and Power in the Three Kingdoms and Wa

In assessing interaction among people of different areas, archaeologists note the unique features of ordinary objects like clay storage jars and tiles. Styles and techniques change over time in one place, and vary from place to place. So, if a style of everyday pottery whose development can be traced in place A suddenly shows up in place B, we conclude that someone travelled from A to B. If that style develops further in B, we conclude that someone who knew how to make it settled in and taught others. Shared architectural features – styles of tombs and houses – indicate that people of different places are in direct contact through travel or immigration. Tomb styles are especially conservative, since the peaceful rest of the dead is at stake, so dramatic, permanent changes suggest that people have moved. Archaeologists also assume that when ritual objects develop in A, and then suddenly appear in B, the same rituals and the same meanings of the ritual have been carried by people from one place to another.[16]



Figure 6.4. Han bronze mirror with supernatural beings, animals, and inscription. Late second century. How could this be used as a mirror? What do you think the knob in the center with two holes was for? Can you read the inscription? Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art – lots more there to look at! Public Domain.

Luxury ceramics, and precious objects of bronze and gold, pass from hand to hand without migration. Their value – not only the material, but the great skill required to make such things – is so obvious that they can immediately signal status and power in new places. The rulers of the Korean Three Kingdoms (Koguryŏ, Paekche, and Silla), as well as the rulers of Kaya and Wa, increased their power by importing mainland culture and knowledge through trade; by monopolizing the increased production that iron made possible; by improving and multiplying bronze weapons, iron weapons, and iron tools; by displaying and distributing goods, whether made at home or imported, to increase their prestige and influence. We can easily understand how controlling weapons was useful in fighting other chiefs, or cowing farmers and workers. It takes a little more work to see how prestige goods like bronze mirrors created power.

East Asia did not have a commercial, money-based economy in which wealth translated directly into high social status (as we imagine our society today to be). Rather, prestige goods, often inherited or acquired as gifts or as booty, created a sense of awe. They indexed command of violence and resources, but particularly for those who did not know how to make precious objects, prestige goods may have signaled some extra-human power. The political order was always unstable, which is a fancy way of saying that chiefs gained and lost power. Even the rules of inheritance within one group were not fixed – certainly, patrilineal descent was not the rule. Therefore, to gain and maintain real and symbolic predominance, chiefs and kings relied on a constant stream of prestige goods, much as Xiongnu chief Modun had held his confederation together with a steady supply of tribute from the Han empire.

A canny leader would take control of a trade route, develop an alliance that could supply goods as gifts, seize goods from a neighbor by force of arms, or capture artisans who knew how to make things. He could pass those goods to his elite followers, who could pass some down to smaller chiefs below them. But each leader could be replaced; loyalty was temporary. The chiefs were not bureaucrats whom the top ruler closely controlled; if he gave them a gold-frilled crown to signify their authority that was all very well, but how could he take it back? To authorize a new chief, he would have to give him a new gold-frilled crown (or silver cap with comma-shaped jades, or whatever the current fashion in empowering headgear was).

Furthermore, both prestige goods and practical things like iron and armor were always being buried with chiefs and rulers. That is how we know about them, after all. The successor chief or ruler wanted to make a good show for the many visiting allies and subordinates whom archaeologists assume attended funerals. Power depended on displaying and sharing wealth, so no successor could afford a small, cheap tomb or a paltry assortment of grave goods: that would signal weakness. No matter how much the dead chief had amassed, the next one still needed a reliable supply. For instance, when Lelang and Daifang collapsed under attacks by Koguryŏ, Wa chiefs on in the area of southern Nara, who held the upper hand in the archipelago at that point, were cut off from their supply of Chinese prestige objects, including specific types of mirrors. That meant that they lost power to the clans in the Kinai region, who had suppliers from the Kumgwan Kaya state.

Bronze Mirrors and Gold Crowns

The most common sign of authority were bronze mirrors – disks cast so that they had decoration on one side and the other side was flat, and polished to reflect. Mirrors had originally been created in the steppe, and had spread to Shang. Thousands were cast in Han times, with patterns that incorporated wishes for longevity and prosperity, cosmological ideas about the five phases and five directions, and iconography of the cult of the Queen Mother of the West, as well as other themes. The Lelang commandery funneled bronze mirrors from the mainland to the Samhan and over to Kyushu in the archipelago. Eventually, craftsmen in the peninsula and archipelago produced them.

Hundreds of cast bronze mirrors have been excavated in the archipelago from Yayoiperiod and Tomb Period graves, sometimes a dozen or more arranged around the coffin. Mirrors imported from the mainland typically bear inscriptions of three kinds. How would you describe these types?

1. [May you have] sons and grandsons for a long time!
   [May you] live as long as metal and stone!
   [May you] win high office!
   Above, [may you] accord with the serried constellations; below, avoid misfortune.
2. Establishing Stability era, 7th year [AD 202], 9th month, 26th day. I made this bright mirror, refining pure bronze a hundred times.

3. The court manufactory made this mirror; it has its own principle.
   It fends off misfortune, and is fit to sell at market.
   [Above] are the King Father of the East and Queen Mother of the West.
   It lets You reflect yourself. May you have many descendants.

Mainland mirrors often used wrong characters that sounded the same, but when the mirrors were copied on the archipelago, the texts got even more interesting.

For instance, can you figure out what two changes happened, and why, to create the following inscription (translated into English), on two identical mirrors made in the archipelago?

> I edam thgirb rorrim yrev lausunu evreserp snos dna snosdnarg htlaew tuohtiw timil erar†

Mirrors made in the archipelago also sometimes included meaningless, made-up characters, called “pseudo-inscriptions.” Lurie refers to all these kinds of inscriptions as “alegible,” meaning that legibility was not really their function. That is, most owners or viewers did not read the words, nor want to.[17] Rather, like the mirrors themselves, characters were strange and interesting, and symbolized magical power or foreign connections.

As well as bronze mirrors, people liked gold. Plenty of it washed down in the streams of the peninsula; more gold ornaments have been found in Silla tombs and sites than in those of any other culture in the world. Archaeologists trace Silla’s alliances largely by finding their amazing gold crowns in tombs in Paekche and the archipelago.



Figure 6.5. Silla wooden-chamber Hwangnamdaechong tomb with stone mound, c. 400. Double tomb for king and queen. The queen has an extra chamber for grave goods. She was buried wearing a crown, a belt, bracelets, rings, necklaces, and a chestlace, all made of gold. Source: National Museum of Korea. Korea Open Government License permits use, unchanged, regardless of commercial use without fee.



Figure 6.6. Silla queen’s solid gold crown from the Hwangnamdaechong tomb. Source: National Museum of Korea. www.museum.go.kr/site/eng/relic/recommend/vi ew?relicRecommendId=519714 Korea Open Government License permits use, unchanged, regardless of commercial use without fee.

Gold crowns made in Silla travelled as far west as Afghanistan. Their decorations of trees, deer, and birds suggest influences from Central Asia, while Silla earrings look like those of South Asian maritime cultures.[18] Silla also used gold for horse-fittings like cheek-straps. During the periods of Silla-Wa alliance, gold crowns, necklaces, earrings, hair ornaments and finger rings; gilt-bronze

saddle-frames, quivers, helmets with visors, and other kinds of armor and horse gear; iron ingots; and glass cups all travelled from Silla to Wa chiefs around Osaka and Nara. In return, Wa sent comma-shaped jade beads and soldiers who helped Silla push Koguryŏ away from the eastern coast.[19] Silks,too, passed from ruler to rulers, in the form of banners declaring their titles, ribbons tied onto gold seals, or lengths of cloth to make into clothing.

Bronze, gold, and silk indexed power. If worked in exotic styles, they showed the subordinates of a ruler that he had access to wealth through trade or conquest, and if in local styles that he controlled the artisans who could make such things. When a king granted gold and bronze to lesser chiefs, they deployed it to impress those below them. Prestige objects created power through social processes; they did not merely symbolize it.

† Here's the answer. 1. The inscription that was copied described the mirror as "unusual and rare," but the person making the mold first left out the "rare" and then just stuck it in at the end. 2. The mold to cast the mirror was made without taking into account the reversal from right to left that would occur, so the characters are backward. See Lurie, *Realms of Literacy*, 60-61.

Iron and Chickens

On the mainland, bronze had been used for weapons, as well as ritual vessels, for over a thousand years before iron made its appearance. Bronze was practical, as well as symbolic. But in the peninsula, bronze made little impact until shortly before the arrival of iron, and the two metals arrived at about the same time in the archipelago, around 400 BC. Iron in ingots was a prestige good, buried in Samhan and Wa tombs. (The precise shape, style, and composition of iron ingots tells archaeologists where they were made.) As the northern dynasties used silk for currency, so iron ingots and tools served as money in the markets of the Samhan. But iron not only indexed power to create it socially; it also armed soldiers and fed them.

The centrality of iron appears in a story that the Silla kings had an ancestor who had worked as an iron-smelter, and who after death was worshipped as a smelting deity. But it was Kaya, in particular, that produced and traded enormous quantities of iron: enough to bury weapons and armor with rulers, and good enough to export even to the commanderies, which surely had access to iron made in the mainland. The iron trade was so important to Kaya that placement along trade routes – rather than, say, military strategic advantage or rich natural resources – determined which communities within the Kaya region rose to prominence.

Iron was not the only item that Samhan had to offer, of course. Samhan towns close to the coast became wealthy by exporting large chestnuts, fine-tailed chickens, grain, a few bronze items, and beautiful glass beads in blue and red, sometimes incorporating gold leaf. From the mainland they imported tin, horse-fittings, bronze mirrors, and other luxury goods. From about AD 200-300, the boat-savvy inhabitants of Tsushima, Iki, Okinoshima and other small islands took on the role of middlemen between Kyushu and the commanderies, and even the mainland proper. It is not clear what Wa exported in exchange for prestige goods and iron: probably local food items, and lumber, and perhaps manpower. Paekche King Muryong, for instance, had a fine coffin of Japanese pinewood.

This was not a question of domination. Both sides gained wealthy and prestige from exchanges. As time went on, the goods exchanged between the mainland and peninsula became more elaborate. Take Paekche as an example. Paekche sent a mission to whichever dynasty was ruling the southern mainland once every five to ten years from about AD 350 to 660. The missions were usually led by royalty or the descendants of mainlanders, accompanied by aristocrats. Twice, when the military situation was critical, crown princes went themselves. The missions asked for specific weapons; titles like "King of Paekche" and "Great General Pacifying the East" and garments showing those ranks; a specific divination text; skilled artisans; someone to teach the Book of Odes; commentaries on Buddhist sutras; and a master of ritual knowledge. In return, Paekche sent mainland regimes unspecified "local products," and musicians – one group for the enthronement ceremony of a southern regimes, and more musicians for Sui. We know the connection was important to the southern regimes, because they granted titles to five Paekche kings even before missions arrived to request the kings' investiture.

The connection with Paekche continued into Tang, still serving both sides. To the young Tang, King Mu of Paekche sent miniature horses called "under the fruit horses;" special, highly burnished iron armor; highly-decorated (in chasing) battle-axes; and a golden suit of armor (iron armor with gold lacquer) and more battle-axes. Tang Taizong was so pleased with King Mu's gifts that he gave King Mu in return 3,000 pieces of silk and a special silk-brocade robe. When King Mu died in 641, Tang Taizong, upon receiving the embassy with the report, donned a white mourning robe, issued a eulogy in a public ceremony, and gave Mu a posthumous title. Paekche also sent gifts to the archipelago. Most astonishing is the Seven-Branched Sword sent to a Wa king in 369. A blade with no

haft, about 2 feet long, it is held by a shrine in Nara. It was cleaned in 1874 (rather carelessly, so some words were lost from its hard-to-read gold-inlaid inscription.

> In the fourth year of the Great Harmony era [AD 369], in the […] month, on the 16th day, the 43rd of the cycle, at noon, was made this seven-branched sword of multiply-refined iron. [May you] avoid injury in battle. It is suitable for a marquis or a king. […] made it. From ages past there has never before been a sword like this one. The Crown Prince of Paekche, Sagely Kusu, had it made especially for King Zhi of Wa. Pass it down and display it to later generations.[20]

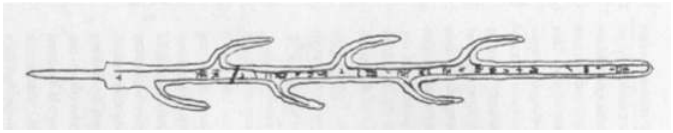


Figure 6.7. The Seven-Branched Sword, granted to a Wa ruler by Paekche in 369. Source: David B. Lurie, *Realms of Literacy*, p. 86. Used by kind permission of the author.

More on inscribed swords later… But note here that the maker's name was recorded, although it is now illegible. Such work was skilled, and those skills were recognized by rulers and warriors.

Boats and Storms

They did not record the names of the sailors, ordinary people doing the work of shuttling those prestige goods back and forth. Boats as presented by models and some drawings on Japanese haniwa (clay tomb figures) had oars for rowing, and maybe masts for sailing.

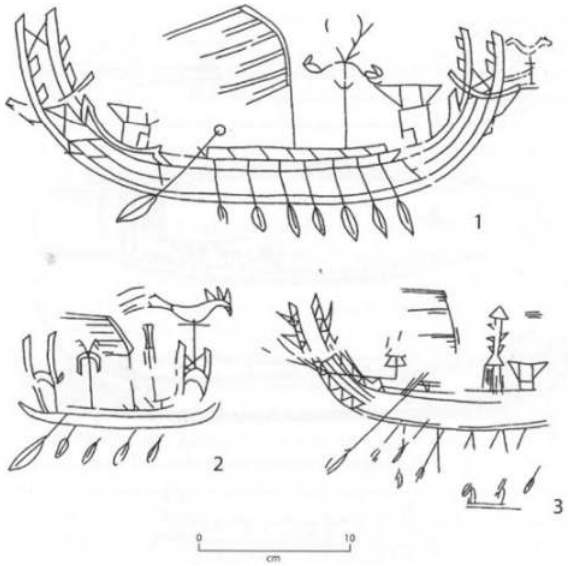


Figure 6.8. Boats incised on haniwa from a tomb mound (tumulus) in Japan. The scholarly chapter that includes these drawings mentions only oars, but I see sails. Or are they just banners? What do you think? What is that bird for? Source: Jae-Pyoung Woo, "Interactions between Paekche and Wa." Fair use.

Sailors knew the routes and the ports, but the rocky coastline with its swirling currents could still be terrifying. One could not travel too far out or for too long, because the oarsmen needed to rest and eat. Setting out from northern Kyushu and its islets, Wa ships could first set anchor in Kaya to rest, resupply, and do a little trading; then stop at other places along the western coast of the peninsula; and finally make their way up the Kŭm River to the Paekche capital. Or Wa merchants and diplomats might change to a boat owned by Kaya or Paekche rulers or merchants along the way. At one Paekche harbor site dating to 400-600, archaeologists have found stone ritual tools of a kind used in ancestral worship in coastal Kyushu. Ships carrying Wa sailors or traders must have stopped there so they could offer prayers to their ancestors for a safe trip. We know even less about such folks than about their social superiors, who recorded their lives and values in their tombs.

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6.5: From Chiefs to Queen and Kings in the Archipelago

Queen Himiko of Wa – the Tomb Period

Across central Japan, about 20,000 keyhole-shaped tombs called *kofun* still exist. The period in which they were built – about AD 250-500 – is called the Tomb Period. Such enormous tombs mean that social differentiation had made some chiefs powerful enough to command the labor to build them and the goods to furnish them. Some of the keyhole tombs have been excavated, and it is noteworthy that they include thousands of clay *haniwa* figures of humans, horses, and so on – not, as in the case of Shang and Zhou tombs, human sacrifices. Do you have thoughts about why that might be?

As Kaya sent rice, iron, and other technology to the archipelago, they stimulated social differentiation and then fighting among chiefs. In about 190, various clans or statelets in the Nara area joined together to diminish conflict by choosing someone to place above them all: Queen Himiko (r. 190 – 248), the first Japanese individual named in written history.

According to the record in a mainland history, Queen Himiko's leadership sprang from her shamanic access to spirits. She kept herself apart, isolated by taboos, so that she could settle disputes fairly. In 239, Himiko's confederation sent envoys to Daifang commandery, and from there on to the Cao-Wei court in Loyang. Wei, seeking her aid or at least neutrality against Koguryŏ in the battles of the next six years, gave her the title "Monarch of Wa, Friendly to Wei." Wei supplied Himiko's court with prestige goods, including bronze mirrors. Wa imitated those mirrors, casting many mirrors from the same mold and dispensing them to local chiefs as symbols of authority.

Himiko was a monarch (there was one of her), but there was not yet a monarchical system, because there was no rule of succession. After her death, the chiefs fell to fighting again, so there is no direct line from her leadership to the Yamato court that would oversee the next stage in the centralization process.

The area of Nara, Osaka, and Kyoto (the Kinai region), maintained some kind of cultural leadership, to judge from tomb styles. What we call the Yamato court gradually centralized control in the Kinai under first one local clan and then another, as supply lines of prestige goods shifted. For instance, it was in 313, when the commanderies fell to Koguryŏ, that one group of powerholders in Nara lost their access to mainland prestige goods and gave way to a group with connections with Kumgwan Kaya with its superb trading connections.

Meanwhile, chiefs outside of the Kinai kept up their own relations with the peninsula, remaining independent of Yamato for two centuries after Himiko. They developed their own specialties based on the local ecology and trade connections, so that even as the Yamato gathered strength from about 400, regional polities just as large existed, including Kibi, Tsukushi (northern Kyushu), Izumo (on the Sea of Japan coast of western Honshu), Owari (on the pacific coast of central Japan), and Kenu (east of Tokyo).[21] The formation of a Japanese state was interrupted and slow, and happened in a variety of places, under the temporary leadership of different groups who appear clearly in the archaeological record, but are absent from or barely discernible in written history.

King Yūryaku Begins Yamato Centralization

Yamato centralization of Wa began, as always, with warfare, negotiation, and exchanges. An energetic Yamato leader called Wakatakirō, but known in legends as Yūryaku (458-479) and in mainland sources as King Wu of Wa, organized the chiefly clans into a rudimentary ranking system, using hereditary titles based on peninsular nomenclature to define positions in the hierarchy. His court was little more than a few thatched wooden buildings huddled together, constantly burning down or rotting, since the support poles sat directly on the ground. (What is is the better way? Only after 500 did the Kinai region adopt the rudimentary comfort of the cookstove and its home-heating system, and begin to produce rooftiles.)

Chiefs visited Yūryaku to offer greetings and receive in return mirrors from the mainland and jade bracelets made only in the Kinai area. Yamato officially "granted" each chiefly clan the right to collect resources from the territory it already controlled in reality. (This is similar to the way the Southern mainland Liu-Song dynasty (429-479) granted Wa authority over Silla and Kaya – neither Liu-Song nor Yamato Wa could enforce that authority; it really just an expressed the wish of the embassy that visited the Liu-Song court.) But when the chiefs accepted gifts, titles, and grants from Yamato, they gave it a nominal leadership role.



Figure 6.9. Haniwa earthenware horse's head, Japan, sixth century. About a foot long. Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public domain.

As well as sweet-talking chiefs into recognizing Yamato preeminence, Yūryaku and his successors actively promoted immigration from the peninsula and perhaps further afield. They settled immigrants where their technical skills could be best deployed, under the command of the chiefs. For instance, by around 400, Yamato had begun importing horses, and the experts who knew how to raise, breed and handle them, as an excavation near Osaka in about 2008 showed.

(The full skeleton of a horse buried with honors in the fifth century also has been excavated in Kyushu.)[22] But Yamato wanted more horses than it could raise itself. The Nagano chiefs (to the northwest of Tokyo) had long been connected to horsemen of the peninsula, as evinced by an iron sword with a spiral pommel of AD 150 and a horse-shaped bronze buckle of about AD 250. So Nagano chiefs were able to invite peninsular experts in horsemanship to settle there over generations from about 450-700, judging from peninsular-style tombs containing archipelagostyle clay figures (*haniwa*) – along with a sacrificed horse.[23] Nagano chiefs could exchange their horse knowledge for signs of authority from Yamato.



Figure 6.10. Haniwa earthenware figure of a warrior. Japan, sixth c. Metropolitan Museum. Public Domain.

Yamato also took advantage of the specialization of the Kibi area, along the southern coast of Honshu west of Hiroshima, facing Shikoku across the Inland Sea. A pit-dwelling from the early 400s in Kibi had an earthen stove for cooking and heating, the earliest kind of *sue* pottery, iron arrowheads in Kaya style, iron ingots, even iron slag (the by-product of iron purification), and whetstones for sharpening iron blades. That means that immigrants from Kaya had settled there, bringing Kaya technology: making iron tools, *sue* ware, and salt, which the dry climate was good for. A hundred similar pit houses cluster around a keyhole-style tomb and some smaller tombs; these would have been for a big chief and some lesser chiefs. The chiefs of Kibi had lost a fight against Yūryaku in 463, and in 555, the Soga clan, acting for Emperor Kinmei, set up royal estates in their territory. He had the local chiefs supervise more peninsular immigrants whom Yamato sent there to begin the earliest iron-smelting in the archipelago. (A couple of dozen iron-smelting furnaces and charcoal-making kilns have been found there.) Since immigrants had been making iron tools from imported ingots there for about 150 years, the Yamato court was building on local knowledge.[24]

War required iron and horses, and now the archipelago had its own supply of both. The cleverness of Yamato lay in its positioning itself as the central coordinator. Other chiefs in the time of Yūryaku, even within an area as small as 125 miles in diameter, and

even though each had peninsular partners, in one historian's words "did not share cultural traits nor form a political unity."[25] They left that cultural and political unification process up to Yamato.

Kinai clans struggled to influence the succession to the Yamato throne. Twenty-five years after Yūryaku died, his direct heirs were wiped out by fighting both amongst themselves and with other clans.

Sword Inscriptions

In the fifth century (401-500), scribes from the peninsula working for Yamato kings produced the first long inscriptions written and preserved in the archipelago. The Eta-Funayama sword, about three feet long and decorated with inlaid horses, birds, and fish, was found in 1873 in a tomb in western Kyushu that was full of gold and silver ornaments and weapons. It has a 75-character inscription that reads:

> In the age of the Great King Wa[…]ru who ruled all-under-Heaven, the master of ceremonies who served him, named Murite, during the eighth month, used a large iron kettle to alloy a four-foot court sword. Eighty times refined and ninety times beaten, it is a three-inch-wide excellent [sharp] sword. Whoever bears this sword [will/may he] live long, have a sea-full of sons and grandsons, obtain [… the king's?] favor, and not lose that which he governs. The name of the swordsmith is Itawa and the writer is 張安. ‡

Lurie guesses that the "writer" – whether s/he composed the inscription or just did the calligraphy or actually inscribed and inlaid it is not clear – was probably an immigrant from the peninsula, perhaps one who claimed mainland ancestry. The characters giving the writer's name are larger than the others, but that could just be because the blade is broader toward the hilt, where they are written. Lurie refers to "the triangular relationship among king, scribe, and vassal seen in the fifth-century sword inscriptions" (99).[26] The swordsmith joined them.

The Sakitama-Inariyama sword blade (See Fig 6.11) was excavated in 1968 near Tokyo and ten years later was found to have an inscription of 57 characters on the front and 58 on the back. The king in both inscriptions was probably the "semi-legendary" (Lurie's term) Yūryaku, who also sent a long document to the Liu Song dynasty (420-479)'s court in the 478. Because the two swords have the exact same ruler's name, and both adopted the mainland and classical phrase "all-under-Heaven" (天下), most scholars think that they both came from the Yamato court, although one thinks that the Sakitama sword was produced away from the court. (See if you can come up with arguments for both views.)



The Sakitama-Inariyama sword reads:

Recorded during the seventh month of the 48th year of the cycle [471]. Wowaki omi's ancestor's name was Opopiko; his son was Takari sukune; his son's name was Teyokariwake; his son's name was Taka[pa]siwake; his son's name was Tasakiwake; his son's name was Patepi; his son's name was Kasa[pa]yo; his son's name was Wowake omi.

Generation after generation, as chief sword-bearer, our service has continued up to today. When Great King Wakakiru's court was at the palace of Siki, I helped him rule all-under-heaven. Having this multiply-refined sharp sword made, I record the origins of my service.[25]

Figure 6.11. The Sakitama-Inariyama sword blade, about 2½ feet long, showing both sides. Excavated in 1968 near Tokyo. Source: David B. Lurie, *Realms of Literacy*, p. 95. Used by permission of the author.

As with mirror inscriptions, Lurie argues that these impressive inscribed objects do not mean that society was literate, or even that the court was literate. Reading and writing mattered little at the Yamato court right up to about 700. Written texts could hold

meaning alegibly, without being read. Tomb-period rulers had great resources, yet they did not find it worthwhile to master reading. Their relations with the peninsula, especially Paekche, meant that they had scribes who knew Chinese when they did want something done with writing.[27]

‡ Zhang An (Ch.)/ Chang An (K.)/ Chō An (J.)

Yamato after Yūryaku

In the early sixth century, power at the Yamato court shifted to King Keitai, who allied with Paekche King Muryong in 503. Muryong needed Yamato military support, because Koguryŏ had forced Paekche to move its capital from Seoul southwards, much closer to Kaya. A mirror with the two ruler's names and the date has been excavated. Tombs, too, signal this rulerto-ruler alliance in three ways.

First, the enormous "keyhole" tombs that developed gradually in the archipelago for rulers from 250 to 600 appear and disappear suddenly in one small part of Paekche: thirteen of them at just this time. Paekche kings had simply allied with local chiefs in the area by giving them gilt-bronze crowns. But Muryong needed closer control now, and archaeologist Woo JaePyoung hypothesizes that Muryong granted local chiefs the honor of being buried in this kind of tomb. It was a special honor in Japan – reserved for the highest rulers. By granting (and presumably paying for) fancy tombs for local chiefs, Muryong could honor them and at the same time remind them that he was allied with a powerful ruler in the archipelago.

Second, at the same time, Keitai and the Yamato court adopted Paekche-style tombs. That advertised the alliance to rivals at home, and to Koguryŏ, which had just wiped out Kŭmgwan Kaya. Third, Muryong had also sent a mission to the Southern Qi dynasty on the mainland. Eager for maritime trade, Qi granted him the title "Grand General," and he constructed for himself a brick-chambered tomb in their style. His coffin was made of elegant Japanese umbrella pinewood, and his grave goods included both Yamato-style bronze mirrors and celadon pottery from southern China. To all who attended his funeral, or heard about the tomb, – to Kaya, Silla, Koguryŏ and the local chiefs – those good and the Qi-style tomb sent the message that he had powerful and prestigious allies both to the east and to the west. A century later, when Paekche had achieved political stability, both foreign styles of tomb were dropped.[28]

The Three Kingdoms and Yamato began as confederations of warrior chiefs dominating unarmed commoners. Prestige goods, practical goods, horses, and funerary diplomacy all played their part in strengthening the kingdoms. Slowly, and with repeated interruption of the actual descent line, one clan would gain enough predominance, initially through violence and control of prestige goods, to call itself royal. New monarchs worked to further distinguish themselves from the chiefs, organized now into an aristocracy.

But objects could only go so far in supporting power – even if they came from impossibly far away, like the Persian and Roman glass unearthed in fifth-century Japanese tombs.[29] More valuable in the long run were new skills. Monarchs and their courts learned from immigrants and envoys how to forge and smelt; to read and write; to count, measure, and tax; to calculate descent and claim virtue; to patronize, build, and pray.

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6.6: Buddhism in Diplomacy

Across East Asia, and not only in Japan where scholars talk about Shinto, many gods and demons were quite local. A famous scholar, Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801), explained *kami*:

> Speaking in general… *kami* signifies, in the first place, the deities of heaven and earth that appear in the ancient records and also the spirits of the shrines where they are worshipped. It is hardly necessary to say that it includes human beings. It also includes such objects as birds, beasts, trees, plants, seas, mountains, and so forth. In ancient usage, anything whatsoever that was outside the ordinary, that possessed superior power, or that was awe-inspiring was called kami. Eminence here does not refer merely to the superiority of nobility, goodness, or meritorious deeds. Evil and mysterious things, if they are extraordinary and dreadful, are called *kami*. It is needless to say that among the human beings who are called *kami* the successive generations of sacred emperors are all included… In lesser degree we find, in the present as well as in ancient times, human beings who are *kami*. Although they may not be accepted throughout the whole country, yet in each province, each village, and each family there are human beings who are *kami*, each one according to his own proper position…[30]

Daoism incorporated many gods, and demons, while elite families also practiced Confucianism. But Buddhism offered centralizing kings new, universal, ways to patronize, build, and pray.

The Buddha, an Indian prince named Siddhartha, had lived in the northern subcontinent some time between 623 and 383 BC. His teachings (read Kenneth Chen, "Background" in his *Buddhism in China* for the basic ideas) were written down in Sri Lanka after 100 BC, centuries after he lived and a thousand miles away. The Indian King Ashoka (r. 268-239 BC) was an early sponsor: he inherited an empire and fought to expand it, but then regretted the bloodshed, converted to Buddhism, and used his vast power to promulgate the faith, engraving its tenets on pillars of stone in all the languages of his empire. The Kushan Empire (AD 50-250) in Northern India and Central Asia also sponsored Buddhism, increasing the Buddhist repertoire of art, architecture, doctrine, and practice. Merchants, missionary monks, and diplomats brought the faith and its repertoire to East Asia piecemeal, by sea and by land, including precious objects, intriguing stories, body practices, and architectural techniques. Buddhism also offered powerful assistance in worldly and spiritual matters through Bodhisattvas: enlightened beings who had vowed not to dissipate in nirvana at death, but to remain in the world to help others. The statues of Bodhisattvas and other Buddhist beings were lifelike, awesome human figures based on Greek sculpture that had been brought to the Kushan area of Gandhara by Alexander the Great. All these factors contributed to the appeal of Buddhism for East Asia.

The early stages of the transmission are obscure. The first recorded believer, a Han royal prince who received imperial permission to worship the Buddha in AD 65, probably just thought of it as a kind of Daoism, and the two were mingled throughout Han times. Missionary monks formed a small community in Loyang, translating and teaching, by about AD 150.[31] In their wildest dreams, did they hope for the success Buddhism eventually attained in East Asia? For as it absorbed and changed all kinds of demons, gods, and ideas, it became the most widely-shared substrate of life across the region.

After the fall of Han, East Asian rulers one after another modelled themselves on King Ashoka, the *čakravartin* king who "turned the wheel of the Buddhist law" with his patronage. Well-attuned to diplomacy and domination through prestige goods, they appreciated how Ashoka had spread the Buddhist faith while assuring his own prestige and reputation. For only a virtuous king would wish, and only a great king could afford, to build vast temples; endow them with large estates to feed monks and nuns while they prayed, held masses, translated and copied scriptures (sutras), lectured to the public, and meditated; carve huge cave complexes filled with stone statues; and support artisans to create beautiful, gilded bronze and wooden images. Such patronage displayed and symbolized royal great control over land and labor, and elevated the king above the aristocracy.

Such patronage made sense to many East Asian rulers. For instance, Silla monarch sponsored and oversaw Buddhist clergy using methods learned from the Northern Wei, Zhou, and Qi dynasties. In 551 a refugee monk from Koguryŏ, Hyeryang, was the first state supervisor of Silla's monks and nuns. Chajang, a Silla aristocrat who returned from Tang in 643 to serve under Queen Sŏndŏk and her successors, also played this role. Silla also appointed provincial overseers of clergy, including some from former Koguryŏ and Paekche, in around 685, as inscriptions on pillars and bells show, and from 785 there was also an office to advise the monarch on managing Buddhist building projects, wealth, land, and personnel.[32]

Buddhist international style included rock-cut temples as well as soaring wooden towers and huge wooden halls on a scale East Asians had not known how to build before. Northern mainland rulers built cave complexes and huge temples in which enormous

Buddha figures symbolized the ruler; one northern monk went so far as to say that the Wei ruler *was* the Buddha. Diplomatic missions to mainland courts were taken on tours of the impressive sites, thus showing off to the public that visitors had come from afar to honor the ruler. Paekche's pagodas (Buddhist towers) were particularly admired, the most famous being the Nine-Story Stupa that Abiji, a Paekche architect, built for Queen Sŏndŏk of Silla (r. 632-647), to fulfill the advice of a mainland dharma dragon who told monk Chajang that it would protect his country. Rulers adopted Buddhist display to claim brotherhood with other rulers and to exalt themselves above their subjects.

In southern mainland regimes, royal control over Buddhism was far less complete. Both rulers and aristocratic clans patronized Buddhism as part of their pursuit, creation, and display of beauty, education, and high culture – they had beautiful images made for them, studied complicated Buddhist texts, and wrote out sutras in beautiful calligraphy. Aristocratic monks of the southern dynasties included Huiyuan (334-416), who corresponded with Kumārajīva, a great translator of sutras, sent for more scriptures from India, put together a translation team, and built his own temple. Huiyan gathered followers by teaching that faith in Amitabha Buddha alone, and chanting his name, could earn spiritual merit, even if one could not read scripture. Monks and nuns from aristocratic families north and south lectured to thousands of people – a non-official form of public influence. Huiyuan argued in a famous essay that monks and nuns should not bow before kings: not from a lack of reverence, but because they followed different rules from ordinary people to signal their higher calling.

Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty (r. 502-549) wrote a commentary on a Buddhist scripture, as well as forcing his family and officials to convert. He fed thousands of monks, and spent lavishly on temples and scriptures. But Bodhidharma, the founder of Chan or Zen Buddhism, told Emperor Wu of the Liang that all the money and effort he had spent for Buddhism did nothing for him. Only meditation moved anyone closer to enlightenment, whether it worked gradually, as Northern Chan taught, or suddenly, as in Southern Chan, which used paradoxes called "cases" (*gong an* or in Japanese *ko'an*) to stimulate the realization that the whole world (including all those good deeds) was illusory. Meditation could be carried out while working at tasks like sweeping. (This school became very popular later in Japan with samurai, because although one ought not to kill, since all is illusion if one kills in a state of understanding that all is illusion, no sin has been committed so no karma results.)[33]



Figure 6.12. Northern Qi or Sui figure of a monk, gilt-bronze, piece-mold cast, sixth century. Source: Metropolitan Museum. Public Domain



Figure 6.13. Northern Wei stone Buddhist triad with flying apsaras, 62” high, dated 534, with inscription on the back praising the majesty of the Buddha and attendant bodhisattvas carved by a skillful hand, and praying that the merit earned by paying for the figure will benefit the emperor and the two hundred monks who contributed to gain their dead kin entry into the Western Paradise, make the living happy, and allow all beings to hear the Buddhist teachings. Metropolitan Museum, Public Domain.

As well as sharing an architectural style, East Asian kings gave each other Buddhist texts, images, ritual objects, and monks. In 372, a mainland regime sent icons and texts, and monk Sŏndo, to Koguryŏ as a diplomatic gesture (Koguryŏ preferred Daoism). In 384 Eastern Jin sent a Central Asian monk, Malanda, to Paekche; King Chimnyu gave him a truly royal welcome, built him a temple and assigned ten men to serve as monks. In 541, Paekche King Sŏng flattered the Southern Liang Emperor Wu by requesting the sutra he had commented on.[34] Eleven years later, King Sŏng sent a mission to Yamato with gifts of Buddhist ritual banners and canopies of silk, and a gilt-bronze statue of the Buddha (probably a foot or so high). Impressive buildings wordlessly signaled the resources the patron controlled. Objects, including texts (which few people could read initially), worked in the same way as other prestige objects to link monarchs.



Gilt-bronze Buddha with Inscription: “Seventh Year of *Yeonga*,” Goguryeo Kingdom (539), Discovered in Uiryeong, South Gyeongsang Province, Height: 16.2cm, National Treasure 119

Figure 6.14. Koguryŏ gilt-bronze Budda with inscription on the back of the halo. Similar in style to mainland Northern Wei Buddhas. The inscription gives a date (probably 539) and says “Seungyeon—who is the abbot of Dongsa Temple in Nangnang of the Goguryeo Kingdom, as well as a reverent disciple of Buddha—and forty Buddhists together produced and distributed 1000 Buddhas. This statue is the twentyninth Buddha donated by Beobyeong, a Buddhist nun.” Source: National Museum of Korea. Korea Open Government License permits use, unchanged, regardless of commercial use without fee.

Monks were more even directly useful. Kings trying to increase their power vis-à-vis that of other aristocrats needed advisors. Monks from abroad had no kin to distort their loyalty to the ruler. Highly-educated and widely-travelled, they understood politics and often spoke several languages and knew the Classics, histories, literature, and so on. They modelled the ritualized polite behavior so central to court life, showing new kings and aristocrats how to behave. Their practice of prayer, chant, and meditation brought them an apparent calm, and since they were not supposed to crave riches, it was difficult to bribe them. And because of the high level of organization required for unrelated men or women to live together in large monasteries and nunneries, Buddhism had a tradition of creating systems that ran by rules and regulations. Organization by rules is precisely what a centralizing regime needs.

For all these reasons, monks advised kings across East Asia even before most people practiced Buddhism. In Koguryŏ and Paekche, monks from the Vinaya (Rules) school of Buddhism were playing this role by 500. Precisely because monks made good advisors, they were a meaningful gift from one ruler to another: a way to help an ally to centralize his power, increasing his ability to tax and field armies. The dates for official acceptance of Buddhism (Koguryŏ in 372, Paekche in 384, Silla two centuries later in 535) signal those regimes' openness to learning from mainland traditions generally, rather than total conversion to the faith.

But royal faith was often genuine. Like Emperor Wu of Liang, Paekche King Sŏng's son wanted to become a monk. Courtiers convinced him to take the throne as Widok. He spread the faith through diplomacy with the Yamato court, sending missions between 555 and 577 that included two monks and a nun, a number of Buddhist texts, and two artisans who specialized in making Buddhist ritual items. King Widok welcomed nuns from Yamato to study in Paekche, and he sent a mission to Northern China, to the Northern Qi (550-577), most Buddhist of the northern regimes. Buddhism worked as a diplomatic language through both display and shared faith, strengthening kings.

Buddhism also changed daily life for everyone. Along with the new faith, which revolutionized conceptions of the cosmos, came Indian mathematics including the zero; new knowledge in astronomy, astrology, divination, and medicine; business practices such as loans on security, joint-stock associations to pool capital, auctions, and lotteries; chairs; tea, sugar, and the industrial processes required to make sugar (Tang Taizong sent a delegation to India specifically to learn how). The need to translate Buddhist scriptures into Classical Chinese for East Asian audiences contributed to scholarship on linguistics. The most characteristic form of Tang poetry, with four or eight lines of five or seven syllables apiece, developed out of a Sanskrit ode of praise. Buddhist tales chanted and sung by monks and laypeople developed into both long fiction and drama, which had not existed in the great tradition before.

Buddhism offered both men and women a way to live outside the family, as monks and nuns; the rules that were developed to manage large communities of unrelated people were later adopted by Confucian academies. Buddhist charity and proselytization gave even ordinary men and women a role in public life, as donors and lay leaders.[35] At the same time, however, the idea that past deeds earned present status legitimated the firmly aristocratic mentality of the next several centuries. Finally since creating wealth and making donations to monasteries earned donors good karma, Buddhism forward commercialization and exploitation of nature.[36]

East Asians did change Buddhism in significant ways (the fear of eating a reincarnated ancestor, for instance, leading to the introduction of vegetarianism, which Buddha had not preached). Kings were the first to benefit. But over time, East Asian culture, knowledge, society, language, literature, economy, and daily life were all revolutionized by this imported religion.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

7: Consolidating Unified Regimes (c. 500-780)

Northern aristocrats ended the period of division on the mainland by reunifying much of the former Han territory, establishing the Sui and then the Tang dynasties. Both fought Koguryŏ, and Tang allied with Silla. Silla, both to solidify the alliance and to centralize control over resources it needed for war, took on much of the apparatus of Tang civilization and government, but its monarchs remained weaker, its aristocrats stronger, and its slaves more numerous. The Tang-Silla alliance also pushed forward centralization in the archipelago. The result was that despite continuing differences at many levels of society, regimes in East Asia looked more similar than ever.

7.1: Written Chinese and Government

7.2: The New Sui Order

7.3: Reunification through Pluralism- Sui and Tang

7.4: The War Against Koguryŏ

7.5: Yamato Centralization

7.6: Sources

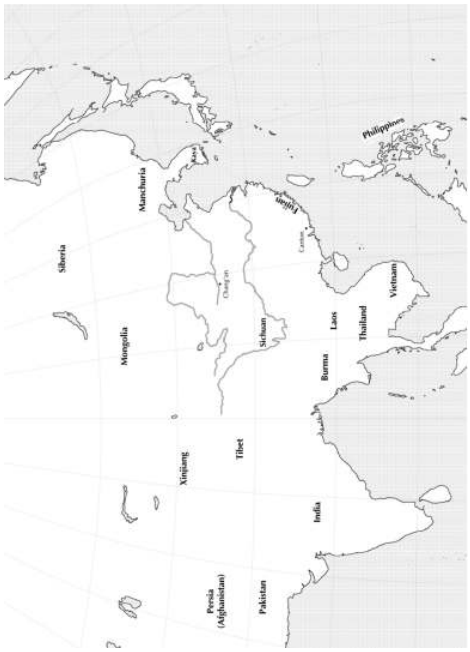
Thumbnail: A portion of the Diamond Sutra printed in Tang in 868. A son had many copies printed for wide distribution, to earn spiritual merit for his parents. The picture is appropriate to this filial action: it shows the Buddha preaching to an aged follower. The sutra was sealed up in the Buddhist caves in Dunhuang around 1000 and re-discovered in 1900. The source (www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-diamondsutra) has more information and close-up images. Public Domain.

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7.1: Written Chinese and Government

East Asians spoke not three, but many languages. The Sino-Tibetan language family, which may have spread with millet-growing from somewhere between Xinjiang and Sichuan from 8,000 BC included, in the period of division, Tibetan, ten Chinese languages (sometimes called dialects), Tangut and related languages, and hundreds of other languages we know little about. Mandarin had not yet developed, and scholars are not sure whether the Middle Chinese spoken at the Sui-Tang court of Chang'an (along with other languages) was Chang'an dialect or a conglomeration of various dialects like modern Shanghainese. A Sichuanese monk named Zhixuan (809-881) had so much trouble communicating in the capital that he avoided discussions until one night, in his dreams, a divine monk switched tongues with him. The next day, he was able to speak correctly – that is in the capital dialect.[1] In the steppe, people spoke many Mongolian and Turkic languages; in the southern mainland people spoke languages in the Thai, Hmong-Miao, Yao, and Austronesian language family. Some languages had fused SinoTibetan with earlier local languages: Cantonese, for instance, is a Sino-Tibetan language with a Thai tonal system and lots of Thai vocabulary. The peninsula and archipelago also had multiple languages. Present-day Korean is related to the Tungus languages of Manchuria and Siberia.[2] Japanese may have evolved from a language of Kaya, with a lot of influence from the Ainu and Malayo-Polynesian languages already being spoken in the islands.[3] (See Map N.)

Linguistic borrowings were common. Korean and Japanese borrowed Chinese words; and Chinese borrowed Turkic words. The area around Canton and along the southern Fujian coast may have contributed to Chinese words from Australia and Polynesia, including the name for the Yangzi River (*jiang* 江). Some travelers learned many languages. The children of intercultural marriages, or elite children whose nannies spoke local languages, were bilingual. Rulers valued language skills. Yamato Emperor Bidatsu was very pleased in 583 when Kibi no Ama no Atai Hashima negotiated with the king of Paekche in his own language, and brought a Paekche man back to the Yamato court. Language could be a focus of fights within regimes. Under Empress Dowager Feng (442 - 490), for instance, the Tuoba Wei dynasty adopted Chinese surnames and required that Chinese be spoken at court. A few decades later, in reaction, Xianbei names were required; some whose surnames had originally been Chinese now took Xianbei ones, and learned to speak Xianbei to serve at court.



Map N. About language. Places mentioned in the text.

In this multi-lingual world, the tiny but powerful stratum of educated people across East Asia adopted the whole Chinese-language written tradition – the Classics, the philosophers, the histories, literature, the texts of Confucianism and Daoism, and Buddhist texts translated into what we call Classical Chinese, which has a grammar different from today's spoken versions of Chinese. Reading the *Book of Documents* and the *Shiji*, Koreans came to see themselves as the heirs of Prince Ji (Kija) (remember him, back in Chapter Two?). Silla aristocrats scolded their kings in the language of Mencius. Paekche immigrants brought Chinese poetry to the

archipelago, and Yamato noblemen wrote reams of poetry in Classical Chinese, alongside poems in Japanese that initially used Chinese characters to represent sounds.

Classical Chinese was the written language of government, too. King Kwanggaet'o's stele is in Classical Chinese, and so are the excavated records and registers on wooden tablets and bamboo slips that attest to the spread of bureaucratic government. Prince Shōtoku's "17- Article Constitution" and the laws of Nara, as well as all the East Asian histories, use Classical Chinese. Educated people across East Asia were bilingual, at least.

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7.2: The New Sui Order

In 581, a general of a Xianbei dynasty, Yang Jian (in Xianbei "Puliuru Jian") launched a *coup d'etat*. Completing the reconquest of much of the former Han territory, he named his new empire Sui, and to declare that this would not be just another short-lived regime, the Sui decided to demolish the sad old remains of Han Chang'an and build an entirely new capital. There were practical considerations – moving to newer ground made newer sources of water available. But the old Han capital had suffered four centuries of warfare, disease, massacre, murders, and executions. One advisor told Yang Jian that the city was filled with the ghosts of murdered men. New, better-designed cities such as the Wei capital of Luoyang, which Queen Himiko's envoys had visited, provided models. The main architect of the new Chang'an was a Turko-Mongol, a member of the Yuwen family whom Yang Jian had spared in his coup. Yuwen was a brilliant architect and engineer, and his team included northerners and Central Asians of various language and religious groups. One had a Zoroastrian name.

In order to choose a good site for the new capital, Yang Jian made a tortoise-shell divination, and consulted astronomers and astrologers. But he also appealed to the public, writing, "The new capital is the administrative seat of the ten thousand officials and the place to which all those within the four seas will turn. It is not the sole possession of Us the Emperor." He asked the people to take on the burden of the work, saying,

> Planning the new and getting rid of the old is like the farmer looking forward to autumn. Although for the time the work may be hard, he knows that at the end he will be peacefully at ease.

Imagine the work involved in building an entirely new city, surrounded by a pounded earth wall that was almost 6 miles east to west and over 5 miles north to south, and maybe 35 feet high. The labor force was made up of farmers who owed the state thirty days of labor. There were also specialized artisans who made rooftiles and other items. The basic layout of the city was completed in nine months; then people had to move in and build their houses. The new emperor encouraged them also to build temples and pagodas. In Tang times, this grand vision of a city was realized, and Chang'an was the greatest city in the world.

Like Qin and Han, Sui also built infrastructure to overcome the natural ecological divisions of the empire. Along with more roads, Sui linked Yangzi and Yellow Rivers with the Grand Canal system, which combined canals and rivers. The main canal was more than 130 feet wide, with an imperial road alongside it and relay stations set up along it. It was meant first for carrying communications after unification, but as the Yangzi valley area produced more and more rice, it carried grain. A second canal ran from Loyang, the Sui capital, up to present dayBeijing. Reaching out to that area, in the old state of Yan, far from the cultural center, was a strategic location that signaled – ominously for the Sui, as it turned out – broader territorial ambitions.[4]

To assure that the state served the public, not merely the elite, and to create a long-lived regime, Sui revised recruitment and reinstated elements of legalist bureaucracy. First, in terms of recruitment, the elite were used to simply inheriting government office, or being selected on the basis of their grand family histories, their military accomplishments. In the Period of Division, bureaucrats were not controlled by the center as in the original Legalist vision, nor selected for individual merit as the Confucian compromise with legalism advocated.

For instance, two men were competing for a government office in a northern regime in the 500s. One said: For successive generations my family have been the governors of this prefecture. Your family for generations have been the old servants of my house."

The other retorted, "From the time your ancestor Bi Gui was executed (300 years earlier) your family has been inactive and has produced no notable persons. Recently the governorship of this prefecture has been awarded on the basis of military feats. Then and now, what do you have to boast about? How can you match our Han dynasty Metropolitan Prefect, our Jin dynasty Grand Preceptor of the Heir Apparent, our scholarly and moral achievements spreading excellence for 100 generations?"

The two agreed that office should be granted on the basis of family accomplishments, and was essentially meant to serve those families' interests, rather than the other way around. To recruit talent and promote public service, the Sui wiped out the old rank systems and returned to a Han-like system of recommendation by local officials, followed by an exam at the capital.

Second, in terms of government structure, the emperor was not impossibly far above all others as in the pure Legalist model. Rather, he was "first among equals." In making decisions he consulted with his ministers, who drawn from among his relatives, his in-laws, and members of other elite families. The group sat down together and talked until they came to a consensus. But the

central government did recover its power, compared with most of the regimes since late Han. The center again selected all those who administered the prefectures of the empire. Those officials (prefects) served for short terms, and not in their native places, as under Qin and Han. Every prefecture had to send one official to the capital at the New Year, to see the glory of the emperor and participate in rituals there, increasing the sense that all belonged to one empire.

At the capital, there were many different bureaux of government, including the functional six ministries (Rites, Personnel, Revenue, Justice, War, and Public Works) that continued until 1911. The Ministry of Investigation or Censorate was so active in remonstrating with the emperor and impeaching officials who were not following regulations that Yang Jian had to ask them to chill out during the banquet part of the New Years' celebrations, and let officials relax for a few hours. The system was designed to make the state a public structure again, to assure a long-lasting peace.

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7.3: Reunification through Pluralism- Sui and Tang

To unite the empire, Sui set about knitting together the deeply divided northern and southern regions. The Sui imperial couple married their children into southern aristocratic families, and encouraged other northern aristocrats to adopt Chinese-language surnames and marry across regional and linguistic lines. But that was only the first step. Both Sui and Tang – which replaced Sui with another coup d'etat in 618 – solidified military conquest by incorporating as many existing cultural elements as possible into a new, pluralist empire.

The founding Sui imperial couple were both devout Buddhists. They personally copied sutras, and they kept strict order in the palace, filling it with prayer and incense. Since so many of their new subjects, north and south, shared their faith, they used it as one strand to weave their new, expanding realm together. In 589, when he defeated the last legitimate dynasty in the South, Sui Wendi also took boddhisattva vows with Zhiyi (538-597), the founder of a school of Buddhism called Tiantai. Tiantai itself drew together northern piety and meditation with southern sutra study and meditation, presenting a sutra popular in the North as the Buddha's first sermon and one popular in the South as his last.[5] Consciously imitating King Ashoka, Sui Wendi paid to build temples and support monks and nuns across the country. He ordered Buddhist clergy to chant Buddhist prayers for the nation three months out of the year. Monks also served at the sacred mountains.

The Sui capital alone housed 120 Buddhist temples. The largest supervised the national network, set standards of education and behavior for the clergy, and translated Buddhist texts. In 601, when the Sui founder turned 60, he ordered stupas built in every prefecture, and send monks and nuns to bring Buddhist relics to each and celebrate the opening of the stupas. He closed government offices for a week's holiday.

Tang rulers were not initially as enthusiastic about Buddhism. The great travelling monk Xuanzang had to sneak out of Tang territory to begin his seventeen-year journey to India in search of sutras. But when he returned, Tang Taizong welcomed him back, sponsoring the translation of the 1,300 scrolls he had acquired. After that, support for Buddhism faltered only for about a year, when the government, alarmed at the wealth of monasteries, suppressed Buddhism in 845-46, melting down bells and statues to mint copper coins. Most Tang rulers lavished resources on temples and monasteries, and in return, monks served the state. They chanted sutras summoning spirit armies to protect the state, drew subjects into one cohesive body by holding vegetarian feasts for tens of thousands of people, held funerals to settle the spirits of soldiers killed in Tang's massive military campaigns, and watched on Mount Wutai for auspicious signs of the presence of the bodhisattva Manjusri, which signaled good luck for the dynasty.[6]

Sui and Tang also patronized northern- and southern-style learning to pull the empire together. The Sui regime hired classicist northerners to claim the Mandate of Heaven. The propaganda, modeled on Cao-Wei proclamations, said that the Sui founder had faithfully served the Northern Zhou's last child emperor until the emperor abdicated in his favor, giving him nine ritual gifts identical to Cao Cao's, and pointing to cosmic signs that the dynasty ought to change.7 The Confucian propagandists designed rituals such as informing Heaven of the change, issuing a general amnesty, and having the emperor plow a furrow in a special field. The Sui issued a detailed code of proper rituals for relations between the emperor and his ministers, relations with foreigners, seasonal sacrifices, and marriage and funeral ceremonies for emperor and high officials.

As well as public relations for the imperial family as a whole, there were individual efforts. Tang Taizong associated himself with culture heroes sage-king Yu, King Wen of Zhou, his brother the Duke of Zhou, and Confucius. He patronized shrines to these figures and wrote poems expressing his feelings about them as exemplars. We'll meet another great self-promoter at the end of this chapter.

In the period of division, aristocratic families north and south had practiced Confucian family rituals and intensified attention to the patriline, building on Latter Han ideas and practices that had launched the big clans into the status of a new aristocracy. Here's an example of intensified patrilinealism: In Han times, even royal lines that produced no sons simply died out (that was what ended most of the early Han feudal kingdoms), not to speak of other families. But the Western Jin emperor carefully adopted sons as ritual heirs for his brothers who died childless. The Liu-Song dynasty of the South (420 to 479) also built the first state temple honoring Confucius, and Tuoba Empress Dowager Feng had followed suit, as well as having the *Classic of Filial Piety* translated into Xianbei.

Sui and Tang reinforced this shared elite patrilinealism to meld the empire together. Sui and Tang set up schools in the capital for elite sons that combined northern classicism with the southern poetic heritage. And to signal the court's central cultural role, Sui

Wendi collected, edited, and copied texts, offering a roll of silk for each scroll of text people brought in. He also proscribed "subversive" books, and tried to establish a simple and straightforward literary style. Tang emperors even decreed that every household own and study the *Classic of Filial Piety* – an order surely not followed, and perhaps modelled on the promulgation of Buddhist scriptures.

Daoism, too, aided unification. It bridged the gap between commoners and high-ranking families better than Confucianism. On the one hand, southern aristocrats had adopted Daoism as legitimating a life of leisure and poetry, as exemplified by Tao Qian and the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove. The southern Liang dynasty had supported a school of Daoism centered on Mt. Mao near Nanjing, and two of the Northern regimes had adopted Daoism as the state religion. On the other hand, lower-ranking people adhered to the organized Daoism church that grew out of the late Han sects.

So the Sui regime employed Daoists to make calendars, and drew on their interpretations of omens and portents. Sui Wendi repaired Laozi's shrine and praised himself in an inscription there. He collected over 8,000 scrolls of Daoist texts. Tang sponsored Daoism even more enthusiastically: a mission to Koguryŏ promoted Daoism as an international religion, visiting Turkish envoys toured a Daoist temple, and the *Dao de jing* was translated into Sanskrit, the language of Indian Buddhist scriptures. The Tang royal family claimed descent from Laozi (part of Taizong's suppression of discussion of their Turkic roots), and Empress Wu and her husband Gaozong both engaged with Daoism. Their grandson, Emperor Xuanzong, (r.713-756), invited Daoist as well as Buddhist clergy to court, wrote a commentary on the *Dao De Jing*, and instituted an examination on Daoist scripture, with a school to teach it.

The state also permitted the many foreigners living in Tang – perhaps one-third of the population of the capital alone – to practice their own faiths, including Judaism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, and Christianity. A Syrian branch of Christianity (Nestorians) even performed masses in the Tang palace. Finally, the Sui and Tang states normally tolerated the numerous local cults to deities that people relied on for help with the weather, sickness, and the like. Tang official Di Renjie, an advisor to Empress Wu, suppressed a large number of local cults, and Buddhist and Daoist clergy did try to stamp out or absorb these cults, converting blood sacrifice to vegetarian sacrifice, and enrolling local spirits as members of the Daoist pantheon, officials in hell, or fierce protectors of temples. But generally, the many faiths and deity cults coexisted.[8]

The faiths, languages, and peoples unified under one state were a collage: not uniform. As one historian writes, "the Tang empire was not a single homogenous community but rather a hodge-podge of communities and networks that stretched horizontally and vertically."[9]

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7.4: The War Against Koguryŏ

Sui's reconquest of Han territory did not include its far western holdings. The Sui founder worried about the Turks to the West, and about the possibility of Koguryŏ allying with the Turks – just as Han Wudi had worried about Chosŏn and the Xiongnu. Koguryŏ did attack Sui, and Sui's counterattacks were foiled three times by Koguryŏ official Ulchi Mondok. The war decimated the Sui army, bankrupted the Sui regime, and destroyed its popular support in its northern base. When the second Sui emperor was assassinated, Sui general Li Yuan eliminated his rivals through war, to found the Tang dynasty in 618. (His generals included his daughter, the Pingyang princess, leading an army she herself had raised.) In effect, Koguryŏ had ended the Sui dynasty.

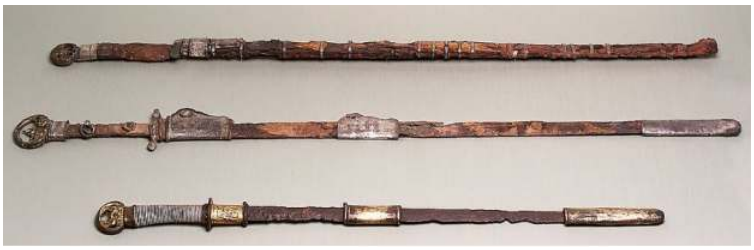


Figure 7.1. Mainland swords with scabbard mounts, c. 600. The P-shaped scabbard mount (in the middle) was probably modelled on Persian longswords, and in turn was the prototype for the Japanese *tachi*. Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public Domain.



Map P. Tang and its neighbors.

Tang quickly incorporated the far west of former Han territory. But to the east things were more complicated. In the middle of the sixth century, the Korean Three Kingdoms were struggling with one another. Silla, with Yamato military aid, had taken considerable territory from Koguryŏ and Paekche. Paekche in its turn allied with Yamato, and struck back at Silla. Now, in the seventh century, Silla appealed for aid to Koguryŏ and Yamato in vain, and finally turned to Tang. To signify eagerness for Tang aid, Silla Queen Sŏndok (r. 632-647) adopted Tang-style court dress, official titles, and reign-names for its calendars. Beginning in 640, she sent members of the Silla royal family to join the thousands of students from Paekche, Koguryŏ, Tibet, Turfan, and elsewhere who had flocked to the Tang academy set up in 631. The Tang welcomed such prestige-giving moves, for it was not yet secure. The diplomacy also included passing a Silla monk, Chajang (590–658), back and forth with scriptures, relics, and images.

With Silla and Tang allied, Koguryŏ aristocrats saw trouble coming. They allowed one of their number to seize and centralize power, to prepare a defense.

Confidently, Tang Taizong (r. 626-649) proclaimed his right and duty to rule the whole world. He personally led troops against Koguryŏ in 645, behaving with great brutality: he buried alive three thousand Malgal (Mohe) warriors fighting for Koguryŏ. Taizong expected to march the royal family of Koguryŏ triumphantly across the northeast and through the streets of Chang'an.

Instead, he lost badly; even forts initially he captured were retaken by Koguryŏ. The defeat was so humiliating that historian Andrew Eisenberg calls him “an emperor on the run” as he tried to reclaim his reputation and hold onto power. Some courtiers accused him of having a “Han Wudi complex” – as in, “My empire has to be bigger than his!” “Hemorrhaging prestige and political capital,” in Eisenberg’s words, Taizong retreated for a month to Bingzhou, the old home of the Li family. While there he wrote a stone inscription for a famous old shrine to spirits including a very ancient female water deity and a Zhou king. The inscription recounts the history of the dynasty so far (as Changsu’s stele for his father Kwanggaet’o had done in 414), emphasizing that – unlike Sui – Tang did not covet wealth and power and territory for its own sake, but wanted to rule for the sake of the people. In other words, “Oh well, I didn’t really want Koguryŏ’s territory anyway.”[10] – Fortunately for Taizong, Tang armies won some great victories to the West, and he was able to retrieve his military reputation at gathering of many western tribal leaders who acknowledged his overlordship as “Heavenly Khaghan.”[11] Taizong left famous instructions to his sons, saying that military offensives should be balanced with the good of the people: this is a position that Koguryŏ forced him into.

Fifteen years later, in 660, Tang had a bit more success to the east. Tang Gaozong and his Empress Wu allied with Silla King Taejong Muyŏl and his successor. Together the two armies demolished the kingdom of Paekche in the first mainland military victory in Korea since Han times. Silla incorporated Paekche’s territory in 660. The Silla-Tang alliance finally managed to take advantage of internal fighting in Koguryŏ to defeat it in 668.

That done, Tang renounced its ally. It turned on Silla, trying to conquer the whole peninsula and Manchuria. But by 676, Silla armies that included the soldiers of its former rival kingdoms Paekche and Koguryŏ had expelled Tang from the whole peninsula, for good. Tang and Silla two resumed diplomatic relations. Silla sent frequent embassies to Chang’an, students and monks studied there, and a lively trade brought Tang luxury goods to the Silla court. But Tang never even got a toehold on the peninsula.

Koguryŏ King Kwanggaet’o, back in the late fourth century, had not fulfilled all of his military ambitions. But kingdom shaped East Asian politics right up to its end in 668, and played a definitive role in keeping the very powerful Sui and Tang empire off the peninsula. Ulchi Mondok brought down the Sui, defeats by Koguryŏ destabilized the early Tang, and Koguryŏ soldiers under Silla chased Tang out of the peninsula. Tang did hold the Manchurian part of Koguryŏ’s territory, but only for three decades. Then old Koguryŏ aristocrats and members of the Malgal (Mohe) tribe rebelled against Tang. They founded the state of Parhae, which lasted in Manchuria and the Liaodong peninsula until 926. In a way, Kwanggaet’o’s dynasty lived on.





Figures 7.2 and 7.3. Earthenware with three-color glaze tomb-guardian in armor, c. 680-750, about 17” high (left); and ceramic tomb guardian in scale (lamellar) armor, about 9” high. What do you think the angler-fish style helmet does? Why have such fierce guys in a tomb? Source: Metropolitan Museum. Public Domain.

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7.5: Yamato Centralization

Taming the Clans

Another legacy of the Koguryŏ wars was the centralization of Japan. In Chapter Six we saw how Yūryaku and his Yamato court had begun with symbolic visits, titles, and gifts to win recognition as the top, or center, of a network of chiefs of clans and regions. Centralization might have gone no further. As archaeologist Habuta Yoshiyuki writes, “Because a political system armed with a well-defined territorial boundary and centralized authority is a rare thing in human history, we scholars must be conscientious about avoiding assumptions based on the influence of present-day political systems.”[12] That the islands would become one nation was not foreordained, nor was that something that the chiefs and clans envisioned.



Figure 7.4. Sixth-century swords from Japan, made there or imported from the mainland or peninsula+. Iron, gilt copper, silver. The marshmallows are merely supporting the sword in their case. Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art (which has a wonderful gallery of arms and armor). Public Domain.

By about 600, the Yamato court almost monopolized the prestige goods coming in from Silla and Paekche. The court, recall, coordinated the production of horses and iron in regions well-suited to those ventures. Each statelet or clan sent tribute and family members to serve the Yamato court in specialized ways. The Mononobe had military responsibilities, the Nakatomi/Fujiwara specialized in Shinto ritual. The Kibi no Ama no Atai family may have been put in charge of diplomatic relations with the peninsular kingdoms, because of their long-term connections there.

But each chief still ruled his own statelet. Even after accepting titles and court roles from Yamato, each chiefly clan maintained its own kami (totem, deity, or spirit) and traditions. Each clan had an oral tradition about whichever kami was its ancestor or sponsor – for not all claimed to be descended from the kami. Each clan head kept up sacrifices to that deity, as a claim to nobility and political authority. The adoption of the new gods of Buddhism was also attached to various clans, including the Hata immigrant family of Kibi, who built a Buddhist temple there in about 625 using Paekche-style rooftiles, and the Soga clan. As a method of centralizing power, prestige goods and violence could do only so much.

To increase its power and authority, Yamato imported ideas and organization from the mainland, including Buddhism, Confucianism, and ways to govern. Silla and especially Paekche provided them. The major players at the Yamato court in the late sixth and early seventh centuries were the Soga clan, possibly immigrants from the peninsula (scholars do not agree), who dominated the Yamato line matrilineally: marrying and thus giving birth to Yamato kings. They relied on Buddhism, and their sponsorship of the new religion played a role in their competition with the other clans. The most important Soga figures are empress Suiko (r. 592- 628) and her nephew Prince Shōtoku (574-622). The document known as “Prince Shōtoku’s 17- Article Constitution” introduced Buddhist and Confucian ideas in order to differentiate the Yamato line from all other clans, elevating the king.

Why would the clans accept that? The basic reason was fear.

In 598, as Sui sent troops against Koguryŏ, Wa (probably the Yamato court) sent envoys to Sui, hoping to avoid attack. More missions went to Tang, with the same aim, but that became urgent only in 645, as Tang Taizong, allied with Silla’s Queen Sŏndŏk,

hurled his forces against Koguryŏ. At that point, Yamato Prince Naka no Ōe and a clan chief Nakatomi no Kamatari (615-669, later granted the surname Fujiwara) ousted the Soga clan, while implementing the kinds of changes Prince Shōtoku's "constitution" envisaged. Nakatomi dominated the court as head of the anti-Buddhist Shinto ritual experts. He could see trouble coming from Tang, and despite disliking Buddhism – some thought that the old gods were angry about the Buddhist images and were causing widespread illness – he relied on Paekche immigrants to import bureaucratic methods of government. The Taika reforms of 646 laid out what is called the *ritsruryō* (律令) system: a Legalist structure that included a bureaucratic division of court administration, the division of territory into "provinces" (*kuni* 国) and "districts" (郡), and the registration of all residents as taxpayers. The point was to increase the prestige of the Yamato clan and the control of the central government over manpower and resources in much of Japan. The other clans signed on, because they were afraid of attack by the Tang-Silla alliance.

But Tang Taizong lost. Pressure let up. The Taika reforms did not really go into effect for another twenty years. In 663, as allies of Paekche, Wa forces experienced a huge defeat by Tang and Silla. They lost four hundred boats and ten thousand men – probably just meaning "an awful lot." The military defeat finally convinced the recalcitrant clans to accept a centralized administration under Yamato that could arm and feed enough soldiers to fend off attack. The arrival of large numbers of literate refugees from the peninsula, as well as Tang prisoners, made available the personnel to design and take various administrative measures.

Nakatomi/Fujiwara's protégé Naka no Ōe, now ruling as Tenji (r. 661-672), oversaw the first systematic registration of households for tax collection and military duty, a survey of farmland and division into standard-sized fields, a new legal code regulating family property and other matters, – and the earliest firmly dateable poems in the *Manyoshu*, written in Old Japanese using Chinese characters. Tens of thousands of excavated wooden tablets show that bureaucratic control – counting, taxing, measuring, moving people, moving goods – extended to Shikoku, to Kyushu, and halfway up Honshu. As provinces and commanderies were set up across more and of the islands, the Yamato court's power increased.

The chiefs agreed to become members of an organized aristocracy, ruled by and serving as officials in a central, Legalist state, because they were afraid that Tang and Silla might set their sights on the islands. To block entry at the easiest, oldest point of access, in 663 the court set up an office in Kyushu, right where immigration from the peninsula had started the process of civilizational transfer many centuries earlier.[13]



Figure 6.14. Source: Metropolitan Museum. Public domain.

Descent from the Sun-Goddess

The final important steps in Yamato centralization were taken by Tenji's brother Temmu (r. 672-686) and his wife Jitō (d.702). Temmu was the first Japanese ruler, and when he died Jitō was the second, to use the title "tennō" 天皇 "heavenly shining," which, like the Qin term *huangdi* 皇帝, we translate as "emperor" or "empress." (Empress Wu of Tang borrowed the title).

Temmu and Jitō centralized power with both organization and ideology. In terms of organization, they decreed that only their direct descendants could hold the throne. They rewarded their supporters with Tang-style court ranks and with positions in a Tang-style

government structure centered on the court. They convinced aristocrats, the former chiefs, to their acquiescence in central control through bureaucracy in exchange for these honors and official posts. Like the Qin emperor, Temmu and Jitō moved the aristocrats to their new capital city, away from their original territories. They busied the former chiefs with an extensive calendar of Buddhist and Shinto rituals. They set them to learning Chinese, and studying the classics, poetry, painting and calligraphy, music and dance. Legalist government and mainland culture, funneled largely through the peninsula, tamed the clans.



Figure 7.6. Buddha Preaching, a section from the Illustrate Sutra of Past and Present Karma, Japan, Nara period (mid-8 th century). Source: Metropolitan Museum. Public Domain.

Across East Asia, rulers had claimed to be descended from illustrious figures. For instance, the Tang had claimed descent from Laozi, mythical author of the Dao De Jing, who had become a god. Koguryŏ and Paekche both claimed descent from the royal house of the northern state of Puyŏ.[14] Such claims made sense in an aristocratic age, when people's quality depended on the status of their birth families. So now, to legitimate the principle that only their direct descendants could hold the throne, co-rulers Temmu and Jitō stressed that each clan's status had originally come from their descent from a god of some kind.

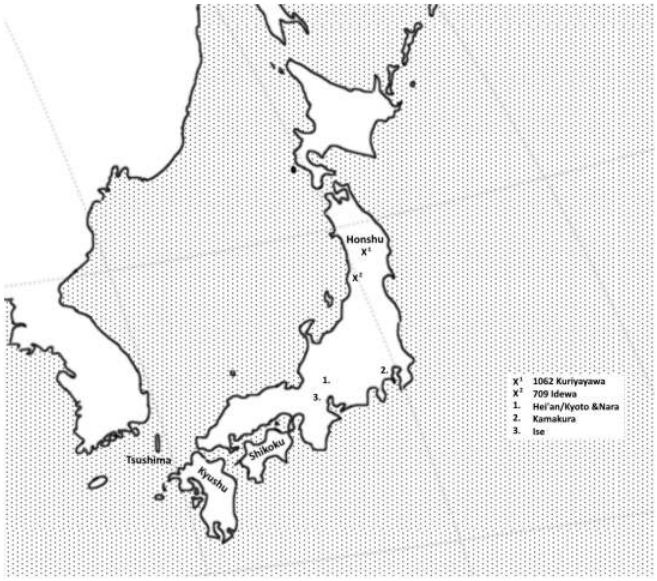
And, the co-rulers stressed, the Yamato line – their ancestors – came from the sungoddess Amaterasu. She had installed her grandson Hononinigi as the first ruler of Japan; his descendant was the emperor Jimmu, who conquered the whole archipelago in 660 BC; and from him the throne had descended within the Yamato family in an unbroken succession down to Temmu, himself a deity. To institutionalize this idea of imperial descent from Great Goddess Amaterasu, she was made top god in a Shinto pantheon that included all the clan deities. In the bureaucracy, the Council of Kami Affairs was placed beside the Council of State, right under the emperor, and given the responsibility for organizing, developing, and administering Great Goddess shrines, rituals, offerings, priests, and patronage. The Ise Grand Shrine to the Goddess hosted the most spectacular rituals conducted by the highest-ranking Shinto priests. A huge amount of ritual regulation about worship of Amaterasu was written into the *Engishiki*.[15] The court rejected the designation Wa, and named their country "Origin of the Sun" (Nippon 日本), or "Japan."

The Nara Period (710-784)

To impose this false narrative – for as you know there was not even an unbroken Yamato descent line going back to Yūryaku – Temmu and Jitō began sponsoring historiography. Their daughter-in-law (and Jitō's half-sister) Genmei (r. 707-715) continued the project. The results, both written in classical Chinese, were the *Records of Ancient Matters* (Kojiki, 712), and *Chronicles* (Nihon Shoki, 720, a mainland-style official history). Along with other older myths of gods and heroes, and more accurate historical accounts, they embedded stories promoting the unbroken Yamato connection to the goddess. As people died and texts lived, over the centuries those stories came to be ardently believed, like the stories of Yao, Shun, and Yu, dynastic founders across East Asia, and other myths.

As well as overseeing the histories, Genmei built a new capital city between 708 and 712. The Yamato court had gradually moved beyond thatched wooden halls, abandoned at the death of each ruler to avoid pollution. Jitō had built a first Tang-style capital in 694. Genmei's capital Nara, slightly to the north, replaced it. The new capital housed a centralized administration that, when it took final form with the Taihō Code (701), included household registration, taxation including military service for all commoner men, the minting of coins, and the Tang equal fields system of redistributing fields after a census taken every six years. Coastal and mountain resources, though far more important to the economy than they were on the mainland, were not included, because the Tang model excluded them.

Nara housed an imperial academy where four hundred young aristocrats studied the Classics, calligraphy, mathematics, law, and how to pronounce Chinese characters in Chinese. (They could be read in Japanese pronunciation, too, and simplified versions of characters were used to represent Japanese language – a system called hiragana.) Theoretically there were schools in each province, too. But the provincial schools could not find enough teachers, and the academy's promise of meritocratic advancement proved hollow: not only were government positions dominated by the top clans, but even teaching posts at the academy became hereditary. Probably only 20,000 people out of the population of five or six million could read at all.



Map R. The Japanese archipelago, showing the location of Hei'an (today's Kyoto); Ise where Amaterasu had her most important shrine; Kamakura; and the farthest northern forts established by the Nara/Hei'an regime. Hokkaido, the large island north of Honshu, was completely independent of the Yamato court until at least 1400, but people there, later dubbed Ainu, traded with Honshu for iron.

As more literate people learned about Confucianism, Empress Kōken in 757 required every household to own the *Classic of Filial Piety*. But as in Tang, it is quite unlikely that that happened, and impossible that everyone could read it. More likely is that the *Classic of Filial Piety* was distributed as a kind of magical object. For in 770, Empress Shōtoku also had a million printed copies of a charm written in Sanskrit, each in a miniature pagoda, distributed. Nara-period emperors promoted Buddhism by creating a national network of temples, carrying out Buddhist rituals, promulgated scriptures, and so on.

The Tōdaiji (Great Eastern Temple) built by Emperor Shōmu in Nara is today the world's largest wooden structure. When we consider that until the reign of Empress Suiko, in 592, the court itself had been living in wooden huts, the enormous temple shows how quickly architectural knowledge had grown. Because of the international Buddhist tradition of grand scale, Buddhism was perhaps even more useful than Shinto for expressing the centrality of the monarch, as the northern mainland regimes had done in the period of division. It could subsume Shinto gods and send political messages that way. For example, the Tōdaiji's sixty-four-foot high gilded bronze Buddha was accompanied by a small shrine to an important Shinto deity of Kyushu, where a rebel group of Fujiwara was defeated: once they submitted to the Yamato court, they were re-incorporated in a supporting role, as the small statue symbolized. The blazing gold Buddha, surrounded by smaller figures, sent a clear message that the ruler who created it was rich and powerful.



Figure 7.7. One of the “One Million Pagodas” with printed charms distributed by order of Empress Shōtoku to thank Buddhist deities for helping suppress a rebellion in 764. Scholars do not agree about whether the charms were printed using woodblocks or bronze plates. Either way, they are among the oldest printed texts in the world. Source: Metropolitan Museum. Public Domain.

As for the US, that power resided partly in the control of natural resources that had scarcely been tapped. Historian Conrad Totman argues that the temples built in Japan between 600 and 850 required almost four million cubic yards of wood. Building the Tōdaiji temple complex – initially two nine-story pagodas and a meeting hall measuring about 50 by 86 yards – would have taken the timber grown on about 3.4 square miles. After Tōdaiji burned down in 1180, there was little local wood, because so many other temples and mansions had been built. The court had to build 118 dams to create water flows to carry suitable timber from all over Japan. Firing bricks and clay tiles, and making the mortar to hold bricks together, required so much that by the Hei’an period, the kilns had been moved 50 miles from the capital where wood was still available. Quarrying clay and stone meant further environmental costs.[16]

Buddhism took a huge toll on the landscape everywhere in Asia, not just in Japan. Tang Empress Wu built a wooden tower almost 1,000 feet tall, which housed a statue of Maitreya over 900 feet tall. As well as demonstrating imperial piety, and channeling supernatural support for dynasties, these immense structures vividly communicated the vast power of the donors – the rulers – over land and labor.

Of course, it was ordinary people who built the huge temples and palaces. Totman has argued that workers were gathered and settled in labor camps to build the temples, and suffered from all the ills that living away from home in temporary shelters brings.[17] Wooden statues could be gilded pressing gold leaf onto a sticky lacquer layer. Craftsmen under Empress Wu Zhao of Tang shaped a huge Buddha (so large its pinky finger could hold many people) of clay, wrapped it in cloth, painted it with layers of lacquer, and then shattered and removed the clay core.[18] But the Tōdaiji’s large figure, and many other Buddhas across East Asia, were of bronze. Gilding bronze is an arduous ten-step process that involves painting the figure with a mixture of mercury and gold, and slowly burning off the mercury as gas. Not only did gilding the Tōdaiji Buddha take five years (752-757), and use yet more wood, but the craftspeople, even if they were protected by masks, inhaled the mercury gas, which of course left nerve and organ damage.[19]

When we consider that these artisans, and the lumberjacks and carpenters, and the specialized craftspeople who made the gold, silver, silk, items for those elaborate temples and their ceremonies, and the monks and nuns themselves, and the musicians – when we consider all those people who had to be fed by someone else, we can see that imperial Buddhism must have pushed forward riziculture in Japan. Historian Amino Yoshihiko argues that the Nara and Hei’an textual stress on rice as the center of the economy, including the rituals around rice production and the key role of rice in the myth of Amaterasu and Susano-o, was ideological, as much as factual. It represented adoption of the high-prestige Tang model of the state. People were growing millet, barley, buckwheat, and root crops, and given the long coastline and mountainous forests, people found it much easier to eat fish, seaweed, and nuts and other things growing in the forests. Rice had come to the archipelago from the peninsula by about 900 BC, but it requires a lot of work every season, even after forests have been cleared and marshes drained. On the other hand, rice feeds a lot of people – it offers more calories per bowl than other grains, and a higher yield per bushel of seed. Both the association of rice with the Tang system and the state’s need for labor probably pushed forward the adoption of rice.

Silla State Structure

Silla, last of the Three Kingdoms to begin consolidation, arose from the Chinhan tribal confederation in the southeastern peninsula. It centered on six villages or clans – the most important being Hwe and Sahwe – but the chiefs came, armed and mounted, from the north, and never fully integrated with the locals they dominated. Silla adopted mainland knowledge primarily from Koguryŏ,

secondarily from Paekche, and only indirectly from the mainland before the mid-seventh century. The Silla ruling husband and wife Naemul (r. 356-402) and Poban (r. approx. same) sent envoys along with a diplomatic mission from Koguryŏ to one of the mainland regimes, and this seems to have been part of very early stages in consolidating Silla power; shortly thereafter Silla rulers took on a new title. In about 500, Silla formed as a duarchy, with a primary ruler from the Hwe and a backup from the Sahwe clan. Buddhism – a measure of the openness to mainland ideas – was declared an official religion in Silla only in 535, a century and half after Paekche and Koguryŏ and about the same time as Yamato.

Despite its late development, Silla was the kingdom that unified most of the peninsula. But that unification, scholars agree, was only a surface phenomenon, when compared with Sui and Tang, on the one hand, and the later Koryŏ on the other. More on this in the next chapter.

Silla monarchs remained weak, barely elevated above the aristocracy descended from earlier clan chiefs. Like Yamato, Silla did adopt the *junxian* system of Legalist rule, dividing the whole conquered part of the peninsula (Parhae held the northernmost part of the peninsula) into nine commanderies (called "provinces") with counties below them. Recent discoveries of village records suggest that a central fiscal ministry counted and controlled households and the land they worked. Silla set up a postal system to carry imperial commands, and bureaux for classical and Confucian learning and astronomy. It carried out ambitious irrigation projects to promote agricultural productivity. One point on which preserved sources and the *Samguk yusa* agree is the details of Buddhist ceremonies to protect the state, which continued to be very important right through the Silla period.[20] The court built both wooden Buddhist temples in mainland style and temples cut out of rock (most famous is the Sŏkkuram Grotto), and deployed its artisans' old skills with gold to create graceful, elegant gold images of bodhisattvas. These were all methods that other East Asian monarchs had deployed to centralize power. But few Silla monarchs could stand up to the aristocrats at court, who blocked almost all attempts to admit to high office newcomers, or even men of slightly lower aristocratic rank.

Not the monarch alone, but a council of high-ranking aristocrats made policy. Stone steles from the early sixth century refer to a decision by the highest-ranking seven men of Silla settling a property dispute, and record a public announcement by the council. More than two centuries later there is a record of the council deciding policy by unanimous vote (surely preceded by long discussion). When the monarch left no heir, it was the council that decided on the next monarch, and such lapses of course provided the greatest opportunities for aristocratic factions to maneuver at court. The fact that King Muyŏl left a competent first son to become King Munmu (文武 r. 661-681), and that he in turn left a competent eldest son, made it easier for these monarchs to centralize, for they were not beholden to the council for their thrones.[21]

Munmu completed the defeat of Paekche, Koguryŏ, and Tang. To rein in both Buddhist wealth and aristocratic display, he prohibited donations to Buddhist temples without government approval. He set up an "Office of the Great Religion" through which secular officials managed monks, as had been done in Northern Qi and in Japan.[22] He vowed to become a dragon, protecting Silla's eastern coast, so after death he was cremated, scattered at sea, and commemorated with an undersea turtle-shaped marker on a rocky crag along the coast. His successor, King Sinmum (681-692), managed to purge the most powerful aristocrats from government, appoint lesser nobles to important positions, and choose his own cabinet of ministers. This attempt to separate inherited rank from state authority and elevate the king lasted for about a hundred years. King Kyŏngdŏk (r. 742-765) tried to strengthen Confucian learning and a meritocratically-recruited bureaucracy, but with little success. Compared with Tang, Silla monarchs were relatively weak vis-à-vis the aristocracy.

Empress Wu Zhao

Song historians looked back in amazement at the career of the Tang's only woman emperor, Wu Zhao (Wu Zetian) (624/5-705). In amazement – and distaste. Song gender roles were more clearly differentiated. To explain how the brilliant poets and scholar-officials of Tang could have worked under a mere woman, Song intellectual invented tales about her ruthlessness – just as the patrilinealists of Latter Han had smeared Empress Lü. Given the patterns of East Asian rulership described in this chapter, Empress Wu was not so very odd in her own time.

Wu Zhao was the daughter of a merchant who had been an early supporter of the Tang founder and of a high-ranking woman from the Sui royal family. She entered palace life as a teenager in 637, officially married to Tang Taizong as a very low-ranking consort. He paid little attention to her, but when he died, she entered a nunnery with the rest of the palace women. Taizong's ninth son and successor, Gaozong, married her in 650 as a secondary consort. Despite opposition from many aristocrats, he elevated her to Empress in 655 after she had borne three children. The pair ruled jointly from 660 to about 673, as Temmu and Jitō were doing at

the same time in Japan, and as Naemul and Poban had done earlier in Silla. When Gaozong became ill, she ruled for him until he died in 683, and then continued to hold power as several sons tired and failed to push her aside. In 684, some Tang princes (not her sons) rebelled, but the army supported Wu Zhao. In 690, Wu Zhao crowned herself emperor of a new dynasty. She called it “Zhou” to underline her claim to be descended from Zhou royalty going all the way back to King Wu, King Wen, and ultimately to Jiang Yuan, who became pregnant with Lord Millet, ancestor of the Zhou dynasty and inventor of agriculture, after stepping in a god’s footprint.

Like other medieval rulers, Wu and Gaozong drew on many different ideas to strengthen their rule. First, Confucianism. The pair presented themselves as serving the popular welfare so as to hold onto the Mandate of Heaven, and were called “the Two Sages.” Wu Zhao created a public role for herself that accorded with gendered roles, by instructing women and worshiping the silkworm deity, for instance. In ruling for Gaozong when he was ill, she displayed wifely loyalty, and won the support of officials in taking control of the reins of government (and managing the alliance with Silla). After Gaozong’s death, officials supported her continued rule in the role of wise mother when the heir-apparent, Li Xian, proved himself feckless: he had been stockpiling armor for a coup d’etat and supposedly offered the throne to his father-in-law. Wu Zhao built up further legitimacy in the six years after Gaozong’s death by linking herself with classical magic architecture and omens, all within a Confucian framework. And she promoted use of the civil service examinations, hoping to promote talented men from lower-ranked aristocratic families through a meritocratic process.

Second, Gaozong and Wu Zhao continued Tang sponsorship of Daoism. Both wrote prefaces to accompany a vast collection of Daoist scriptures. They awarded the deified Laozi (supposedly Gaozong’s ancestor) new titles. Their youngest daughter, the Taiping princess, was ordained as a Daoist priestess. They made a pilgrimage to a Daoist mountain together. And they decreed that the civil service examinations had to include questions on the Dao De Jing.[23]

Third, Wu Zhao was firmly embedded in the international culture of her time: A team that included Korean and Persian architects cooperated to build one of her monuments.[24] So of course, like monarchs all across Asia, Wu Zhao believed in and drew on Buddhism. Throughout her public life, from 651-704, she associated herself with Buddhist virtue and deities, stressing mercy and compassion. She publicized a Buddhist sutra that prophesied the incarnation of Maitreya, Buddha of the future, in the form of a woman, as a legitimation of her own dynasty. In 693, she proclaimed herself a čakravartin, wheel-turning king, like Ashoka. One scholar has argued that her vow to promulgate hundreds of thousands of Buddhist texts led to the invention of printing, based on ancient pattern-stamp technology.[25] (Wu Zhao also invented special Chinese characters used only in her reign.) The earliest extant precisely-dated printed book in the world is a copy of the Diamond Sutra made on May 11, 868.



Figure 7.8. Two portions of the Diamond Sutra printed in Tang in 868. A son had many copies printed for wide distribution, to earn spiritual merit for his parents. The picture is appropriate to this filial action: it shows the Buddha preaching to an aged follower. The sutra was sealed up in the Buddhist caves in Dunhuang around 1000 and re-discovered in 1900. The source (www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-diamondsutra) has more information and close-up images. Public Domain.

Wu Zhao was indeed ruthless – like male rulers. Her first husband, Tang Taizong, after all, had killed his brothers and nephews when he forced his father to cede the throne in 626. She did remove sons whom she found stupid or disobedient, but the later stories about killing her own children do not appear even as vague rumors in sources close to her time. She implemented a reign of terror between 683 and 697, arresting and even killing real and potential political enemies among the aristocratic families. But she never expanded terror to the whole population (unlike twentieth-century fascist and communist regimes), nor did she abandon the broader goals of good government. While more successful than most male rulers, she was not more brutal.

At the age of about 80, Wu Zhao retired. One of her sons took the throne, and rejected the Zhou dynastic name, reestablishing Tang.[26] Song historians regarded her as unique, and portrayed her as demonically clever and ruthless. But in her own time, she was not the only female ruler in East Asia, and her activities fit well into in East Asian ruling patterns.

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7.6: Sources

[1] This anecdote courtesy of Tom Manazec. From *Song biographies of eminent monks* 宋高僧傳, T no. 2061, 50:743c.

[2] Anderson, *The East Asian World-System: Climate and Dynastic Change*, 81-5.

[3] Hong, "Yayoi Wave, Kofun Wave, and Timing."

[4] Much of this section is based on Wright, *The Sui Dynasty*.

[5] Ebrey, *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook*, 98-104.

[6] Lewis, *China's Cosmopolitan Empire: the Tang Dynasty*, 215-17.

[7] The gifts were: two different carriages and teams of black horses, a hat and a robe with a red belt, musical instruments and dancers for ancestral ritual, for his house red doors and a staircase, three hundred bodyguards, two different axes, one red bow and ten black bows with 100 matching arrows each, and a jade cup full of millet ale. Wright, *The Sui Dynasty*, 112.

[8] Much of this section is based on Wright, *The Sui Dynasty*.

9 Marc Abramson, *Ethnic Identity in Tang China* (2008), quoted in Clark, "What's the Matter with 'China'? A Critique of Teleological History," 309.

[10] Eisenberg, *Kingship in Early Medieval China*, 247

[11] Eisenberg, *Kingship in Early Medieval China*, 239ff.

[12] Habuta, "Japan-Korea Interaction Viewed from Eastern Japan," 408.

[13] This section is based on Totman, *A History of Japan* and Holcombe, *A History of East Asia*.

[14] Byington, *The Ancient State of Puyŏ*, 302.

[15] For this section see among others Kirkland, "The Sun and the Throne."

[16] Elverskog, *The Buddha's Footprint: An Environmental History of Asia*

[17] Totman, *A History of Japan*.

[18] Qingfei Nie, *Ordering the Urban Space in Luoyang, 600–1000 CE*.

[19] Moran, "The Gilding of Ancient Bronze Statues in Japan." Barbieri-Low, *Artisans in Early Imperial China*, 16.

[20] Kim Youn-mi, *New Perspectives on Early Korean Art*, chapter 3.

[21] King Munmu's funerary stone inscription survives, although it is damaged, and with some other data was used in a documentary by the Korean Broadcasting Service in 2008 to suggest that the royal Kim family of Silla were descended from the Xiongnu. McBride, "Making and Remaking Silla Origins," 531.

[22] Kim, "Buddhism and the State," 110-111.

[23] Adshead, *T'ang China*, 45.

[24] Qingfei Nie, *Ordering the Urban Space in Luoyang, 600–1000 CE*.

25 Barrett, *The Woman who Discovered Printing*. To see how wood-block printed books are made, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y57rUeCHoXg

[26] This section is based mainly on Rothschild, *Wu Zhao: China's Only Woman Emperor*.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

8: Tang and Silla

The unified kingdoms that emerged from the centuries of division – Tang, Silla, and Japan – shared not only modes of government, but a great deal of religious, literate, visual, and musical culture. But just as government varied, so too did culture. The Tang period (618-906) has been called “cosmopolitan” and “a golden age.” It drew visitors from across Asia, and from the Middle East, and incorporated not only Buddhism but influences from greater Persia into its art, architecture, and literature. The greatest poets of the Chinese language were Tang scholars and officials, and great short stories were written as mere exercises to show off a man’s talent to the official overseeing his civil service exam. Tang models were appealing enough to merit adoption by Silla (668-935) and, as the next chapter will discuss, by the Yamato court in the Nara (710-794) and Hei’an (794-1180) periods.

8.1: Ethnicity
8.2: Tang Social Structure
8.3: Tang Government Structure
8.4: The Tang Civil Service Examinations
8.5: Silla Villagers and their Farms
8.6: Poetry in Aristocratic Society
8.7: Buddhism
8.8: The Queen Mother of the West
8.9: The Fall of Tang
8.10: Sources

Thumbnail: Earthenware, with traces of pigment. Tomb figurines. Seated musicians, late seventh century. How does each instrument work? Source: Metropolitan Museum. Public Domain.

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8.1: Ethnicity

Sui founding emperor Yang Jian (541-604), who ruled as Wendi, and his empress both illustrate the difficulty of categorizing anyone as “Chinese” or “non-Chinese” in the medieval period. Yang Jian was born in the heartland between the old capitals of Chang’an and Loyang, but his ancestors for six generations back had worked on the northwestern frontier and intermarried with Turko-Mongol (Xianbei) families there. His father worked for the Northern Wei until it split in half, and then for a Xianbei ruler. Until he was ten years old, Yang Jian was raised by a Buddhist nun; he then learned hunting and riding, and attended a Confucian school in the capital. At age thirteen he was appointed to office and rose quickly, perhaps because of his powerful father. At age sixteen he married a thirteen-year-old girl descended from a very highranking northern Chinese family on one side and from several Turko-Mongol families that served the Northern Wei on the other side. She was highly educated, good at practical management, and a devout Buddhist. The young couple vowed to marry no-one else, and eventually had at least ten children.[1] Their mixed cultural heritage was typical of the ruling class.

The Tang royal family, surnamed Li, also came from Turkic and Central Asian groups. The Tang founder, Gaozu, had made his eldest son heir apparent, but the second son, claiming that there was a plot against his own life, killed his elder brother and forced his father to abdicate in 626. Sanping Chen argues that this was not merely the usual brutal behavior of royalty, but an instance of Turkic practice of “tanistry.” In contrast to the Zhou model of trunk and branch lineages with the eldest son of the primary wife inheriting, a pattern reinforced by Han patrilinealists, tanistry meant that the most qualified son, or the one who could gather the most support among the ruling group, inherited leadership. Underlining Chen’s emphasis on the Turkic roots of the imperial family, one early Tang prince refused to speak Chinese, lived in a tent, and wore Turkish clothes.



Figure 8.1. Earthenware tomb-figure with three-color glaze. Horse and female rider. Tang, late seventh to first half of eighth century. This kind of hairstyle led to medieval European high hats with long veils for ladies. Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art, where there are plenty more to look at. Public Domain.

Tang incorporated international talent: the son of a Koguryŏ general captured by TangSilla forces served in the Tang army thereafter, and his son Gao Xianzhi carried out Tang foreign policy in Central Asia. Tang general An Lushan was part Turkish and part Sogdian, a Persianspeaking group who lived around Samarkand. An was adopted by the imperial consort Yang Guifei, and Emperor Xuanzong trusted him so deeply that he wished to make him Prime Minister, although he was apparently illiterate. In 755, General An, in charge of a hundred thousand troops fighting the Khitans in Manchuria, rebelled against Tang. Xuanzong and Yang Guifei fled Loyang (his troops murdered her along the way, causing him great grief), and An Lushan was defeated by Uighurs allied with Tang.

If An Lushan had succeeded in replacing Tang, it would have been the third successive dynastic change via coup d'etat by a mixed-ethnicity general overthrowing the mixed-ethnicity emperor for whom he worked. Even below the elite level, medieval Chinese people, from the fall of Han through the Tang, spoke many languages, cooked many cuisines, wore many styles of clothing, and carried out different family rituals. And people of different cultures intermarried and raised children together. Ethnic categories were flexible.





Figures 8.2 and 8.3. Tang Tomb figurines. Left, ceramic: male dignitary in court dress of long wide-sleeved tunic over long gown, with hat. Right, wood: female in court style highwaisted dress and short jacket. Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public Domain.

Tang also employed and welcomed foreigners. Foreign merchants of many kinds – Jews, Arabs, Persians, and South Asians – established communities in the capital and Tang ports, and made great profits. After the defeat of Koguryŏ, up to 5% of its population was moved to the mainland, and the descendants of both Koguryŏ and Paekche immigrants entered Tang military service.[2] The Yamato court and Silla sent members of the elite to study in Tang. In 837 alone, a state record counted 216 Silla men studying in Tang.[3] The special Tang examination for foreigners, which 58 Silla men passed, was a route into office back in Silla for head-rank six men; but others migrated to Tang and stayed there. A tomb inscription of about 693 tells us that the wife's surname was Xue (= Sŏl, 薛); her head-rank six family had served the Silla dynasty for generations, until her father became a Tang military

general. The inscription also claimed that Xue was descended from a very early Korean king.[4] Both examination degrees and high social rank were meaningful across international boundaries.



Figure 8.4. Octagonal hammered silver cup with ring handle and chased design. Tang. Before this time, silver and gold were cast, not hammered, and used as inlay. Hammering and chasing techniques for precious metals, as well as lobed and sharp-edged shapes like this, and the flower-and-leaf ornamentation, came from Persia. Source: Metropolitan Museum. Public Domain.

Tang Taizong learned court style from a Sassanid shah in Persia (Iran). The imperial family ate off gold and silver vessels in Persian styles. Horses from Persia were Taizong's pride, in war and in peace; Tang ceramic sculptures of polo-players, male and female, survive from many tombs. In Xuanzong's reign, courtiers loved Persian music and dance. The famous poet Li Bai immortalized one dancer as "the whirling girl," but rebel general An Lushan and Xuanzong's true love, Yang Guifei, both also excelled in the dance.[5] The court purchased or demanded as tribute most imported luxury goods: sandalwood, ivory, frankincense, spices, jewels, and pearls that came in from countries well-represented in Tang geographical works -- Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Iran, and Iraq -- as well as Bahrain, Oman, Yemen, and even Tanzania. Tang merchants sailed to Japan, Korea, and southeast Asia, and reached India and even the Persian gulf by about 850.[6] Arab, Persian, and Indian merchants brought imports to Guangzhou (Canton), Quanzhou, and Yangzhou, buying silk, porcelain, and copper- and iron-ware to sell back home. Amazing skirts, raincoats, cloaks, and other garments made of colorful feathers were created for Tang royalty, aristocrats, and soldiers in such numbers as to drive some birds almost into extinction, according to the official *New Tang History* written in Song times.[7] Trade in luxury goods flourished in Tang times.

With these prestige goods, music, games, and elaborate rituals, as well as the foreign merchants, monks, and others who visited and settled there, Tang created a court and capital so rich and appealing that members of the aristocratic elite flocked there from north and south. They left their family estates to be managed by others, eager to serve in the central government, and reluctant to leave the exciting capital. Of course, they had to serve as officials all over the empire, but reluctantly. Official postings south of the Yangzi River, not to speak of the far south around Guangzhou, were used as punishments. Such exile might easily kill a northerner not used to the heat and to malaria. The only thing that could make up for it were the fabulous fortunes to be made by milking the vibrant and lucrative overseas trade there.

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8.2: Tang Social Structure

The Super-Elite: Four Aristocracies Conjoined

A writer of Song times, when the Tang aristocracy had vanished, Shen Gua, likened Tang society to the caste system in India with its rigid inherited distinctions. At the top of Tang society stood the super-elite. They belonged to four separate aristocracies, each made up of many clans documented in various lists and genealogies that have been found among the archives at Dunhuang. First, the clans of the northeast (Hebei) claimed to represent the purest Chinese tradition of the Classics and Confucianism, with family lines reaching back to Han times. They married only among themselves -- unless a prospective mate was very wealthy indeed. They considered the Tang royal family of Li to be mere social upstarts. Taizong challenged that view in 632, only to find to his dismay that genealogical research supported it.

Second, the clans of the northwest included the Sui and Tang ruling houses and others who had served under the northern dynasties, had Turkic roots, and maintained central Asian customs and contacts. Northwesterners thought themselves superior because of their military and governing abilities, but they had also adopted classical learning and Confucian family practices. Third were the great clans of northern Shanxi, who also had central Asian contacts. Fourth were the wealthy Yangzi valley clans of the Southern Dynasties, also originally Han-era clans who had fled south. They were proud of the elegant culture they had built on the foundations of the classics, Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism, but northerners looked down on them as southern barbarians. These four regional aristocracies retained their place as the super-elite of Tang society until the end of the period.



Figure 8.5. Covered inkstone in the shape of a turtle, with the eight trigrams of the *Book of Changes* inscribed on its back. Review Chapter One and think about why it made sense to present the trigrams on a turtle shell, and use that for writing. Source: Metropolitan Museum. Public Domain.

The super-elite clans had each developed in a certain place going back to Han or Wei-Jin times. Each was labelled not only with a surname, such as Cui, that would be shared by many others, but also with the name of their home base, such as Boling. They had a strong sense of family tradition and history, documented in genealogies that listed clan members who had had successful political careers. (Any branch of a clan that failed to produce officials for a couple of generations would be dropped from the clan and its records.) Kinfolk, matrilineal as well as patrilineal, were important in sponsoring the next generation for high-ranking posts, so they married only with their social equals. Kin networks were the most important resource of the super-elite.

Members of the elite commanded deference from those below them, and each knew how to defer to his own superiors in age, rank, or status. By law their punishments were lighter. They had sumptuary privileges – the right to wear certain clothes, drive certain carriages, and so on. After moving to the capital region, they kept up the connection with the home place – even clan members who lived and died in the capital were buried back home until late in Tang times. That meant that everyone would meet at the tombs on certain festivals. As time went on, the clans spent less and less time back home; they preferred to be in the capital. It used to be thought that disconnection from those home bases was what ultimately brought them down, but that was true only indirectly, as we shall see.

What did the great clans of Tang times *not* have, compared with other elites? First, their home estates were not like Zhou feudal domains. They had to pay taxes, and in the north they did not even own the land – the Tang central state did. In the south, estates were divided among sons, so they did not last long or expand. Clan members and their tenants were all subject to the Tang Code and bureaucratic government. Second, the did not have the kind of lineage organizations that formed in Song and especially Ming times, in which clans had shared, corporately-held land, and written rules that gave them institutional continuity. Third, unlike the aristocratic clans of Japan, they did not each have a deity. They did not even have ancestral temples for the whole clan, only meetings at the tombs.[8]

Scholars, Commoners, and Slaves

Below the super-elite, a hundred or so prominent clans in each locality, called *shi zu* or "scholar clans," constituted the middle range of the aristocracy. They recognized one another as good families, and cultivated family solidarity through rituals centered on ancestral temples and graves, through formality of relations between the generations and the sexes, through an ethic of discipline and responsibility to the family, and through traditions of learning. They held office and served the Tang state in many capacities. Another set of families constituted the lower elite, powerful in their local areas.

Below them was the vast group of commoners, called "good people" (良民). Unlike in Qin and Han times, commoners held no rank, but were respectable. Below them were private retainers, who belonged to other households, but could legally marry commoners. Below them were base people, a category that included groups who hereditarily performed polluting tasks like music and acting, prostitution, and tending to the dead. Slaves were also base people.

Some slaves were purchased along the silk roads. For instance, after Tang conquered the kingdom of Gaochang in 640, Tang issued market contracts that validated the sale of slaves there. One excavated travel permit lists seven slaves with names like "Model Trustworthiness" and "Submit to Orders." Among four travel parties of Tang officials, two-thirds of the laborers listed were slaves belonging to the officials.[9] As in Han times commoners could slide down the social scale to become slaves, if a kinsman committed a serious crime, or to pay a debt; but unlike in Han times, there was no rising out of slavery again. In dramatic contrast to the Legalist principle that the state came first, a slave who informed on his master for any crime less than treason was liable to be judicially strangled. And unlike in Han times when a freed slave carried no taint, even manumission did not dissolve the obligation of a slave to be loyal to his former master. Slaves were supposed to marry only other slaves, because the distinction of rank was so important.



Figure 8.6. Earthenware, with traces of pigment. Tomb figurines. Seated musicians, late seventh century. How does each instrument work? Source: Metropolitan Museum. Public Domain.

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8.3: Tang Government Structure

Every aspect of Tang government was affected by aristocratic power: bureaucracy, recruitment, law. Under the emperor, a bureaucracy based on the Qin-Han model carried out the work of government. Unlike in the northern regimes of the period of division, government office was not inherited within a clan.

The Tang state recruited officials in three ways. First, one could be a member of a clan with a close relationship to the imperial house, the Li clan. Second, a close relative already in office could designate a son or nephew for office, which was called the "shadow privilege," but it would not be the same office that he himself held, so that bureaucratic rotation was possible. Third, the route for a minority of Tang officials was to pass the civil service examinations. Tang rulers, and the Empress Wu especially, did use the examination system to recruit new talent into government, but the exams did not really challenge aristocratic power. About thirty families normally held the highest offices, and a top post required a personal connection to the imperial Li clan or another very powerful person.

A new set of laws, the Tang Code, provided the basic law of the land and was adopted by centralizing regimes in the peninsula and archipelago. It was based on a legal code designed for Emperor Wu of Liang, gentler than that of Han, in accordance with his Buddhist beliefs, and it included both northern and southern legal elements. Laws were standard for whole country, but not for all Tang subjects. Rather, following Tuoba Wei precedent, it divided people into three broad categories: the privileged, respectable commoners (良民), and inferior or base people (賤 民).

A person's category of birth and social roles had very real effects. By law, the privileged – imperial relatives and high officials – received lighter sentences, while inferior people received heavier sentences for the same crime. Punishments for commoners varied by age, sex, mental and physical health, and relationship to the victim. The very young, very old, and women, for instance, generally got lighter sentences. It was much worse to murder one's father than a stranger. Sons and wives were punished for hitting fathers and husbands, but fathers and husbands were not punished for hitting sons and wives. Crime and punishment varied by social rank, but the law was uniform throughout the empire. The exception was foreigners: if a conflict arose between two people from different countries, Tang law applied, and if they were from the same country, that country's law should apply. And contrary to Qin and Han law, family juniors were supposed to report seniors' crimes only if they directly threatened the state.



Figure 8.7. Tang woven silk textile identical to one held by the Tōdaiji temple in Nara, donated by a Japanese empress in 756. Can you identify a foreign influence, and a possible origin of the purple dye, by reviewing? Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public Domain.

In managing land and labor, Tang bureaucratic government remedied the weaknesses of northern and southern regimes, while adopting their useful innovations. Tang taxed its subjects in two separate ways, based on their different eco-systems. First, in the drier north, the state claimed most of the land and adopted the Tuoba Wei "equal-field" system to parcel it out to farming men for

their lifetimes. There is evidence from land registers preserved in dry Dunhuang that the system was actually enforced. Each man between the ages of 21 and 59 was granted the same amount of land, and owed about three bushels of grain, seven meters of silk cloth or eight of hemp or ramie cloth, and twenty days of labor. The labor and grain could be commuted to cloth payments. Only husbands were liable for the tax, but the cloth was probably mostly made by wives, and that constituted most of the payment, so it was the work of women that supported the state most directly. (Moreover, since there was a shortage of coin and counterfeiting was rampant, cloth was the most common, stable, and transportable form of currency in Tang; so weaving wives were literally making money.) Unlike in Qin, military conscription was not universal, but was a special service that won a man exemption from labor conscription, like other specialized labor for local government office.

Second, in the south, grain was collected according to the amount of land a family owned, and money was collected according to the amount of other property they owned – not much, an average of 240 coins per household, providing only about one-twentieth of the value of the graincloth-labor taxes in the equal field system.[10]

The officials of the former Southern Dynasties, which had relied on commercial taxation, had earned reputations for astonishing levels of corruption, including rip-offs like forcing foreign merchants to sell goods to them at half price, then reselling at the regular price. To avoid such a bad reputation, the Tang central government disavowed interest in profiting from the luxury trade, or even taxing maritime trade directly. Instead it demanded foreign luxury goods as tribute from domestic prefectures that did not produce them, so had to buy them from Canton merchants themselves. “By doing so,” historian Wang Zhenping explains, “the T’ang court wanted to create for itself an image of a moral and benevolent government.”[11] This set a precedent for the unrealistic way in which the Japanese state, focused its regulations on rice, and simply ignored the lucrative maritime trade as a possible source of tax income.[12]

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8.4: The Tang Civil Service Examinations

The civil service examinations never selected enough officials from non-aristocratic families to undermine the great clans. Instead, as the exams became the more prestigious route to office, the great clans maintained their power *through* the examinations, in Penelope Herbert's phrase "by fair means or foul." Foul means of dominating the exam system included bribing corrupt and incompetent exam officials, or corrupt local headmen who had to certify who was eligible for exam, as well as good connections that enabled top families to send sons to state colleges that funneled men into the bureaucracy. Fair: even after printing was invented under Empress Wu, books were relatively scarce. Owning books, or having access to the libraries of other noble families was a privilege of the few. Most pupils got their basic schooling at home from their fathers, or more often (since they were often away in office or at court) their mothers. Those who did not have books could study at Buddhist monasteries, whose libraries held not just scriptures but the Classics and literature as well. But one still needed the leisure to learn without having to earn a living.

Furthermore, one had to be recommended to take the examinations, and they were not anonymous. Examiners knew the candidates, and were supposed to judge them in part on their personal (and hence also familial) characteristics. To do well, it was essential to submit writing samples ahead of time to the chief examiner, and impression on him and other influential people with one's poetic and musical talents, and one's sociability, appearance, and knowledge of etiquette, so complex that it was hard to learn if one had not grown up in an elite family. (Many Tang tales, like the story of Li Wa the loyal courtesan, were written by scholars for pre-exam presentation.) Commoners and members of the scholar clans could not do as well as those who had grown up in the highest social circles. If a social nobody did indeed have great literary talent, he often had a dream in which his heart and guts were cut out: this miraculous bodily transformation explained his extraordinary success. (High-ranking aristocrats, by contrast, dreamt of ghosts when they were going to *fail*.)[13]

Family and social connections constituted the real strength of the aristocracy: patrilineal kin, matrilineal kin, marital connections, and native-place connections all helped assure careers and get the work of government done. But increasingly, perhaps because of the mainland heritage of meritocracy, Tang men disdained to hold office purely by right or through connections. The most prestigious route to office was through the written examinations, which tested poetry-writing and calligraphy and secondarily required essays on philosophical and political issues. Careers depended on talent in poetry, calligraphy, painting, and music, and families boasted not merely of their illustrious ancestors but also of their abilities and their virtues. Meritocracy was meant to select the wisest and most virtuous to govern; and in Tang thinking, virtue lay in family and in learning.

Tang Confucianism

Tang Taizong advised his heir: "The Way (*dao* 道) is spread through culture (*wen* 文); fame is gained through learning." This was an aristocratic credo, for "culture" included all the practices of the great clans. "This culture of ours" they called it, thinking of *Analects* 9.5. An eightfold chain of historical reasoning linked cosmic patterns (the Way) to elite culture.

1. *Humans in nature.* Humans began as part of Heaven and Earth and the myriad living beings of the world.
2. *Sage-kings create civilization.* Then the sage-kings of Xia, Shang, and Zhou brought humanity out of the realm of nature by creating civilization. The sage rulers included Yao, Shun, and Yu; Tang the founder of Shang; King Wen, the Zhou progenitor, and the Duke of Zhou. Observing the patterns of nature (seasons, star movement, life cycles), they translated them into stable guides for humanity: calendars, hierarchies, boundaries. Since all elements of the cosmos resonated with one another, ordering human life properly could bring order to the cosmos.
3. *Civilization in Zhou.* The writing, rituals, calendars, institutions, implements, and arts created by the former kings continued be elaborated, creating the Six Arts of the Zhou.
4. *The Five Classics.* The Six Arts, and the world of the sage-king and their ministers were recorded in the Five Classics. Tang people believed that through the Classics we can still know what happened in Xia, Shang, and Zhou. They did not worry about the histories of compilations, or whether some had been forged. They accepted the Classics at face value.
5. *Confucius.* Confucius played a key role, for they thought he had written or edited the Classics. Confucius, they thought, had chosen the 305 poems of the *Book of Poetry* from more than 3000 in oral tradition. He had compiled the *Book of Documents*. He wrote a commentary on the *Book of Changes*, and composed the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. His disciple Zengzi and his grandson Zisi contributed to the three rites classics. Confucius, the first teacher and a sage himself, had put the Classics in order, to record and clarify and preserve the model world of the sage rulers as his world declined. He preserved antiquity.

6. *Decline.* In the Late Zhou, people had turned away from the institutions and practices of the golden age of antiquity.
7. *The Break.* The Qin purposely broke with antiquity by destroying feudalism.
8. *Restoring antiquity.* But the Han and the Tang, by looking back to the Classics, as interpreted by Confucians, had "restored antiquity." They had restored its spirit and its outlines. They did not follow the exact same institutions as the sage-king Yao, because they saw institutions as having developed historically in civilization before the decline, but their institutions were based on the Classics, and hence ultimately on cosmic patterns.[14]

In the view of the Tang elite, their government, writing, ritual, arts, and personal behavior; their friendships, in which they mutually cultivated virtue and deeply understood each other; and even their leisure pastimes came in an unbroken line of transmission from those of ancient times, which in turn had been patterned on the intrinsic nature of the cosmos. All the practices of the great clans expressed cosmic patterns. Doing culture was aligning humanity with the cosmos. Culture *was* the Way. Culture was what gave a person merit; and what meritorious persons – those with long, illustrious traditions of family education and achievement – did, was culture.[15]



Figure 8.8. Han Gan, "Night-shining White," painted c. 750. The horse belonged to Tang Emperor Xuanzong, and Han Gan was the most famous painter of horses. What do you think all those seal impressions are for? Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public Domain.

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8.5: Silla Villagers and their Farms

However narrow the Tang superelite, Silla's was yet more restricted. Silla conquered much of the peninsula. But it never truly incorporated, with equal opportunities, the old aristocrats of Paekche or Koguryŏ, or any chiefly families from outside the core capital area with its six division.[16] Real unification, according to some scholars, awaited Koryŏ times.[17]

We have few written records of ordinary people's lives. Recent excavations have turned up a few records of village people and property from Silla. These two fragments, on paper, date to 695, according to Yoon Seon Tao, but other scholars date them to 755 or 815. Part of Yoon's argument for his date is that the term "first month" 一月 is used instead of "starting month" 初月, a change made by Wu Zetian for her Zhou dynasty, which lasted only from 690-705.[18]

The village documents were found when conservators were repairing a thread-bound book stored in Japan, in the Shōsōin or great storehouse of the Japanese imperial household, built around 756 in Nara. The Silla village documents had been re-used to cover the other book, which was a Buddhist text.[19] How do you think the Silla documents might have come to the Japanese court?



Figure 8.9. Photograph of Silla village register from about 695. Even if you cannot read the characters, can you figure out the different parts of the text? Heading, item, number? Source: Yoon Sea Tae, "Village Society and the System of Local Governance," p. 60. Held in the Korean National Museum. Fair Use.

The records cover four villages and report on their holdings in a way that is unique to Silla, according to Yoon Seon Tae: the old official documents of mainland and Japan do not have this village-centered format, although many of the items are the same as the Japanese household registers and supplements (households, horses and cattle, taxable agricultural land, productive trees). As you read the report, see if the math works out. What is the reporting cycle? What do you think each category means ("helping son," "additional daughter," etc.): what do you guess is the basis for categorization and why? Does the report capture all productive resources?

Here is the text describing Village B:

> The village Sarhiji of the same districts has an area of tree-covered hills that is 12,830 paces in circumference. This includes an original area of 8, 770 paces and a newlycultivated area of 4,060 paces around, in Hamokchang valley. It has a total of 15 households ("hearths") equaling 4 ⅓ tax-quota households. These include 1 middlelower household with an able-bodied man, 2 upper-lower households with an ablebodied man, 5 lower-middle households with an able-bodied man, and 6 lower households, 5 with an able-bodied man and one with 1 (later changed to 2) *pŏpsa*. There is one new household that moved in during the past 3 years.
>
> The total population is 125. The number of people originally here plus the number of new births over the past three years is 118 (117). The males are as follows: 31 (30) able-bodied adults, including 4 slaves; 5 helping sons; 2 additional sons, 2 small sons plus 3 other small sons born during the past three years; and 1 elder. The females are as follows: 45 able-bodied adults, including 3 slaves; 4 helping daughters; 13 additional daughters; 6 small daughters; 3 small daughters born in the past three years; 1 exempt mother; and 1 elderly mother. There are 7 persons who moved in during the past three years; they include 3 who have not formed a household (1 ablebodied male adult, 1 additional daughter, and 1 small daughter) and 4 who belong to the *sujwanae* hearth (1 helping son, 1 elder, and 2 able-bodied female adults).
>
> There are 18 horses, including 16 from three years ago and 2 added since then. There are 12 cattle, including 11 from three years ago and 1 added since then. Paddies [i.e. wet rice fields] total 63 *kyŏl*, 5 *pu*, and 9 *sok*. This includes 3 *kyŏl*, and 66 *pu* of *kwanmo* paddy and 59 *kyŏl* and 98 *pu* of *yŏnsuyu* paddies. There are 119 *kyŏl*, 5 *pu*, and 8 *sok* of dry fields, all owned by

village households. Hemp fields total 1 *kyŏl*. There are 1,280 mulberry trees, including an original 1,091 and 189 newly planted in the past three years. There are 69 pine-nut trees, including an original 59 and 10 planted in the past 3 years. There are 71 walnut trees, with no new walnut trees planted in the past three years.

In the year *ŭlmi*, as reported to Your Excellencies, there was one upper hearth household that fled, made up of three persons: 1 able-bodied male adult and 2 ablebodied female adults.[20]

Village A's similar description ends:

The total number of people who died is 9 (10): 1 able-bodied male and 3 small sons, including 1 male slave; 1 able-bodied female, 1 small daughter (1 exempt mother), and 3 elderly mothers. It is also reported that one *kwan'gap* [slave?] was sold. There was a decrease of 2 horses and 4 cattle, all reported as having died.

These village people were categorized for tax and legal purposes, labelled with terms borrowed from the Tuoba Wei via Tang: respectable commoners and base people. But we know very little about them.

Silla Aristocratic Clans

Most written sources focus on the ranked aristocrats. The ranks were called different kinds of "bone" and "head" because descent, and human quality, were understood as physical. The highest ranked families were the holy-bone (*sŏnggol* 聖骨), then true-bone, then head-ranks six, five, four, three, two and one. Aristocratic clans took surnames on the mainland model: first Kim and Pak for the holy-bone clans, then with surnames invented or adopted after the Silla unification for the descent groups of the six major parts of the capital area.*

Silla law strictly forbade intermarriage across ranks. Lovers broke the law: General Kim Yusin, who defeated Tang, had a holy-bone mother descended from Kaya royalty and a true-bone father; they had fallen in love at first sight and run away together. Two and a half centuries later, another former-Kaya Kim, named Kangsu, of head-rank six, went so far as to fall in love and elope with the daughter of a blacksmith. Monk Wŏnhyo (617-686, surnamed Sŏl) was only from head-rank six, but he married a widowed princess descended from the first true-bone king, Muyŏl. Their son was Sŏl Chong (c. 660-730), who is considered the first great Korean Confucian thinker.[21]

But when couples did marry across ranks contrary to the law, or when a man took as a secondary wife a woman of lower status, the children inherited the lower rank, whatever it was. For to an even greater degree than in Tang and Japan at the time, rank was understood as something physical and real.

The holy bone supposedly all descended from King Chijŭng (r. 500-514). Only people descended on both sides from holy bone families could be monarchs. The holy-bone line died out with Queen Chindŏk (r. 647-654) just before the Tang-Silla alliance conquered Paekche – hardly surprising with all those close relatives marrying. As the *New History of Tang* explained to its surprised readers, the Silla king could only marry a wife who was also from "his family" so that "daughters of brothers, paternal and maternal aunts, and female cousins are all married as wives and spouses." This practice ran completely contrary to mainland patrilineal norms, which permitted marriage with matrilineal cousins, but forbade marriage among people with the same surname (patrilineal cousins). In Tang, the father's family determined rank, so a woman of beauty, education, or wealth could marry up the social ladder, and her children would have their father's higher rank. But a lower-ranking Silla mother would pull her children down with her. Silla was well aware of the mainland practice, and mendaciously identified many Kim wives and mothers of Silla kings in the ninth century as Paks to avoid offending the Tang court.[22] Tang layered aristocratic thinking over its Han legacy of meritocracy and patrilinealism; Silla felt more deeply the pollution of mixed rank.

The irony is that that very valorization of blood purity in theory undermined it in practice. The holy-bone died out just as the bone-rank system was being finalized. Recall that the Zhou ranks of duke, marquis, and earl were formalized when the fiefs were becoming warring states. Perhaps something similar happened here: as long as the holy-bone could provide an unquestioned top leader the other distinctions mattered less. But with Queen Chindŏk's childless death, the rest of the Kims and other aristocrats had to establish rules for a stable succession. Some managed to snag a designation as true-bone, others were relegated to head-rank six or below.

Far from practicing blood-line purity, head-rank six, right below the true-bone clans, became a very mixed elite group. When Silla conquered Paekche and Koguryŏ, it incorporated their former royal families and aristocrats as head-rank six. Head-rank six also

included the Ch'oe 崔 clan, whose members won more government positions from the late eighth century by studying in Tang. Some famous Ch'oe monks claimed to be descended from mainland immigrants – not just any immigrants, but the famous Boling Cui clan, as a way of adding luster to their otherwise lowly ancestry. As Jeon explains, "Because the bone-rank system was in use by the time of Queen Chindŏk, those with no surname and those outside of the bone-rank system often picked desirable Chinese surnames to link their ancestry to China."[23] Head-rank six, therefore mingled chiefly clans from outside the capital area, the offspring of Kim and Paks who had married lower-ranking spouses, immigrants from the mainland, people pretending to have immigrated from the mainland, and former aristocrats of Koguryŏ and Paekche.



Figure 8.10. Chosŏn period (1392-1910) wood-block for printing map of the Silla royal tombs and a royal palace. How do you think the block was made and how was it used? What makes this a practical printing technology? Source: National Museum of Korea www.museum.go.kr/site/eng/. Used by permission.

This invented and mixed system naturally required a long (fabricated) pedigree that traced different lineages back to monarchs and princes who supposedly wielded great power in a time when, as the archaeological record shows, there were only small chiefs. The stories were new at one time, but quickly achieved acceptance as a set of myths that upheld status distinctions, which in turn minimized elite in-group violence. The system and its myths also legitimated (at least to the elite themselves) their domination of everyone else.

From among the aristocracy, Silla recruited officials through different routes over time. In the sixth century, elite boys joined a group called the "Flower Youths" (*Hwarang* 花郎 화랑) that groomed them for power. From 682, a National University on the Tang model educated elite boys in the Classics. Officials could also recommend men for office. From the 660s until almost 800, good archers were selected. (True-bone aristocrats also played kickball and other sports like those at the Tang court, inherited from the steppe.) From about 800, lower-elite men won appointment by studying in Tang. At the same time a three-level course of study was set up as another route into office: men aged 15-30, probably (as in Tang and later Koryŏ) only descendants of officials, studied for up to 9 years and could then be appointed to lower offices like county magistrate. A few head-rank six Tang clans that had immigrated to Silla had members win office for their skill in composition and calligraphy. Two of them, surnamed Yo (Ch. Yao) and probably descended from Yo Tan, who moved to Silla in about 770, are known because they wrote records celebrating Buddhist objects: the Nine-Story Stupa and a large bell.[24]

But Kims dominated government. True-bone Kims held the throne and most high offices. High-ranking Kims recommended and hired their half-brothers and cousins by headrank six mothers for lower posts. Of 594 Silla officials named in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean sources, almost 400 were true-bone Kims, and most of the rest were Paks. 178 Silla men who went to Tang or Yamato as envoys, or served as junior officials, 79% were Kims.[25] The surname was coveted even overseas; fifty-three Silla immigrants to near today's Tokyo in 733 requested the Japanese court to grant them the surname Kim.[26]

* Ch'oe, Sŏl, Pae, Yi, Chŏng, and Son.

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8.6: Poetry in Aristocratic Society

Tang and Hei'an (Chapter 9) aristocrats all learned to write poetry proper to any social occasion from birthdays to journeys to funerals to imperial sacrifices. (This is called "occasional poetry.") Silla aristocrats may have done the same. A few wooden tablets with poems have survived from Silla. Figure 8.11 shows the two sides of one of the tablets: it is about six inches long, and based on dates given on other tablets excavated from the same pond, it must have been written around 750-800. Scholar Lee SeungJae points out that these tablets were not sharpened so as to be stuck into something; nor did they have v-shaped grooves around the top for tying them onto something; nor did they have holes punched in the tops so that they could be strung together.[27] What would you conclude from that?



Figure 8.11. Photographs and images of the front (1 & 3) and back (2 & 4) of a wooden tablet with poem written on it in ink, excavated with others from a pond in what was once Silla. Source: SeungJae Lee, "Two Silla Poetry Fragments," p. 133. Used by kind permission of the author.

Lee concludes that the tablet was not meant to last, but was written during a social occasion.

Scholars had to figure out which was side 1, and are still debating exactly which Chinese characters the graphs correspond to, for they are irregular and take years of work to see and read. Lee spends pages going through every character and arguing for his reading of each, giving the images so that the reader can see for herself (134-48). The words represented by □ are now totally illegible. Try turning this into an English poem before you read Lee's comments.

Table 6. Identification and Translation of the Writings on Gyeongju Anapji Pond Wooden Tablet no. 20

	Identification	Translation
「Anapji 20-1-1」:	[剋熟犯指耕慰]	won over familiarized crime, consoling the suppression[5]
「Anapji 20-1-2」:	[璧□琴現碧]	round gem [ ] sound of lute echoes in blue
「Anapji 20-2-1」:	[憂辱□送日壬]	grief and shame [ ] bearing the setting sun
「Anapji 20-2-2」:	[是法念□宿]	reciting this prayer [ ] fall asleep

Figure 8.12. Identification and translation of the words on a wooden tablet from the pond in former Silla territory. Lee notes: "A more literal translation of 'plowed field' would be 'turned-over, knocked-over things,' and a more liberal translation would be 'suppressed things.' Source: SeungJae Lee, "Two Silla Poetry Fragments." Used by kind permission of the author.

How did your poem come out?

All across East Asia, elite celebrations include writing what is called "occasional poetry." Verses had to follow strict rules. They honored the host or person being celebrated, and enabled everyone to show off their literary talent and make catty comments about others. It was a central form of entertainment and social bonding.

Lee points out that the four lines fit with no known verse-form in terms of the line length and rhyme. But there were many forms of verse, and the 5-7-5-7-7 syllable count of Japanese *waka* may have developed in Silla. Lee speculates that the literary narrator of the poem (whether or not s/he was the actual author) was a Silla general sent to suppress a revolt: *Samguk sagi* records six revolts between 768 and 780. The tablet was found in an artificial pond that was built inside the palace in the Silla capital, where banquets were often held, so Lee speculates that the occasion of the poem was a banquet held to celebrate this general's victory.[28]

Lee writes that lines 1 and 2 lay out the time and place, while lines 3 and 4 show how the speaker is feeling (140). Lee also explains, in terms of grammar, that lines 1 and 2 are in Classical Chinese word order Subject-Verb-Object, while lines 3 and 4 are in Korean-language word order SOV.† With that in mind, try again to make the lines into a sensible English poem. Could the different grammars used relate to content?[29]

Lee also translated an even earlier wooden tablet, called "Suksega," from a cemetery of Paekche royalty buried between 538 and 660. Written down around 575-600, it too has mixed word order. Can you turn this into a meaningful poem or piece of prose in English?

Table 7. Identification and Translation of the "Suksega" 宿世歌 *mokgan*

Identification	Translation
宿世結業	with binding force (fate) from previous life
同生一處	we are born in one place at the same time
是非相問	asking right and wrong to one another
上拜白來[8]	bow above and come to tell

8. Kim Wanjin (2005) has read "白來" as /*salβora/ *숣보라, suggesting that "來" is not used as a main verb.

Figure 8.13. Identification and translation of the words on a wooden tablet from a Paekche royal cemetery called the "Puyŏ Neungsan-ri Ancient Tombs." It is about a two-hour drive south of Seoul. The tablet dates to the late sixth or early seventh century. Source: SeungJae Lee, "Two Silla Poetry Fragments." Used by kind permission of the author.

These tablets hint at how much we have lost of what people were writing. They have survived only by the merest chance, slipping out of someone's hand and into a pond, to be covered over with mud for centuries.

By contrast, reams and reams of Tang poetry have survived. An indispensable part of elite life, it was used to make social connections and celebrate public and private events, as well as recording emotions and observations, and serving as a medium of creativity. Elite men also shared poetry and music with courtesans: educated entertainers at the high end of a large prostitution industry centered in Chang'an and Loyang. Out of a culture in which poems were an everyday event, a few great poets emerged: Li Bai, Du Fu, Bai Juyi, Li Shangyin, and others. Many of the great poets also served in office – Du Fu did so during and after the An Lushan rebellion of 755, for instance, so he left many poems about being separated from his family, seeing the country torn apart, and the sufferings of others in a time of civil war. (Song men sometimes dreamed of Du Fu giving them the first two lines of a poem.)[30]

† This is a fundamental way linguists classify languages. English and Chinese are SVO, Japanese is SOV.

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8.7: Buddhism

Shen Gua was right to liken Tang society to Indian society. In the Hindu system, a person was born into the caste he deserved based on whether or not he had done his duty in the previous life. The good or bad karma earned was carried on the soul and determined the next birth. Buddha taught, in contrast, that just as everything else in the universe was temporary, illusory, so there was no soul either. No individual soul carried karma to the next life: rather, acting with intention created karma that brought into existence other, new beings, born to suffer. Since the same soul is not reborn, social hierarchy with its inequities – power and glory for some, disgrace and hard work for others – does not embody cosmic justice for individuals. Individuals may do as they choose; there is nothing divinely-appointed about their social roles. This teaching was revolutionary in India, responding to the need of an increasingly wealthy merchant class for an ideology that allowed them to earn respectability.

East Asian intellectuals made their own contributions to understanding karma. **Tiantai Buddhism** – the sort followed by the Sui founder – taught that phenomena lack an essential nature, but they do exist temporarily, so truth encompasses and transcends both existence and non-existence, and is immanent in everything: so everything can be saved – even dust, according to one teacher. **Huayan Buddhism** taught that all phenomena arise simultaneously from reciprocal causation – time itself is not real. It used the parable of a Buddha image surrounded by ten mirrors all reflecting one another. Which causes the others to reflect first?[31] These and other doctrinal schools appealed East Asian intellectuals, the same sorts of people who had been studying the classics in depth, writing elaborate poetry, and debating the ins and outs of Daoist philosophy.

But the teaching of no-soul is hard to accept. Furthermore, as Buddhists recognized, few men and women could devote their lives to pursuing enlightenment that would bring release from rebirth forever (*nirvana*) by becoming monks and nuns. Since those few, the clergy, benefitted all by creating no new karma, Buddhists taught that most people could improve their status upon rebirth by assisting others, especially monks and nuns. Monks and nuns formed the “field of merit” in which laypeople could plant “seeds” of good karma. Some early donors were frustrated to learn that their gives of money to feed and house clergy were simply piling up in warehouses. They were not earning good karma when their gifts were not used, they worried. Buddhist monasteries began making loans, sometimes to the poor who could not pay interest, but often to those who could pay interest. Such loans benefitted the monasteries by bringing income; the borrowers by financing their economic ventures; and the donors, whose “seeds” kept growing into more and more merit.[32] These practices travelled along with other Buddhist ideas into in East Asia, where Buddhist monasteries became major financial and industrial enterprises.

In India, karmic law (that action must have results) operated automatically. But from at least Han times, religion had already included the idea that judgement after death was carried out by an underworld bureaucracy that tracked good and bad deeds, and doled out punishments.[33] Karma as the idea of punishment after death re-emerged. But whereas in Hinduism it was strictly individual, and in high Buddhist theory it affected beings born in the future and elsewhere, in East Asia karmic destiny, and especially the punishment for sin, was shared by living and dead members of the whole family, in both directions: the living inherited the burden of sin, but their wickedness could also make ancestors suffer. The need to mitigate the damage done to oneself and one’s family by one’s sins, even if one could not become a monk or nun and devote one’s whole life to spiritual pursuits, gave rise to a whole set of practices that offered comfort and strengthened Buddhism in a positive feedback loop.

Everyone could contribute to Buddhism, and Buddhism had something for everyone. Once karma was re-attached to individual and familial souls, everyone could earn spiritual merit to aid ancestors and descendants, increase blessings in this life, and bring a better rebirth, perhaps in the Pure Land paradise. Laymen could earn spiritual merit not only by donating oil, silk, money, grain, money, land, labor, and other things to monasteries and temples, but also by making pilgrimages to sacred sites; copying and promulgating scriptures; paying to create, clothe, or re-gild statues of buddhas and boddhisattvas; undertaking charity for people other than monks and nuns, such as feeding or clothing the poor, attending to burials of abandoned corpses, taking care of orphans, providing people with medicine, etc.; making contributions to the community as a whole by building roads and bridges; road building, bridge-building; burning incense and offering non-meat sacrifices and prayers to Buddhist figures; releasing captive animals, birds, or fish; undertaking bodily disciplines like abstaining from meat, wine, onions, and sex, either on particular days or in old age; meditating on the Buddhist truth, on the Lotus sutra, or on the name of Guanyin; chanting scriptures or chanting the name of Guanyin, or of Amitabha. Everyone could do these practices.



Figure 8.14. Reliquary in the shape of a coffin. Gilt bronze. Tang, eighth century. About 4 inches long. A reliquary holds a sacred relic of a saint or deity. Han Yu (768-824) criticized the huge festival that celebrated the Buddha's finger bone: a relic. This object was meant to help the believer's devotional state of mind. What do you think was the message of its shape? Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public Domain.

On the one hand, the participation of nearly all East Asians, from rulers to slaves, in Buddhism by about 700 greatly strengthened Buddhist institutions. By 534, for instance, the Northern Wei capital of Luoyang had over 1300 Buddhist temples of various sizes: 50 built by the dynasty, 800 by aristocratic families and officials, and smaller ones by wealthy commoners. The wealth did not go to monks and nuns individually (about 1% of the population): they were supposed to own only a robe, begging bowl, and staff. Rather, all donations and products belonged to the clergy corporately, so it was not liable to taxation or rules about inheritance. Corporate ownership of land and slaves – unknown in East Asia before Buddhism – enabled the monasteries to dole out charity, build roads and bridges, make loans, and run shops, flour mills, and oil presses. Wealth raised their social profile and attracted yet more followers.

On the other hand, since individuals and families had the ability to earn merit that would improve their lives and rebirths, those who were born into the aristocracy must deserve it. They really *were* better than those born as commoners or mean people. So reasoned the aristocrats of Tang, Silla, and Hei'an.

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8.8: The Queen Mother of the West

> The Queen Mother rode an imperial carriage of purple clouds, harnessed with nine-colored dappled *qilin* (unicorns). Tied around her waist, she wore the whip of the Celestial Realized Ones; as a belt pendant she had a diamond numinous seal. On her clothing, fashioned of multicolored damask with a yellow background, the patterns and variegated colors were bright and fresh. The radiance of metal made a shimmering gleam. At her waist was a double-bladed sword for dividing phosphors, and knotted flying clouds made a great cord. On top of her head was a great floriate chignon. She wore the crown of the Grand Realized Ones with hanging beaded strings of daybreak. She stepped forth on squared-off, phoenix-patterned shoes, soled with rose-gem. Her age might have been around twenty. Her celestial appearance eclipsed and put in the shade all others. Her numinous complexion was unique in the world. Truly, she was a Realized Numinous Being.[34]

Do you remember the Queen Mother of the West from Chapter Five? She was still present in Tang times, as a Daoist deity and a poetic muse. She embodied ultimate *yin*, the female force of the universe, and worked with other high deities to create and maintain the cosmos. Her devotees turned to her for aid them in transcending human limitations such as death and ignorance, helping them become perfected and immortal beings. There were many methods to reach Daoist spiritual purity, including giving up eating normal food (grain). Special medicines made of mica, pine resin, and many herbs could both diminish hunger and thirst in fasting, and contribute to the development of special powers.[35] As well as uniting in holy marriage with a deity of the opposite sex, a person aiming for Daoist perfection and immortality could also be tutored by a deity of the opposite sex in how to meditate and what elixirs or special potions to drink.

The Queen Mother of the West brought followers to spiritual attainments through the experience of divine passion. Divine passion was the desire of deities and humans for mutual union and communication, spiritual union aiming at spiritual development, but described in sensual terms. The Queen Mother had liaisons with sage kings, historical emperors, poets and male Daoists. Tang poets wrote frequently about those meetings, but even more about her visits to their contemporaries and themselves, and their journeys to her beautiful, joyful paradise. The poems reflect their desire to find a divine teacher to show them the meaning of life, let them experience perfect fulfillment, and free them from ignorance, suffering, and death.

Tang poets used the same kind of language in describing their love affairs with Daoist priestesses and nuns, or when courting them. They used the same language of beauty and power and imagination and transcendence in writing to, for, and with courtesan entertainers, whom they compared to the Queen Mother's attendants. This was an imaginative space for divine love and love-poetry. As one poet praised an entertainer:

> Sounds of tubes and strings congeal; the singing she produces is so lofty.
>
> How many people, in the region of the heart, conceal a wounding knife?
>
> I think and measure again: what would bear comparison?
>
> Just a single tree, newly opened, of the Queen Mother's peaches.[36]

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8.9: The Fall of Tang

The fall of the Tang dynasty has recently become better understood. Historians used to think that aristocratic power was already on the wane as the examinations drew in new talent, and the clans lost touch with their estates back home. Then the An Lushan rebellion of 755 seriously weakened Tang, allowing its generals to become warlords who brought chaos to society so that the dynasty could barely hang on.

But the Tang dynasty survived the rebellion quite well. It is true that the central government lost some control, but the rebellion also promoted development in the economy. Millions of families fled south, pushing forward agricultural development there. The equal-field system collapsed, putting land into private hands, and the state came to rely on commercial taxes and a twice-a-year tax measured in coin but collected mainly in cloth, and assessed on the basis of household wealth (in nine grades). Earlier in Tang, merchants had been required to join guilds and restricted to a few marketplaces in the capital and one in each city, where officials strictly limited business hours and inspected weights and measures. Now the central government could not enforce those restrictions, and the provincial courts of the generals welcomed commerce.

Things worked differently, but the Li family presided over the Tang state for another century and a half.

Tang aristocratic power also survived the rebellion. A relatively small number of clans provided most of the Tang chief ministers, and because they influenced personnel decisions they could reproduce their power, like the Kims of Silla. The super-elite clans, stretching back long before Sui times, had long held onto power through dense networks of intermarriage and friendship. The networks were strong, partly because clan members all lived in the capital region, in and between Luoyang and Chang'an (a 10-day journey apart), except when posted as officials to other parts of Tang. Even within the two capital cities, their homes clustered together. As high ministers they married their daughters to the smartest members of the capital elite and hired their sons-in-law.

An Lushan was a member of the Tang government himself, and the adopted son of the emperor's favorite consort. When he rebelled, An left administration intact, and did not massacre aristocrats. They fled the capitals, but then they returned. Even late in the Tang period more than half of the chief ministers and many lower officials still came from a small number of clans. In other words, as new evidence shows – including digital analysis of excavated epitaphs – the clans were doing fine long after the An Lushan rebellion.

In fact, the very reason we know so much about the disruption the rebellion caused, historian Nicolas Tackett argues, is that aristocrats survived to write complaints about it. Here is a poem by Du Fu, serving far from the capital:

> Springtime – Gazing into the Distance
>
> My country's broken, though the hills and rivers remain. 春 望
>
> About the springtime city the grasses and trees grow thick. 國 破 山 河 在
>
> Feeling the times, flowers, too, drop tears. 城 春 草 木 深
>
> Hating to part, birds, too, have jumpy hearts. 感 時 花 濺 淚
>
> Beacon fires light, one after another, these three months. 烽 火連 三 月
>
> A letter from home! – worth a thousand gold. 家 書 抵 萬 金
>
> I've scratched my white hairs even shorter – 白 頭 搔 更 短
>
> The topknot soon won't hold my hairpin. 渾 欲 不 勝 簪

After the An Lushan rebellion, a few men from lower-ranked families made their way into high office through the examination system and the networks of friendship that gathering for the exams made possible. But it was not until later that the clans vanished as a political force. Their power dissolved very quickly, between 870s and 907, because of a different rebellion, led by Huang Chao (d. 884).

Unlike An Lushan, Huang Chao had no court ties. He was educated, but when his anger at the Tang regime for not recognizing him exploded into rebellion, he had no long-term plan to replace the dynasty. Unlike An, Huang moved so quickly that the elite had no time to escape the capital area. Huang executed many officials, and then lost control of his troops, who sacked the two capitals and slaughtered officials and their families.

Two decades of massacres across the empire followed. Moments of peace in each place gave rise to impossible situations in which people had to take sides, and no-one knew where or when to escape. So many aristocrats were killed or scattered that their whole power-base, the network of families and connections, collapsed. For the very same reason, the written record of the destruction is sparse.[37] When Tang finally fell, the aristocracy fell with it, murdered and scattered with no time to write and preserve poems.

The Five Dynasties period (906-960) that followed Tang is often considered a time of violence and tumult. In fact, people experienced it as a welcome reestablishment of order, even though there was not one central government. The economy continued to grow and commercialize, creating an entirely new social formation, as we will see in Chapter Ten. But first we will turn to a culture that shared much with Tang, but produced its own wonderful objects and texts: Hei'an Japan.

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[14] Bol, *Neo-Confucianism in History*, 59.

[15] Peter Bol, *This Culture of Ours*.

[16] Ha Il Sik contrasts this purposely narrow policy of incorporation with the way Rome created more citizens as it expanded from a city-state to hold more and more territory. Ha, “Dynastic Crisis and the Ruling Strata in Silla,” p. 157.

[17] McBride, “Introduction” in *State and Society in Middle and Late Silla*.

[18] Yoon, “Village Society and the System of Local Governance,” 67. Image p. 60.

[19] Yoon, “Village Society,” 59.

[20] Yoon, “Village Society,” 62-63, translation emended to incorporate Yoon’s definitions for smoother reading.

[21] McBride, “Introduction,” *State and Society in Middle and Late Silla*, 8. Jeon “The Constitution of the Ruling Elite in Middle and Late Silla,” 44.

[22] Jeon, “The Constitution of the Ruling Elite in Middle and Late Silla,” 41.

[23] Jeon, “The Constitution of the Ruling Elite in Middle and Late Silla,” 44.

[24] Jeon, “The Constitution of the Ruling Elite in Middle and Late Silla,” 27, 24-25.

[25] Jeon “The Constitution of the Ruling Elite in Middle and Late Silla,” 27.

[26] According to a Japanese historical source. Jeon, “The Constitution of the Ruling Elite,” 51.

[27] Lee SeungJae, “A Deciphering of Two Silla Poetry Fragments Inscribed on Wooden Tablets.”

[28] Lee SeungJae, “A Deciphering of Two Silla Poetry Fragments,” 139.

[29] Lee SeungJae, “A Deciphering of Two Silla Poetry Fragments,” 140.

[30] Yin Shoufu, “Why Sharing Atrocious Dreams?”

[31] Ebrey, *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook*, pp. 98-104.

[32] Mitchell, “Borrowing from the Buddha.”

[33] Von Glahn, *The Sinister Way*, 68.

[34] Cahill, “Performers and Female Taoist Adepts: Hsi Wang Mu as the Patron Deity of Women,” 156.

[35] H.S. Sum Cheuk Shing, “Eliminating Hunger and Thirst with Medicine: Buddhist and Daoist Recipes from Medieval China,” 2021 AAS Presentation, cited by permission.

[36] Cahill, “Performers and Female Taoist Adepts,” 160. Section based on Cahill, *Transcendence and Divine Passion: The Queen Mother of the West in Medieval China*.

[37] Tackett, *The Destruction of the Medieval Chinese Aristocracy*.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

9: Hei’an Japan

When Silla sent gilded saddles to Wa, their frames had rivets of a particular kind; in Wa, a clever armorer, perhaps in consultation with a Silla saddle-maker, adopted the rivets to make strong, flexible iron armor.[1] When a Kaya potter had travelled to Kyushu and taught others how to make wheel-turned pots, Wa potters developed *sue* ware that spread throughout the islands and roofed the provincial temples of the Nara period. As the mainland tradition, itself the product of long centuries of interactions among different cultures, travelled to the peninsula and the archipelago, people changed it in creative ways. In the archipelago, the Hei’an regime chose to cut itself off from the rest of East Asia as Tang power faltered, and developed a fascinating literature that reveal is its elite culture.

9.1: Hei’an Government 794-1185

9.2: The Balance of Weakness in the Economy and the Fisc

9.3: An Isolated Aristocracy

9.4: Whence Came the Samurai?

9.5: Warriors or Lawyers?

9.6: Sources

Thumbnail: Handscroll, paint on paper, 1300-1325, fragment showing the Battle at Rokuhara (the sixth district of Hei’an/Kyoto) of 1159, from the *Heiji Monogatari*, “Tale of the Heiji.” Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public Domain.

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9.1: Hei'an Government 794-1185

From supporting the imperial throne, Nara's Buddhist establishment became powerful on its own account. A Nara monk even co-ruled with an empress who had retired, become a nun, but then returned to power. Perhaps to reassert imperial independence, the court moved again, settling in its final location, Hei'an, today's Kyoto, in 794. From then on, emperors were men. Like other East Asian rulers, the emperor spent much of his time in elaborate ceremonies that affirmed his centrality. Unlike mainland emperors, however, Japanese emperors often abdicated at about age thirty. From about 750 to 850 there was energetic direct rule by emperors, including Shōmu, the builder of Tōdaiji. They built Hei'an, barely managing to complete the government center and northern section of the planned Tang-style grid by reusing timbers and tiles. They promoted temple construction and study of Buddhist works within and outside Heian to compete with power of Nara temples. They fostered contacts with Silla and Tang, simplified administrative procedures, and made military organization more effective, using a conscript army until 792, and then hiring professional generals with their own troops. The army pushed the remaining hunter/gatherer cultures further north and east, but the regime still did not hold all of Honshu.

After 850, like most Han and Silla monarchs, the emperor often had little real power over the aristocracy around him. For about two centuries, Fujiwara fathers-in-law made personnel and policy decisions, governing as regents, as Han empresses had done. They made sure that they always had a young son or grandson on the throne by forcing emperors to abdicate as soon as a son was born. Regency became so normal that eventually even adult emperors did not really rule, but had Fujiwara regents. The Fujiwara did face resistance from emperors canny enough to ally with nobles of other clans; the most famous such ally was Sugawara no Michizane (845 -903), who was defeated and exiled. He bewailed his fate in poetry, and his angry spirit caused calamities, so a shrine was established to settle him, and over time he became the patron god of literature. The Fujiwara gradually lost power to abbots, warriors, and other aristocrats, but in particular, from about 1050 to 1180, retired emperors dominated young emperors indirectly in similar ways. Emperor Go-Sanjō was able to reclaim imperial authority for a while by favoring other clans and pitting Fujiwaras against one another.

Even as the aristocratic clans served in a bureaucracy based on Tang models, as ministers at the center, provincial governors in the localities, and even as local officials below them; and even as they became proficient in all the polite arts, and lived a life of luxury, they did not cease competing with one another. But they gave up their horses, iron weapons and armor until many could not ride at all. Their competition moved to the realm of culture. Compared with other East Asian regimes, that court infighting shed little blood. No clan was wiped out (unlike, say, the relatives of Han Empress Lü), and the Yamato line was not threatened with replacement as in the many coups of the mainland. Why?

It was not merely that there were no external military threats, because the relatively safe southern mainland dynasties had still displaced one another quickly in the period of division. What we might call a balance of weakness kept the whole aristocracy – perhaps .01% of Japan's population – in place for four or five centuries. Only from about 1185, or some say 1250, was aristocratic power overthrown, as a new group – the samurai – rose to power and created an entirely different culture.[2] Even then the old nobles were not slaughtered as Huang Chao slaughtered Tang aristocrats. They simply lost some power.

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9.2: The Balance of Weakness in the Economy and the Fisc

Low Productivity

This balance of weakness appears in the economy. Hei'an experienced economic and demographic stability. If we believe the historical record, right up until the eighteenth century, the Japanese economy was based almost entirely on agricultural land. Certainly that was true of the fisc, the state's financing. The government's most important job was to manage the distribution of the products of the land to the aristocracy and their clients. Complex struggles around landholding appear in many documents, including the allocation of land rights, taxes and tax exemptions, the punishment of criminals who foraged another's crops, and military obligations that went with a particular plot of land. Control of land and labor was the foundation of wealth and of aristocratic power, and the two were related. Disease, low nutrition, and low productivity kept the population from growing much. The relative shortage of labor made it difficult to bring new lands under cultivation. Economic growth was limited.

Farming technology did not improve much, either. Farmers had to turn over almost the entire harvest beyond what they needed for subsistence, so they had little incentive to increase productivity. The educated people in society – aristocrats – lived in the capital, and were descended from warriors with no experience of farming, so they did not contribute new technology, either. Nor was it imported from the mainland: the disarray of late Tang made travel downright dangerous. So productivity did not rise through increased labor or land, nor through better tools, methods, or seeds.

Stagnant production levels meant that as long as the existing elite could keep hold of the resources they already controlled, there was no additional surplus locally honored families, travelling preachers, small-time fighters or merchants could commandeer and transmute into local political or military or social or cultural power. In fact, money, though coined in Nara times, fell out of use entirely in Hei'an times.

No More Money? No Merchants?

To understand why, let's look first at manufactured goods, and then turn to grain. The architects of the centralized, Tang-Legalist-style ritsuryō order had planned that goods like salt, fish, oil, wine, wood, iron cooking pots, textiles, mats, etc. would come up to the capital in the form of taxes, be stored in government warehouses, and then be both distributed as part of salary to aristocrats holding office, and traded and sold in the two marketplaces of the capital. Other goods would be produced in the capital by artisans overseen by officials, and distributed in the same way. Money would have played a small role in this system, as it did in Tang.

But over time, the aristocracy gained more and more control over land – as I will explain below – and the economy shifted back to a more manorial system. Each of the aristocratic clans, though residing in the capital, requisitioned the goods they needed directly from their estates. Each clan patronized its own artisans to make what they needed (aristocrats themselves also designed and made textiles, as part of their cultural repertoire), and owned suburban manors on the outskirts of town where their staff processed and stored goods for their use. Temples, too, held huge estates, and managed their own production and distribution through feudal demands rather than through the market. Manorial control of production and distribution cut out buying and selling. No entrepreneurs arose to profit from trade, build up wealth, and change the dynamics of political power – as, for instance, Tang Gaozu's rise had been bankrolled by a wealthy timber merchant, the father of Empress Wu.

But Historian Amino Yoshihiko has suggested that our whole picture of the premodern Japanese economy is skewed. He discovered that for the later Tokugawa period (1600-1867) huge numbers of people, as one might expect in rocky, forested, islands with long coastlines – earned their livelihoods not by growing rice but from fish, seaweed, salt, lumber, and commerce. Because of the Tang model, the central laws did not include such activities. The contracts and other documents that did record them were not needed in the long term, and while Tokugawa was recent enough that many Tokugawa contracts survived accidentally (and Amino tells the thrilling story of their discovery), Hei'an is too far back for much accidental preservation. The idea that Japan was fundamentally agrarian and isolated became so deeply embedded in historical thinking that the term *hyakushō* (百姓), which originally meant "commoners" as opposed to aristocrats and then to samurai, is understood by modern Japanese speakers as meaning "farmer" or even "peasant." When they look back at historical documents that refer to *hyakushō*, therefore, they do not even consider that it might include fisherfolk, manufacturers, lumbermen, and very wealthy merchants.[3]

All transmitted and nearly all preserved written sources on Hei'an were created by a tiny elite. Perhaps they simply did not care to recognize in writing a social ferment below them. Perhaps coins went out of use, not because there was no international or

domestic trade, but because (as occurred in the period of division and Tang) people did not trust coins. Perhaps the products of forest and sea were avidly made and traded, but escaped control by the state, which was blinded by its adherence to a Tang model of taxing agriculture and not commerce. The state did treat rice as the fundamental resource. Rice had fueled the Qin conquest, and imperial armies since then. But in Hei'an it came to be managed in such a way that it contributed to the balance of weakness.

Rights to Rice

In theory, the central government controlled rice through the equal field system, in which the center claimed ownership of all land and its produce, to distribute and redistribute at a taxpayer's death, as needed. Excavated land registers and aerial photographs of land boundaries show that the equal field system was carried out, at least in less-developed western Japan (as in less-developed western China). But within 40 years, the state had to allow families to own land in perpetuity, because land without labor was of no use, and a smallpox epidemic had devasted the population in the 730s. To induce people to settle down and grow grain, the state gave up the right to redistribute land. Still, smallholders paid taxes to the center, through the provincial bureaucracy. That rice was paid out as salary to officials, supported the imperial household, and paid for defense, rituals, and other central government functions.

So, initially, tax rice went into central granaries. But land and labor, over time, passed out of bureaucratic control. Instead, it entered a second kind of tribute arrangement, called the estate (*shōen*) system. Originally, tax exemptions had rewarded farmers who planted (reclaimed) fields that had been wild or abandoned. But the imperial family, aristocrats above the eighth rank serving in office, a few other aristocratic families, and Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines were also able to get their fields designated tax-exempt. The farmers on these estates paid their harvest as rent to the estate proprietors, rather than taxes. From the late 800s onward, farming families began to "commend" their lands to aristocrats. The proprietors entrusted management of their estates to stewards, called *jitō*, who collected the rents and sent them on to the noble household or temple in Hei'an, keeping some for themselves.

As time went on, more and more land was held in estates, and less and less provided tax grain to fund the imperial government. This looks like the situation of Eastern Han, when the clans stopped paying taxes and the dynasty faltered and fell, doesn't it? But it was different.

First, Hei'an aristocrats could not use their estates to build up local power as the Han clans had done, because they did not hold one big parcel of land, but many small plots of land in different places. And second, a single owner rarely held undivided rights to the land. Instead, when farmers or low-ranking landholders, who could never hope to obtain tax exemptions on their own, commended their land to high-ranking aristocratic proprietors at court, they would cut a deal. Each party claimed the right to a portion of income (rice or other products) from the land. The rights to certain proportions of produce were known as *shiki*. The farmers held *shiki* entitling them to some grain, the estate stewards were also paid according to their *shiki*, and most of the harvest was assigned as a *shiki* to the estate's proprietor, the powerful court noble or temple who held the tax exemptions. Further complicating matters, *shiki*, the right to a part of the product of a given plot of land, were heritable; they were divisible; and they were alienable by sale, inheritance, or donation. So *shiki*, or a fraction of a *shiki*, could be traded or lost or won just like a pair of gold earrings. Many different people had rights to them produce of each small plot of land.

This certainly was not a clear, centrally managed bureaucratic system. Rather, it was a very complex system that supported the Hei'an court and aristocrats for centuries. I argue that it worked precisely by giving so many people at different levels a stake in it, fracturing control over land and labor in a balance of weakness.

The balance of weakness enabled farmers to maneuver better than in Eastern Han. In Han localities, a few big clans owned the land, hired the thugs, socialized with the county magistrate, and kept juniors in line with patrilineal ideology and organization. Their power over their poor neighbors was undivided. In Hei'an, because of the two systems of land-holding – taxes paid to the bureaucracy and rents paid to *shiki* holders, and because of the relative shortage of labor, each kind of superior, whether a shōen proprietor or a provincial administrator, had to restrain his demands somewhat. A truly unhappy farmer might cut a deal with another proprietor, and land could be shifted from one category to the other. Documents show farmers complaining to governors about their underlings, or working with the lower officials behind the governor's back. They could complain to one *shiki* holder about another, since all these people had to somehow enforce their claims – easier to do with the cooperation of the farmers. A farmer who is half subject of the imperial state and half client of a court noble or a Buddhist temple in the capital has a bit more leeway to maneuver.[4]



Figure 9.1. Piece of silk woven cloth, Hei'an, tenth century. Metropolitan Museum. Public Domain.

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9.3: An Isolated Aristocracy

Japanese nobles were few, and closely related, as in Silla – perhaps even more so. Out of a population of about 5-6 million (estimates vary, and population may have dropped around 950), court aristocrats comprised only about 1/10th of 1%, that is about 5,000 people in all at any one time. That small group dominated rank, wealth, government office, and the written record, and they married only with one another. Everyone was related to everyone else, especially given the practice of polygyny, a strong matrilineal tradition, and plentiful love affairs. Factions shifted frequently, but violence was rare. Disputes were settled by giving or taking away rank, so that the bureaucratic system as a set of ranks and offices was not challenged but valued and supported. About the worst thing that could happen to a high-ranking aristocrat was that he or she would be exiled, which only increased the sense that ultimately, conflicts had to be settled within the court.

As among the true-bone elite of Silla, these 5,000 people considered themselves better than everyone else by virtue of their birth. But the true-bone Kims shared a surname with immigrants and lower-ranking kinfolk. The Japanese aristocracy, though it included many who had originally come from the peninsula, did not care to remember that. Their sense of superiority was justified by their Shinto godly ancestry; by the Buddhist notion of karma, which they took to mean that since they were living the good life they must have deserved it; and by the Han philosophical idea that the imperial bureaucratic order expressed and supported the order of the cosmos, of heaven and earth. What was, was right; and any doubts could be funneled into a toothless general view drawn from Buddhism that everything was transient.

The Hei'an elite seem narrow, even in descriptions by scholars who love their culture.[5] Missions to the mainland bringing back books, paintings, statues, poems, music, dance, and ways to garden and build and govern and lay out cities slowed with the An Lushan rebellion of 755 and ceased entirely after 894. No more Japanese monks went to study in China, as Ennin had done just at the end of the Tang period; a few merchants still came to the Japanese court in Hei'an, selling books, ceramics, and textiles for gold, but no-one wanted to talk to them. Hei'an aristocrats kept reciting the poetry of Tang poet Bai Juyi, but they learned no new mainland poetry. They wrote their own poetry, kept diaries, and wrote novels about themselves. (The most famous is Murasaki Shikibu's *Tale of Genji*, about Prince Genji and his many loves.) They cut themselves off from the world outside the archipelago.

The Good People of Hei'an City

In fact, they tried to live entirely within Hei'an city (Kyoto). Hei'an was laid out in a grid like the Tang capital, but whereas Chang'an stimulated the economy, bringing in trade from as far away as Persia, Hei'an ate up the wood and other resources of the country without stimulating prosperity in return. Roads were neglected. There were horses, and the Members of the Imperial Guard could ride on horseback, even though they performed no real military function. But many other members of the aristocracy did not even know how to mount a horse. Instead, they travelled, both within the capital and outside, in very high ox-carts, designed more for show than for comfort. A village ten miles out of the capital, in the *Tale of Genji*, is considered absurdly far away, practically unreachable. To go from Kyoto to the area of today's Tokyo took several months and was very dangerous and uncomfortable. Why would one leave?

Under the bureaucratic system, governors and their staffs went out to administer Kyushu, Shikoku, and the southern half of Honshu. But these were hardship posts assigned to losers in the factional fighting at court. Exile from the capital the worst punishment: not only because of the danger of travel, but primarily because there could be no cultured existence in such "undesirable surroundings," no life worth living away from the "good people." One daughter explained her father's posting as governor as a result of his bad karma from a previous existence. A governor would often send a member of his household as a deputy, so he could stay in the capital. The worst thing you could say about someone was that he or she was "countrified;" one governor's daughter raised near today's Tokyo wrote resignedly that the people of the capital, because "I was brought up in a remote part of the world… would regard me as hopelessly outlandish." Not only did the nobility cut themselves off from knowledge of the rest of Asia, but they knew almost nothing of Japan.

If the capital nobility looked down on ranked nobles posted outside the capital, you can imagine how they felt about farmers and workers. Because the popular Tang poet Bai Juyi had written about poor people, they were an acceptable literary subject, but still the literature of the Hei'an barely refers to such people, except in passing as incomprehensible figures who are hardly human – part of the mechanics of life, like carts and oxen. Working people were dismissed in one work as "uninteresting, useless, and unintelligible." Diarist Sei Shonagon once described some workmen she had watched eating:

> The way that carpenters eat is really odd. When the roof of the eastern wing was being built, there were several carpenters squatting in a row and having their meal; I went out to have a look. The moment the food was brought, they fell on the soup bowls and gulped down the contents. Then they pushed the bowls aside and polished off all the vegetables. I was wondering whether they were going to leave their rice; a second later there wasn't a grain left in their bowls. They all behaved in exactly the same way and I suppose this must be the nature of carpenters. I should not call it a very charming one.

The nobility seem to have been so shut into themselves that they could not imagine that a working man might be hungry at noon. Certainly the idea that such people might love their families or suffer when someone died would not occur to the nobles. Their world was socially closed in, as well as cut off from the outside, limited to "good people" of the upper ranks.

Social Rank and Political Rank

Moreover, the aristocracy hedged themselves about with rules, rituals, and regulations of many kinds. To begin with the rules about personal and family rank: one's rank determined many facets of one's life. First there was the royal family itself, calculated patrilineally. Then Ranks 1, 2, and 3 were the "High Court Nobles" and were mainly junior branches of the royal family and descendants of those who had held clan titles before the Taika policy changes of 646, carried out in the 660s. 1, 2, and 3 were subdivided into Junior and Senior. Ranks 4 & 5 (each subdivided into 4) were the second layer, who still received their individual appointments from the emperor personally, and who were mainly the descendants of lesser clans from the area around the capital in the old days, along with some who had immigrated to Japan a couple of centuries earlier. Below them were Ranks 6-10 and their subdivisions, for a total of 30 ranks, mostly minor clans from the provinces. All these nobles shared some privileges: they were not required to do labor for the state or serve in the army. They could not be beaten if they committed a crime, and served lesser sentences than commoners. But within the nobility, these ranks, and family tradition, and the support of matrilineal relatives and other connections, determined which official posts in the bureaucracy a man was eligible for and, since government grants were the source of wealth, also determined his wealth. The top five ranks were granted rice land to live from – about 200 acres for Senior First Rank, who would have the job of Prime Minister, down to about 20 acres for Junior Fifth.

As across East Asia in this age of aristocracy, inherited rank and office rank set many details of life: what one could wear, in color, fabric, and style, including styles of hats and fans; what kind of carriage one could have, with how many outriders; the style and materials of one's house, down to the height of the gate post. These details were what concerned the elite, and they obsessively followed who held what rank and whether they were overstepping their privileges. The children of the top five ranks automatically gained a place in the rank system when they came of age; in the top three ranks grandchildren also automatically got rank. The other noble children must have attached themselves to the noble houses as personal servants, ladies' maids, and so on, for such people, too, had to be well-educated and refined.

The emperor could move a person up or down in rank, and you could be shifted from one position to another, but all such changes were the stuff of factional struggle and extensive maneuvering. Promotion depended on family connections, especially with the Fujiwara family who were the mothers and fathers-in-laws of nearly all the emperors. Without high-ranking and active family members, one had no chance of moving from the sixth rank into a higher rank. We do read of men who took the Confucian message to heart and worked hard for the government. But even more than in Tang, the interest of most of these nobility focused on the promotion of their kin and the demotion of their rivals, on marriage alliances and on the competitions in the arts that helped to make a person's reputation and perhaps open up the way to a promotion.

Elite Culture

The regulations of rank were only one set of rules the aristocracy had to follow. They were bound by a calendar of Shinto ceremonies, and Buddhist ceremonies, each with its requirements, traditions, and pleasures. Much of the energy of government went into managing these rituals and ceremonies, and so it was the nobility who ran them and served as the audience as well. There were rules about how each had to be done and who had to do what. Moreover, the nobility were bound by a number of what we would consider superstitions. There were ideas about yin-yang, the alternation of opposing forces in the universe, and about fengshui or geomancy, and astrology, omens, and divination which all affected how people carried out their daily lives.

For the Hei'an nobility, these layered beliefs evolved into an elaborate set of taboos to avoid disaster. There were deities who moved around the points of the compass according to a complicated schedule, and when a deity was in a certain direction, you were not to travel through it. You might be able to take a long way around, or you might have to stay and wait until the time had passed.

A deity called Doku spent spring in each house's oven, summers at each gate, autumns in each well, and winters in each courtyard. So it would be disastrous to do repairs to whatever part of the house he was in – even if the well was not working in autumn, you had to wait to repair it. Or you could move temporarily to another house and do a set of rituals to "convert" the unlucky part or direction of the house into something else. Any planned construction or any celebration had to take careful account of where the various deities were and what directions were forbidden to whom when.



Figure, gilt-bronze with inscribed decoration. Eleventh century. Zaō Gongen, a non-Buddhist deity, shown here in a demon-quelling pose. Source: Metropolitan Museum. Public Domain.

Based on divinations involving the Chinese calendar, whole days were designated as taboo days when one should just stay indoors and do nothing. There was a whole miscellany of rules to avoid trouble: fingernails could only be cut on Ox-days, toenails only on Tiger-day. Bathing could take place only every five days and only if the fifth day was reckoned to be auspicious. There were other complicated rules involving avoiding "pollution" – contact with death or birth or other kinds of impurities.



Figure 9.3. Scene from the illustrated handscroll of Tale of Genji, c. 1130. What are the ladies doing? How many robes is each wearing? Source: en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Genji_Monogatari_Emaki#/. Public Domain.

In addition to these taboos, and the rules of rank, Hei'an noble life was structured by the rules of taste. Every aspect of life was understood as an expression of beauty and good taste. Men and women mixed their own perfumes, dyed their own clothes, designed their own gardens, and wrote or performed their own music and dances, so that every aspect of life expressed your own sense of style and taste. Not even the content of one's poetry but one's handwriting was seen as expressing the essence of one's being, and everyone was always judging everyone else on that basis. Within the elaborate and shifting codes of tradition and fashion, choosing a paper sprinkled with silver instead of gold for an excuse or a love-letter could be a disastrous error depending on the precise circumstances. Fastening a note to a pine-branch instead of a cherry branch, or writing in a style wrong for the occasion might wreck a love affair or destroy one's reputation for tastefulness and elegance. A slip would be discussed with disdain by everyone.

Hei'an houses were open to all weather. The garden was the center of interest of a house, and sometimes contained expensive simalcra of places they would never travel to: one nobleman in the Sixth Ward had a small lake in his garden with an artificial sand-bar planted with windwarped pine trees such as one finds along the shore. The seasons were experienced through the changes in the garden, and the changing of leaves and blossoms was obsessively followed, with the pride of ownership as well as the sensitivity of the romantic.

The mansions were mainly one-story buildings, often in a U-shape with the garden as the center. The middle of the U was the main hall, where the master lived, and the flanking halls housed his children, relatives, secondary consorts, high-ranking retainers, etc. The principal wife might live with her own family, in a mansion they provided for her, or in a building facing her husband's across the garden. Long verandas ran along the sides of the houses. Rooms were protected from the outside by hanging curtains and screens. Inside, each hall was one large space, divided as needed into smaller rooms by screens. The rooms were practically bare, with the very minimum of furniture: straw mats and cushions moved around as needed on bare wooden floors, a chest or shelf for storage, a charcoal brazier to provide a little warmth, and movable screens. Music, chess (go), reading and writing all took place in that room, sitting on the floor on the very spot, perhaps, in which one would sleep that night. A space serving longterm as a bedroom there hold a raised black platform, 2 feet high and nine feet square, covered with straw mats and cushions and surrounded by curtains. There were no solid walls.



Figure 9.4. Scenes from the illustrated handscroll of Tale of Genji, c. 1130. Only cloth and bamboo hangings protect the inside, although there is snow in the garden. What are the ladies doing? How are the rooms divided? Source: en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Genji_Monogatari_Emaki#/. Public Domain.

There was no dining room or other space where the whole family gathered. Family members lived largely isolated from one another. Brothers and sisters might grow up in the same household and literally never see one another. Women in particular were

not supposed to be seen and talked with guests only from behind a frame with heavy curtains, called the “screen of state.” And so the main impression nobles gained of the people of their own class outside their immediate circle came from gossip, not from face-to-face communication. A noble person was never unattended: ladies or gentleman in waiting were never farther away than on the other side of a screen. The lack of privacy only adds to the feeling of claustrophobia. Every action was observed, every word heard, every letter read, by the people of the household.

In *The World of the Shining Prince*, Ivan Morris writes that an informed Westerner who was asked to list the outstanding aspects of traditional Japan might include Noh and kabuki drama, haiku poems, *ukiyo-e* color prints, samisen music, the tea ceremony, flower arranging, miniature landscapes; samurai with two swords and a “Bushido” ethic of loyalty and sacrifice; geisha courtesans; Zen Buddhism; suicide commonly permitted and even admired in the name of honor or love; houses with straw matting and alcoves to display seasonal paintings; large communal baths; and a diet that included raw fish and soy sauce. Not one of these existed in the Hei’an world. All came about in the great change from the classical or antique to the medieval period, as those terms are used in Japanese history.

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9.4: Whence Came the Samurai?

In the classical Hei'an world, warriors had no place among the elite. Where did the samurai come from? There is still a lot of scholarly debate about that. Court aristocrats and bureaucrats had employed professional fighters successfully throughout the Hei'an period, once the conscript army set up by the Taika Reforms as part of bureaucratic government had failed. Commanders had employed experienced fighting men on the northeastern frontier, and rulers had used career soldiers for routine patrol, criminal investigations, pursuit and arrest of criminals, and suppression of banditry. In and around the capital, a special police agency oversaw such organized state violence. Aristocrats had hired experienced military men to guard shōen property, punish enemies, and keep the peace. The abbots of Buddhist temples, too, developed their own guards of armed monks to protect their lands and rights.



Figure 9.5. Handscroll, paint on paper, 1300-1325, fragment showing the Battle at Rokuhara (the sixth district of Hei'an/Kyoto) of 1159, from the *Heiji Monogatari*, "Tale of the Heiji." Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public Domain.

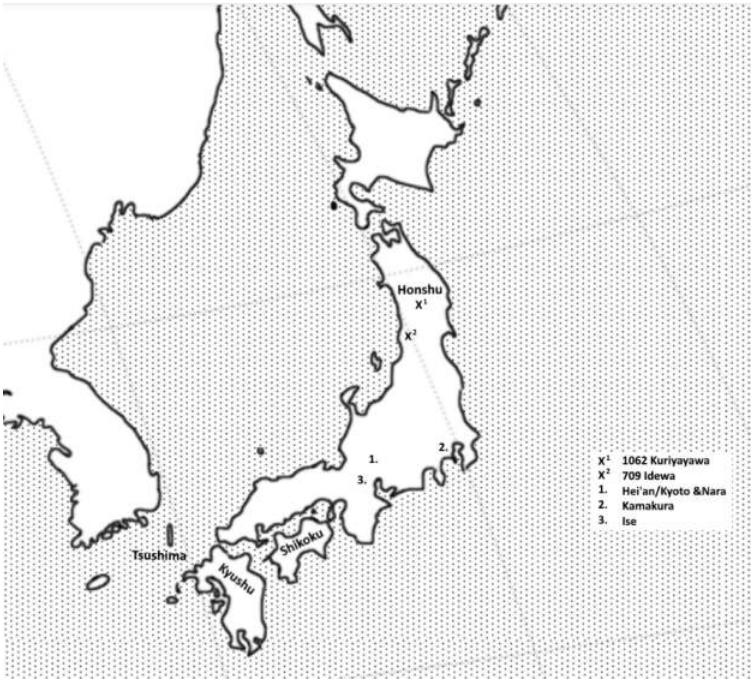
For many generations, the court elite kept these warrior forces under control with a mixture of bribery, divided control, and ideology. Most obviously, it was not in warriors' interests to undermine the system that employed them. Any individual soldier who seemed dangerous could lose his pay, his promotions, and his rewards. No-one could build up a resource base large enough to challenge the whole system, because of the balance of weakness.

But more importantly, the senior commanders of these soldiers identified with the royal house and the aristocracy. They accepted the values of the court aristocracy, because many of them were related to it: they were junior branches of the royal household. When a line was six generations removed from the imperial main line, its members were re-classified as autonomous families of modest court rank. They took the surnames Minamoto and Taira, and were given posts both at court and away in the provinces. They still thought of themselves as aristocrats, their identity relied on the system continuing as it did. They did not make trouble for the senior branches of their families, still less for the emperor. They accepted the court nobility's claims of superiority, and thought of themselves as inferior because they were fighting men. They worked for the imperial bureaucratic order, not against it, even as their actual power within the system grew and grew.

Warriors emerge clearly into the historical record when for the first time, in the early twelfth century, the retired monarch hired Minamoto men as a personal bodyguard. As with all Hei'an honors, this one became a target of struggle – everyone wanted it – and when tired of the Minamoto quarrelling, the retired emperor selected Taira no Kiyomori instead, a man who had proven his valor in fighting pirates. Now armed men were in the capital, and by 1156, they were drawn into factional struggles over the throne.

From 1180-1185, Taira and Minamoto fought one another (not necessarily along family lines) in the Genpei War, until Minamoto no Yoshitsune defeated – and wiped out -- the Taira. Minamoto no Yoritomo, meanwhile, had built up a base at Kamakura, east of Kyoto. In return for his competent service and a guarantee of income, the emperor recognized his right to govern all military personnel on his behalf – a kind of regency and division of power that was new, but not really strange since Hei'an authority had

been divided in so many ways for so long. The Kamakura “tent office” (*bakufu*) continued the Hei’an warrior mission of protecting the emperor and the aristocracy. They did not do much fighting at all.



Map R. The bakufu headquarters was in Kamakura (2) on the Kantō plain, while the imperial court remained in Hei’an/Kyoto (1) in the area called Kinai.

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9.5: Warriors or Lawyers?

Rather, the main activity of this Kamakura "warrior government" – which we might liken to the hegemon of the Spring and Autumn period – was to create and manage a vigorous legal system. As historian Jeffrey Mass explains,

> Throughout the Kamakura period the central concern of the Bakufu was to balance the interests of the traditional aristocracy in Kyoto with the interests of the rising class of warriors in the provinces. The judicial system that resulted became the foundation upon which the Bakufu established its ascendency.

When the Genpei War ended, Yoritomo needed to do three things: stop the fighting throughout the islands, reward his followers even as he reigned them in, and figure out a working relationship with the bureaucracy in the capital. He came up with two lasting solutions.

First, Yoritomo created a dyarchy, or "bipolar administration." The court continued to manage the lands and taxpayers that fell under the centralized *ritsuryo* system; and the court and its members also continued to manage the lands and people of the estate system, that is, the rice rights owed to courtiers and temples. But in order to guarantee those rights, Kamakura put military men in charge of estates as stewards (*jitō*). Its main business became managing those stewards, its vassals, and resolving disputes that involved them. So, the second major innovation was a "vigorous judicial system."[6]

Initially, while Kamakura controlled most of the Kantō plain, the imperial court still controlled the Kinai and other parts of Japan. But in 1221, the emperor Go-Toba tried to overturn the power of Kamakura. He was soundly beaten, and the shogunate (bakufu) was strengthened, so that the Kamakura vassals who had supported the bakufu were posted as stewards all over. They were selected as a reward for supporting the shogunate. Their job was to keep the peace, collect taxes, and serve in the army as needed. They checked military rivals and assured sufficient peace that temples, shrines, and aristocrats who cooperated could continue to collect income from their estates. The Kamakura stewards carried out police and judicial functions on the estates, collected the rents, and forwarded them to the owners of the various shiki rights. In return, they were granted *shiki* themselves as payment.

A further complication is that after Yoritomo died, the shoguns themselves became puppets managed by the Hōjō regents. These were Yoritomo's widow Masako and her family, who held key posts in Kamakura. Since the emperor was still theoretically the top authority, this means that power was doubly removed from authority. And, there is yet a further complication. When we read the Kamakura lawsuits, they deal only with the rights to various kinds of product. The Hei'an-based administration dealt with a few murder and rape cases according to the central law code, but basically, regulations were set and justice was carried out at a very local level. Holding the right/obligation to manage disputes was in fact another kind of *shiki* right, and those rights could be divided for any given plot of land. Cultivators, a steward, and patrons at the capital could all hold rights in the same shōen estate (though not always) and cultivators also hold their own cultivation-shiki. In this network of various rights and obligations pertaining to one estate, the laws are issued by the holder of the highest (in terms of social status) shiki, often religious institutions or sometimes the imperial figures. So, a temple or imperial patron or even the village itself might issue regulations or send out agents to catch a thief. If there was also a steward, adjudication occurred at the bakufu level.[7] Kamakura never created uniform laws. Rather, it tried to uphold the customary practices, rights, and relationships of each area.

Kamakura presents the paradox of a warrior government that mainly operated through a legal system. Not only that, but Yoritomo, his heirs and the Hōjō regents, never tried to expand their jurisdiction or their power. Quite the contrary: in the early years a few disputes involving only shōen were brought to Kamakura, but the bakufu court would not hear them – it heard only cases that involved its own vassals serving as stewards, or their police force. Its reputation as a fair court was so good that estate proprietors who should have appealed to Kyoto sometimes forced their suits on the bakufu courts. Not only did Kamakura not try to extend its power into the areas traditionally managed by the court, but it also minimized its interference in relations among its own vassals, encouraging them to work disputes out for themselves. Jeffrey Mass puzzles over the great inconveniences caused by the fact that the Kamakura government, when it appointed a steward, gave him the document proving his rights over the land, but did not keep a copy. Why would a government that works by examining pieces of paper and issuing paper decisions not keep copies of its own documents? But since Mass shows very clearly the reluctance of Kamakura to increase its jurisdiction, I think that refusing to keep the kind of paper record characteristic of a centralized, bureaucratic government makes perfect sense. Qin had undermined its popular support by trying to make reality match the paperwork. Kamakura judged cases only based on what the disputants brought forward.

Kamakura would not take complaints directed against it by its own vassals; nor would it take action against anyone of its own accord; it would only adjudicate disputes between stewards and other vassals, or between landholders of other kinds and stewards, or complaints brought by commoners against stewards. Further, if litigants called to Kamakura for a lawsuit did not come, the only response of the warrior government was to call them again, and again. The military governor who served the subpoena was responsible for bringing the defendant to court, but often this simply did not happen, and the worst punishment a steward faced for avoiding court was losing his job. In one case, this step – a judgement against a person who was not present – was taken only after seven repeated subpoenas. They never sent armed men to bring people in. This warrior government was very reluctant to use force.

Proud of their military accomplishments, the Kamakura samurai saw themselves as preserving peace and stability in balance with the larger, very old, and divine rulership of the royal family and courtiers. Mass points out the contrast with feudal Europe. There, although lords and vassals indeed took disputes to one court or another, the oaths and words of witnesses outweighed documentation, and only a royal edict had the final word. “Resort to the battlefield was never far from the minds of litigants.” By contrast, Mass writes, the Kamakura *bakufu* “had all but outlawed war.” If legal settlement was violated a second time, the two parties in the dispute return to the Kamakura court. They did not fight it out with their swords and bows.

For 150 years after the Taira uprising, many factors – revulsion against the violence it had brought; a sense of the benefits of the complex, divided property arrangements of Hei’an; respect for the court with its emperor descended from the Sun Goddess Amaterasu; transfer of this deference to the Kamakura lords; and a preference for peaceful arrangements for sharing the fruits of land and labor – all meant that a warrior government ruled mainly through careful legal processes based on documentary evidence.

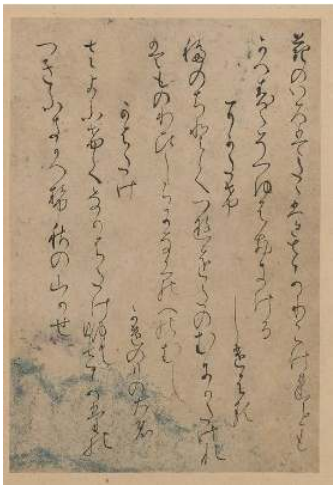


Figure 9.6. Calligraphy by Fujiwara no Yukinari. Ink on “cloud paper” made with indigo-dyed pulp. Second half of the eleventh century. Three poems from the *Collection of Poems Ancient and Modern*, one of the “Araki Fragments.” Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public Domain.

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9.6: Sources

[1] Park, “Kaya, Silla, and Wa,” 142.

[2] This section is based on Schirokauer, *A Brief History of Chinese and Japanese Civilizations*, and Totman, *A History of Japan*.

[3] Amino, *Rethinking Japanese History*. Everyone interested in Japanese or East Asian history, or in the processes of historical discovery and rethinking anywhere any time, should read this wonderful, highly readable book. The two chapters most relevant to this text book are: 1 “Was medieval (premodern) Japan an agrarian society?” and 2 “The maritime view of the Japanese archipelago.”

[4] This section is based on Schirokauer, *A Brief History of Chinese and Japanese Civilizations*, and Totman, *A History of Japan*. For a recent treatment of the estate system see Goodwin and Piggott, *Land, Power, and the Sacred*.

[5] This section is based on Ivan Morris, *World of the Shining Prince*, which I highly recommend.

[6] Mass, *The Development of Kamakura Rule, 1180-1250: A History with Documents*, xiii.

[7] Hitomi Tonomura, personal communication, January 2014 (University of Michigan).

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

10: The Commercial Revolution

Many of East Asia's most determining aspects had come from afar – chariots and horses, bronze and iron, the deity Heaven, and Buddhism, for starters. Trade, as well as diplomatic exchange, had tied the mainland, peninsula, and archipelago together. Yet from the middle of the ninth century onwards, there was a quantum leap in the growth and ubiquity of trade. It fueled a new and different regime, Koryŏ (935-1392), on the peninsula, and it changed every aspect of life on the mainland in ways that continued into the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644- 1911). Japan, so far as historians know today, was much less affected. So great were the changes from Tang to Song (960-1279) in the mainland that one historian has written "In some ways, modern Japan is a more direct heir of the Sui-Tang reformation than [is] modern China."[1]

10.1: From Silla to Koryŏ

10.2: Hybrid States in Northern China and the Steppe

10.3: Song Economy, State, and Society (960-1276)

10.4: Sources

Thumbnail: Song copper coin dating to 1102-1106. Why is this a good, practical shape for a coin? Source: Metropolitan Museum. Public domain.

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10.1: From Silla to Koryŏ

New Powers in Silla

In the last 150 years of Silla history (about 785-935), true-bone aristocratic factions put 20 kings on the throne as puppets. Certain noble families, to increase their leverage in the factional fighting, used wealth derived from land and maritime trade to gather huge private armies of slaves. That armed might increasingly determined who sat on the throne: the king became the plaything of aristocrats with military power.

In the ninth century, the true-bone Kim and Pak clans increasingly fought one another and weakened the monarchy. Officialdom did become more diverse in terms of rank, as those who had studied in Tang or in the National University won office. But most lower elite men, of head-rank six, still had no chance to rise above lower offices. Some simply abandoned their political careers. But others, along with those with only provincial rank who had been even more thoroughly excluded from power, defected from Silla. They joined one of the new regional regimes that were beginning, by about 830, to challenge Silla, just as regional warlords in Tang China were challenging the Tang center.

Three kinds of regional leaders ushered in the "Later Three Kingdoms period." First were Silla generals from high-ranking families. The first major rebellion against Silla was headed by a true-bone Kim general angry because his father had been passed over as king. Instead of continuing the fight at court, Commander-in-Chief of Ungch'ŏn Prefecture Kim Hŏnchong in 822 proclaimed his own new kingdom called "Everlasting Peace" (Chang'an, the name of the Tang capital) and his own reign-name. Word leaked out before he was ready to fight the court, because he had contacted other provincial generals, seeking allies. But the leak did not matter. Some provincial generals joined him; none fought against him; some who wished to oppose him deserted their posts because their subordinates would not fight him; and the central army had already fallen apart from disuse and a weakening tax base. Kim also found allies among lowerranking officials, even those of true-bone families. The court had to request some true-bone families to deploy their private armies to put down the rebellion, showing weakness that emboldened rivals. And Kim's rebellion showed that there was opposition not only to the king, but to the dominance of the narrow, true-bone, capital elite.



Figure 10.1. Koryŏ-period bronze mirror decorated with a ship on a stormy sea. The lobed rim is inherited from Persia via Tang mirrors. About 7" across. Source: Metropolitan Museum. Public Domain.

A second kind of regional leaders were lowlier military men authorized to deal with the pirates who had sprung up, kidnapping Silla people to sell as slaves in Tang. The Silla government authorized local leaders to protect the borders and ports, only to see them build independent power bases in the garrisons and enrich themselves through the maritime trade they protected. One such man was Chang Pojo (787-846, also known as Kungbok). Chang was a lowly Silla man who had become a minor military officer in Tang, and then made a fortune in international trade. The central Silla government authorized him to found a garrison on Wando

Island to defeat the pirates – really the court was just recognizing and reinforcing power he already had as a "merchant prince" along the southwestern coast. Chang was the ideal man to control pirates, for they were cutting into his own interests in ways that he thoroughly understood. Once that was done, Chang deployed his power and wealth to give sanctuary to some court nobles in trouble, and then to back a candidate for king, successfully. He won some nice titles and the great honor of wearing court dress appropriate only for true-bone men. But aristocratic tolerance of such a person could only go so far. Chang proposed making his daughter a secondary consort of King Munsŏng, the son of the man he had enthroned. The true-bone nobility furiously objected: "How could a daughter from an island ever be fit to marry into the royal family?" Chang, in his turn became angry, and rose in rebellion. He was assassinated in about 846.[2]

The third sort of regional leaders were the "castle lords." They came from families that, excluded from court power because they had only provincial rank, built bases in their local areas. They made connections with garrisons, fortified their own estates, created large armies of slaves and peasants, and seized grain and cloth produced by the villages. Like the rebel generals, they weakened and attacked Silla's power from within. The castle lords demanded food and grain from the villages around them, but the central government still wanted to collect its taxes as well. Farmers had to pay both the central government and from the castle lords, so many of them had no choice but to abandon their taxable fields, and either turn bandit or become slaves in the private armies of the castle lords and the maritime generals. Their plight was made worse by bad harvests in the ninth century, perhaps the result of low rainfall.[3]

Famine in Silla

Lee Kidong and other historians believe that in ordinary times, the farmers of Silla were quite prosperous. In addition to rice land, the one excavated tax register lists farmers of different strata. The wealthiest owned cattle, horses, a variety of nut-trees, and mulberry trees, as well as one or two domestic slaves per household. But in the ninth century, productivity may have been declining because the nobility and Buddhist temples were expanding their estates. Just as in late Han times, smallholders lost their independence to become mere tenants of big landowners.

Moreover, the weather had taken a bad turn, causing hunger and famine for farmers in Tang, Silla, and perhaps even in Japan. That imperial storehouses and farmers' bellies were empty did not stop Silla aristocrats from living the high life – at least 39 of them literally gilded their houses, covering them entirely with gold. The Silla Queen Chinsŏng made matters worse by demanding rice and cloth from farmers. When, without enough to eat themselves, they refused her demands, the Queen turned to overseas raids. One Silla sailor who was captured by Japanese troops in a raid on Tsushima in 894 told the Japanese authorities that "The grain did not ripen in our country, the warehouses are empty and the royal capital is feeling insecure, so the queen ordered us to conduct raids to get grain and cloth."[4]

Faced with such royal demands, farmers all over the country joined rebellions. The rebellions were started by the provincial elites whom true-bone families and monarchs had politically exploited and marginalized for centuries, and later led also by big landowners and strongmen. The dire situation had also created gangs of bandits, who started by raiding for food and goods, but gained in political ambition as they found no state force powerful enough to stop them.

We have a vivid report written by Choe Chiwon, a head-rank six man who had studied and worked in Tang, witnessed the violent and destructive Huang Chao rebellion (874-884), and returned to Silla. While in office in a Silla province there, he wrote back to the Tang emperor reporting that under the "foolish" rule of Queen Chinsŏng:

> This kingdom is experiencing a great famine. Sneak thieves have arisen throughout the land. At first they behaved like greedy wolves, but now they are boasting of their great ambitions. In the beginning they hid like mice, coming out to pilfer rice chests and rifle pockets, but taking advantage of the situation they then swarmed like bees, seizing fortresses and raiding villages, so that before long their smoke and dust filled the country, ruining the weather and spoiling the harvest. The thieves at Tongnung flourish even more so that the fields cannot be plowed…. The brigands kill people like cutting up cloth and the skeletons they throw aside are piled up like a forest. What was once a gentle land has become an afflicted land…. All of the prefectures have become the lairs of brigands and the rivers and mountains have become battlefields. How is it that Heaven has visited all its disasters on Korea?[5]

Choe's answer to his last question was that the bad luck of Tang had spread, as its learning and civilization had spread earlier, infecting Silla.

The bad luck did spread, somehow. Let's look across East Asia. Parhae in Manchuria fell in 926. In 894, Japan stopped sending embassies to Tang. Sugawara no Michizane stopped what would have been a mission in that year; he argued that it was too dangerous, with the piracy on the seas and so many ships being taken or sunk, and it was also pointless, with the Tang itself so greatly weakened, about to collapse in 907.[6] Tang could offer Silla no more support. Queen Chinsŏng tried repeatedly to send envoys to Tang, but bandits stopped every embassy on its way.

Rebels: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

In this increasingly violent situation, eighty years after the true-bone courtiers had Chang Pojo assassinated, two major rebellions against Silla took shape, and a third leader reunited the country. One historian has called the three leaders the good, the bad, and the ugly.[7] "The bad" was a poor farmer turned soldier, Kyonhwan (867-936), who raised an army sufficient to sack the Silla capital in 927, kill the king and capture many high officials, and loot an incredible quantity of treasure. In 900, Kyonhwan founded a regime he called – to lean on the prestige of an earlier rival to Silla – "Latter Paekche." He explicitly modelled himself on the Huang Chao rebellion against Tang, brutally attacking the nobility. The regime lasted until 936.

"The ugly" came from the opposite end of the social scale: He was a Silla prince. Cut out of the succession by factional maneuvering, Prince Kungye (d. 918) had become first a monk and then a commander of a Silla army garrison. At the garrison, he gathered followers, overthrew his superior officer, and declared an independent regime: "Latter Korguryŏ." Latter Koguryŏ followed more meritocratic practices than Silla, recruiting some men not of true-bone rank to hold high office. But Prince Kungye proved to be an utter despot who relied on terror to rule. Still the arrogant aristocrat, he showed little respect for the men who supported him. They threw him out, and as he fled, his own subjects killed him.

His generals then chose one of their own number to succeed him: "the good." This was Wang Kon (877-943) posthumously known as T'aejo. Latter Koguryŏ was renamed Koryŏ, and this new dynasty lasted right through the Mongol domination of Eurasia, until 1392.

Wang Kŏn was a castle lord. He was from the Kaesong region, just north of today's border between north and south Korea, and along the western coast. Using the profits from trade that passed through an island just off the coast, and with support from a nearby Silla garrison, he had built up his family's private army. He joined Prince Kungye's Latter Korguryŏ, won many battles, and became the Prince's chief minister. With the backing of the other generals to become king of Koryŏ, he proceeded to gather support for it from as many sources as possible, while continuing to conquer territory through fighting, defeating Latter Paekche. He successfully allied with various powerful groups, and forged a new legitimacy for himself out of the ideas of the time. Then, he sponsored a new history that made Korea into a nation.[8]

Koryŏ Pluralism

How did Wang Kŏn create a successful new regime, twenty-five years before Song reunified the mainland? Like Sui and Tang, he drew in existing powers and organizations, and drew on existing ideas and beliefs, developing both the ideas and the organization further.

First, Wang Kŏn set up his capital in his home town, rather than in the old Silla capital. That emphasized his status as a local magnate or castle lord, so he could gain the support of other such families. Those castle lords were proud and powerful, unwilling to give up their autonomy, but Wang courted them successfully. He established marriage connections with at least twenty such families, and gave others his surname to establish fictive kin connections.

Second, he originally maintained friendly relations with the remnant Silla regime as he fought against the peasant regime of Latter Paekche. In 930 and 934 he won decisive battles against Latter Paekche, aided by an internal father-son fight. The peasant founder Kyonhwon, having earned the enmity of one of his sons and lost control to him, came over to Wang Kŏn's side and helped him to defeat the movement he himself had founded. Wang Kŏn now had the support of one of his former chief rivals, from the low end of the social scale.

Third, he exercised restraint when in 935 Silla's last king surrendered to Wang Kŏn. He incorporated the elite of Silla, rather than alienating them with bloody retribution as Kyonhwon had done. Wang Kŏn married a Silla princess, and unlike in Chang Pojo's time, the former royal family had to accept him. He treated the nobility well, making many of them officials in his new government. He himself married and hired so many Paks that their prominence may account for the appearance in the first histories

of Silla (written down in Koryŏ times), of the oldest mythical ancestor yet, Pak Hyŏkkŏse, the founder of Silla who hatched from an egg and gave off light, and of many very early Silla queens (dating to before Silla people even used surnames) who said to have been Paks.[9] So he had support from the upper end of the social scale, too.

Fourth, Wang Kŏn was lucky in that the Parhae regime in the north, the old rival to Silla, was defeated by the Khitan Liao as they expanded their power on the mainland. He took advantage of his luck by welcoming the many members of Parhae's ruling class who fled southward, even giving them land to live by. The new Koryŏ regime thus incorporated the independent castle lords, the rival latter Paekche leader, the old Silla nobility, and the Parhae nobility. Wang made the most of luck by welcoming elite refugees instead of making enemies of them.

And fifth, Koryŏ reversed Silla's style of recruitment into officialdom. Silla had preferred hiring from the royal clans of Kim and Pak; Koryŏ worked to avoid hiring members of his own, now royal, Wang clan, to overcome Silla's rigidly hereditary system. In 958 Koryŏ introduced a state examination system modelled on that of Tang, shifting in the direction of meritocracy. That meant that men of lower elite ranks would not be alienated as in Silla times. Compared with Silla, Koryŏ was truly a unifying regime.

Furthermore, as had Sui and Tang in their unification efforts, Wang Kon also drew on a number of different ways of thought to support his regime. The Mandate of Heaven ideology appeared throughout the Chinese Classics and other imported books. In the Three Kingdoms er and Silla, some ministers had used it to criticize kings, according to stories recorded later, but the kings had not been interested. Their legitimacy sprang instead from their illustrious ancestry, their display of honors and goods from overseas, their military might, and their patronage of Buddhism. Wang Kon – like the Zhou overthrowing social superiors of five centuries – may have been the first Korean ruler to employ Mandate theory. He chose the reign-title "Heavenbestowed." A stele erected shortly after his reign contains the oldest known Korean reference to the term Heavenly Mandate. Wang also referred to the Chinese classics in his edicts, and promoted their study.

Still, Wang Kŏn thought of himself much more as a Buddhist ruler.[10] It was Buddhism to which he really felt indebted, and it became an integral part of life in Koryŏ. Buddhist festivals shaped the year, temples were built everywhere, and the state sponsored Buddhist institutions, which promised in turn to protect it.

Wang Kŏn also believed in a third force: the spirits of his native land. This Korean Shinto included imported ideas about *fengshui* ("wind and water"), a spiritual technology related to divination techniques that had been first applied to the siting of graves in the mainland about AD 300. A monk, Toson, brought fengshui to Silla, combining it with other elements: the Buddhist idea of earning merit to improve one's lot in this life or the next; the Han theory of Five phases of cosmic forces underlying political change; yin-yang theory that stressed that as a force reached its strongest point its opposite would begin to appear within it. The natural shapes of mountains and rivers affected the characters and lives of the individuals who lived there. A propitious site for a building or a tomb could channel the energy of the earth and bring good fortune. Building in a bad place brought trouble. An unlucky landscape could be healed by building a Buddhist temple or a shrine to a deity to contain bad energy and prevent calamity.

Toson travelled over Korea divining for the local important families, like Wang Kŏn's father, and helping them plan construction accordingly. Each family viewed its own home territory as good, and even claimed political legitimacy on these grounds. Late Silla true-bone aristocrats had competed with one another by building pagodas at certain spots in their territories: Wang Kŏn believed that he had been able to unite the peninsula precisely because of the strength of the Kaesong area's topography. But this kind of localist ideology cut both ways. In 1135, some courtiers wanted to move the capital closer to their own family power bases near Pyongyang. Working with the conspirators, monk Myoch'ong used geomantic arguments to try to convince the King to move the capital. When the Kaesong people won the argument, Myoch'ong's faction turned to military rebellion, which failed. Fengshui was a powerful force in people's thinking, alongside Buddhism, and the learning of the Classics and Confucianism. Various ways of thought co-existed in Koryŏ as in other East Asian regimes.

Koryŏ State and Social Structure

The new Koryŏ regime had incorporated the independent castle lords, the rival Latter Paekche leader, the old Silla nobility, and the Parhae nobility. It drew on various strands of thought and belief for its legitimation. Nonetheless, the coalition required further work.

First, Silla aristocrats were absorbed into the Koryŏ ruling class, but did not necessarily share the same outlook as the former rebels: that difference may have led to a succession crisis in 945, when the regime was still young.[11] Second, like Liu Bang, Wang

Kŏn had to recognize and reward those who had supported him. It was left to the third Koryŏ ruler, King Kwangjong (r. 949-975), to suppress the castle lords in a brutal purge; to try to free slaves to pay taxes to the central government; and to institute a civil service examination system to recruit low-ranking men to staff the bureaucracy. He tried; but no sooner was he dead than another portion of the old Silla aristocracy asserted itself and took control of government.

This was the sixth head-rank educated Confucians who had chafed at true-bone snobbishness. King Sŏngjong (981-997) sponsored them, and promoted Confucianism, hoping to increase his own authority. Sŏngjong set up a double-tiered bureaucracy, with Ministries to run affairs in the capital, and officials sent out to govern twelve provinces and about 300 counties. Officials could not govern their home areas and each posting was brief, in Legalist bureaucratic style. To further prevent officials building up power bases, they sometimes had to leave a son at the capital as a hostage, a method later used in Tokugawa Japan.

King Sŏngjong had offered an opening to head-rank six and even provincial men, but they quickly closed ranks to keep others out. To counteract that and admit lower ranks, King Sŏngjong set up a Confucian academy and local schools, – but only the locally powerful could attend. He held civil service examinations, – but even more than in Tang, the new Koryŏ elite passed or bypassed them. As in Hei'an Japan, they could demand grants of tax-exempt land, weakening the central government's control of revenue, and they came to control the throne.

This meant that, once more, an aristocratic mentality prevailed: people were sorted out into boxes from birth. Koryŏ clans were classified into hereditary "orders" who specialized in serving as civil officials, as military officials, as clerks, and as soldiers.[12] The common people included hereditary artisan families. Peasants were stuck in farming, often leading lives of poverty as landlords or the state took most of their grain and cloth, and demanded labor too. Slave children became slaves, who could be bought and sold. Certain hereditary professions – butchers, actors, and singers – were outcastes: necessary of course, but despised. There were occasional examples of social mobility – occasional slaves who were talented, tough, and lucky enough to rise into the ranks of the military officers; but it was very rare.

All this was true of Tang and Hei'an as well, but in Koryŏ about thirty percent of the population was enslaved – much higher than in either China or Japan at any time, and high enough for some scholars to consider Korea a "slave society."[13] Commercialization created some social mobility in the mainland, as we shall see, but the real power of aristocracy and aristocratic thinking was not broken until the twentieth century in Korea.



Figure 10.2. Koryŏ celadon vase with cranes, 1150-1200. Source: Metropolitan Museum. Public Domain.

Managing the Economy: an early text from the Peninsula + Manchuria

Recently, archaeologists in the peninsula+ have excavated 430 wooden tablets with writing on them, dating from about 550 up to 1300. Some are only fragments, so in the example

… means something came before or after the extant text

□ means one character is illegible

[ ] and words in square brackets are added by the historian to make the meaning clear.

Think about what kinds of things were recorded and what kinds of questions historians could ask and answer. What material items might help answer the questions? What does the text suggest about ordinary people's lives? Why did I put it in this spot in the textbook?



1. 62 *seom* [of grain] were harvested from one *hyeong* of dry fields (1 *seom* 石= 3 bushels?)
2. Attack Bu□ castle, □*si* of central office
3. … [one] jar of food [made of] deer
4. jar of saucy food wild boar…
5. one pot of beans eleven [baskets of] cinnamon-vine yams village
6. … presenting the food white and red [rice]
7. … ten jars of live abalone…
8. … Father sends two *seom* of salt
9. … on the day 65 adult males hurry to go…
10. Presenting five processed animal hides
11. to Sir Dae-ojrang, Gahaeng politely tell
12. … jar of pickled fish from Goseong county
13. For 600 bricks headed to the great fortress
14. …in the warehouse are two *seom* of barnyard millet from the upper dry field
15. A prayer chest [with the capacity to hold] 8 *hop*, a palanquin of 2 *seom*
16. Gathered about 400 catties of mixed iron. Having requested permission, took in artisans including good workers who built □□ Temple; joined the skilled monks that reside in this temple; and disassembled the pagoda on February 17, 1024, the auspicious day that had been decided upon.

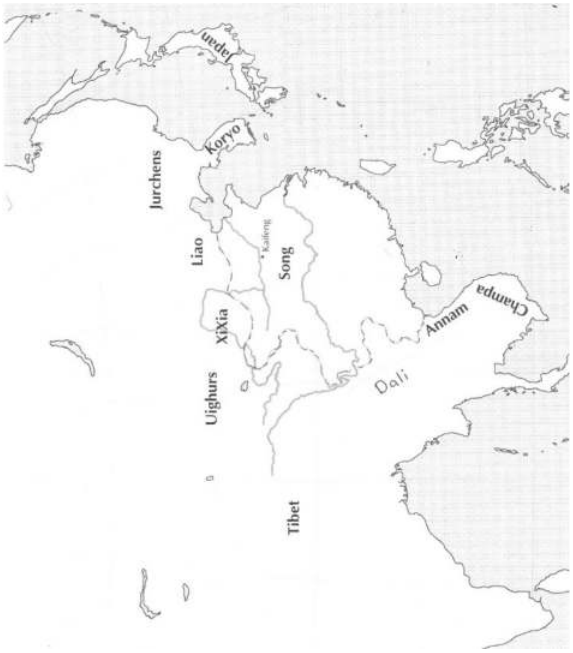
Figure 6.10. Excavated record from Korea. How does the translation tell us the earliest possible date of the record? Source: Lee SeungJae, "Old Korean Writing on Wooden Tablets," p. 171. Used by kind permission of the author.

Lee SeungJae has circled four examples on this broken tablet of Korean phonetic script mixed in with the Chinese characters. Such notations may have been the origin of Japanese *katakana*, a way of writing foreign words in Japanese that appears only after 800 or so. Lee concludes that Japanese writing developed under the influence first of Paekche and then from 660 onwards of Silla, and not just directly from Chinese texts.[14]

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10.2: Hybrid States in Northern China and the Steppe

The collapse of the Tang state in 907 set the stage for an entirely new situation in East Asia. The eastern half of Tang territory was reunited, after five decades, by the Song, which drew on the long heritage of the bureaucratic state, taxing farmers as part of its fiscal base. But along the northern border, several new states arose, which historian F. W. Mote calls "hybrid states." Even more dramatically than Tang and Sui, they combined mainland traditions of rule with nomadic traditions of rule, and made competing claims to the Mandate of Heaven. Three hybrid states coexisted and fought with Song: the Liao state founded by the Khitan tribes (907- 1125), the Xi Xia state founded by the Tanguts (1038-1237), and the Jin state founded by the Jurchens (1115-1234), which conquered North China in 1127. The Song court fled from Kaifeng to Hangzhou and regrouped as what is known as the Southern Song (1127-1279). In the end, a fourth hybrid state, the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1234-1367) defeated Xi Xia, Jin, and Song and reached into Koryŏ.



Map V. Song and its neighbors, about 1050. The dashed line shows the rough northern and western borders of Song; the coast forms the eastern border. Taiwan was not settled.

Liao

The Liao emerged even before the collapse of Tang. Its founder, Abaoji, became khan in 901, but with the fall of Tang in 907, he faced the challenge of holding together a nomad confederation when there was no centralized government to his south to extract goods from. Although Modun, in Han times, had overseen some farmers, he had not been able to stop the Xiongnu chiefs below him from raiding across the border, nor transform the confederation into a more centralized form of government. Abaoji did. Treating settled farmers as a conquered tribe, he nevertheless managed them with a bureaucratic administration called the Southern Chancellery, while continuing to manage nomads as a tribal confederation under the Northern Chancellery. This innovation – a hybrid administration for settled and nomadic subjects – enabled Abaoji to overcome rebellions and to establish a somewhat more stable line of succession than was usual in steppe empires. Of course, this double administration was pricy: the chiefs wanted a steady supply of goods, and officials needed salaries.

How could Abaoji keep the tribesmen from raiding? He did so by choosing a particular area of settled territory in northern China, just on the other side of a line of fortified passes – about where the later Great Wall would be. As dozens of warlords cycled through the thrones of former northern Tang territory, Abaoji's son and successor incorporated the target territory into the Southern Chancellery. This area, called "the Sixteen Prefectures," was recognized by Northern Song (960-1127) as being part of Liao, in the Treaty of Chanyuan in 1005. The first clear border in East Asian history, the Song/Liao border ran to the south of the Sixteen Prefectures. It was marked most dramatically with man-made lakes and ponds (dubbed by one historian "the Great Ditch") and a new forest of fast-growing elm and willow trees (the "Green Great Wall"): a barrier to defend the Song capital of Kaifeng.[16] Liao

and Song both observed the border. Peace held for decades, with diplomatic missions going back and forth, sharing travel, banquets and poetic toasts.

In the end, however, tempted by the weakening of Liao, Song hawks finally pressed their claim that without this area, the Song Mandate of Heaven was incomplete.[17] In 1122, Song broke the Chanyuan peace. To attack Liao, Song troops cut down the forest. A few years later, Jin cavalry easily crossed the once more "barren, tree-less moonscape" southward to conquer Kaifeng and end the Northern Song.[18]

Xi Xia

The Xi Xia state of the Tanguts adapted Abaoji's dual structure. The Tanguts lived where steppe met sown in the far northwest. They had been subjects of the Tibetan empire at its height and were then caught between Song and Liao. In self-defense, they created a nomadicstyle military force, even though many of them had long been farmers. They did so by adding to their expertise and investment ranching and state-sponsored horse-breeding to support cavalry, and incorporating smaller tribes along the steppe margin. As they built up their forces, they paid tribute to both Song and Liao.

All these efforts came to fruition in 1032 when a man named Yuanhao became ruler of the Tanguts. Yuanhao had distinguished himself in the new nomadic lifestyle by leading campaigns out along the oases of the Silk Road, an area that could provide rich pasture for raising horses. Yuanhao moved closer to a tribal model, training all young men to fight, and drawing elite sons into his *kesig* honor guard. But at the same time he sponsored a new script to keep records in Tangut. The script was loosely based on Chinese characters. In 1038, Yuanhao finally declared the Xi Xia a new dynasty, and himself the emperor, with his own Mandate.

The hybrid Xi Xia state was strong enough to play off both Liao and Song. On the one hand, Liao protected Xi Xia as a counter-balance to Song; on the other, Song decided that its vast wealth was better deployed by paying the other two off than by trying in vain to defeat their impressive cavalries. And as the Rong and the Di had done in Zhou times, the Xi Xia and Liao buffered Song from more powerful military forces – for a while.

Jin

The Jurchens, who founded Jin, created a third variation on the hybrid state. The Jurchens began as dispersed forest tribes in Manchuria. Some, called in the records "tame" Jurchens, were incorporated into the Liao tribal confederation; the so-called "wild" Jurchens were huntergatherers living in scattered villages and doing a little farming and pig-raising. They first learned to work iron only about 1074, and about the same time, the Liao designated one of their chiefs "military governor" of all the wild tribes, providing a basis for organization. Over the next two generations, the emerging Jurchen confederation learned equestrian skills and became great cavalrymen.

Resenting Liao oppression, the Jurchen leadership quickly developed a centralized, army based on a decimal units – easier for them since the tribes were small and weak to begin with. In 1114-15 a leader named Aguda attacked the Liao border, took a key strategic spot, declared the establishment of the Jin state, and with the support of other rebel tribes and mutinous Khitan forces completely took over the Liao's Northern Chancellory in 1122, recreating a tribal confederation. In the Southern Chancellery, the Jin quickly gained the services of both Khitan and Song defectors with experience. These recent "wild tribes" quickly came to control a hybrid agricultural-nomadic state.

According to a secret alliance made between Jin and Song in 1115, Song was supposed to capture the Liao southern capital within the Sixteen Prefectures, while the Jin conquered the Northern Chancellory, but the Song campaign had failed utterly. Liao took the area, looted it, and then turned it over to Song. Negotiations resumed, but when Aguda died, his brother let his generals do as they liked, and they quickly retook the Sixteen Prefectures, and then went further south. The result was that in 1127 the Song emperor surrendered the capital, Kaifeng, to Jin, and the imperial family were marched off to the northwards, in humiliation and misery, through what was now all Jin territory. Eager to consolidate a sole claim to the Mandate of Heaven, Jin forced Xi Xia to acknowledge their superiority in exchange for continued independence, and pursued the one Song prince who escaped Kaifeng far into central China. He escaped only by boarding a ship and sailing down the coast, and eventually established a new capital at Hangzhou, founding the Southern Song.

The Jin regime quickly decided that Song constituted no real threat. The real threat lay in the newly-rising Mongol confederation. More useful than a claim to the mandate was tribute that could be passed along to hold together the tribal side of the hybrid state.

And the immense riches of the Song state were the obvious source of such tribute.



Figure 10.3. Handscroll, ink and color on silk. Yang Bangji, late 1150s, “A Diplomatic Mission [from Song] to Jin.” Source (where you can see the whole thing): Metropolitan Museum. Public Domain.

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10.3: Song Economy, State, and Society (960-1276)

More Rice, More People, More Rice

The conquest of the area south of the Yangzi River by people who paid taxes to Chinese regimes was slow indeed. The southern regimes of the Period of Division presided over less than a quarter of the whole population of former Han territory. In Tang, officials posted to the south – like Hei'an officials sent away from the capital – considered it an exile, and one that might spell doom through malaria. But in Song times, sixty percent of the population resided in the south: rice country. The result was a revolution in production and in productivity, which led to dramatic changes in every area of life. The styles of cooking known today, for instance, stems from Song times, although American foods like hot peppers, corn (maize), potatoes, and sweet potatoes (and tobacco, not a food) were added in Ming times, after 1492. (What happened in 1492?)

The growth in population is both a measure of the changes and a contributing factor. In the middle of the Han, in the year 2, the population of China was about 60 million people, dropping to 49 million in the Latter Han. In the year 200, it was about 60 million people. In the year 755, the census counted about 52 million, so real population was probably still around 60 million people. In other words, population remained essentially stable for eight or nine centuries. By 980, however, Song presided over 100 million people, even though its territory did not reach the far west. The number of households registered by the state tripled from 980 to 1110, even as registered cultivated land only doubled.[19]



Map W. Rough borders of the Southern Song (dashed) and Jin (dotted) territories, after 1127; some of their neighbors; and cities mentioned in the text. Q = Quanzhou. G= Guangzhou (Canton).

How could two times the land support three times the population? The answer is that wet rice agriculture feeds more people than wheat or millet. In the South, during the centuries of division, people had built dikes and transformed the swamps of the south into fields that could be flooded and drained at the appropriate times for plowing, planting, transplanting, weeding, and harvesting. Rice produces more food per acre than any other grain: even today wheat yields only half as much per acre as rice, and the gap between medieval European wheat crops and Song rice crops was much more dramatic.[20] Unlike other plants, rice can breathe under water, and the water regulates temperature, controls weeds, dissolves nitrogen and inorganic salts so that they are easier for the rice to absorb. That means that the fields do not need to lie fallow for a season to rebuild nutrients; in fact, the longer rice is grown in one place the more nutritious the soil gets, because the water and roots pull minerals up from far below.[21] Southern areas had more water. The growing season in southern areas in longer, and farmers in Southeast Asia had developed new strains of rice with a shorter time to harvest, so two crops per year could be grown. Song farmers also developed strains that were more resistant to disease, or had other strengths. New varieties of seed passed from farmer to farmer, and were distributed by the government. There were fewer years of dearth.

Scholar-official Zhu Xi (1130-1200), a key figure in Confucian thought, wrote in a letter about Xinchang county in Zhejiang:

> This county, too, has had a severe drought. The early rice harvest was entirely lost. The fields of intermediate and late rice had already become cracked and parched when, in the middle of the 7th month, it rained for several days in a row. As a result, it has been possible to have water in all the fields; and there is hope that there will be a harvest of the intermediate and late rice.[22]

Overall production and productivity per acre increased. But since rice required a lot of tending and winter was less harsh in the South, people also worked more. As a big landlord in the Yangzi delta wrote:

> Before the new year, wheat is sown.
>
> When the wheat has risen, we plant the sprouts of rice.
>
> When the latest-ripening rice is done,
>
> The winter vegetables are already green.
>
> After the harvest, there are no idle hands,
>
> No empty acres in the diked fields.
>
> My family's hundred tenants have learned
>
> What it is to reap in every season.[23]

But even with the year-round work, fewer people were engaged in producing basic necessities. At the end of the Tang period, most cultivators were still largely self-sufficient in food and clothing, buying only government salt and iron tools. By the middle of the Song period, although some farming households were still self-sufficient, many had become specialists, growing one main crop to sell on the free market – tea, sugar, indigo, and mulberry – and using the money to buy grain and cloth and pay their taxes.

The Cosmopolitan South

It is sometimes said that Tang was a cosmopolitan empire with connections far afield, while Song closed in on itself again. We have already seen Song engaging in fruitful diplomacy with the Liao regime under the century-long Chanyuan peace. When we look at the South, Song looks even more cosmopolitan. The Southern Song capital Hangzhou, Guangzhou (Canton), Hainan Island, and especially Quanzhou all hosted communities of foreign merchants who alongside Chinese merchants traded peacefully with ports in today's Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and India.

The coast of Fujian, where Quanzhou is, was the last part of the coast to fall under the control of Chinese regimes, because of the mountains that surround it. The Tang writer Han Yu described it this way:

> Typhoons for winds, crocodiles for fish –
>
> Afflictions and misfortunes not to be understood!
>
> South of the country, as you approach its boundary,
>
> There are swollen seas linked to the sky.
>
> Poisonous fogs and malarial miasmas
>
> Day and evening flare and foam.[24]

Traders went to Guangzhou or further north to Yangzhou instead. But in the Period of Division an autonomous regime developed Quanzhou as a port. Under Song control, it continued to grow. By about 1000 it housed communities of Muslims (the first mosque was built in Quanzhou in 1009) and Hindus. A Shiva lingam existed in Quanzhou by about 1000, there are inscriptions written in Tamil, and Hindu gods including Shiva and Vishnu appear in a Buddhist temple there. Most intriguingly, the two pagodas of that temple include the Monkey King Sun Wukung (hero of *Journey to the West*) looking exactly like the Hindu monkey-god Hanuman. The foreigners who settled in Quanzhou, bringing their languages and religions, also brought those new strains of rice mentioned above – drought-tolerant and disease-resistant – which spread the habit of eating rice.[25]

Along with the extraordinary productivity of rice and the widespread use of iron, the many waterways of the south contributed to the commercial revolution. Water made transport cheaper than in the North, where goods had to be carted or carried by road, so prices could be lower, and there was profit to be made even in cheap bulk goods like grain, vegetable oil, and ordinary cloth. Since most farms were large enough to support the family, they were also consumers, purchasing the "seven indispensable items:" tea, rice, salt, soy sauce, cooking oil, vinegar, and charcoal or firewood. One observer saw farmers carrying rice into Southern Song Hangzhou and going home with the seven goods and with incense, candles, noodles, spiritmoney, flour, pepper, ginger, and medicine.[26] Fujian, on the southeastern coast, transformed from a subsistence hemp and rice economy to one that specialized in fruits like oranges and lichees; sugarcane; manufactured goods including pottery and metalware; and cotton, introduced through Southeast Asia from the Middle East.[27] In Tang long-distance trade focused on luxury items; now the mass market in staples and moderately-priced consumer goods drove longdistance commerce. Boats of every size and description plied the rivers, streams, lakes, and coastline of the south, carrying goods to be sold as far away as the Middle East or as close as the next town.

In some areas, transport meant employment: whole families lived on boats and made their livings by moving consumer goods from one Yangtze city to another. As a national market developed, farmers learned to calculate possible profit based on complex factors, and were affected by changes in markets far away. But in addition, a whole human infrastructure of trade arose: from peddlers whose capital was a couple of baskets full of shoes carried on a ten-day circuit of villages up to merchants whose capital amounted to several large seagoing boats, and who invited investors to partner in one voyage or many. From village shopkeepers selling a few needles and pots from the front of a house up to town shop-owners specializing in gold-speckled folding fans from Japan. From brokers who managed relations between porcelain wholesalers and retailers to salt merchants who held licenses from the state and lived in unimaginable wealth. Innkeepers, porters, muleteers, boatmen of all kinds – thieves and rascals – goldsmiths, pawnbrokers, moneychangers, moneylenders – smugglers and officials on the take: every kind of living that could be made from commerce appeared in Song times. In thirteenth-century Hangzhou, artisans and merchants were organized into 414 different guilds (hang 行).[28]

The infrastructure of trade included many more towns and cities. Tang towns had been administrative centers, and the only cities that counted, socially, were the capitals. By late in Song times, about 12% of the population may have lived in cities. As the population grew and more shops and markets were needed to handle trade, the once-every-ten-days market serving nearby villages became a town ,and towns became cities with markets open every day, as well as permanent shops.

Trees fell across the south: to build boats and houses, make lacquerware and paper, and fuel the specialized pottery kilns of cities like Jingdezhen. True porcelain, with its lustrous sheen and unmatched smoothness and hardness, was invented in Song times, and outpaced silk as an export product. Tea was grown on family farms and on plantations owned privately or by the state, picking tea came to be women's work. Sugar mills employed a dozen workers and ran on ox-power, selling the jugs of cane juice to candy-makers.[29]

Iron production rose dramatically: Agricultural productivity reinforced the production of other necessities and luxuries. In 1078, the Song national output of iron was about 125,000 tons per year, six times what was produced in 806 under the Tang. That's about 3 pounds of iron per person: a rate of produced Europe achieved only in 1700. Much of the iron went to the capital, Kaifeng, with a population of nearly one million. Thousands of iron workers turned it into weapons, tools, nails, locks, and musical instruments. Huge smelters used up the available wood by 1100, so the industry turned to burning coke (made by anaerobically heating coal). The iron industry was widespread enough that it hired farmers in the agricultural slack season, and poets pitied families in areas where such employment was not available.[30] The ideal that most taxpaying commoners were smallholding farmers feeding and clothing their families themselves had never been further from the truth. Other aspects of the state changed as well.

Recruitment for Office

The Song founder, Zhao Kuangyin, is said to have invited all his senior generals to a banquet in the palace the year of a major victory. They reminisced about their shared glories in battle. Then Zhao congratulated the generals on their having honorably come to the end of their fighting days. They could retire now, he told them, to comfortable mansions in the capital. They did so, removing the immediate threat that one of them would replace the fledgling Song.

Zhao followed up by choosing young generals who were reliably subordinate to him. He conducted the rest of the conquest patiently, giving regional leaders plenty of time to surrender peacefully. As he set up the state structure, he carefully subordinated military power to civil power. Han and Tang consort families had frequently intervened in government, and in later periods eunuchs

and favorites sometimes even ran the whole country. But in the Song the bureaucrats and emperors, really did wield power. Their reform programs were not just futile cries like those of the Han Confucians. And they took full account of the commercial economy.

The history of Song government is a history less of emperors than of advisors – advisors who were self-consciously Confucian, even though they did not agree on what that meant. However they came to office, they came to *high* office because they were unusually articulate or savvy. These men had multiple talents. Most of them led troops in battle against foes or rebels, as well as taking on all the practical matters of government: building infrastructure, settling lawsuits, dealing with poor harvests or famine, collecting taxes, and solving murder cases – from 1247 with the aid of the world's first manual of forensic medicine, *The Washing Away of Wrongs*. They wrote memorials to the emperor on policy, reams of poetry, epitaphs for friends, and ruminations on the places they travelled through. They painted and did calligraphy and played music, and managed large estates and affairs in their own communities. (When they were away their wives managed the estates and educated the children.) They wondered about and investigated natural phenomena and studied history from primary and secondary sources. Multitaskers extraordinaire, these men.

Song officials were recruited from a larger number of families than in Tang. The Tang aristocracy who had monopolized office had been slaughtered and scattered by Huang Chao. Moreover, a key technological advance made it possible to educate and recruit from a wider swath of the male population. That was printing. Tang aristocratic families who owned manuscript libraries had had an enormous advantage in studying for the examinations. Printing had been invented about the year 700, but was used initially only for Buddhist materials and images of gods. The Song printing industry made widely available the classics and other Confucian texts (as well as Buddhist and Daoist scriptures, posters, political pamphlets, newspapers, and every other kind of book imaginable), and the commercial economy made teachers widely available for hire.[31]

The dominant stream of recruitment into government was through examinations. Government schools recruited from among the common people, and unlike in Tang times the examinations were graded anonymously. There were three levels of exam, held on a three-year cycle that was observed, with some breaks, until 1905. Examinations allowed for specialization in Confucian classics, or historical texts, or ritual texts or the law. Entering office through examination was the most prestigious route, but there were other routes. Each high official could put forward one son (the "shadow" privilege); government clerks could be promoted to officials; provincial officials could recommend men for office; graduates of the National University were eligible; military men could be transferred to the civil side; lower-level degrees could be purchased; and there were special "facilitated" exams for those who had repeatedly failed. Once gentry families were in place, of course, they took steps to assure their own continued status: even as more and more men took examinations, the percentage of officials who held regular examination degrees dropped, from 89% in 1046 to 54% in 1213.[32] Studying for and taking exams, however, became the defining characteristic of the new elite, the gentry.

A New Elite: The Gentry Class

Participation in the civil service examinations defined the gentry class. It was truly a class, for its power rested on wealth, not inherited rank or bloodline. But wealth had to be funneled into education sufficient for a son to pass an examination every generation or two, or the family would lose its legal privileges and becomes commoners again. The gentry class, though composed of different families over time, dominated mainland society until the dynastic system fell in 1911. In the Tang, there had been an infinite grading of social statuses from the purest blood families with their family traditions down to lower aristocrats, to commoners and mean people and slaves. From Song through Qing, setting aside the imperial family, the major social distinction was between the gentry (or literati), and everyone else. Although individual gentrymen held different ranks and amounts of wealth, and might never serve in office, and although gentry families ranged from rich to poor, gentry status was not much more hereditary than wealth is in the US today.

A gentry family was one in which people had enough land and money to support highstatus activities. They owned, borrowed, read and wrote books, performed classical family rituals, took the examinations and aspired to hold office, married other gentry families, and visited high officials and other powerful people. Along with religious beliefs in Buddhism and organized Daoism, they identified with the Confucian tradition of scholarship and public service, and that meant study, which required a certain amount of land or other capital. Once a family had the cash, earned through participation in the commercial economy, gentry attributes could be acquired over a couple of generations, as Tang aristocratic rank could not. So in the Song, and even more in the Ming and Qing, gentry families were involved in trade and money-lending and even production, as well as agriculture, and mercantile families or well-to-to farmers could buy books, hire teachers, educate their sons to pass the exams and take office, and slowly acquire the

cultural polish necessary to be “gentry.” It is because the gentry status required some money, and did not require a long pedigree, that they are a “class.”

This was not an egalitarian society. Office-holding was still the most prestigious occupation, and educated men even remade the ideal of filial piety: they argued that earning state honors and privileges was the most filial of acts, more important than the daily, personal service to parents they could not do while travelling and serving far from home.[33] Officials could earn personal as well as office rank, and gentry might believe themselves composed of finer *qi* than others. A large permanent underclass of convicts and soldiers were marked by tattoos. The military-penal complex, as historian Elad Alyagon has dubbed it, included at its height 1.4 million men, as well as their families. Some soldiers were so poor that their wives and daughters collected firewood to sell, wove sandals, collected night soil (excrement), brewed moonshine, or turned to prostitution. Officials illegally exploited the labor of both soldiers and these armycamp courtesans.[34] The dynasty displayed more compassion for these people once they had died in battle than while they lived, paying monks to hold Buddhist masses for their souls, lest they become vengeful ghosts.[35]



Figure 10.4. Jin Chushi, detail from “Ten Kings of Hell,” before 1195. Source: Metropolitan Museum. Public domain. See the whole hanging scroll at https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/44510

Nevertheless, social mobility upwards was a theoretical possibility that was sometimes realized. A family could, by hard work and good luck and study, move up into the gentry elite. Conversely, a gentry family whose sons refused to study or work, but preferred to gamble and whore around, selling off the family library to buy wine and hire actors, could sink back into the working class in generation or two. As Song gentryman Yuan Cai warned: “Gentlemen and officials should try to count the number of their hometown’s official families of thirty years ago who still survive today. They will find only a handful.”[36] Both the opportunity and the danger were ever-present in people’s thinking. Yuan Cai advised that the smartest gentry sons study for the exams, the next smartest become teachers, and others work as clerks, doctors, Buddhist monks, Daoist priests, diviners, astrologers, and physiognomists, or manage farming, gardening, and trade. “All provide income for your family without bringing shame to your ancestors,” he wrote. “All are acceptable.”[37] Tang aristocrats would not have agreed.



Figure 10.5. Li Gonglin, illustration for the *Classic of Filial Piety* (c. 1085). You can see the whole thing at the collection website for the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public Domain.

Debates over the Role of the State in Northern Song

The Tang government had controlled markets and prices, and tried to rely on selfsufficient households paying taxes in grain and cloth. After Tang fell, in the "Five Dynasties" period (907- 960), the North was divided among dozens of local warlords. Seven relatively stable regimes held the South, each eagerly promoting the production of local products like salt, lumber, paper, cloth, and ceramics. These states relied on taxing the private merchants who traded along the coast and to Liao, Koryŏ, Japan, and Southeast Asia, importing other necessities like iron as well as luxury goods like incense and gold jewelry. The direct trade with Japan, reestablished in the 900s, was particularly valuable, since the Hei'an elite paid for books, ceramics, and textiles mainly with gold.[38] The Song state, too, relied on commercial taxes for about a fifth or a quarter of its cash income. The state also engaged in commerce directly, brewing ale and licensing others to do so, for instance; making cash loans to sericultural families who repaid them in finished cloth; and maintaining a monopolies on tea (for a while) and salt production.[39] Money – iron coins, then bronze coins and paper money – became ever more central to the economy, and silk was no longer used as currency.

Money came to seem to some officials an answer to the fiscal problems the Song government faced -- problems that stemmed in part from pay-offs they had continually to make to the northern nomads on their borders. The Tang court had loved foreign goods but held itself above taxing them. Song was perfectly happy to do so. Whereas Tang had collected taxes in grain and cloth from each farming family, and distained commercial taxes, the Song fisc relied mainly on commercial taxes and on monopolies on necessities such as salt, tea, iron and wine.[40]

But since the Song desperately needed money to fend off the northern regimes, some officials proposed involving the state in the economy much more deeply. In a great debate about state ideology and organization, Song officials framed a moral and pragmatic choice between an ideal of a small, lightly-funded government and an ideal that government must be effective and powerful in creating a better society, caring for the people, and defending the realm. Of the many participants in the debate, I will focus on two main figures, each of whom had supporters and opponents: historian Sima Guang, who believed in small government, and classicist Wang Anshi, who attempted major reforms so that government could tackle big problems.

Sima Guang (1019-1086) argued that government should be small and cheap. Low taxes would free people to grow and make, buy and sell, and profit. That meant Song could not support the huge army needed to retake the Sixteen Prefectures. But Sima was satisfied with a balance of power between Song and Liao. More generally, Sima was conservative: he thought that the emperor should work with the inherited structure of government and society, only improving it here and there. It was not flawless, but radical attempts at change *in themselves* would destabilize society and endanger everyone.

As a historian, Sima Guang regarded the state not as a natural or cosmic product, but as a building constructed by the dynastic founder at the start of each dynasty. The founder earned the Mandate of Heaven by having outsmarted and outlasted all his rivals. The founder put together the building of the state with the people as its foundation, rules and rituals its supporting columns, the high ministers its roof beams, the rest of officialdom its roof, the generals its walls, and the soldiers its gate. Later rulers inherited this building. They did not own it, but were supposed to be caretakers, and maintenance on the building meant preparing against foreign invasions and natural disasters by training soldiers, storing grain, selecting honest officials, and keeping administration going. Just like a building, the state could only stand if every part of it carried out its function faithfully, while the caretaker watched out for rotten beams or loose bricks.

Wang Anshi (1021-1086), thought that the metaphorical building of the Song state was already rotting. Big parts of it should be torn down and built anew, even if that meant sleeping outside while the reconstruction was going on. In the dynamiting and rebuilding, different parts of the state might not work for a while, and the architect – Wang himself, of course – had to be able to call the shots. The self-interested elite who staffed the bureaucracy would object, but Wang knew he was right: the classics, he said, backed him up. The short-sighted common people might balk, but they would eventually see that the changes were good for them.

When Emperor Shenzong (r. 1068-86) took the throne, he was only 20: a fiery young nationalist determined to re-take the Sixteen Prefectures from Liao. He appointed Wang Anshi Prime Minister, and supported a series of reforms called the New Policies, from 1069-1076. Shenzong chose Wang because Wang talked about enriching the state and strengthening the army, and argued that government revenue could be raised *without* increasing the burden on working people, if there were structural changes and if the government got into the business of actively promoting production. In fact, Wang was not particularly interested in military strength beyond defense. Rather, he was worried about how the laissez-faire economy had resulted in serious class inequities, so that the poor could not meet their basic needs. He believed that to take care of the people's livelihood, the state had to radically restructure itself and take charge of society in a much more aggressive way. Like Wang Mang of Han times, he turned to the classics to envision fundamental changes.

With Shenzong's backing, Wang and his group implemented the "New Policies," which put the state more firmly in control of the economy and related aspects of society than at any time since Qin. They implemented old Legalist measures like remeasuring land to make taxes fair, and organizing households into be organized into groups – of tens and hundreds – to police each other and form local militias for defense. But the New Policies also included pro-trade rationalizing measures like legalizing the trade through Quanzhou.[41] They included new measures like organizing special zones in the northern frontier areas to raise horses, new ways to manufacture weapons efficiently, and to train militia members.

As an example, one of the New Policies, the "Green Sprouts" program, was meant to assure the long-term fiscal strength of the state by helping farmers stay secure.[42] Farmers had been borrowing seed grain for planting in spring, at exorbitant rates of interest from wealthy landlords, merchants, or Buddhist temples. That led to a spiraling cycle of debt, so that small farmers lost land to their wealthier neighbors, who were better able to evade taxes because of their wealth, connections, and influence. The fiscal base of the state eroded as fewer taxes were paid. (Does that sound familiar?) To prevent small farmers from falling into debt and losing their land, the state would lend farmers the seed they needed for the next crop, allowing them to pay it back to state granaries when the harvest came. The state would charge a below-market interest rate: only 20% plus fees over 6 months.

This was not intrinsically a bad idea. In fact, even Sima Guang wrote after Wang's death that 'the great idea of this measure was in the interests of the people.'[43] And poet and scholarofficial Su Shi, although at first he strongly opposed the project, after thirteen years of seeing it in action wrote that "the idea of Wang Anshi's measure could not be improved upon, even by a Sage."[44] Even Wang's opponents thought "Green Sprouts" was a good idea. The problem was that local officials *abused* the policy. To fulfill required quotas of loans, or just from greed, they forced unnecessary loans on farmers and even urbanites, to collect the interest. This aroused great resentment, of course. The anti-Wang party thought that empowering government would always lead to such corruption; even the best idea, if imposed by the center, would have bad results. They preferred to let the market work according to laws of supply and demand.

Political debate was rational. But the New Policies were also unfairly blamed for the fact that in 1074 a terrible drought in North China forced many poor farmers to abandon their land. The situation *appeared* to have been worsened by the loans they had been forced to take out by local officials, who pressed for repayment even when the crop failed in a large area. Someone wrote a very moving memorial describing the suffering of these families to the emperor, and the Empress Dowager and some eunuchs who opposed Wang Anshi took advantage of the famine to criticize him. Shenzong felt torn. He still supported Wang, but Wang felt he

had lost face, and insisted on retiring, with honors, to Nanjing.[45] The two sided cycled in and out of power like Democrats and Republicans, until 1127, when Kaifeng fell and Song abandoned the north.

When in power, Wang did not hesitate to demote and exile those who disagreed with him, and promote youngsters who did support him. He also imposed his interpretation of the classics on the curriculum for all. He believed he knew best, and that others, if forced to work within the new system, they would eventually change their minds. A period of enforcement was necessary for real change. This kind of argument is normal for revolutionaries.

Like other revolutionaries, Wang also believed that there should be one integrated system that incorporated everyone and linked everything to the state. And that everyone should believe basically the same thing; he did not like variation and dissent in thought. Sima, on the other hand, held that as long as man did not abuse public office for private gain, but worked as honestly and thoroughly as he could, what he thought was none of the state's business. He believed a clear line demarcated a private sphere in which the state had no business. People are still arguing today about just these kinds of issues.

In the Southern Song, a different set of solutions arose. The gentry took the lead in organizing their communities, substituting for the central state. They replaced the Green Sprouts program with locally-managed community or charity granaries that could lend out grain to locals if they needed it, and collect moderate interest. They substituted local academies for Wang's centralized educational system. Socially, too, they married close to home, building dense local marriage networks instead of focusing on the capital area. And in many other ways, they shifted activism down to the local level.[46] This became the long story of the late imperial period.

The Money Mentality and Song Neo-Confucianism

The money mentality entered every part of life in Song. In popular religion, people came to believe that they were born with a deposit of credit in a spiritual account, which they had to pay back either by doing good or by burning "spirit money" – paper in the shape of silver ingots or imitating bank notes. Song poets, painters, monks, doctors, and all occupations saw themselves as competing in a marketplace, catering to consumers who had plenty of choice. Awareness of money crept into every kind of writing and every area of life. Song opera tunes, for instance, borrowed from the jingles that street peddlers sang to advertise their wares. Porcelain developed new and beautiful forms as the rich invested their silver and gold instead of eating off of it. When copper was cheap people melted down coins to make Buddha images; when copper was expensive, they melted the Buddhas to make coins.[47]



Figure 10.5. Song copper coin dating to 1102-1106. Why is this a good, practical shape for a coin? Source: Metropolitan Museum. Public domain.

The money economy and mentality generated reactions. A concrete example was the development of an amateur ideal in art, the development of black and white ink paintings that were less realistic, colorful and detailed than court and commercial painting. They frequently incorporated ordinary people going about their business, and carrying things for the elite men they accompanied.





Figure 10.6. Guo Xi, “Old Trees, Middle Distance,” c. 1080. Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public Domain. View the scroll at https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/39668.

Gender roles also reacted against the money mentality. Wealthy women gained some autonomy from the family because of increasing education, expanding commercial opportunities, and high dowries (which legally belonged to the wife, not the husband or family). Poor women could also earn a living independent of the family, but were increasingly in danger of being bought and sold on the market. Men responded by portraying women as dangerous, weak, and vulnerable, regardless of their individual status or accomplishments.[48] As elite men tried to control women, elite women responded, in turn, by adopting high-prestige behavior like not remarrying, avoiding contact with unrelated men, and practicing ostentatious frugality. Gender became a more apparently natural differentiation among people than rank.

Likewise, the uncomfortable facts that gentry status relied on cash and an anonymous examination competition may have given impetus to the revival of a strand of Confucianism that emphasized that a person’s worth lay in his or her personal moral understanding and effort, even without public recognition. For it was in Song times that Zhang Zai, the Cheng brothers, and Zhu Xi developed “Neo-Confucianism,” which they called “the Learning of the Way” (*Daoxue* 道學). This new Confucianism began as a minority movement; its interpretation of the Classics was accepted as state orthodoxy only in 1313, under the Mongols who headed the Yuan dynasty.

In Tang thinking, learned culture – the family inheritance of aristocrats – had been in itself the Way. The An Lushan rebellion, and their own frustrations at being unable to hold office even when they passed examinations, led some Tang men from lesser clans to challenge this. The foremost of these was Han Yu (768-824), who asked how writing – the key skill tested in exams and valued in aristocratic society – could itself improve the world. Han Yu advocated a return to what he saw as the old, pre-Buddhist, Confucian ethical message for individuals. He thought that writing should straightforwardly *explain* the way; literature could not *be* the Way. Han Yu emphasized personal moral responsibility and saw Confucius as primarily teaching about right and wrong.

This made sense to Song gentry, for their families did not reach all the way back to Han as the Tang elite had, or even back to Tang. For the growing number of educated people who were first-generation students, literacy something hard-won, with a purpose and a message.[49]

Song Neo-Confucians thought that after Mencius the understanding of the Way transmitted from the sage-kings and Confucius was broken off. The Way was lost; and the confusions of Buddhism and Daoism made things worse. The truth, the Way, was no-one’s birthright; it could be learned from the Classics, the only thing that *did* reach back to the sagekings Yao and Shun. Neo-Confucianism opened a path to ethical social mobility that competed with Buddhism and that broadened over the remainder of the late imperial period, just as commercialization had opened a path to wealth and status.

Commercialization had changed everything about the Song world. But people still understood and managed that world not by entirely rejecting, but by remaking and continuing the great tradition.



Figure 10.7. Attributed to Liu Songnian, “Streams and Mountains Under Fresh Snow,” late 12th century. Detail, a gentleman being served wine or tea. Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public Domain. For the whole scroll and a short recording about it, see https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/40987.

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Index

B

Ba state
6.3: The Mainland- Aristocracy Returns
Bronze Age
1.5: Three Bronze Age Imports
Buddhism
8.7: Buddhism

C

Chosŏn
4.8: Outflanking the Xiongnu on the East
Confucius
2.8: Confucius

D

Daoism
5.9: Daoism and the Fall of Han
dynasty
1.7: The Shang Period (1554-1045 BC)

E

Emperor Gaozu
4.2: From Commoner to Emperor
Erligang culture
1.5: Three Bronze Age Imports

F

Five Classics
1.6: Was There a Xia Dynasty?

H

Huang Chao
8.9: The Fall of Tang
Hundred Schools
2.8: Confucius

J

Jomon Period
1.4: Jewelry, Trade, and Hierarchy

K

Koguryŏ
6.2: Koguryŏ's East Asia

L

Lü Exu
4.3: Empresses
Liu Bang
4.2: From Commoner to Emperor

M

myths
1.1: Myths and Nations

O

One Million Pagodas
7.5: Yamato Centralization

S

samurai
9.4: Whence Came the Samurai?
Shang Dynasty
1.5: Three Bronze Age Imports
Shang Yang
3.4: Shang Yang's Legalist Policies in Qin
Shiji
1.6: Was There a Xia Dynasty?
Sixteen Dynasties
6.3: The Mainland- Aristocracy Returns
society
1.8: Shang State and Society

T

Taoism
5.9: Daoism and the Fall of Han
teleology
1.3: Cultural Variety and Teleology
the steppe bridge
1.4: Jewelry, Trade, and Hierarchy

X

Xia Dynasty
1.6: Was There a Xia Dynasty?

Y

Yamato centralization
7.5: Yamato Centralization

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    - 1.5: Three Bronze Age Imports — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 1.6: Was There a Xia Dynasty? — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
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    - 1.8: Shang State and Society — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 1.9: Violence and Ritual — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 1.10: Oracle Bone Divination — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 1.11: Sources — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 1.12: Section 1.1 Figures — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 2: The Zhou Period (1045 – 256 BC) — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 2.1: A Violent Transition — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 2.2: The Feudal State — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 2.3: The Zhou Aristocracy — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 2.4: Did Kija Move Eastwards to Found Old Chosŏn? — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 2.5: Relations with Other Peoples — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 2.6: The “Hegemon” System of the Spring and Autumn Period (771-476 BC) — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 2.7: Ritual Changes in the Spring and Autumn Period — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 2.8: Confucius — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 2.9: Sources — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 3: From Warring States Two Empire (480 BC -207 BC) — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 3.1: From Bronze to Iron — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 3.2: Horses and Walls — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 3.3: The Feudal State of Qin Edit section — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 3.4: Shang Yang’s Legalist Policies in Qin — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 3.5: Iron and Water — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 3.6: Meritocracy and Bureaucracy — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
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    - 3.8: Earned Social Rank — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 3.9: Surveillance and Law — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
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    - 3.11: The Information State — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 3.12: Sources — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 4: The Han Empire and Its Neighbors — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 4.1: The Fall of Qin — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 4.2: From Commoner to Emperor — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 4.3: Empresses — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 4.4: The Bureaucracy — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 4.5: Commoners — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 4.6: Enslaved People — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 4.7: The Silk Roads and the Xiongnu War — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 4.8: Outflanking the Xiongnu on the East — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
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    - 4.10: Early Proto-states in the Peninsula + Manchuria — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 4.11: The Yayoi Period on the Archipelago — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
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- 5.1: The Queen Mother of the West — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 5.2: Rivals to the Confucians at Court — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 5.3: Confucians at the Han Imperial Court — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 5.4: Confucius- Sage and Mage — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 5.5: Han Marriage and Family — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 5.6: The Rise of the Clans — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 5.7: Wang Mang's "New" Dynasty, AD 9-23 — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 5.8: Han Clan Ideology and Organization — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
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6: A World of Many Powers (AD 200 – AD 580) — *CC BY-NC 4.0*

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- 6.2: Koguryŏ's East Asia — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 6.3: The Mainland- Aristocracy Returns — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 6.4: The Peninsula and Archipelago Before Writing — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 6.5: From Chiefs to Queen and Kings in the Archipelago — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 6.6: Buddhism in Diplomacy — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 6.7: Sources — *CC BY-NC 4.0*

7: Consolidating Unified Regimes (c. 500-780) — *CC BY-NC 4.0*

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- 7.2: The New Sui Order — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 7.3: Reunification through Pluralism- Sui and Tang — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 7.4: The War Against Koguryŏ — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
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- 7.6: Sources — *CC BY-NC 4.0*

8: Tang and Silla — *CC BY-NC 4.0*

- 8.1: Ethnicity — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 8.2: Tang Social Structure — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 8.3: Tang Government Structure — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 8.4: The Tang Civil Service Examinations — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 8.5: Silla Villagers and their Farms — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 8.6: Poetry in Aristocratic Society — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
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- 8.8: The Queen Mother of the West — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 8.9: The Fall of Tang — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 8.10: Sources — *CC BY-NC 4.0*

9: Hei'an Japan — *CC BY-NC 4.0*

- 9.1: Hei'an Government 794-1185 — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 9.2: The Balance of Weakness in the Economy and the Fisc — *CC BY-NC 4.0*
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Epilogue

Think back to ancient bronze vessels. Shang kings used them in rituals of communication with his all-powerful ancestors, and were buried with them. Zhou kings and feudal lords used bronze vessels to worship their shared ancestors, and rewarded their generals the copper to make vessels telling their own ancestors about the king's recognition of their merit. Later, feudal lords distancing themselves from their lower-ranked relatives used bronze vessels in more public rituals to assert their superiority. Finally, bronze miniatures and imitations of bronze were used in graves, to save the real thing for living rituals.

Like bronze mirrors and weapons in the peninsula+ and archipelago, bronze vessels displayed inherited power and rank. And the artisans and resources for the bronze were more or less directly controlled by the elite who used and displayed the vessels.



Figure 11.1. Spouted wine vessel covered with fantastic birds, dragons, cats, and fish. 13th century BC, from Anyang or nearby. Source: Metropolitan Museum.

www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/44781

. Public domain.

Now let's turn far ahead to the Song period. Li Qingzhao (1084-1155)'s autobiographical "Afterword to *Catalogue of a Collection of Bronze and Stone Inscriptions*," describes how she and her husband shared a mania for collecting books and art objects, among them antique bronzes. When Li and her husband saw a bronze vessel they could not buy, they made a rubbing of the inscription. They catalogued over 2,000 volumes of such inscriptions from bronze and stone. Knowing that the dire conditions of war and disorder would force Li to sell or abandon the collection, her husband ordered her to keep the bronzes until the very last. Their collection was not unique in Song, nor was the pair's habit of cataloguing and studying their objects.

In a catalogue of art objects in private collections, gentryman Zhou Mi listed, along with 800 paintings, books, and other objects, nineteen bronze vessels. Some of the bronzes were genuinely old, having been discovered when farmers accidentally dug up Shang and Zhou graves. Others had been made recently for the art and antiques trade. The mania for antique bronzes led, in the Southern Song, to an industry that created "old" bronze goblets, horse trappings, vases, candlesticks, statues, cymbals and bells and gongs. Copper was also used for weapons, cooking pots, Buddhist and Daoist statues and incense burners, mirrors, and ornaments. By about 1050, copper mines were depleted, since Song did not control Yunnan where more mines opened in Yuan and Ming.[2] Artisans melted down copper cash for the raw material to make "ancient bronzes."[3] Certain places, such as Jurong county outside Nanjing, were particularly well-known for their production of ancient-style bronzes – places that had not even been part of the Shang culture area.

Zhou Mi's catalogue was the work of a lifetime. When he was fourteen, he was traveling with his office-holding father (the family had produced officials for six generations) from the family estate north of Hangzhou (near Huzhou) to Quzhou in southern Zhejiang. There the father and son had met a circle of men who loved poetry and painting, but also studied ancient inscriptions on stone and bronze. As he hovered on the edges of the men's conversations in their family gardens, Zhou conceived a passion for studying, collecting, and authenticating bronze vessels. He eventually obtained rubbings of the inscriptions of such vessels, and

perhaps even the bronzes themselves, from one of these men, who became his father-in-law. Zhou Mi and his father arduously built up their own art collection while they served in office. They also carefully recorded the events of their time: another sort of collection.

Li Qingzhao lost her books, bronzes, and paintings when the Northern Song fell in 1127. Likewise, when the Mongol army took the Southern Song capital in 1276, Zhou Mi's whole ancestral estate, with its library, residences, studios, and gardens, was destroyed; the entire collection was looted, and all the written records kept by Zhou and his father were lost. Zhou Mi became deeply depressed, and slowly emerged only by obsessively writing poetry. He would not serve the new dynasty, but he socialized with many who did, including former Song subjects as well as men from Mongolia and Central Asia. Zhou turned his knowledge, talent, and social connections to writing history, and to evaluating and recording collections. In his catalogue, Zhou Mi recorded the history of ownership of the finest bronze vessel he had seen, one now lost. This fine vessel had belonged to Prime Minister Jia Sidao (1213-1275).

Jia Sidao was a typical gentryman of his time. The son of a middle-ranking military administrator, he had come into office not by taking the prestigious jinshi examination, but through the less-esteemed shadow privilege: he won his first job because of his grandfather's official posts. His sister had been an imperial concubine, but Jia rose through the ranks not because of any special favor from the court, but because personnel officials recognized his competence. Like most gentrymen, he enjoyed all the entertainments of the capital, and loved to drink and pass time with the talented and beautiful courtesans of Hangzhou. As well as producing art himself, he was a great collector. He became Prime Minister from 1259. He had the responsibility of running the government during the period when the Mongols' intention and ability to conquer the Southern Song became very clear. Jia had some success in redistributing land to fund the army on the Legalist model.

When an expedition against the Mongols failed in 1275, another high official memorialized the Empress Dowager Xie, who was ruling for her husband's son, that Jia should be executed as the person to blame for the defeat. The Empress Dowager objected that Jia had served honestly and untiringly through the reigns of three emperors, but his fellow officials insisted that he be banished. On the road to exile he was assassinated. In 1276, Mongol forces captured Hangzhou, and historians, at first gentrymen whose land-holdings Jia had threatened, reviled Jia as the man who lost the dynasty.

Jia Sidao's very best piece was the antique bronze vessel. The Empress Dowager had tried to protect Jia, but this bronze vessel entered her own art collection somehow. She too was a great collector of antiquities and art objects. Imagine the opportunities she had as empress for half-a-century, the power behind the throne for ten years, -- and the one who actually had to order the surrender of the Song capital to the Yuan armies. Jia had given her at least one other bronze vessel, inlaid with gold filigree.[4] It is suspected that when he was exiled and the state confiscated his collection, she appropriated much of the collection.

The antique bronze must have been surprised to find itself moving *up* from a minister to an empress. But what happened next was perhaps even more surprising. After the fall of the Song, the imperial collections were dispersed in various ways. Some pieces were stolen in the chaos that followed the occupation of the capital; others the Yuan invaders carefully stored away in several large ware-houses, and slowly sold off to raise cash. Zhou Mi saw many former imperial treasures in private hands: objects with imperial seals and inscriptions, decrees written in emperors' own handwriting. A similar thing had happened, of course, in the earlier fall of the Northern Song capital of Kaifeng to the Jin dynasty in 1126. That time, 150 years earlier, an art and antique dealer named Bi Liangshi, having fled south with the court, managed to return north on an official mission to the Jin. In the markets of Kaifeng he purchased many treasures from the former imperial collection. When he returned to the Southern Song capital of Hangzhou, he presented the items to the emperor and was rewarded with an official position.

Somehow, in the transition from Song to Yuan, the Empress lost Jia Sidao's fine bronze vessel. As the moment of surrender approached, she gave part of her collection to her relatives for safe-keeping, but she took many objects with her when she was marched in captivity to the Yuan capital. One official, Hu Yong, captured with the court, so ingratiated himself with the Empress Dowager Xie that she sold him several imperial jade vessels.[5] Hu Yong was generous and hospitable, and a responsible official, but he was also an avid collector, and as an ambitious career man he pursued official advancement partly by making handsome gifts of paintings to men in high places.[6] Whether or not it passed through Hu Yong's hands, Jia Sidao's bronze vessel went from the Empress Dowager to a wealthy merchant, a dealer in pearls known only as Mr. Chen; and he in turn sold it to a monk called Youdeyuan. Nothing further is known of either.[7] The gold-inlaid vessel that Jia Sidao had given to Empress Xie, was held first by a scion of the Song royal family, the very famous painter Zhao Mengfu; and later fell into the hands of a Korean merchant who sold it for forty *liang* (ounces) of silver to Hu Yong.[8]

The fact that a vessel made for Shang royal use, another made for some Zhou feudal lords, and imperial jade vessels made for the Song imperial family, could pass from hand to hand for sale, up the social scale from minister to empress and back down to officials, merchants and monks, is eloquent testimony to the great changes in the Song period. It was a time when the things that had set the Tang aristocracy at the top of society and in the dominant position in the state – land, books, scholarship and poetry, dignified mien and proper etiquette, old and beautiful objects, family ritual, an illustrious genealogy, and extensive networks of connections – could all, if a family enjoyed several generations of prosperity and imitated upper-class modes of behavior, be bought.

Sources

[1] This section draws mainly on Ankeney Weitz, *Zhou Mi's "Record of Clouds and Mist Passing Before One's Eyes*."

[2] Shiba, *Commerce and Society in Sung China*, 124.

[3] Shiba, *Commerce and Society in Sung China*, 125.

[4] Weitz, *Zhou Mi's "Record of Clouds and Mist Passing Before One's Eyes,"* 180.

[5] Weitz, *Zhou Mi's "Record of Clouds and Mist Passing Before One's Eyes,"* 154.

[6] Weitz, *Zhou Mi's "Record of Clouds and Mist Passing Before One's Eyes,"* 153.

[7] Weitz, *Zhou Mi's "Record of Clouds and Mist Passing Before One's Eyes,"* 199.

[8] Weitz, *Zhou Mi's "Record of Clouds and Mist Passing Before One's Eyes,"* 180-1.