Wall Painting of Nubians Arriving in Egypt with Rings and Bags of Gold, Fourteenth Century B.C.E. This image decorated the tomb of an Egyptian administrator in Nubia. (Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)

- How did early Chinese rulers use religion to justify and strengthen their power?
- How did the technological and cultural influences of Egypt affect the formation of Nubia?
- What role did nature and the environment play in the development of early civilizations in the Americas?
Around 2200 B.C.E. an Egyptian official named Harkhuf, who lived at Aswan on the southern boundary of Egypt, set out for a place called Yam, far to the south in the land that later came to be called Nubia. He had made this trek three times before, so he was familiar with the route and skillful in dealing with various Nubian chieftains along the way. He brought gifts from the Egyptian pharaoh for the ruler of Yam, and he returned home with three hundred donkeys loaded with incense, dark ebony wood, ivory, panthers, and other exotic products from tropical Africa. While this exchange was couched in the diplomatic fiction of gifts, we should probably regard it as a form of trade and Harkhuf as a brave and enterprising caravan.
leader. On this particular trip he returned with something so special that the eight-year-old boy pharaoh, Pepi II, could not contain his excitement. He wrote:

Come north to the residence at once! Hurry and bring with you this pygmy whom you brought from the land of the horizon-dwellers live, hale, and healthy, for the dances of the gods, to gladden the heart, to delight the heart of king Neferkare [Pepi] who lives forever! When he goes down with you into the ship, get worthy men to be around him on deck, lest he fall into the water! When he lies down at night, get worthy men to lie around him in his tent. Inspect ten times at night! My majesty desires to see this pygmy more than the gifts of the mine-land and of Punt!1

Although the precise location of Yam is uncertain, scholars are beginning to identify it with Kerma, later the capital of the kingdom of Nubia, on the upper Nile in modern Sudan. From the Egyptian point of view, Nubia was a wild and dangerous place. Yet we can see that it was developing features of more complex political organization, and this illustration demonstrates how vibrant the commerce and cultural interaction between Nubia and Egypt would later become.

In contrast to the river-valley civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Indus Valley surveyed in the previous chapter, the complex societies examined in this chapter subsequently emerged in ecological conditions quite a bit more diverse, sometimes independently, sometimes under the influence of the older centers. Whereas the river-valley civilizations were originally largely self-sufficient, each of the new civilizations discussed in this chapter and the next was shaped by the development of networks of long-distance trade.

In the second millennium B.C.E., a civilization based on irrigation agriculture arose along the valley of the Yellow River and its tributaries in northern China. In the same epoch, in Nubia (southern Egypt and northern Sudan), the first complex society in tropical Africa continued to develop from the roots observed earlier by Harkhuf. The first millennium B.C.E. witnessed the flourishing of the earliest complex societies of the Western Hemisphere, the Olmec of Mesoamerica and the Chavin culture on the flanks of the Andes Mountains in South America. These societies had no contact with one another, and they represent a variety of responses to different environmental and historical circumstances. Thus, their stories will necessarily be separate. However, as we shall see, they have certain features in common and collectively point to a distinct stage in the development of human societies.

**EARLY CHINA, 2000–221 B.C.E.**

On the eastern edge of the great Eurasian landmass, Neolithic cultures developed as early as 8000 B.C.E. A more complex civilization evolved in the second millennium B.C.E. Under the Shang and Zhou monarchs many of the institutions and values of classical Chinese civilization emerged and spread south and west. As in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Indus Valley, the rise of cities, specialization of labor, bureaucratic government, writing, and other advanced technologies depended on the exploitation of a great river system—the Yellow River (Huang He*) and its tributaries—to support intensive agriculture. Although there is archeological evidence of some movement of goods and ideas between western and eastern Asia, developments in China were largely independent of the complex societies in the Middle East and the Indus Valley.

**Geography and Resources**

China is isolated from the rest of the Eastern Hemisphere by formidable natural barriers: the Himalaya* mountain range on the southwest; the Pamir* and Tian* Mountains and the Takla Makan* Desert on the west; the Gobi* Desert and the treeless and grassy hills and plains of the Mongolian steppe on the northwest (see Map 2.1). To the east lies the Pacific Ocean. Although China's separation was not total—trade goods, people, and ideas moved back and forth between China, India, and Central Asia—in many respects its development was distinctive. Most of East Asia is covered with mountains, making overland travel, transport, and communications difficult.
**China** | **Nubia** | **Americas**
---|---|---
8000–2000 B.C.E. | Neolithic cultures | 4500 B.C.E. Early agriculture in Nubia
2500 B.C.E. |  | 3500 B.C.E. Early agriculture in Mesoamerica and Andes
2000 B.C.E. | Bronze metallurgy | 2200 B.C.E. Harkhuf’s expeditions to Yam
1750–1027 B.C.E. | Shang dynasty | 1750 B.C.E. Rise of kingdom of Kush based on Kerma
1500 B.C.E. |  | 1500 B.C.E. Egyptian conquest of Nubia
1027–221 B.C.E. | Zhou dynasty | 1200–900 B.C.E. Rise of Olmec civilization, centered on San Lorenzo
1000 B.C.E. |  | 900–600 B.C.E. La Venta, the dominant Olmec center
800 B.C.E. |  | 900–250 B.C.E. Chavin civilization in the Andes
600 B.C.E. | Iron metallurgy | 600–400 B.C.E. Ascendancy of Tres Zapotes and Olmec decline
500 B.C.E. |  | 500 B.C.E. Early metallurgy in Andes

difficult and slow. The great river systems of eastern China, however—the Yellow and the Yangzi® Rivers and their tributaries—facilitate east-west movement. In the eastern river valleys dense populations could practice intensive agriculture; on the steppe lands of Mongolia, the deserts and oases of Xinjiang*, and the high plateau of Tibet sparser populations engaged in different forms of livelihood. The climate zones of East Asia range from the dry, subarctic reaches of Manchuria in the north to the lush, subtropical forests of the south, and they support a rich variety of plant and animal life adapted to these zones.

Within the eastern agricultural zone, the north and the south have strikingly different environments. Each zone produced distinctive patterns for the use of the land, the kinds of crops that could flourish, and the organization of agricultural labor. The monsoons that affect India and Southeast Asia (see Chapter 1) drench southern China with heavy rainfall in the summer, the most beneficial time for agriculture. Northern China, in contrast, where rainfall is much more erratic, receives

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*Yangzi (yang-zuh)  Xinjiang (shin-yahng)
less moisture. As in Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley, where technological and social developments unfolded in relatively adverse conditions, China's early history unfolded on the northern plains, a demanding environment that stimulated important technologies and political traditions as well as the philosophical and religious views that became hallmarks of Chinese civilization. By the third century C.E., however, the gradual flow of population toward the warmer southern lands caused the political and intellectual center to move south.

The eastern river valleys and the North China Plain contained timber, stone, scattered deposits of metals, and, above all, potentially productive land. Since prehistoric times, winds blowing from Central Asia have deposited a yellowish-brown dust called loess* (these particles suspended in the water give the Yellow River its distinctive hue and name). Over the ages a thick mantle of soil has accumulated that is extremely fertile and soft enough to be worked with wooden digging sticks. The lack of compactness of this soil accounts for the severity of earthquake damage in this region.

In this landscape, agriculture demanded the coordinated efforts of large groups of people. In parts of northern China forests had to be cleared. Recurrent floods on the Yellow River necessitated the construction of earthen dikes and channels to carry off the overflow. To cope with the periodic droughts, catch basins (reservoirs) were dug to store river water and rainfall. As the population grew,
people built retaining walls to partition the hillsides into tiers of flat, arable terraces.

The staple crops in the northern region were millet, a grain indigenous to China, and wheat, which had spread to East Asia from the Middle East. Rice requires a warmer climate and prospered in the south. The cultivation of rice in the Yangzi River Valley and the south required a great outlay of labor. Rice paddies—the fields where rice is grown—must be absolutely flat and surrounded by water channels to bring and lead away water according to a precise schedule. Seedlings are sprouted in a nursery and are transplanted one by one to the paddy, which is then flooded. Flooding eliminates weeds and rival plants and supports microscopic organisms that keep the soil fertile. When the crop is ripe, the paddy is drained; the rice stalks are harvested with a sickle; and the edible kernels are separated out. The reward for this effort is a spectacular yield. Rice can feed more people per cultivated acre than any other grain, which explains why the south eventually became more populous and important than the north.

The Shang Period, 1750–1027 B.C.E.

Archaeologists have identified several Neolithic cultural complexes in China, primarily on the basis of styles of pottery and forms of burial. These early populations grew millet, raised pigs and chickens, and used stone tools. They made pottery on a wheel and fired it in high-temperature kilns. They pioneered the production of silk cloth, first raising silkworms on mulberry trees, then carefully unraveling their cocoons to produce silk thread. The early Chinese built walls of pounded earth by hammering the soil inside temporary wooden frames until it became hard as cement. By 2000 B.C.E. they had begun to make bronze (roughly a thousand years after the beginnings of bronze-working in the Middle East).

Later generations of Chinese told stories about the ancient dynasty of the Xia, said to have ruled the core region of the Yellow River Valley. The validity of those stories is difficult to gauge, though some archaeologists identify the Xia with the Neolithic Longshan cultural complex in the centuries before and after 2000 B.C.E. Chinese history proper begins with the rise to power of the Shang clans, which coincides with the earliest written records anywhere in China.

The Shang originated in the part of the Yellow River Valley that lies in the present-day province of Henan.

After 1750 B.C.E. they extended their control north into Mongolia, west as far as Gansu, and south to the Yangzi River Valley. Shang society was dominated by a warrior aristocracy whose greatest pleasures were warfare, hunting (for recreation and to fine-tune skills required for war), exchanging gifts, feasting, and wine-filled revelry.

The king and his court ruled the core area of the Shang state directly. Aristocrats served as generals, ambassadors, and supervisors of public projects. Other members of the royal family and high-ranking nobility governed outlying provinces. The most distant regions were governed by native rulers who swore allegiance to the Shang king. The king was often on the road, traveling to the courts of his subordinates to reinforce their loyalty.

Bronze Vessel from the Shang Period. 12th–11th Century B.C.E.

Vessels such as this large wine jar were used in rituals that allowed members of the Shang ruling class to make contact with their ancestors. Signifying both the source and the proof of the elite’s authority, these vessels were often buried in Shang tombs. The complex shapes and elaborate decorations testify to the artisans’ skill. (Image Archive)

Shang (shahng)  Henan (heh-nahn)

Gansu (gahn-soo)
Frequent military campaigns provided the warrior aristocracy with a theater for brave achievements and yielded considerable plunder. The nomadic peoples who occupied the steppe and desert regions to the north and west were periodically rolled back and given a demonstration of Shang power. (Chinese sources refer to these peoples as "barbarians." Modern readers should be wary of the Chinese claim that these nomads were culturally backward and morally inferior to the Chinese.) Large numbers of prisoners of war were taken in these campaigns and used as slaves in the Shang capital.

Various cities served as the capital of the Shang kingdom. The last and most important was near modern Anyang (see Map 2.1). Shang cities were centers of political control and religion. Surrounded by massive walls of pounded earth, they contained palaces, administrative buildings and storehouses, royal tombs, shrines of gods and ancestors, and houses of the nobility. The common people lived in agricultural villages outside these centers. Because stone was in short supply, buildings were set on foundation platforms of pounded earth and constructed with wooden posts and dried mud. These cities, which were laid out on a grid plan aligned with the north polar star and had gates opening to the cardinal directions, are an early manifestation of the Chinese concern with the orientation of buildings known as feng shui, and they symbolized the order imposed by gods and monarchs.

A key to effective administration was the form of writing developed in this era. Pictograms (pictures representing objects and concepts) and phonetic symbols representing the sounds of syllables were combined to form a complex system of hundreds of signs. Only a small, educated elite had the time to master this system. Despite substantial changes through the ages, the fundamental principles of the Chinese system still endure today. As a result, people speaking essentially different languages, such as Mandarin and Cantonese, can read and understand the same text. In contrast, the cuneiform of Mesopotamia and the hieroglyphics of Egypt were eventually replaced by simpler alphabetic scripts.

The Shang ideology of kingship glorified the king as the indispensable intermediary between the people and the gods. The Shang royal family and aristocracy worshiped the spirits of their male ancestors. They believed that these ancestors were intensely interested in the fortunes of their descendants and had special influence with the gods. Before taking any action, the Shang rulers used divination to determine the will of the gods (see Environment and Technology: Divination in Ancient Societies). They made ritual sacrifices to their gods and ancestors in order to win divine favor. Burials of kings also entailed sacrifices, not only of animals but also of humans, including noble officials of the court, women, servants, soldiers, and prisoners of war.

Possession of bronze objects was a sign of authority and nobility. Bronze weapons allowed the state to assert its authority, and bronze vessels were used in rituals seeking the support of ancestors and gods. The quantity of bronze objects found in Shang tombs is impressive. The relatively modest tomb of one queen contained 450 bronze articles (ritual vessels, bells, weapons, and mirrors)—remarkable because copper and tin, the principal ingredients of bronze, were not plentiful in northern China. (Also found in the same tomb were numerous objects in jade, bone, ivory, and stone; seven thousand cowrie shells; sixteen sacrificed men, women, and children; and six dogs!) The Shang elite expended huge effort to find and mine deposits of copper and tin, refine them into pure metal, transport the ingots to the capital, and commission the creation of weapons and beautifully decorated objects.

Artisans worked in foundries outside the main cities. They poured the molten bronze into clay molds and joined together the hardened pieces as necessary. Shang artisans made weapons, chariot fittings, musical instruments, and the ritual vessels used in religious ceremonies. Many of these elegant vessels were vividly decorated with stylized depictions of real and imaginary animals.

Far-reaching networks of trade sprang up across China, bringing the Shang valued commodities such as jade, ivory, and mother of pearl (a hard, shiny substance from the interior of mollusk shells) used for jewelry, carved figurines, and decorative inlays. Some evidence suggests that Shang China may have exchanged goods and ideas with distant Mesopotamia. The horse-drawn chariot, which the Shang may have adopted from western Asia, was a formidable instrument of war.

The Zhou Period, 1027–221 B.C.E.

Shang domination of central and northern China lasted more than six centuries. In the eleventh century B.C.E. the last Shang king was defeated by Wu, the ruler of Zhou, a dependent state in the Wei River Valley. The Zhou line of

Anyang (ah-nyung) feng shui (fung shway) Zhou (joe) Wei (way)
Divination in Ancient Societies

The ancient inhabitants of China, the Middle East, Europe, and the Americas, as well as many other peoples throughout history, believed that the gods controlled the forces of nature and shaped destinies. Starting from this premise, they practiced various techniques of divination—the effort to interpret phenomena in the natural world as signs of the gods' will and intentions. Through divination the ancients sought to communicate with the gods and thereby anticipate—even influence—the future.

The Shang ruling class in China frequently sought information from shamans, individuals who claimed the ability to make direct contact with ancestors and other higher powers. The Shang monarch himself often functioned as a shaman. Chief among the tools of divination used by a shaman were oracle bones. The shaman touched a tortoiseshell or the shoulder bone of an animal (sometimes holes had been drilled in it ahead of time) with the heated point of a stick. The shell or bone would crack, and the cracks were "read" as a message from the spirit world.

Tens of thousands of oracle bones survive. They are a major source of information about Shang life; usually the question, the resulting answer, and often confirmation of the accuracy of the prediction were inscribed on the back of the shell or bone. The rulers asked about the proper performance of ritual, the likely outcome of wars or hunting expeditions, the prospects for rainfall and the harvest, and the meaning of strange occurrences.

**Chinese Divination Shell.** After inscribing questions on a bone or shell, the diviner applied a red-hot point and interpreted the resulting cracks as a divine response. (Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica)

In Mesopotamia in the third and second millennia B.C.E., the most important divination involved the close inspection of the form, size, and markings of the organs of sacrificed animals. Archaeologists have found models of sheep's livers accompanied by written explanations of the meaning of various features. Two other techniques of divination were following the trail of smoke from burning incense and examining the patterns that resulted when oil was thrown on water.

From about 2000 B.C.E. Mesopotamian diviners foretold the future from their observation of the movements of the sun, moon, planets, stars, and constellations. In the centuries after 1000 B.C.E. celestial omens were the most important source of predictions about the future, and specialists maintained precise records of astronomical events. Mesopotamian mathematics, essential for calculations of the movements of celestial bodies, was the most sophisticated in the ancient Middle East. Astrology, with its division of the sky into the twelve segments of the zodiac and its use of the position of the stars and planets to predict an individual's destiny, developed out of long-standing Mesopotamian attention to the movements of celestial objects. Horoscopes—charts with calculations and predictions based on an individual's date of birth—have been found from shortly before 400 B.C.E.

In the Hellenistic period (323–30 B.C.E.), Greek settlers flooding into western Asia built on this Mesopotamian foundation and greatly advanced the study of astrology.

Little is known for certain about the divinatory practices of early American peoples. The Olmec produced polished stone mirrors whose concave surfaces gave off reflected images that were thought to emanate from a supernatural realm. Painted basins found in Olmec households have been
compared to those attested for later Mesopotamian groups. In the latter, women threw maize kernels onto the surface of water-filled basins and noted the patterns by which they floated or sank, in order to ascertain information useful to the family, such as the cause and cure of illness, the right time for agricultural tasks or marriage, and propitious names for newborn children.

It may seem surprising that divination is being treated here as a form of technology. Most modern people would regard such interpretations of patterns in everyday phenomena as mere superstition. However, within the context of the laws of nature as understood by ancient societies (the gods control and direct events in the natural world), divination involved the application of principles of causation to the socially beneficial task of acquiring information about what would happen in the future. These techniques were usually known only to a class of experts whose special training and knowledge gave them high status in their society.

Kings (ca. 1027–221 B.C.E.) was the longest lasting and most revered of all dynasties in Chinese history. Just as the Semitic peoples in Mesopotamia had adapted and adapted the Sumerian legacy (see Chapter 1), the Zhou preserved the essentials of Shang culture and added new elements of ideology and technology.

The positive image of Zhou rule was skillfully constructed by propagandists for the new regime. The early Zhou monarchs had to justify their seizure of power to the restive remnants of the Shang clans. The chief deity was now referred to as “Heaven”; the monarch was called the “Son of Heaven”; and his rule was called the “Mandate of Heaven.” According to the new theory, the ruler had been chosen by the supreme deity and would retain his backing as long as he served as a wise, principled, and energetic guardian of his people. The proof of divine favor was the prosperity and the stability of the kingdom. If the ruler misbehaved, as the last Shang ruler had done, his right to rule could be withdrawn. Corruption, violence, arrogance, and insurrection, such as had occurred under the last Shang king, were signs of divine displeasure and validated the ruler’s replacement by a new dynasty that was committed to just rule.

The Zhou kings continued some of the Shang rituals, but there was a marked decline in the practice of divination and extravagant bloody sacrifices and burials. The priestly power of the ruling class, the only ones who had been able to make contact with the spirits of ancestors during the Shang period, faded away. The resulting separation of religion and government promoted the development of important philosophical and mystical systems in the Zhou period. The bronze vessels that had been sacred implements in the Shang period now became family treasures.

The early period of Zhou rule, the eleventh through ninth centuries B.C.E., is sometimes called the Western Zhou era because of the location of the capitals in the western part of the kingdom. These centuries saw the development of a sophisticated administrative apparatus. The Zhou built a series of capital cities with pounded-earth foundations and walls. The major buildings all faced south, in keeping with an already ancient concern to orient structures so that they would be in a harmonious relationship with the terrain, the forces of wind, water, and sunlight, and the invisible energy perceived to be flowing through the natural world. All government officials, including the king, were supposed to be models of morality, fairness, and concern for the welfare of the people.

Like the Shang, the Zhou regime was highly decentralized. Members and allies of the royal family ruled more than a hundred largely autonomous territories. The court was the scene of elaborate ceremonial, embellished by music and dance, that impressed on observers the glory of Zhou rule and reinforced the bonds of obligation between rulers and ruled.

Around 800 B.C.E. Zhou power began to wane. Ambitious local rulers operated ever more independently and waged war on one another, while nomadic peoples attacked the northwest frontiers (see Map 2.1). The following five hundred years are sometimes referred to as the Eastern Zhou era. In 771 B.C.E., members of the Zhou lineage relocated to a new, more secure, eastern capital near Luoyang, where they continued to hold the royal title and received at least nominal homage from the real power brokers of the age. This was a time of political fragmentation, rapidly shifting centers of power, and fierce competition and warfare among numerous small and independent states. Historians conventionally divide Eastern Zhou into the “Spring and Autumn Period,” from 771 to 481 B.C.E., after a collection of chronicles that give annual entries for those two seasons, and the “Warring States Period,” from 480 to the unification of China in 221 B.C.E.

The many states of the Eastern Zhou era contended with one another for leadership. Cities, some of them quite large, spread across the Chinese landscape. Long walls of pounded earth, the ancestors of the Great Wall of

Luoyang (LUH-ohe-yoong)
Warring States Period Bronze Figurine. The figurine of a youth, made of bronze, was produced in the Warring States Period, but the jade birds perched atop the staffs were originally carved in the Shang era. The youth has braided hair and is wearing boots and an elaborately decorated robe. The chain may indicate that these were live birds rather than images. (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Maria Antoinette Evans Fund, Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston 31.970)

China, protected the kingdoms from each other and from northern nomads. The Chinese also learned from the steppe nomads to put fighters on horseback. By 600 B.C.E. iron began to replace bronze as the primary metal for tools and weapons. There is mounting evidence that ironworking came to China from the nomadic peoples of the northwest. Subsequently, metalworkers in southern China, which had limited access to copper and tin for making bronze, were the first in the world to forge steel by removing carbon during the iron-smelting process.

In many of the states, bureaucrats expanded in number and function. Codes of law were written down. Governments collected taxes from the peasants directly, imposed standardized money, and managed large-scale public works projects. The wealth and power of the state and its demands for obedience were justified by an authoritarian political philosophy that came to be called Legalism. Legalist thinkers maintained that human nature is essentially wicked and that people behave in an orderly fashion only if compelled by strict laws and harsh punishments. Legalists believed that every aspect of human society ought to be controlled and personal freedom sacrificed for the good of the state.

Confucianism, Daoism, and Chinese Society

The governments of the major Zhou states took over many of the traditional functions of the aristocracy. To maintain their influence, aristocrats sought a new role as advisers to the rulers. One who lived through the political flux and social change of this anxious time was Kongzi (551–479 B.C.E.)—known in the West by the Latin form of his name, Confucius. Coming from one of the smaller states, he had not been particularly successful in obtaining administrative posts. His doctrine of duty and public service, initially aimed at fellow aristocrats, was to become a central influence in Chinese thought (see Diversity and Dominance: Human Nature and Good Government in the Analects of Confucius and the Legalist Writings of Han Fei). Many elements in Confucius’s teaching had roots in earlier Chinese belief, including folk religion and the rites of the Zhou royal family, such as the veneration of ancestors and elders and worship of the deity Heaven. Confucius drew a parallel between the family and the state. Just as the family is a hierarchy, with the father at its top, sons next, then wives and daughters in order of age, so too the state is a hierarchy, with the ruler at the top, the public officials as the sons, and the common people as the women.

Confucius took a traditional term for the feelings between family members (ren) and expanded it into a universal ideal of benevolence toward all humanity, which he believed was the foundation of moral government. Government exists, he said, to serve the people, and the administrator or ruler gains respect and authority by displaying fairness and integrity. Confucian teachings emphasized benevolence, avoidance of violence, justice, rationalism, loyalty, and dignity. Confucius, who held a far more optimistic view of the basic goodness of human nature than the adherents of Legalism, sought to affirm and maintain the political and social order by improving it.

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It is ironic that Confucius, whose ideas were to become so important in Chinese thought, actually had little influence in his own time. His later follower Mencius (Mengzi, 371–289 B.C.E.), who opposed despotism and
Human Nature and Good Government
in the Analects of Confucius and the Legalist Writings of Han Fei

While autocracy (the rule of one man) was the standard form of government in ancient China and was rarely challenged, political theorists and philosophers thought a great deal about the qualities of the ideal ruler, his relationship to his subjects, and the means by which he controlled them. These considerations about how to govern people were inevitably molded by fundamental assumptions about the nature of human beings. In the Warring States Period, as the major kingdoms struggled desperately with one another for survival and expansion, such discussions took on a special urgency, and the Confucians and Legalists came to represent two powerful, and largely contradictory, points of view.

The Analects are a collection of sayings of Confucius, probably compiled and written down several generations after he lived, though some elements may have been added even later. They cover a wide range of matters, including ethics, government, education, music, and rituals. Taken as a whole, they are a guide to living a proper, honorable, virtuous, useful, and satisfying life. While subject to reinterpretation according to the circumstances of the times, Confucian principles have had a great influence on Chinese values and behavior ever since.

Han Fei (280-233 B.C.E.), who was, ironically, at one time the student of a Confucian teacher, became a Legalist writer and political adviser to the ruler of the ambitious state of Qin. Eventually he lost out in a power struggle at court and was forced to kill himself.

The following selections illuminate the profound disagreements between Confucians and Legalists over the essential nature of human beings and how the ruler should conduct himself in order to most effectively govern his subjects and protect his kingdom.

Confucius

1:6 Confucius said: "A young man should serve his parents at home and be respectful to elders outside his home. He should be earnest and truthful, loving all, but become intimate with ren [an inner capacity, possessed by all human beings, to do good]. After doing this, if he has energy to spare, he can study literature and the arts."

4:18 Confucius said: "When you serve your mother and father it is okay to try to correct them once in a while. But if you see that they are not going to listen to you, keep your respect for them and don't distance yourself from them. Work without complaining."

2:5 Meng Yi Zì asked about the meaning of filial piety. Confucius said, "It means not diverging [from your parents]." Later, when Fan Chi was driving him, Confucius told Fan Chi, "Meng asked me about the meaning of filial piety, and I told him not diverging." Fan Chi said, "What did you mean by that?" Confucius said, "When your parents are alive, serve them with propriety; when they die, bury them with propriety; and then worship them with propriety."

1:2 Master You said: "There are few who have developed themselves filially and fraternal who enjoy offending their superiors. Those who do not enjoy offending superiors are never troublemakers. The Superior Man concerns himself with the fundamentals. Once the fundamentals are established, the proper way (dao) appears. Are not filial piety and obedience to elders fundamental to the enactment of ren?"

1:8 Confucius said: "If the Superior Man is not heavy, then he will not inspire awe in others. If he is not learned, then he will not be on firm ground. He takes loyalty and good faith to be of primary importance, and has no friends who are not of equal (moral) caliber. When he makes a mistake, he doesn't hesitate to correct it."

4:5 Confucius said, "Riches and honors are what all men desire. But if they cannot be attained in accordance with the dao they should not be kept. Poverty and low status are what all men hate. But if they cannot be avoided while staying in accordance with the dao, you should not avoid them. If a Superior Man departs from ren, how can he be worthy of that name? A Superior Man never leaves ren for even the time of a single meal. In moments of haste he acts according to it. In times of difficulty or confusion he acts according to it."

15:20 Confucius said: "The Superior Man seeks within himself. The inferior man seeks within others."

16:8 Confucius said: "The Superior Man stands in awe of three things:
(1) He is in awe of the decree of Heaven.
(2) He is in awe of great men.
(3) He is in awe of the words of the sages."
The inferior man does not know the decree of Heaven; takes great men lightly and laughs at the words of the sages.

4:14 Confucius said: "I don’t worry about not having a good position; I worry about the means I use to gain position. I don’t worry about being unknown; I seek to be known in the right way."

7:15 Confucius said: "I can live with coarse rice to eat, water for drink and my arm as a pillow and still be happy. Wealth and honors that one possesses in the midst of injustice are like floating clouds."

4:17 Confucius said: "When you see a good person, think of becoming like her/him. When you see someone not so good, reflect on your own weak points."

13:6 Confucius said: "When you have gotten your own life straightened out, things will go well without your giving orders. But if your own life isn’t straightened out, even if you give orders, no one will follow them."

12:2 Zhonggong asked about the meaning of ren. The Master said: "Go out of your home as if you were receiving an important guest. Employ the people as if you were assisting at a great ceremony. What you don’t want done to yourself, don’t do to others. Live in your town without stirring up resentments, and live in your household without stirring up resentments."

1:5 Confucius said: "If you would govern a state of a thousand chariots (a small-to-middle-size state), you must pay strict attention to business, be true to your word, be economical in expenditure and love the people. You should use them according to the seasons."

2:3 Confucius said: "If you govern the people legally and control them by punishment, they will avoid crime, but have no personal sense of shame. If you govern them by means of virtue and control them with propriety, they will gain their own sense of shame, and thus correct themselves."

12:7 Zigong asked about government.

The Master said, "Enough food, enough weapons and the confidence of the people."

Zigong said, "Suppose you had no alternative but to give up one of these three, which one would be let go of first?"

The Master said, "Weapons."

Zigong said, "What if you had to give up one of the remaining two which one would it be?"

The Master said, "Food. From ancient times, death has come to all men, but a people without confidence in its rulers will not stand."

12:19 Ji Kang Zi asked Confucius about government saying: "Suppose I were to kill the unjust, in order to advance the just. Would that be all right?"

Confucius replied: "In doing government, what is the need of killing? If you desire good, the people will be good. The nature of the Superior Man is like the wind, the nature of the inferior man is like the grass. When the wind blows over the grass, it always bends."

2:19 The Duke of Ai asked: "How can I make the people follow me?" Confucius replied: "Advance the upright and set aside the crooked; and the people will follow you. Advance the crooked and set aside the upright, and the people will not follow you."

2:20 Ji Kang Zi asked: "How can I make the people reverent and loyal, so they will work positively for me?" Confucius said, "Approach them with dignity, and they will be reverent. Be filial and compassionate and they will be loyal. Promote the able and teach the incompetent, and they will work positively for you."

Han Fei

Past and present have different customs; new and old adopt different measures. To try to use the ways of a generous and lenient government to rule the people of a critical age is like trying to drive a runaway horse without using reins or whips. This is the misfortune that ignorance invites. . . .

Humaneo [ren] may make one shed tears and be reluctant to apply penalties, but law makes it clear that such penalties must be applied. The ancient kings allowed law to be supreme and did not give in to their fearful longings. Hence it is obvious that humanity cannot be used to achieve order in the state. . . .

The best rewards are those that are generous and predictable, so that the people may profit by them. The best penalties are those that are severe and inescapable, so that the people will fear them. The best laws are those that are uniform and inflexible, so that the people can understand them. . . .

Hardly ten men of true integrity and good faith can be found today, and yet the offices of the state number in the hundreds. . . . Therefore the way of the enlightened ruler is to unify the laws instead of seeking for wise men, to lay down firm policies instead of longing for men of good faith. . . .

When a sage rules the state, he does not depend on people’s doing good of themselves; he sees to it that they are not allowed to do what is bad. If he depends on people’s doing good of themselves, then within his borders he can count fewer than ten instances of success. But if he sees to it that they are not allowed to do what is bad, then the whole state can be brought to a uniform level of order. Those who rule must employ measures that will be effective with the majority and discard those that will be effective with only a few. Therefore they devote themselves not to virtue but to law. . . .

When the Confucians of the present time counsel rulers, they do not praise those measures that will bring order today, but talk only of the achievements of the men who brought order in the past. . . . No ruler with proper standards will tolerate them. Therefore the enlightened ruler works with facts and discards useless theories. He does not talk about deeds of
humaneness and righteousness, and he does not listen to the words of scholars. . . .

Nowadays, those who do not understand how to govern invariably say, "You must win the hearts of the people!" . . . The reason you cannot rely on the wisdom of the people is that they have the minds of little children. If the child’s head is not shaved, its sores will spread; and if its nose is not lanced, it will become sicker than ever . . . for it does not understand that the little pain it suffers now will bring great benefit later. . . .

Now, the ruler presses the people to till the land and open up new pastures so as to increase their means of livelihood, and yet they consider him harsh; he draws up a penal code and makes the punishments more severe in order to put a stop to evil, and yet the people consider him stern. . . . He makes certain that everyone within his borders understands warfare and sees to it that there are no private exemptions from military service; he unites the strength of the state and fights fiercely in order to take its enemies captive, and yet the people consider him violent. . . . [These] types of undertaking all ensure order and safety to the state, and yet the people do not have sense enough to rejoice in them.

argued against the authoritarian political ideology of the Legalists, made Confucius’s teachings much better known. In the era of the early emperors, Confucianism became the dominant political philosophy and the core of the educational system for government officials (see Chapter 5).

The Warring States Period also saw the rise of the school of thought known as Daoism. According to tradition, Laozi, the originator of Daoism (believed to have lived in the sixth century B.C.E., though some scholars doubt his existence), sought to stop the warfare of the age by urging humanity to follow the Dao, or “path.” Daoists accept the world as they find it, avoiding useless struggles and adhering to the “path” of nature. They avoid violence if at all possible and take the minimal action necessary for a task. Rather than fight the current of a stream, a wise man allows the onrushing waters to pass around him. This passivity arises from the Daoist’s sense that the world is always changing and lacks any absolute morality or meaning. In the end, Daoists believe, all that matters is the individual’s fundamental understanding of the “path.”

The original Daoist philosophy was greatly expanded in subsequent centuries to incorporate popular beliefs, magic, and mysticism. Daoism represented an important stream of thought throughout Chinese history. By idealizing individuals who find their own “path” to right conduct, it offered an alternative to the Confucian emphasis on hierarchy and duty and to the Legalist approval of force.

Questions for Analysis

1. What do Confucius and Han Fei believe about the nature of human beings? Are people intrinsically good and well-behaved, or bad and prone to misbehave?

2. What are the qualifications of an ideal ruler for Confucius and Han Fei?

3. By what means can the ruler influence his subjects in Confucian thought? How should the ruler compel obedience in Legalist thought?

4. What do Confucians and Legalists think about the value of the past as a model for the present?

5. Why might Confucius’s passionate concern for ethical behavior on the part of officials and rulers arise at a time when the size and power of governments were growing?


Social organization also changed in this period. The kinship structures of the Shang and early Zhou periods, based on the clan (a relatively large group of related families), gave way to the three-generation family of grandparents, parents, and children as the fundamental social unit. A related development was the emergence of the concept of private property. Land was considered to belong to the men of the family and was divided equally among the sons when the father died.

Little is known about the conditions of life for women in early China. Some scholars believe that women may have acted as shamans, entering into trances to communicate with supernatural forces, making requests on behalf of their communities, and receiving predictions of the future. By the time written records begin to illuminate our knowledge of women’s experiences, they show women in a subordinate position in the strongly patriarchal family.

Confucian thought codified this male-female hierarchy. Only men could conduct rituals and make offerings to the ancestors, though women could help maintain the household’s ancestral shrines. Fathers held authority over the women and children, arranged marriages for their offspring, and could sell the labor of family members. A man was limited to one wife but was permitted additional sexual partners, who had the lower status of concubines. The elite classes used marriage to create political alliances, and it was common for the groom’s family to offer a substantial “bride-gift,” a proof of the wealth and standing of his family, to the family of the prospective bride. A man
whose wife died had a duty to remarry in order to produce male heirs to keep alive the cult of the ancestors.

These differences in male and female activities were explained by the concept of yin and yang, the complementary nature of male and female roles in the natural order. The male principle (yang) was equated with the sun, active, bright, and shining; the female principle (yin) corresponded to the moon, passive, shaded, and reflective. Male toughness was balanced by female gentleness, male action and initiative by female endurance and need for completion, and male leadership by female supportiveness. In its earliest form, the theory considered yin and yang as equal and alternately dominant, like day and night, creating balance in the world. However, as a result of the changing role of women in the Zhou period and the pervasive influence of Confucian ideology, the male principle came to be seen as superior to the female.

The classical Chinese patterns of family, property, and bureaucracy took shape during the long centuries of Zhou rule and the competition among small states. At the end of this period the state of Qin’s, whose aggressive and disciplined policies made it the premier power among the warring states, defeated all rivals and unified China (see Chapter 6).

**NUBIA, 3100 B.C.E.–350 C.E.**

Since the first century B.C.E. the name Nubia has been applied to a thousand-mile (1,600-kilometer) stretch of the Nile Valley lying between Aswan and Khartoum and straddling the southern part of the modern nation of Egypt and the northern part of Sudan (see Map 2.2). The ancient Egyptians called it Ta-sety, meaning “Land of the Bow,” after the favorite weapon of its warriors. Nubia is the only continuously inhabited stretch of territory connecting sub-Saharan Africa (the lands south of the vast Sahara Desert) with North Africa. For thousands of years it has served as a corridor for trade between tropical Africa and the Mediterranean. Nubia was richly endowed with natural resources such as gold, copper, and semiprecious stones.

Nubia’s location and natural wealth, along with Egypt’s quest for Nubian gold, explain the early rise of a civilization with a complex political organization, social stratification, metallurgy, monumental building, and writing. Nubia traditionally was considered a periphery, or outlying region, of Egypt, and its culture was regarded as derivative. Now, however, most scholars emphasize the interactions between Egypt and Nubia and the mutually beneficial borrowings and syntheses that took place, and there is growing evidence

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Qin (chin)  Khartoum (kahr-TOOM)

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Map 2.2 Ancient Nubia  The land route alongside the Nile River as it flows through Nubia has long served as a corridor connecting sub-Saharan Africa with North Africa. The centuries of Egyptian occupation, as well as time spent in Egypt by Nubian hostages, mercenaries, and merchants, led to a marked Egyptian cultural influence in Nubia. (Based on Map 15 from *The Historical Atlas of Africa*, ed. by J. F. Alji and Michael Crowder. Reprinted by permission of Addison Wesley Longman Ltd.)
In the fourth millennium B.C.E., bands of people in northern Nubia made the transition from seminomadic hunting and gathering to a settled life based on grain agriculture and cattle herding. From this time on, the majority of the population lived in agricultural villages alongside the river. Even before 3000 B.C.E., Nubia served as a corridor for long-distance commerce. Egyptian craftsmen of the period were working in ivory and in ebony wood—products of tropical Africa that had to have come through Nubia.

Nubia enters the historical record around 2300 B.C.E. in Old Kingdom Egyptian accounts of trade missions to southern lands. At that time Aswan, just north of the First Cataract, was the southern limit of Egyptian control. As we saw with the journey of Harkhuf at the beginning of this chapter, Egyptian noblemen stationed there led donkey caravans south in search of gold, incense, ebony, ivory, slaves, and exotic animals from tropical Africa. This was dangerous work, requiring delicate negotiations with local Nubian chiefs in order to secure protection, but it brought substantial rewards to those who succeeded.

During the Middle Kingdom (ca. 2040–1640 B.C.E.), Egypt adopted a more aggressive stance toward Nubia. Egyptian rulers sought to control the gold mines in the desert east of the Nile and to cut out the Nubian middlemen who drove up the cost of luxury goods from the tropics. The Egyptians erected a string of mud-brick forts on islands and riverbanks south of the Second Cataract. The forts protected the southern frontier of Egypt against Nubians and nomadic raiders from the desert, as well as regulated the flow of commerce. There seem to have been peaceful relations but little interaction between the Egyptian garrisons and the indigenous population of northern Nubia, which continued to practice its age-old farming and herding ways.

Farther south, where the Nile makes a great U-shaped turn in the fertile plain of the Dongola Reach (see Map 2.2), a more complex political entity was evolving from the chieftaincies of the third millennium B.C.E. The Egyptians gave the name Kush to the kingdom whose capital was located at Kerma, one of the earliest urbanized centers in tropical Africa. Beginning around 1750 B.C.E., the kings of Kush marshaled a labor force to build monumental walls and structures of mud brick. The dozens or even hundreds of servants and wives sacrificed for burial with the kings, as well as the rich objects found in their tombs, testify to the wealth and power of the rulers of Kush and suggest a belief in some sort of afterlife in which attendants...
and possessions would be useful. Kushite craftsmen were skilled in metalworking, whether for weapons or jewelry, and their pottery surpassed anything produced in Egypt.

During the expansionist New Kingdom (ca. 1532–1070 B.C.E.), the Egyptians penetrated more deeply into Nubia (see Chapter 3). They destroyed Kush and its capital and extended their frontier to the Fourth Cataract. A high-ranking Egyptian official called "Overseer of Southern Lands" or "King's Son of Kush" ruled Nubia from a new administrative center at Napata, near Gebel Barkal, the "Holy Mountain," believed to be the home of a local god. In an era of intense commerce among the states of the Middle East, when everyone was looking to Egypt as the prime source of gold, Egypt exploited the mines of Nubia at considerable human cost. Fatalities were high among native workers in the brutal desert climate, and the army had to ward off attacks from desert nomads.

Five hundred years of Egyptian domination in Nubia left many marks. The Egyptian government imposed Egyptian culture on the native population. Children from elite families were brought to the Egyptian royal court to guarantee the good behavior of their relatives in Nubia; they absorbed Egyptian language, culture, and religion, which they later carried home with them. Other Nubians served as archers in the Egyptian armed forces. The manufactured goods that they brought back to Nubia have been found in their graves. The Nubians built towns on the Egyptian model and erected stone temples to Egyptian gods, particularly Amon. The frequent depiction of Amon with the head of a ram may reflect a blending of the chief Egyptian god with a Nubian ram deity.

The Kingdom of Meroë. 800 B.C.E.–350 C.E.

Egypt's weakness after 1200 B.C.E. led to the collapse of its authority in Nubia. In the eighth century B.C.E., a powerful new native kingdom emerged in southern Nubia. The story of this civilization, which lasted for over a thousand years, can be divided into two parts. During the early period, between the eighth and fourth centuries B.C.E., Napata, the former Egyptian headquarters, was the primary center. During the later period, from the fourth century B.C.E. to the fourth century C.E., the center was farther south, at Meroë, near the Sixth Cataract.

Napata (nah-PAH-tuh) Gebel Barkal (JEH-buhl BAHR-kahl)
Meroë (MER-oh-ee)

For half a century, from around 712 to 660 B.C.E., the kings of Nubia ruled all of Egypt as the Twenty-fifth Dynasty. They conducted themselves in the age-old manner of Egyptian rulers. They were addressed by royal titles, depicted in traditional costume, and buried according to Egyptian custom. However, they kept their Nubian names and were depicted with physical features suggesting peoples of sub-Saharan Africa. They inaugurated an artistic and cultural renaissance, building on a monumental scale for the first time in centuries and reinvigorating Egyptian art, architecture, and religion. The Nubian kings resided at Memphis, the Old Kingdom capital, while Thebes, the New Kingdom capital, was the residence of a celibate female member of the king's family who was titled "God's Wife of Amon."

The Nubian dynasty made a disastrous mistake in 701 B.C.E. when it offered help to local rulers in Palestine who were struggling against the Assyrian Empire. The Assyrians retaliated by invading Egypt and driving the Nubian monarchs back to their southern domain by 660 B.C.E. Napata again became the chief royal residence and religious center of the kingdom. Egyptian cultural influences remained strong. Court documents continued to be written in Egyptian hieroglyphs, and the mummmified remains of the rulers were buried in modestly sized sandstone pyramids along with hundreds of shawabti figurines.

By the fourth century B.C.E. the center of gravity had shifted south to Meroë, perhaps because Meroë was better situated for agriculture and trade, the economic mainstays of the Nubian kingdom. As a result, sub-Saharan cultural patterns gradually replaced Egyptian ones. Egyptian hieroglyphs gave way to a new set of symbols, still essentially undeciphered, for writing the Meroitic language. People continued to worship Amon as well as Isis, an Egyptian goddess connected to fertility and sexuality. But those deities had to share the stage with Nubian deities like the lion-god Apedemak, and elephants had some religious significance. Meroitic art combined Egyptian, Greco-Roman, and indigenous traditions.

Women of the royal family played an important role in Meroitic politics, another reflection of the influence of sub-Saharan Africa. The Nubians employed a matrilineal system in which the king was succeeded by the son of his sister. Nubian queens sometimes ruled by themselves and sometimes in partnership with their husbands.
Greek, Roman, and biblical sources refer to a queen of Nubia named Candace. Since these sources relate to different times, Candace was probably a title rather than a proper name. At least seven queens ruled between 284 B.C.E. and 115 B.C.E. They played a part in warfare, diplomacy, and the building of temples and pyramid tombs. They are depicted in scenes reserved for male rulers in Egyptian imagery, smiting enemies in battle and being suckled by the mother-goddess Isis. Roman sources marvel at the fierce resistance put up by a one-eyed warrior-queen.

Meroë was a huge city for its time, more than a square mile in area, overlooking fertile grasslands and dominating converging trade routes. Much of the city is still buried under the sand. In 2002 archaeologists using a magnetometer to detect buried structures discovered a large palace. Great reservoirs were dug to catch precious rainfall. The city was a major center for iron smelting (after 1000 B.C.E., iron had replaced bronze as the primary metal for tools and weapons). The Temple of Amun was approached by an avenue of stone rams, and the enclosed “Royal City” was filled with palaces, temples, and administrative buildings. The ruler, who may have been regarded as divine, was assisted by a professional class of officials, priests, and army officers.

Meroë collapsed in the early fourth century C.E. It may have been overrun by nomads from the western desert who had become more mobile because of the arrival of the camel in North Africa. Meroë had already been weakened when profitable commerce with the Roman Empire was diverted to the Red Sea and to the rising kingdom of Aksum (in present-day Ethiopia). In any case, the end of the Meroitic kingdom, and of this phase of civilization in Nubia, was as closely linked to Nubia’s role in long-distance commerce as had been its beginning.

**First Civilizations of the Americas: The Olmec and Chavín, 1200–250 B.C.E.**

Humans reached the Western Hemisphere through a series of migrations from Asia. Some scholars believe that the first migrations occurred as early as 35,000 to 25,000 B.C.E., but most accept a later date of 20,000 to 13,000 B.C.E. Although some limited contacts with other cultures—for example, with Polynesians—may have occurred later, the peoples in the Western Hemisphere were virtually isolated from the rest of the world for at least fifteen thousand years. The duration and comprehensiveness of their isolation distinguishes the Americas from the world’s other major cultural regions. While technological innovations passed back and forth among the civilizations of Asia, Africa, and Europe, the peoples of the Americas faced the challenges of the natural environment on their own.

Over thousands of years the population of the Americas grew and spread throughout the hemisphere, responding to environments that included frozen regions of the polar extremes, tropical rain forests, and high mountain ranges as well as deserts, woodlands, and prairies. Two of the hemisphere’s most impressive cultural traditions developed in Mesoamerica (Mexico and northern Central America) and in the mountainous Andean region of South America. Well before 1000 B.C.E., the domestication of new plant varieties, the introduction of new technologies, and a limited development of trade led to greater social stratification and the beginnings of urbanization in both regions. Cultural elites associated with these changes used their increased political and religious authority to organize great numbers of laborers to construct large-scale irrigation and drainage works, to clear forests, and to unleash the productive potential of floodplains and steeply pitched hillside.s. These transformed environments provided the economic platform for the construction of urban centers dominated by monumental structures devoted to religious purposes and to housing for members of the elite. By 1000 B.C.E. the major urban centers of Mesoamerica and the Andes had begun to project their political and cultural power over broad territories; they had become civilizations. The cultural legacies of the two most important of these early civilizations, the Olmec of Mesoamerica and the Chavin of the Andes, would persist for more than a thousand years.

**The Mesoamerican Olmec, 1200–400 B.C.E.**

Mesoamerica is a region of great geographic and climatic diversity. It is extremely active geologically, experiencing both earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. Mountain ranges break the region into microenvironments, including the temperate climates of the Valley of Mexico and the Guatemalan highlands, the tropical forests of the Peten and Gulf of Mexico.
The most influential early Mesoamerican civilization was the Olmec, flourishing between 1200 and 400 B.C.E. (see Map 2.3). The center of Olmec civilization was located near the tropical Atlantic coast of what are now the Mexican states of Veracruz and Tabasco. Olmec cultural influence reached as far as the Pacific coast of Central America and the Central Plateau of Mexico.

Olmec urban development was made possible by earlier advances in agriculture. Original settlements depended on the region's rich plant diversity and on fishing. Later, by 3500 B.C.E. or earlier, the staples of the Mesoamerican diet—corn, beans, and squash—were domesticated. Recent research indicates that manioc, a calorie-rich root
crop, was also grown in the floodplains of the region, multiplying food resources. The ability of farmers to produce dependable surpluses of these products permitted the first stages of craft specialization and social stratification. As religious and political elites emerged, they used their prestige and authority to organize the population to dig irrigation and drainage canals, develop raised fields in wetlands that could be farmed more intensively, and construct the large-scale religious and civic buildings that became the cultural signature of Olmec civilization.

The cultural core of the early Olmec civilization was located at San Lorenzo but included smaller centers nearby (1200–900 B.C.E.). La Venta, which developed at about the same time, became the most important Olmec center after 900 B.C.E. when San Lorenzo was abandoned or destroyed. Tres Zapotes was the last dominant center, rising to prominence after La Venta collapsed or was destroyed around 600 B.C.E. The relationship among these centers is unclear. Scholars have found little evidence to suggest that they were either rival city-states or dependent centers of a centralized political authority. It appears that each center developed independently to exploit and exchange specialized products like salt, cacao (chocolate beans), clay for ceramics, and limestone. Each major Olmec center was eventually abandoned, its monuments defaced and buried and its buildings destroyed. Archaeologists interpret these events differently; some see them as evidence of internal upheavals or military defeat by neighboring peoples, and others suggest that they were rituals associated with the death of a ruler.

Large artificial platforms and mounds of packed earth dominated Olmec urban centers and served to frame the collective ritual and political activities that brought the rural population to the cities at special times in the year. Some of the platforms also served as foundations for elite residences, in effect lifting the elite above the masses. The Olmec laid out their cities in alignment with the paths of certain stars, reflecting their strong belief in the significance of astronomical events. Since these centers had small permanent populations, the scale of construction suggests that the Olmec elite was able to require and direct the labor of thousands of men and women from surrounding settlements and dispersed family plots in the region. This labor pool was used primarily for low-skill tasks like moving dirt and stone construction materials. Skilled artisans who lived in or near the urban core decorated the buildings with carvings and sculptures. They also produced the high-quality crafts, such as exquisite carved jade figurines, necklaces, and ceremonial knives and axes, that distinguished Olmec culture. Archaeological evidence suggests the existence of a class of merchants who traded with distant peoples for obsidian, jade, and pottery.

Little is known about Olmec political structure, but it seems likely that the rise of major urban centers coincided with the appearance of a form of kingship that combined religious and secular roles. Finely crafted objects decorated the households of the elite and distinguished their dress from that of the commoners who lived in dispersed small structures constructed of sticks and mud. The authority of the rulers and their kin groups is suggested by a series of colossal carved stone heads, some as large as 11 feet (3.4 meters) high. Since each head is unique and suggestive of individual personality, most archaeologists believe they were carved to memorialize individual rulers. This theory is reinforced by the location of the heads close to the major urban centers,
especially San Lorenzo. These remarkable stone sculptures are the best-known monuments of Olmec culture.

The organization of collective labor by the Olmec elites benefited the commoners by increasing food production and making it more reliable. People also enjoyed a more diverse diet. Ceramic products such as utilitarian pots and small figurines as well as small stone carvings associated with religious belief have been found in commoner households. This suggests that at least some advantages gained from urbanization and growing elite power were shared broadly in the society.

The Olmec elite used elaborate religious rituals to control this complex society. Thousands of commoners were drawn from the countryside to attend awe-inspiring ceremonies at the centers. The elevated platforms and mounds with carved stone vases served as potent backdrops for these rituals. Rulers and their close kin came to be associated with the gods through bloodletting and human sacrifice, evidence of which is found in all the urban centers. The Olmec were polytheistic, and most of their deities had dual (male and female) natures. Human and animal characteristics were also blended. Surviving representations of jaguars, crocodiles, snakes, and sharks suggest that these powerful animals provided the most enduring images used in Olmec religious representation. The ability of humans to transform themselves into these animals is a common decorative motif. Rulers were especially associated with the jaguar.

An important class of shamans and healers attached to the elite organized religious life and provided practical advice about the periodic rains essential to agricultural life. They directed the planning of urban centers to reflect astronomical observations and were responsible for developing a form of writing that may have influenced later innovations among the Maya (see Chapter 11). From their close observation of the stars, they produced a calendar that was used to organize ritual life and agriculture. The Olmec were also the likely originators of a ritual ball game that became an enduring part of Mesoamerican ceremonial life.

There is little evidence for the existence of an Olmec empire. Given the limited technological and agricultural base of the society, it is unlikely that the power of the Olmec could have been projected over significant distances militarily. However, the discovery of Olmec products and images, such as jade carvings decorated with the jaguar-god, as far away as central Mexico provides evidence that the Olmec did exercise cultural influence over a wide area. This influence would endure for centuries.

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**Early South American Civilization: Chavin, 900–250 B.C.E.**

Geography played an important role in the development of human society in the Andes. The region's diverse environment—a mountainous core, arid coastal plain, and dense interior jungles—challenged human populations, encouraging the development of specialized regional production as well as complex social institutions and cultural values that facilitated interregional exchanges and shared labor responsibilities. These adaptations to environmental challenge became enduring features of Andean civilization.

The earliest urban centers in the Andean region were villages of a few hundred people built along the coastal plain or in the foothills near the coast. The abundance of fish and mollusks along the coast of Peru provided a dependable supply of food that helped make the development of early cities possible. The coastal populations traded these products as well as decorative shells for corn, other foods, and eventually textiles produced in the foothills. The two regions also exchanged ceremonial practices, religious motifs, and aesthetic ideas. Recent discoveries demonstrate that as early as 2600 B.C.E., the vast site called Caral in the Supe Valley had developed many of the characteristics now viewed as the hallmarks of later Andean civilization, including ceremonial plazas, pyramids, elevated platforms and mounds, and extensive irrigation works. The scale of the public works in Caral suggests a population of thousands and a political structure capable of organizing the production and distribution of maritime and agricultural products over a broad area.

Chavin, one of the most impressive of South America's early urban civilizations (see Map 2.3), inherited many of the cultural and economic characteristics of Caral. Its capital, Chavin de Huantar*, was located at 10,300 feet (3,139 meters) in the eastern range of the Andes north of the modern city of Lima. Between 900 and 250 B.C.E., a period roughly coinciding with Olmec civilization in Mesoamerica, Chavin dominated a densely populated region that included large areas of the Peruvian coastal plain and Andean foothills. Chavin de Huantar's location at the intersection of trade routes connecting the coast with populous mountain valleys and the tropical lowlands on the eastern flank of the Andes allowed the city's rulers to control trade among these distinct ecological zones and gain an important economic advantage over regional rivals.

Chavin de Huantar (cha-BEAN day WAHN-tar)
Chavin's dominance as a ceremonial and commercial center depended on earlier developments in agriculture and trade, including the introduction of maize cultivation from Mesoamerica. Maize increased the food supplies of the coast and interior foothills, allowing greater levels of urbanization. As Chavin grew, its trade linked the coastal economy with the producers of quinoa (a local grain), potatoes, and llamas in the high mountain valleys and, to a lesser extent, with Amazonian producers of coca (the leaves were chewed, producing a mild narcotic effect) and fruits.

These developments were accompanied by the evolution of reciprocal labor obligations that permitted the construction and maintenance of roads, bridges, temples, palaces, and large irrigation and drainage projects as well as textile production. The exact nature of these reciprocal labor obligations at Chavin is unknown. In later times they were organized by groups of related families who held land communally and claimed descent from a common ancestor. Group members thought of each other as brothers and sisters and were obligated to aid each other, providing a model for the organization of labor and the distribution of goods at every level of Andean society.

The increased use of llamas to move goods from one ecological zone to another specialized specialization of production and increased trade. Llamas were the only domesticated beasts of burden in the Americas and they played an important role in the integration of the Andean region. They were first domesticated in the mountainous interior of Peru and were crucial to Chavin's development, not unlike the camel in the evolution of trans-Saharan trade (see Chapter 7). Llamas provided meat and wool and decreased the labor needed to transport goods. A single driver could control ten to thirty animals, each carrying up to 70 pounds (32 kilograms); a human porter could carry only about 50 pounds (22.5 kilograms).

The enormous scale of the capital and the dispersal of Chavin's pottery styles, religious motifs, and architectural forms over a wide area suggest that Chavin imposed some form of political integration and trade dependency on its neighbors that may have relied in part on military force. Most modern scholars believe that, as in the case of the Olmec civilization, Chavin's influence depended more on the development of an attractive and convincing religious belief system and related rituals. Chavin's most potent religious symbol, a jaguar deity, was dispersed over a broad area, and archaeological evidence suggests that Chavin de Huantar served as a pilgrimage site.

The architectural signature of Chavin was a large complex of multilevel platforms made of packed earth or rubble and faced with cut stone or adobe (sun-dried brick made of clay and straw). Small buildings used for ritual purposes or as elite residences were built on these platforms. Nearly all the buildings were decorated with relief carvings of serpents, condors, jaguars, or human forms. The largest building at Chavin de Huantar measured 250 feet (76 meters) on each side and rose to a height of 50 feet (15 meters). About one-third of its interior is hollow, containing narrow galleries and small rooms that may have housed the remains of royal ancestors.

American metallurgy was first developed in the Andean region. The later introduction of metallurgy in Mesoamerica, like the appearance of maize agriculture in the Andes, suggests sustained trade and cultural contacts between the two regions. Archaeological investigations of Chavin de Huantar and smaller centers have revealed remarkable three-dimensional silver, gold, and gold alloy ornaments that represent a clear advance over earlier technologies. Improvements in both the manufacture and the decoration of textiles are also associated with the rise of Chavin. The quality of these products, probably used only by the elite or in religious rituals, added to the reputation and prestige of the culture and aided in the projection of its power and influence. The most common decorative motif in sculpture, pottery, and textiles was a jaguar-man similar in conception to the Olmec symbol. In both civilizations and in many other cultures in the Americas, this powerful predator provided an enduring image of religious authority and a vehicle through which the gods could act in the world of men and women.

Class distinctions appear to have increased during this period of expansion. A class of priests directed religious life. Modern scholars also see evidence that both local chiefs and a more powerful chief or king dominated Chavin's politics. Excavations of graves reveal that superior-quality textiles as well as gold crowns, breastplates, and jewelry distinguished rulers from commoners. These rich objects, the quality and abundance of pottery, and the monumental architecture of the major centers all suggest the presence of highly skilled artisans as well.

There is no convincing evidence, like defaced buildings or broken images, that the eclipse of Chavin (unlike the Olmec centers) was associated with conquest or rebellion. However, recent investigations have suggested that increased warfare throughout the region around 200 B.C.E. disrupted Chavin's trade and undermined the authority of the governing elite. Regardless of what caused the collapse of this powerful culture, the technologies, material culture, statecraft, architecture, and urban planning associated with Chavin influenced the Andean region for centuries.
Comparative Perspectives

The civilizations of early China, Nubia, and the Americas (the Olmec and Chavin) emerged in very different ecological contexts in widely separated parts of the globe, and the patterns of organization, technology, behavior, and belief that they developed were, in large part, responses to the challenges and opportunities of those environments.

In the North China Plain, as in the river-valley civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt, the presence of great, flood-prone rivers and the lack of dependable rainfall led to the formation of powerful institutions capable of organizing large numbers of people to dig and maintain irrigation channels and build dikes. An authoritarian central government has been a recurring feature of Chinese history from at least as early as the Shang monarchy.

In Nubia, the initial impetus for the formation of a strong state was the need for protection from desert nomads and from the Egyptian rulers who coveted Nubian gold and other resources. Control of these resources and of the trade route between sub-Saharan Africa and the north, as well as the agricultural surplus to feed administrators and specialists in the urban centers, made the rulers of Kerma, Napata, and Meroë wealthy and powerful.

While the ecological zones in Mesoamerica and South America in which the Olmec and Chavin cultures emerged were quite different, both societies created networks that brought together the resources and products of disparate regions. Little is known about the political and social organization of these societies, but archaeological evidence makes clear the existence of ruling elites that gathered wealth and organized labor for the construction of monumental centers.

Scholars have debated why powerful civilizations appeared many centuries later in the Western Hemisphere than in the Eastern Hemisphere. Recent theories have focused on environmental differences. The Eastern Hemisphere was home to a far larger number of wild plant and animal species that were particularly well suited to domestication. In addition, the natural east-west axis of the huge landmass of Europe and Asia allowed for the relatively rapid spread of domesticated plants and animals to climatically similar zones along the same latitudes. Settled agriculture led to population growth, more complex political and social organization, and increased technological sophistication. In the Americas, by contrast, there were fewer wild plant and animal species that could be domesticated, and the north-south axis of the continents made it more difficult for domesticated species to spread because of variations in climate at different latitudes. As a result, the processes that foster the development of complex societies evolved somewhat more slowly.

Summary

- How did early Chinese rulers use religion to justify and strengthen their power?
- How did the technological and cultural influences of Egypt affect the formation of Nubia?
- What role did nature and the environment play in the development of early civilizations in the Americas?

Throughout history, elites have used religion to bolster their position. The Shang rulers of China were indispensable intermediaries between their kingdom and powerful and protective ancestors and gods. Bronze vessels were used to make offerings to ancestral spirits, and royal and elite families were buried in elaborate tombs that were
intended to serve the occupant in the afterlife. Their Zhou successors developed the concept of the ruler as divine Son of Heaven who ruled in accord with the Mandate of Heaven.

The civilization that developed in Nubia was powerfully influenced by its interactions with the more complex and technologically advanced neighboring society in Egypt. Nubia was engaged in trade with Egypt for most of its history, and Egyptians often sought to control and dominate the gold trade. In the New Kingdom period, the Egyptian government imposed Egyptian culture, language, and religion on the native population, and Nubian architecture came to be based on Egyptian models. In the eighth century B.C.E., the kingdom of Meroë emerged, and Nubia controlled all of Egypt for half a century. While they kept their Nubian names, the rulers imitated the style of Egyptian rulers and kept many Egyptian traditions. By the fourth century, power shifted south to Meroë and sub-Saharan African cultural influences replaced Egyptian ones.

The people of the Americas lived in virtual isolation from the rest of the world for at least fifteen thousand years. During this period, they learned to adapt to their natural environment on their own. The Olmec and Chavin civilizations both relied heavily on agriculture. The Olmec organized their population to dig irrigation and drainage canals and to cultivate the land. Chavin agriculture depended on the introduction of maize cultivation as well as trade with other regions. Llamas were used to transport goods along newly constructed roads and bridges. Artificial platforms and mounds of packed earth dominated both civilizations' urban centers. Olmec shamans also directed the planning of urban centers to be aligned with the stars.

### Key Terms

- loess p. 42
- Shang p. 43
- divination p. 44
- Zhou p. 44
- Mandate of Heaven p. 46
- Legalism p. 47
- Confucius p. 47
- Daoism p. 50
- Yin/yang p. 51
- Kush p. 52
- Meroë p. 53
- Olmec p. 55
- Chavin p. 57
- llama p. 58

### Suggested Reading


Jared Diamond, Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies (1997), tackles the difficult question of why technological development occurred at different times and took different paths of development in the Eastern and Western Hemispheres.

NOTES