# 3 Classical Civilization: China

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

3.1 How did the sequence of dynasties in classical China build a successful empire? p. 56

3.2 What were the distinctive features of China's political system under the Han? p. 60

3.3 What was the relationship between Confucianism and Daoism? p. 63

3.4 How did Confucianism affect Chinese social and family structure? p. 67

3.5 What were the most important complexities in classical Chinese society? p. 71

**Late in the 6th century** B.C.E., a brilliant middle-aged scholar-philosopher applied for a high post in the bureaucracy of the small kingdom of Lu in northeast China (Map 3.1). Perhaps because Kong Fuzi—or Confucius, as he came to be known centuries later in the West—was widely reputed to be an opinionated and outspoken person, he was denied the position for which he was confident he was well qualified. Angered by this rebuff, Confucius left Lu and took to the road in search of the ideal ruler, who presumably would recognize his talents and offer him employment at a suitable level of distinction at his court.

**View** the **map** on **MyHistoryLab**: Historic Sites of Daoism and Confucianism

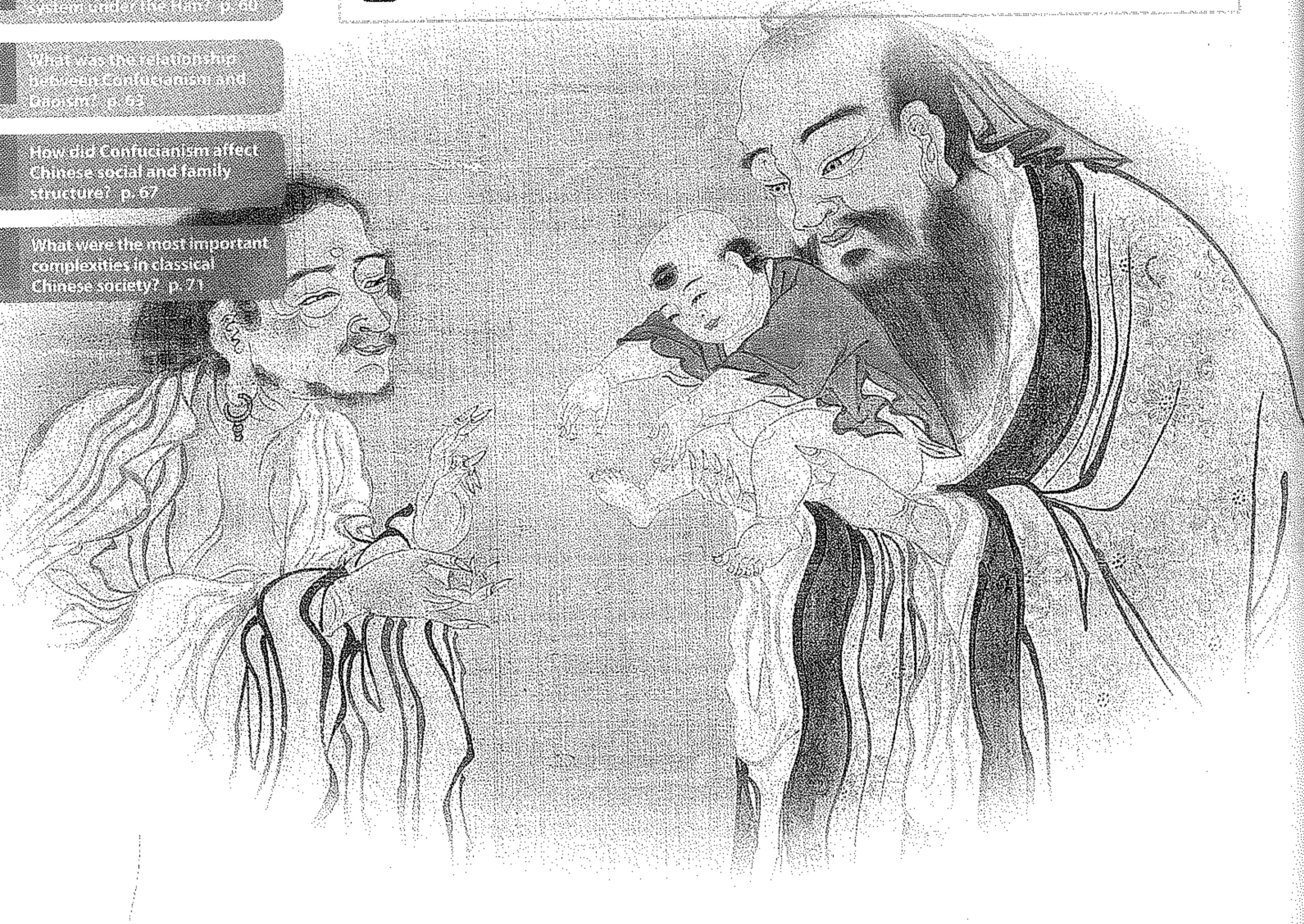

FIGURE **3.1** This 18th-century painting by Wang Shugu vividly illustrates the high esteem in which the philosopher Confucius has been held by the Chinese for over two millennia. Here Confucius is depicted with Laozi, another of China's great thinkers, and the Buddha, an Indian philosopher whose teachings won a widespread following in China. Confucius is clearly the pivotal figure in the painting, while Laozi is depicted as a dignified onlooker. The fact that Buddha is only a baby reflects the artist's sense of the stature of this foreign thinker compared to the two most revered figures of the Chinese intellectual tradition.



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The China of Confucius's day offered abundant options for a talented political advisor. The declining power of the Zhou kingdom, which had for centuries dominated early Chinese civilization along the Yellow River, opened the way for the rise of a patchwork of rival states. Many of these competing states were ruled by nomadic peoples who had migrated from the north or west. Wars between these upstart forces and the lords of long-established households with imperial pretensions were frequent, banditry was widespread, commerce was threatened, and displaced peasants and warrior bands wandered throughout the countryside. The monarchs of some nomad kingdoms had extensively adopted the distinct culture that had been developing in the Yellow River region since the age of the Shang warrior kings. Nonetheless, Confucius and others in the emerging scholar-gentry—or shi—social strata continued to regard most of the nomads as uncouth, warlike barbarians. Convinced that he was a man with a mission, Confucius undertook a lifelong quest to become the chief advisor to a ruler who possessed the vision and skills to restore centralized control, peace, and order.

One among many wandering scholars in the late Zhou era, Confucius attracted numerous disciples, some of whom became distinguished philosophers in their own right. The master's students preserved, spread, and debated his teachings, and after his death in the early 5th century B.C.E., they compiled his wisdom in what would come to be known as the *Analects*, or collected sayings: hence, "Confucius says . . . ."

Over time, Confucius's political and social philosophy became foundational for one of humanity's greatest and most enduring civilizations (see Figure 3.1). In view of the turmoil in China when Confucian teachings were formulated, it is not surprising that they idealized strong rulers and the consolidation of political power. Confucius advocated rule by a highly educated, exclusively male elite, but one that was deemed responsible for the well-being of all of the subjects of the state. Primarily an ethical rather than a religious system, Confucianism sought to establish norms for all aspects of Chinese life, from relationships within the family that stressed respect for one's elders to the importance of art, music, and elegant calligraphy in the cultivation of scholar-bureaucrats.

Measured in terms of the acquisition of wealth and power, Confucius was a failure. He never found his ideal monarch, or even a suitable post at any of the numerous royal households that jostled for dominance across China. In fact, in the centuries following his death—often appropriately designated as the era of the warring states—political and social disintegration intensified. But the students and disciples of Confucius found a large and enthusiastic audience for his teachings in these troubled times. ■

China generated the first of the great classical societies. The region faced periodic nomadic invasions, which encouraged an intense, and distinctive, Chinese identity. The society had a cultural heritage that stressed the basic harmony of nature: Every feature is balanced by an opposite, every *yin* by a *yang*. Thus, for hot there is cold, for male, female. According to this philosophy, an individual should seek a way, called *Dao*, to relate to this harmony, avoiding excess and appreciating the balance of opposites. Individuals and human institutions existed within this world of balanced nature, not, as in later Mediterranean philosophy, on the outside. Chinese traditions about balance, Dao, and yin/yang were

| 1200 B.C.E. | 600 B.C.E. | 400 B.C.E. | 200 B.C.E. | C.E. | 200 C.E. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1122–770** Former or western Zhou kingdom<br>**770–403** Later or eastern Zhou kingdom | **551–c. 233** Period of the "hundred philosophers" (including Confucius, Laozi, Mencius, Xunzi, the Legalists)<br>**403–222** Warring States period | **c. 400–320** Era of Xunzi<br>**221–207** Qin dynasty<br>**221** Shi Huangdi proclaimed first emperor of China<br>**221** Great Wall completed<br>**202–195** Reign of Liu Bang (Gaozu emperor) | **200 B.C.E.–9 C.E.** Former Han dynasty; development of the horse collar, stern-post rudder, and watermill<br>**141–87** Reign of Han Wudi | **23–220** Later Han dynasty; invention of paper and the compass<br>**9–23** Interregnum of Wang Mang | **2nd century** Development of porcelain |

intrinsic to diverse philosophies and religions established in the classical period, and they provided some unity among various schools of thought in China.

Politically, classical Chinese history begins, around 700 B.C.E., with the increasingly ineffective Zhou dynasty. Local leaders began to pull away, and there were also a number of invasions from the outside. The Zhou ruled through alliances with landed families, lacking the means to govern the whole territory directly. This was China's feudal period, with supporters asked to provide troops and tax revenues to the central government in return for grants of land. The Zhou did establish some important innovations in Chinese history, including expansion of territory. Their decline triggered cultural efforts to promote greater order—with Confucianism becoming the leading result—and ultimately a direct political response as well, under the ruthless emperor **Shi Huangdi** and the **Qin** dynasty. The Qin interlude set the conditions for the **Han** dynasty, which built the most effective bureaucracy in the premodern world. Han institutions helped build a sense of Chinese distinctiveness and identity that led the majority of Chinese to think of themselves as "sons of Han."

**Shi Huangdi** [shiuh-hwahng-dee] Founder of the brief Qin dynasty in 221 B.C.E.

**Qin** [chin] Dynasty established in 221 B.C.E. at the end of the Warring States period following the decline of the Zhou dynasty; fell in 207 B.C.E.

**Han** Chinese dynasty that succeeded the Qin in 202 B.C.E.; ruled for next 400 years.

Despite important cultural continuities, classical China did not simply maintain earlier traditions. The formative centuries of classical Chinese history were witness to a great many changes. The religious and particularly the political habits of the Shang kingdom were substantially modified as part of building the world's largest classical empire. As a result of these new centuries of development, leading to much diversity but often painful conflict, the Chinese emerged with an unusually well-integrated system in which government, philosophy, economic incentives, the family, and the individual were intended to blend into a harmonious whole.

# PATTERNS IN CLASSICAL CHINA

**3.1** How did the sequence of dynasties in classical China build a successful empire?

The Zhou dynasty featured decentralized politics but important cultural innovations, while later dynasties emphasized order and centralization.

## The Zhou Dynasty

**Zhou** [joh] Originally a vassal family of Shang China; possibly Turkic in origin; overthrew the Shang and established second historical Chinese dynasty that flourished 1122 to 256 B.C.E.

The warfare that raged throughout China after the **Zhou** rulers lost power was a major setback for both the emerging bureaucratic elite and the ordinary people. Military skills and physical prowess were valued over the literary and ceremonial aptitudes of the scholar-administrators, or shi. Local lords whose kingdoms were constantly threatened by their neighbors (see Map 3.1) tended to concentrate power in their own hands. They put little stock in the council of men who stayed behind in the palace while they risked their lives in battle. The military leaders who wore trousers—which were widely adopted following the example of the horse-riding northern nomads—were contemptuous of the courtiers and administrators who wore robes and gowns. Rituals were neglected, and court etiquette, which had been prized in the early Zhou era, was replaced by the rough manners of nomadic invaders. Many scholar-bureaucrats found themselves without political positions and were forced to work as village schoolteachers and local scribes.

The Zhou did, however, contribute in several ways to the development of Chinese politics and culture in their active early centuries. First, they extended the territory of China by taking over the Yangzi River valley. This new stretch of territory, from the Huanghe in the north to the Yangzi in the south, became China's core—often called the Middle Kingdom. It provided rich agricultural lands plus the benefits of two different agricultures—wheat-growing in the north, rice-growing in the south—a

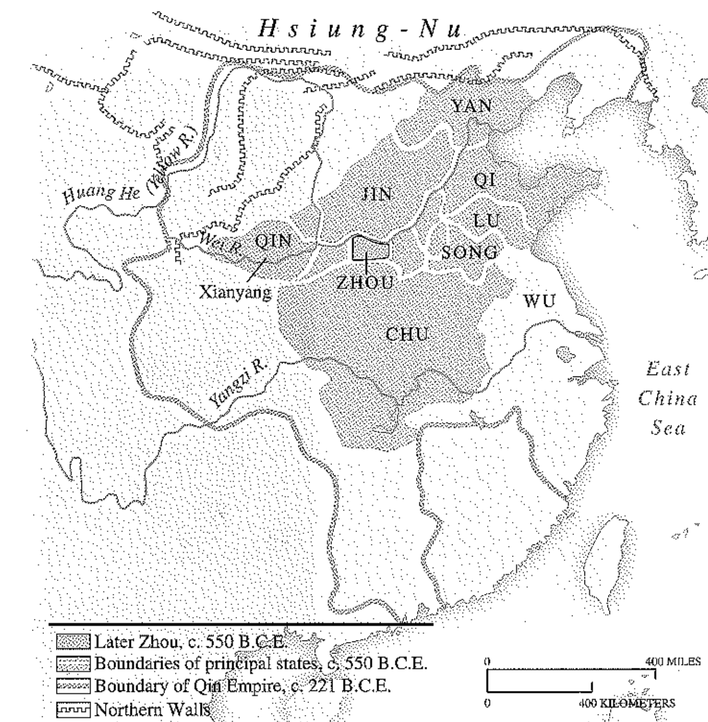




diversity that encouraged population growth. The territorial expansion obviously complicated the problems of central rule, for communication and transport from the capital to the outlying regions were difficult. This is why the Zhou relied so heavily on the loyalty of regional supporters.

Despite these circumstances, the Zhou actually heightened the cultural focus on the central government itself. Zhou rulers claimed direct links to the Shang rulers. They also asserted that heaven had transferred its mandate to rule China to the Zhou emperors. This political concept of a mandate from heaven remained a key justification for Chinese imperial rule from the Zhou on. Known as Sons of Heaven, the emperors lived in a world of awe-inspiring pomp and ceremony.

The Zhou worked to provide greater cultural unity in their empire. They discouraged some of the primitive religious practices of the Huanghe civilization, banning human sacrifice and urging more restrained ceremonies to worship the gods. They also promoted linguistic unity, beginning the process by which a standard spoken language, ultimately called Mandarin Chinese, prevailed over the entire Middle Kingdom. This resulted in the largest single group of people speaking the same language in the world at this time. Regional dialects and languages remained, but educated officials began to rely on the single Mandarin form. Oral epics and stories in Chinese, many gradually recorded in written form, aided in the development of a common cultural currency.




MAP **3.1** **The Era of Nomadic Incursions and Warring States** The fragmented state of the core areas of Chinese civilization from the 6th to the 3rd centuries B.C.E. is clearly illustrated on this map of the many states that jostled for power. The map shows the rise of the semi-nomadic kingdom of Qin in the 3rd century, which both unified politically and greatly enlarged the territory controlled by a mixture of ethnic Chinese and various nomadic peoples.

Increasing cultural unity helps explain why, when the Zhou empire began to fail, scholars were able to use philosophical ideas to lessen the impact of growing political confusion. Indeed, the political crisis spurred efforts to define and articulate Chinese culture. During the late 6th and early 5th centuries B.C.E., the philosopher known in the West as Confucius wrote an elaborate statement on political ethics, providing the core of China's distinctive philosophical heritage. Other writers and religious leaders participated in this great period of cultural creativity, which later reemerged as a set of central beliefs throughout the Middle Kingdom.

Cultural innovation did not, however, reverse the prolonged and painful Zhou downfall. Regional rulers formed independent armies, ultimately reducing the emperors to little more than figureheads. Between 402 and 201 B.C.E., a period known aptly enough as the Era of the Warring States, the Zhou system disintegrated. In reaction, new political ideas emerged, called Legalism, which urged rulers to establish order at all costs.

## The Qin Dynasty

At this point, China might have gone the way of civilizations such as India, where centralized government was more the exception than the rule. But a new dynasty arose to reverse the process of political decay. One regional ruler deposed the last Zhou emperor and within 35 years made himself sole ruler of China. He took the title Qin Shi Huangdi, or First Emperor. The dynastic name, Qin, conferred on the whole country its name of China. Qin Shi Huangdi was a brutal ruler, but effective given the circumstances of internal disorder and supported as well by Legalist ideas. He understood that China's problem lay in the regional power of the aristocrats, and like many later centralizers in world history, he worked vigorously to undo this force. He ordered nobles to leave their regions and appear at his court, assuming control of their feudal estates. China was organized into large provinces ruled by bureaucrats appointed by the emperor; and Qin Shi Huangdi was careful to select his officials from nonaristocratic groups, so that they would owe their power to him and not dare to develop their own independent bases. Under Qin Shi Huangdi's rule, powerful armies crushed regional resistance.

The First Emperor followed up on centralization by extending Chinese territory further to the south, reaching present-day Hong Kong on the South China Sea and even influencing northern

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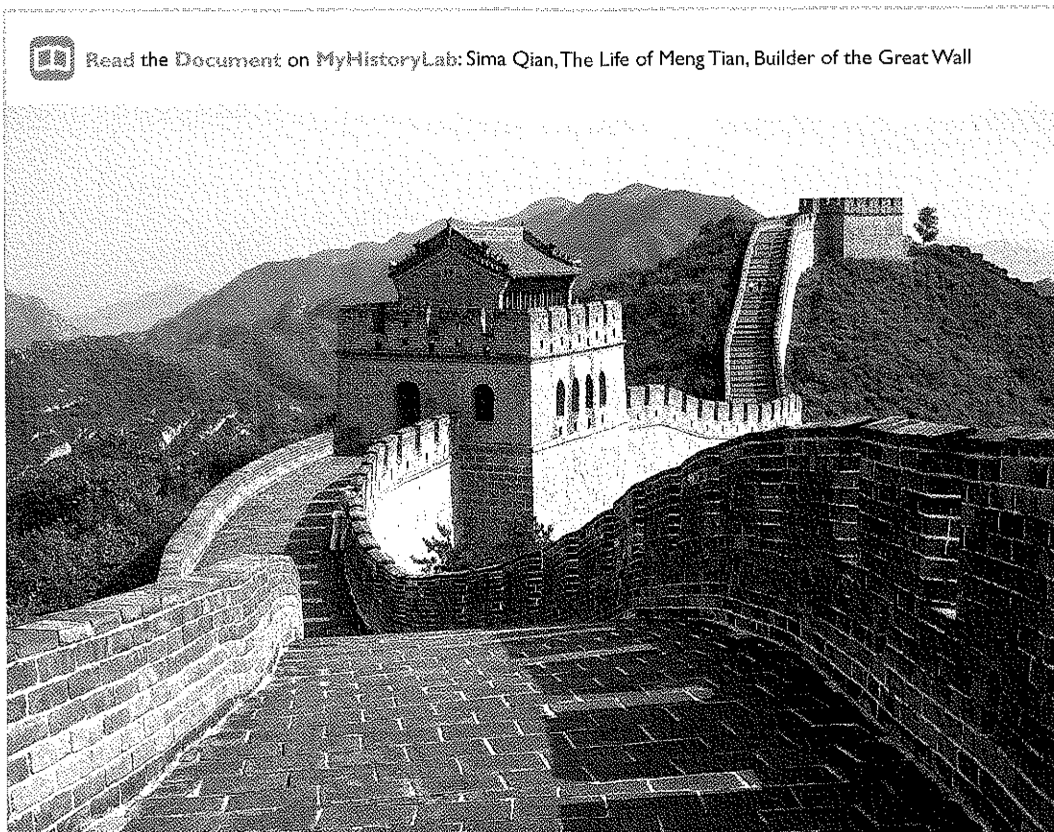


FIGURE 3.2 When kept in good repair and supplied with sufficient numbers of soldiers, the high walls and broad battlements of what would become the northern wall were a formidable obstacle for nomads who sought to invade China. The impressive barrier was made by joining and extending several walls that had been built by regional kingdoms in north China before they were conquered by the Qin. Among the most impressive engineering triumphs of the ancient world, the wall ran for more than 1400 miles through and above the north China plain (see Map 3.2). For more than two millennia, the wall, frequently repaired and improved as this photo illustrates, buffered the interaction between Chinese civilization and the nomadic peoples to the west and north of the Yellow River basin.

**Great Wall** Chinese defensive fortification intended to keep out the nomadic invaders from the north; initiated during Qin dynasty and reign of Shi Huangdi.

Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: Li Si and the Legalist Policies of Qin Shihuang (280–208 B.C.E.)

Vietnam. In the north, to guard against barbarian invasions, Qin Shi Huangdi built a **Great Wall**, extending more than 3000 miles, wide enough for chariots to move along its crest. This massive mud wall, probably the largest construction project in human history up to that point, was built by forced labor, conscripted by the central bureaucracy from among the peasantry (Figure 3.2).

The Qin dynasty was responsible for a number of innovations in Chinese politics and culture. To determine the empire's resources, Qin Shi Huangdi ordered a national census, which provided data for the calculation of tax revenues and labor service. The government standardized coinage, weights, and measures through the entire realm. Even the length of axles on carts was regulated to promote coherent road planning. The government also made Chinese written script uniform, completing the process of creating a single basic language in which all educated Chinese could communicate. The government furthered agriculture, sponsoring new irrigation projects, and promoted manufacturing, particularly for silk cloth. The activist government also attacked formal culture, including Confucian ideas, burning many books. Thinking, according to Qin Shi Huangdi, was likely to be subversive to his autocratic rule.

Although it created many durable features of Chinese government, the Qin dynasty was short-lived. Qin Shi Huangdi's attacks on intellectuals, and particularly the high taxes needed to support military expansion and the construction of the Great Wall, made him fiercely unpopular. One opponent described the First Emperor as a monster who "had the heart of a tiger and a wolf. He killed men as though he thought he could never finish, he punished men as though he were afraid he would never get around to them all." The emperor, for all his great power, grew increasingly afraid of death as he aged—partly because of various assassination attempts. He scoured the countryside seeking magic formulas to prolong life and had many books burned so that scholars would concentrate on his needs.





View the Closer Look on MyHistoryLab: The Terra-Cotta Army of the First Qin Emperor

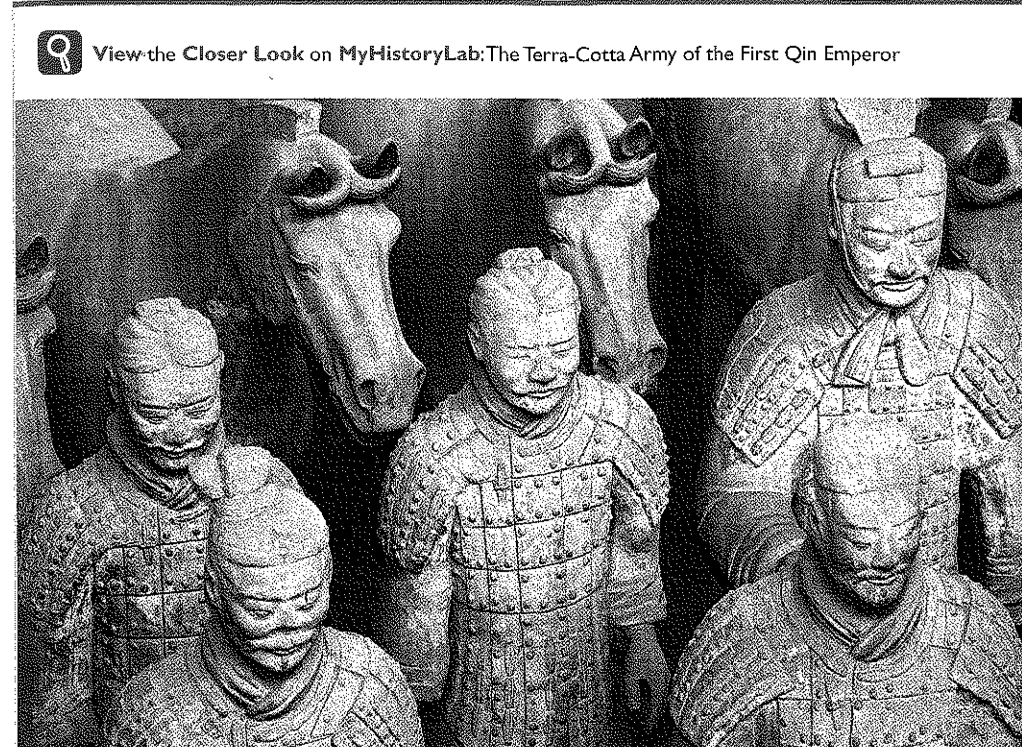


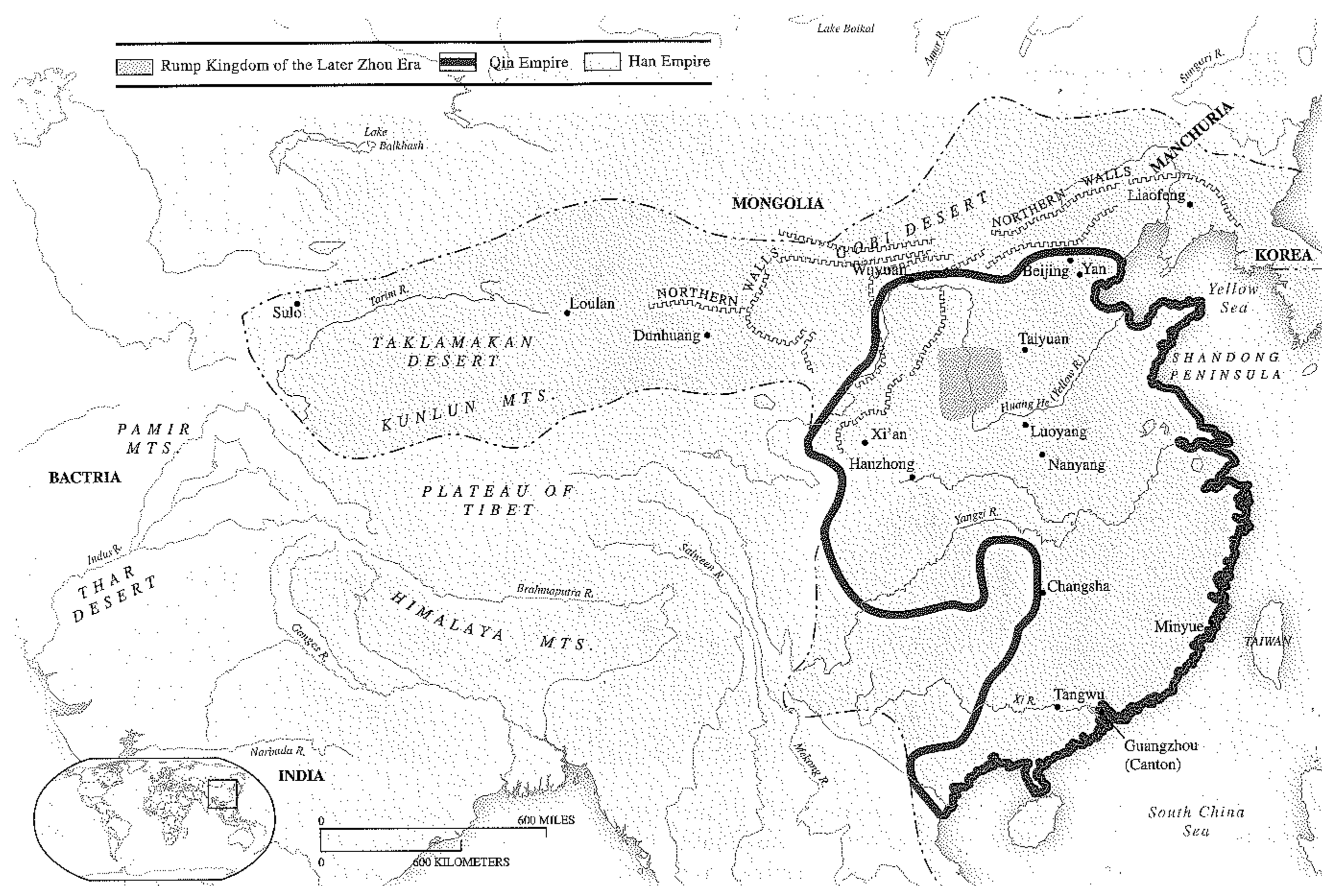
FIGURE 3.3 Hundreds of these clay warriors were found in the tomb of the first Chinese emperor, Shi Huangdi. Remarkably, each of the warriors has different facial features. Together with the clay horses also found in the tomb, these massed forces are striking evidence of the power of the founder of China's short-lived, first imperial dynasty. They also reflect the emperor's obsession with monumental building projects—a direct cause of the fall of the repressive Qin dynasty within a few years of Shi Huangdi's death.

Ironically, he died (in 210 B.C.E.) as a result of taking mercury pills his doctors prescribed in an effort to prolong life. Even then the drama did not end: He needed to be transported to the elaborate tomb he had constructed (Figure 3.3), but his advisers worried about a popular revolt if news of his death leaked out, so they arranged carts of rotten fish to accompany his body in order to disguise the smell. Even so, massive risings organized by aggrieved peasants broke out. One peasant leader defeated other opponents and in 202 B.C.E. established the third dynasty of classical China, the Han (see Map 3.2).

## The Han Dynasty

It was the Han dynasty, which lasted more than 400 years, to 220 C.E., that rounded out China's basic political and intellectual structure. Han rulers retained the centralized administration of the Qin but sought to reduce the brutal repression of that period. Like many dynasties during the first flush of power, early Han rulers expanded Chinese territory, pushing into Korea, Indochina, and central Asia. This expansion gave rise to direct contact with India and also allowed the Chinese to develop contact with the Parthian empire in the Middle East, through which trade with the Roman empire around the Mediterranean was conducted. The most famous Han ruler, Wudi (140–87 B.C.E.), enforced peace throughout much of the continent of Asia, rather like the peace the Roman empire would bring to the Mediterranean region a hundred years later, but embracing even more territory and a larger population. Peace brought great prosperity to China itself. A Han historian conveys the self-satisfied, confident tone of the dynasty:

> The nation had met with no major disturbances so that, except in times of flood or drought, every person was well supplied and every family had enough to get along on. The granaries in the cities and the countryside were full and the government treasuries were running over with wealth. In the capital the strings of cash had stacked up by the hundreds of millions until . . . they could no longer be counted. In the central granary of the government, new grain was heaped on top of the old until the building was full and the grain overflowed and piled up outside, where it spoiled and became unfit to eat. . . . Even the keepers of the community gates ate fine grain and meat.




MAP **3.2** **China from the Later Zhou Era to the Han Era** As this map showing the boundaries of successive Chinese dynasties illustrates, the extent of the early Han empire greatly exceeded even that of the Qin dynasty, which was the first to effectively unify the core regions of Chinese civilization.

Under the Han dynasty, the workings of the state bureaucracy also improved, and the government was linked to formal training that emphasized the values of Confucian philosophy. Reversing the Qin dynasty's policies, Wudi urged support for Confucianism, seeing it as a vital supplement to formal measures on the government's part; shrines were established to promote the worship of the ancient philosopher as a god.

The quality of Han rule declined after about two centuries. Central control weakened, and invasions from central Asia, spearheaded by a nomadic people called the Xiongnu, who had long threatened China's northern borders, overturned the dynasty entirely. Between 220 and 589 C.E., China was in a state of chaos. Order and stability were finally restored, but by then the classical or formative period of Chinese civilization had ended. Well before the Han collapse, however, China had established distinctive political structures and cultural values of unusual clarity, capable, as it turned out, of surviving even three centuries of renewed confusion.

# POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

The power of the emperor, the development of a bureaucracy, and the expansion of state functions became hallmarks of classical Chinese politics.

**3.2** What were the distinctive features of China's political system under the Han?

The Qin and Han dynasties of classical China established a distinctive, and remarkably successful, kind of government. The Qin stressed central authority, whereas the Han expanded the powers of the bureaucracy. More than any other factor, it was the structure of this government that explained how such a vast territory could be effectively ruled—for the Chinese empire was indeed the largest





political system in the classical world. This structure changed after the classical period, particularly in terms of streamlining and expanding bureaucratic systems and procedures, but it never required a fundamental overhaul.

Several key elements predominated. Strong local units never disappeared. Like most successful agricultural societies, China relied heavily on tightly knit patriarchal families. Individual families were linked to other relatives in extended family networks that included brothers, uncles, and any living grandparents. Among the wealthy landowning groups, family authority was enhanced by the practice of ancestor worship, which joined family members through rituals devoted to important forebears who had passed into the spirit world. For ordinary people, among whom ancestor worship was less common, village authority surmounted family rule. Village leaders helped farming families regulate property and coordinate planting and harvest work. During the Zhou dynasty, and also in later periods when dynasties weakened, the regional power of great landlords also played an important role at the village level. Landed nobles provided courts of justice and organized military troops.

Strong local rule was not the most significant or distinctive feature of Chinese government under the Qin and Han dynasties, however. Qin Shi Huangdi not only attacked local rulers; he also provided a single law code for the whole empire and established a uniform tax system. He appointed governors to each district of his domain, who exercised military and legal powers in the name of the emperor. They, in turn, named officials responsible for smaller regions. Here indeed was a classic model of centralized government that other societies later replicated: the establishment of centralized codes and appointment of officials directly by a central authority, rather than by reliance on arrangements with numerous existing local governments. The effectiveness of a central government was further enhanced by specialization among the emperor's ministers. Some dealt with matters of finance, others with justice, others with military affairs, and so on.

## Strong Bureaucracy

Han dynasty rulers not only resumed the attack on local warrior-landlords, but also realized the importance of creating a large, highly skilled bureaucracy. By the end of the Han period, China had about 130,000 bureaucrats, representing 0.2 percent of the population. The emperor Wudi established examinations for his bureaucrats—the first example of civil service tests of the sort that many governments have instituted in modern times. These examinations covered classics of Chinese literature as well as law, suggesting a model of the scholar-bureaucrat that later became an important element of China's political tradition. Wudi also established a school to train men of exceptional talent and ability for the national examinations. Although most bureaucrats were drawn from the landed upper classes, who alone had the time to learn the complex system of Chinese characters, individuals from lower ranks of society were occasionally recruited under this system. China's bureaucracy thus provided a slight check on complete upper-class rule. It also tended to limit the exercise of arbitrary power by the emperor himself. Trained and experienced bureaucrats, confident in their own traditions, could often control the whims of a single ruler, even one who, in the Chinese tradition, regarded himself as divinely appointed—the "Son of Heaven." It was no accident then that the Chinese bureaucracy lasted from the Han period until the 20th century, outliving the empire itself. Small wonder that from the classical period at least until modern times, and possibly still today, the Chinese were the most tightly governed people in any large society in the world.

## Roles of the State

Government traditions established during the classical period included an impressive list of state functions. Like all organized states, the Chinese government operated military and judicial systems. Military activity fluctuated for China did not depend on steady expansion. Judicial matters—crime and legal disputes—commanded more attention by local government authorities.

The government also sponsored much intellectual life, organizing research in astronomy and the maintenance of historical records. Under the Han rulers, the government played a major role in promoting Confucian philosophy as an official statement of Chinese values and in encouraging the worship of Confucius himself. The government developed a durable sense of mission as the primary keeper of Chinese beliefs.

The imperial government was active in the economy. It directly organized the production of iron and salt. Its standardization of currency, weights, and measures facilitated trade throughout the

## THINKING HISTORICALLY

# Xunzi and the Shift from Ritual Combat to "Real" War

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CLASSICAL CIVILIZATIONS IN the Middle East, Greece, China, and India greatly advanced the business of making war. Agricultural surpluses made it possible to support specialized fighters and military commanders. Population growth made for larger armies, which needed armor, weapons, and training. Horses, and in some areas camels and elephants, were raised to carry men into battle or pull war chariots. Advances in metalworking meant steadily improving weaponry, and fortification became a major concern for early engineers and architects. Warfare came to involve more soldiers, who fought for longer periods and suffered more casualties. Frontier defenses and military campaigns became primary concerns for those who ruled civilized states.

Despite advances in weaponry and training, at least for warrior elites, warfare in most early civilizations was a combination of ritual and chaos. Wars normally were not fought during harvest times, the winter, or the monsoon season. A ruler was expected to announce his intention to attack a neighboring kingdom well in advance. Before battle, the high priests of each ruler offered sacrifices to the gods. Their readings of various sorts of omens, not strategic considerations, determined the time and place of combat. Battles consisted primarily of formal duels between trained and well-armed warriors in the midst of confused collisions of masses of poorly trained and armed foot soldiers, who were usually slaves or forcibly recruited peasants. Although often fierce, the warriors' duels were regulated by codes of honor and fair play. For example, it was unseemly for a warrior to strike from behind or to strike when his opponent had fallen.

Duels between warrior champions were the set pieces of a battle. As the great epics of early civilizations, such as the Indian *Mahabharata* and the Greek *Iliad* demonstrate, great warriors cut bloody swaths through the ranks of poorly prepared infantry and lesser fighters to get to each other and set up the hand-to-hand combats that normally determined the outcome of battle. The death of a commander, who was often the ruler of the kingdom at war or a renowned champion, usually meant the collapse of his forces and their chaotic flight from the field. Normally, the victorious army did not destroy or capture what remained of the opposing soldiers. The game had been played and won. The winners either retired with their booty to prepare for the next round or began negotiations to set the terms on which the defeated party would submit to their overlordship.

The Shang and early Zhou periods of Chinese history were filled with wars, most of which were fought according to this ritualized pattern. But by the late Zhou period, some commanders and thinkers had become highly critical of the indecisiveness and waste of the endless conflicts between the warring states. In the 4th century B.C.E., Xunzi, an advisor to one of the warring monarchs, responded to these concerns with a treatise, *The Art of War*, a classic of military theory. Xunzi proposed a vision of military conflict very different from the ritualized approach to war.

**_Xunzi argued that war was merely an extension of statecraft. Wars ought not to be games or macho contests for bragging rights; they ought to be fought only for ends that increased the territory, wealth, and power of the state._**

Xunzi argued that war was merely an extension of statecraft. Wars ought not to be games or macho contests for bragging rights; they ought to be fought only for ends that increased the territory, wealth, and power of the state. With these aims in mind, Xunzi insisted that speed was of the essence in warfare and that long wars burdened the subjects of the warring rulers and bred rebellions. He also urged that target kingdoms be captured swiftly and with as little damage as possible. Xunzi argued that war was a science, which should be the object of extensive study. Rather than brawny warriors, commanders ought to be men well versed in organization, strategy, and tactics. He proposed, and Chinese rulers set up, special schools to train officers in the art of war.

Xunzi's ideas transformed warfare in China. Rulers made every effort short of war to bring down their rivals. Bluffs, spies, threats, and saboteurs were used before armies were sent to war. Both before and after war was actually declared, substantial state resources and large bureaucracies were devoted to building and training armies and supplying them in the field. Sneak attacks were considered fair, and feints and ruses were regularly used by field commanders. Weather conditions and advantageous terrain determined the time and place of battle.

Psychological devices were strongly recommended. For example, techniques were used to make the enemy commanders angry and cause them to make foolish moves that might demoralize their armies. Discipline was needed, rather than individual heroics. This point was driven home by a ruler who had one of his commanders beheaded because the general troops attacked ahead of schedule, despite the fact that this action was the key to victory. In combat, regular formations replaced mass brawls; soldiers fought as units under the direction of a chain of commanders. Good fighters were still valued, but now as unit leaders rather than accomplished duelists. The main object of battle became the destruction of the enemy's forces as quickly as possible.

Shi Huangdi's military and political successes demonstrated how effective warfare reorganized along the lines suggested by Xunzi might be. Halfway across the globe, the Greeks were

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independently developing comparable patterns of warfare. Ironically, this shift in approaches to warfare between the Greek city-states was occurring at about the same time the compilers of the *Iliad* were celebrating the contests of great heroes such as Achilles and Hector. In roughly the same era as Xunzi and Shi Huangdi, the tightly disciplined formations and training of smaller Greek armies culminated in Alexander the Great's unprecedented conquests.

But these successes did not put an end to ritual warfare between civilized peoples. Although Chinese armies tended to be organized and led according to the prescriptions of Xunzi and other theorists, the chivalric codes and battles centered on the duels of champions persisted. This was particularly true in societies that were dominated by warrior elites, such as those that later developed in India, Japan, Africa, Europe, and Mesoamerica. But conditions in the warring states and the genius of Xunzi had led to a radically new vision of what wars were about and how they were fought. The effects of this vision are still felt by civilized societies.

**QUESTIONS**

- What were some of the major differences between ritual warfare and the new approach proposed by Xunzi?
- What are the main advantages and drawbacks of each approach?
- If you were an ancient ruler, which would you tell your military commanders to use?
- Why?

vast empire. The government additionally sponsored public works, including complex irrigation and canal systems. Han rulers even tried to regulate agricultural supplies by storing grain and rice in good times to control price increases—and potential popular unrest—when harvests were bad.

China's ambitious rulers in no sense directed the daily lives of their subjects; the technology of an agricultural society did not permit this. Even under the Han, it took more than a month for a directive from the capital city to reach the outlying districts of the empire—an obvious limit on imperial authority. A revealing Chinese proverb held that "heaven is high, and the emperor is far away." However, the power of the Chinese state did extend considerably. Its system of courts was backed by a strict code of law; torture and execution were widely employed to supplement the preaching of obedience and civic virtue. The central government taxed its subjects and also required some annual labor on the part of every male peasant—this was the source of the incredible physical work involved in building canals, roads, and palaces. No other government had the organization and staff to reach ordinary people so directly until virtually modern times, except in much smaller political units such as city-states. The power of the government and the authority it commanded in the eyes of most ordinary Chinese people help explain why its structure survived decline, invasion, and even rebellion for so many centuries. Invaders such as the Xiongnu might topple a dynasty, but they could not devise a better system to run the country, and so the system and its bureaucratic administrators endured or were soon removed.

## RELIGION AND CULTURE

3.3 What was the relationship between Confucianism and Daoism?

Chinese culture featured the development of the Confucian system, but Daoism and distinctive scientific artistic traditions complemented Confucianism.

The Chinese way of viewing the world, as this belief system developed during the classical period, was closely linked to the political structure. Upper-class cultural values emphasized a good life on earth and the virtues of obedience to the state, more than speculations about God and the mysteries of heaven. At the same time, the Chinese tolerated and often combined various specific beliefs, so long as they did not contradict basic political loyalties.

Rulers in the Zhou dynasty maintained belief in a god or gods, but little attention was given to the nature of a deity. Rather, Chinese leaders stressed the importance of a harmonious earthly life that maintained proper balance between earth and heaven. Harmony included carefully constructed rituals to unify society and prevent individual excess. Among the upper classes, people were trained in elaborate exercises and military skills such as archery. Commonly, ceremonies venerating ancestors and even marking special meals were conducted. The use of chopsticks began at the end of the Zhou dynasty; it encouraged a code of politeness at meals. Soon after this, tea was introduced, although the most elaborate tea-drinking rituals developed later on in Japan more than China.

Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: Confucius: Selections from the *Analects*

FIGURE **3.4** A portrait of Confucius. Because no contemporary likenesses of Confucius have survived, the artists of each era in China's long history depicted him in ways that reflected the tastes and needs of the elites then in power. Here, for example, Confucius is shown as a kind and wise—even grandfatherly—sage. In less stable and prosperous times, he might be depicted as a stern teacher bent on restoring the moral fiber that the Chinese believed was essential to social harmony.

Even before these specific ceremonies arose, however, the basic definition of a carefully ordered existence was given more formal philosophical backing. Amidst the long decline of the Zhou dynasty, many thinkers and religious prophets began to challenge Chinese traditions. From this ferment came a restatement of the traditions that ultimately reduced intellectual conflict and established a long-lasting tone for Chinese cultural and social life.

## Confucianism

**Confucius**, or Kong Fuzi (which means Master Kong), lived from roughly 551 to 478 B.C.E. (Figure 3.4). His life was devoted to teaching, and he traveled through many parts of China preaching his ideas of political virtue and good government. Confucius was not a religious leader; he believed in a divine order but refused to speculate about it. Chinese civilization was unusual, in the classical period and well beyond, in that its dominant values were secular rather than religious.

Confucius saw himself as a spokesman for Chinese tradition and for what he believed were the great days of the Chinese state before the Zhou declined. He maintained that if people could be taught to emphasize personal virtue, which included a reverence for tradition, a solid political life would naturally result. The Confucian list of virtues stressed respect for one's social superiors—including fathers and husbands as leaders of the family. However, this emphasis on a proper hierarchy was balanced by an insistence that society's leaders behave modestly and without excess, shunning abusive power and treating courteously those people who were in their charge. According to Confucius, moderation in behavior, veneration of custom and ritual, and a love of wisdom should characterize the leaders of society at all levels. And with virtuous leaders, a sound political life would inevitably follow: "In an age of good government, men in high stations give preference to men of ability and give opportunity to those who are below them, and lesser people labor vigorously at their husbandry to serve their superiors."

Confucianism was primarily a system of ethics—do unto others as your status and theirs dictate—and a plea for loyalty to the community. It confirmed the distaste that many educated Chinese had developed for religious mysteries, as well as their delight in learning and good manners. Confucian doctrine, lovingly preserved in a book called the *Analects*, was revived under the Han emperors, who saw the usefulness of Confucian emphasis on political virtue and social order. Confucian learning was also incorporated, along with traditional literary works, into the training of aspiring bureaucrats.

**Confucius** Also known as Kong Fuzi; major Chinese philosopher born in 6th century B.C.E.; author of *Analects;* philosophy based on need for restoration of order through advice of superior men to be found among the shi.

Confucianism emphasized the importance of the gentleman, a member of what came to be known as the *shi* class. A superior man controlled his emotions, observed all the proper manners and rituals. He was a generalist, not a specialist, capable of serving in all sorts of government positions, capable of contributing also to art and poetry. His authority rested on his morality, not his expertise. Confucius believed that if such men ruled China, harmony would prevail forever.

For subordinates, Confucius largely recommended obedience and respect; people should know their place, even under bad rulers. However, he urged a political system that would not base rank simply on birth but would make education accessible to all talented and intelligent members of society. The primary emphasis still rested nonetheless on the obligations and desirable characteristics of the ruling class. According to Confucius, force alone cannot permanently conquer unrest, but kindness toward the people and protection of their vital interests will. Rulers should also be humble and sincere, for people will grow rebellious under hypocrisy or arrogance. Nor should rulers be greedy; Confucius warned against a profit motive in leadership, stressing that true happiness rested in doing good for all, not individual gain. Confucius projected the ideal of a gentleman, best described by his benevolence and self-control, a man always courteous and eager for service and anxious to learn.

Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: Confucian political philosophy: an excerpt from Mencius

Confucianism was accepted and amplified by many disciples. Mencius (Meng Ko) was an important figure who emphasized the goodness of human nature. People should be ruled in ways that brought out their goodness. Mencius' ideas, less hierarchical than pure Confucianism, set the basis for the belief that it was legitimate for peasants to rebel against oppressive rulers. While Confucianism spread particularly among the upper classes, ultimately encouraged by the Han dynasty, elements did spread beyond the upper classes, including a taste for ritual, although ordinary peasants also maintained an active polytheistic belief, including a host of practices designed to ward off evil spirits.

## Legalism

During the Qin and early Han periods, the alternate system of political thought called Legalism sprang up in China. Legalist writers prided themselves on their pragmatism. They disdained Confucian virtues in favor of an authoritarian state that ruled by force. Human nature for the Legalists was evil and required restraint and discipline. In a proper state, the army would control and the people would labor; the idea of pleasures in educated discourse or courtesy was dismissed as frivolity. Although Legalism never captured the widespread approval that Confucianism did, it too entered the political traditions of China, where a Confucian veneer was often combined with strong-arm tactics.

Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: The Way of the State (475–221 B.C.E.)

## Daoism

Classical China also produced a more religious philosophy—Daoism—which arose at roughly the same time as Confucianism, during the waning centuries of the Zhou dynasty. Daoism first appealed to many in the upper classes, who had an interest in a more elaborate spirituality. Daoism embraced traditional Chinese beliefs in nature's harmony and added a sense of nature's mystery. As a spiritual alternative to Confucianism, Daoism produced a durable division in China's religious and philosophical culture. This new religion, vital for Chinese civilization, although never widely exported, was furthered by Laozi, who probably lived during the 5th century B.C.E. Laozi stressed that nature contains inherent principles that, if not recognized, lead to strife and unhappiness. True human understanding comes in withdrawing from the world and contemplating this life force. Dao, which means "the way of nature," refers to this same basic, indescribable force:

> There is a thing confusedly formed,
> Born before heaven and earth.
> Silent and void
> It stands alone and does not change,
> Goes round and does not weary.
> It is capable of being the mother of the world.
> I know not its name,
> So I style it "the way."

Along with secret rituals, Daoism promoted its own set of ethics. Daoist harmony with nature best resulted through humility and frugal living. According to this movement, political activity and learning were irrelevant to a good life, and general conditions in the world were of little importance.

Daoism, which combined with a strong Buddhist influence from India during the chaos that followed the collapse of the Han dynasty, guaranteed that China's people were not united by a single religious or philosophical system. Individuals did come to embrace some elements from both Daoism and Confucianism, and indeed many emperors favored Daoism. They accepted its spread with little anxiety, partly because some of them found solace in Daoist belief but also because the religion, with its otherworldly emphasis, posed no real political threat. Confucian scholars disagreed vigorously with Daoist thinking, particularly its emphasis on mysteries and magic, but they saw little reason to challenge its influence. As Daoism became an increasingly formal religion, from the later Han dynasty on, it provided many Chinese with a host of ceremonies designed to promote harmony with the mysterious life force. Finally, the Chinese government from the Han dynasty on was able to persuade Daoist priests to include expressions of loyalty to the emperor in their temple services. This heightened Daoism's political compatibility with Confucianism.

## Literature, Art, and Science

Confucianism and Daoism were not the only intellectual products of China's classical period, but they were the most important. Confucianism blended easily with the high value of literature and art among the upper classes. In literature, a set of Five Classics, written during the early part of the Zhou

# DOCUMENT

## Teachings of the Rival Chinese Schools

THE BRIEF PASSAGES QUOTED HERE ARE taken from the writings of Confucius, Xunzi (a Legalist scholar), and Laozi. Identify the author of each passage and explain why you believe it was written by the person you chose.

**CONFUCIUS:**

I take no action and the people are reformed.
I enjoy peace and people become honest.
I do nothing and people become rich.
I have no desires and people return to the good and simple life.
The gentleman cherishes virtue; the inferior man cherishes possessions.
The educated man thinks of sanctions; the inferior man thinks of personal favors.

**XUNZI:**

The nature of man is evil; his goodness is acquired.
His nature being what it is, man is born, first, with a desire for gain.
If this desire is followed, strife will result and courtesy will disappear.
Keep your mouth closed.

**LAOZI:**

Be at one with the dust of the earth.
This is primal union.
Personal cultivation begins with poetry, is made firm with rules of decorum, and is perfected by music.
When it is left to follow its natural feelings, human nature will do good. That is why I say it is good. If it becomes evil, it is not the fault of man's original capability.

**QUESTIONS**

- Which of these ideas are most compatible?
- Which of these three cultural systems are most in conflict?
- Which of them could best be called religious?
- Which philosophers propose ideas that are best suited to people who want to build a strong and unified political order?

dynasty and then edited during the time of Confucius, provided an important tradition. They were used, among other things, as a basis for civil service examinations. The works provided in the Five Classics included some historical treatises, speeches, and other political materials, and a discussion of etiquette and ceremonies; in the *Classic of Songs*, more than 300 poems dealing with love, joy, politics, and family life appeared. The Chinese literary tradition developed on the basis of mastering these early works, plus Confucian writing; each generation of writers found new meanings in the classical literature, which allowed them to express new ideas within a familiar framework. In literature, poetry commanded particular attention because the Chinese language featured melodic speech and variant pronunciations of the same basic sound, a characteristic that promoted an outpouring of poetry. From the classical period on, the ability to learn and recite poetry became the mark of an educated Chinese. Finally, the literary tradition established in classical China reinforced the Confucian emphasis on human life, although the subjects included romance and sorrow as well as political values.

Chinese art during the classical period was largely decorative, stressing careful detail and craftsmanship (Figure 3.5). Artistic styles often reflected the precision and geometric qualities of the many symbols of Chinese writing. Calligraphy became an important art form. In addition, Chinese artists painted, worked in bronze and pottery, carved jade and ivory, and wove silk screens. Classical China did not produce monumental buildings, aside from the Great Wall and some imperial palaces and tombs, in part because of the absence of a single religion; indeed, the entire tone of upper-class Confucianism was such that it discouraged the notion of temples soaring to the heavens.

In science, important practical work was encouraged, rather than imaginative theorizing. Chinese astronomers had developed an accurate calendar by 444 B.C.E., based on a year of 365.5 days. Later astronomers calculated the movement of the planets Saturn and Jupiter and observed sunspots—more than 1500 years before comparable knowledge developed in Europe. The purpose of Chinese astronomy was to make celestial phenomena predictable, as part of the wider interest in ensuring harmony between heaven and earth. Chinese scientists steadily improved their instrumentation, inventing a kind of seismograph to register earthquakes during the Han dynasty. The Chinese were also active in medical research, developing precise anatomical knowledge and studying principles of hygiene that could promote longer life.





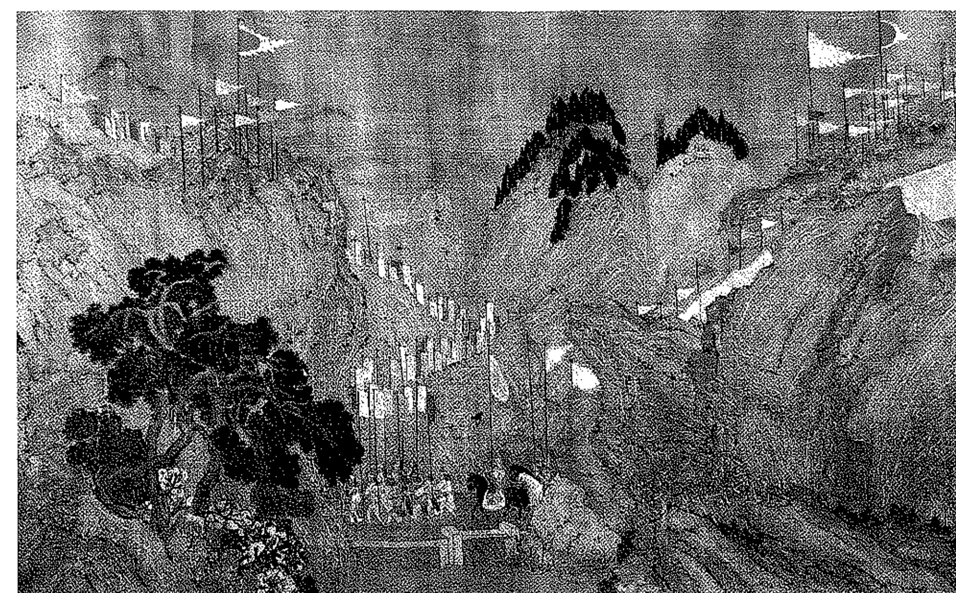


FIGURE 3.5 This painting of "The First Emperor of the Han Dynasty Entering Guandang," by Zhao Bozhu, seeks to recapture the pomp and splendor associated with the founder of the Han dynasty, one of the most powerful and long-lived in Chinese history. By the last centuries B.C.E., large, richly attired entourages, which moved about among several palaces and walled cities, were deemed essential for the emperors and regional lords who had become the dominant force in Chinese political life.

Chinese mathematics also stressed the practical. Daoism encouraged some exploration of the orderly processes of nature, but far more research focused on how things actually worked. For example, Chinese scholars studied the mathematics of music in ways that led to advances in acoustics. This focus for science and mathematics contrasted notably with the more abstract definition of science developed in classical Greece.

## ECONOMY AND SOCIETY

China's economy featured extensive internal trade and important technological innovations. China's family system stressed a rigid patriarchy.

**3.4** How did Confucianism affect Chinese social and family structure?

Although the most distinctive features of classical China centered on politics and culture, developments in the economy, social structure, and family life also shaped Chinese civilization and continued to have an impact on the empire's history for a significant period of time.

As in many agricultural societies, considerable gaps developed between China's upper class, which controlled large landed estates, and the masses, farmer-peasants who produced little more than what was needed for their own subsistence. The difficulty of becoming literate symbolized these gaps, for landlords enjoyed not only wealth but also a culture denied to most common people. Prior to the Zhou dynasty, slaveholding may have been common in China, but by the time of the Zhou, the main social division existed between the landowning gentry—about 2 percent of the total population—and peasants, who provided dues and service to these lords while also controlling some of their own land. The Chinese peasantry depended on intensive cooperation, particularly in the southern rice region; in this group, property was characteristically owned and regulated by the village or the extended family, rather than by individuals. Beneath the peasantry, Chinese social structure included a group of "mean" people who performed rough transport and other unskilled jobs and suffered the lowest possible status. In general, social status was passed from one generation to the next through inheritance, although unusually talented individuals from a peasant background might be given access to an education and rise within the bureaucracy.

## The Confucian Social System

Officially then and to a large extent in fact, classical China consisted of two main social groups, with the mean people and a few household slaves a third segment at the bottom of the heap. The landowning aristocracy plus the educated bureaucrats formed the top group. This top group, first known as the "shi," then the scholar-gentry, under the Han combined education and bureaucratic service with landowning. Scholar-gentry families cooperated to run the estates and also provide bureaucrats. They were marked by their special attire, including silks, which commoners were not supposed to wear. Most gentry families employed some toughs to help protect them and to make sure commoners stayed in their place, but they also received great deference from most ordinary people. Under the gentry next came the laboring masses, peasants, and also urban artisans who manufactured goods. These people, far poorer than the top group and also condemned to a life of hard manual labor, sometimes worked directly on large estates but in other cases had some economic independence. Trade became increasingly important during the Zhou and particularly the Han dynasties. Much trade focused on luxury items for the upper class, produced by skilled artisans in the cities—silks, jewelry, leather goods, and furniture. There was also food exchange between the wheat- and rice-growing regions. Copper coins began to circulate, which facilitated trade, with merchants even sponsoring commercial visits to India. Although trade and its attendant merchant class were vital, the Confucian emphasis on learning and political service led to considerable scorn for lives devoted to moneymaking. The gap between the real importance and wealth of merchants and their officially low prestige was an enduring legacy in Confucian China.

## The Han Capital at Xi'an

The urban growth that had been one of the most notable social developments in the late Zhou era continued in the Han period. The new capital city at Xi'an took on the basic features of Chinese imperial cities from that time forward. Laid out on a somewhat distorted grid, Xi'an had broad roadways that gave access to and defined the main quarters of the city. Much of the city was protected by long earth and brick walls, with towers and gates at regular intervals. Estimates of Xi'an's population range from about 100,000, which probably count only people living within the walls, to 250,000, which included people living outside the walls and in neighboring villages.

### VISUALIZING THE PAST

## Capital Designs and Patterns of Political Power

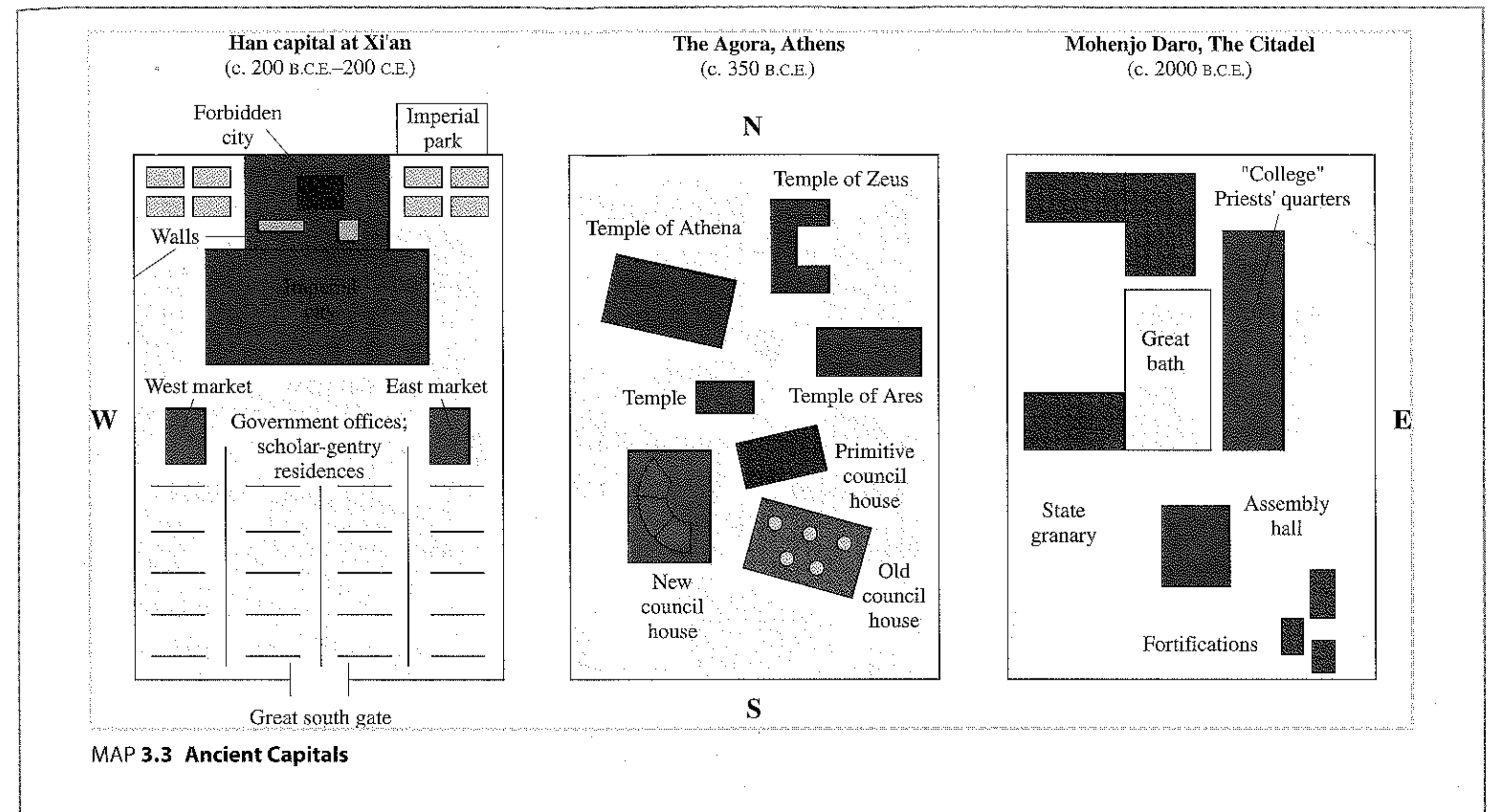
THE DESIGN AND PHYSICAL LAYOUT OF THE CAPITAL CITIES of early civilizations can tell us a great deal about the distribution of political power and social status in different centers of the ancient world (see Map 3.3). In addition, the configurations of these pivotal cities usually manifest religious beliefs and conceptions of the cosmic order in the ways they are oriented and physically constructed. Therefore, plans of the capital centers of ancient civilizations can be read like written texts to help us understand the early history of some of humankind's greatest civilizations. Reproduced here are schematic diagrams of some of the key features of the capital cities of three of the great early civilizations of Eurasia: from Xi'an in Han China, Athens in Greece, and Harappa in India. Study and compare these diagrams for what they tell us about the kinds of elite groups that exercised political power, social stratification, and thinking about the relationship between the supernatural and human rulers in each civilization for which they served as capitals. In thinking about these issues, you may want to refer to relevant sections in Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

**QUESTIONS**

- Which social groups were the most powerful politically in each society?
- How prominent was military force in the exercise of power by the elites in each civilization?
- To what extent was political power legitimized by religious figures, ideas, and conceptions of the workings of the cosmos?
- To what degree did the rulers and political elites seek to separate themselves from the subject population, and what evidence could you use to determine this?







MAP 3.3 **Ancient Capitals**

## Trade and Technology

If trade fit somewhat uncomfortably into the dominant view of society, there was no question about the importance of technological advance. Here, the Chinese excelled. Agricultural implements improved steadily. Ox-drawn plows were introduced around 300 B.C.E., which greatly increased productivity. Under the Han, a new collar was invented for draft animals, allowing them to pull plows or wagons without choking—this was a major improvement that became available to other parts of the world only many centuries later. Chinese iron mining was also well advanced, as pulleys and winding gear were devised to bring material to the surface. Iron tools and other implements such as lamps were widely used. Production methods in textiles and pottery were also highly developed by world standards. Under the Han, the first water-powered mills were introduced, allowing further gains in manufacturing. Finally, during the Han, paper was invented, which was a major boon to a system of government that emphasized the bureaucracy. In sum, classical China reached far higher levels of technical expertise than Europe or western Asia in the same period, a lead that it long maintained.

Technological improvements, emphasis on manufacturing, and the particular mastery of silk production also positioned China strongly in the world trade of the period. The quality of Chinese goods helped sustain the network of the Silk Roads.

The relatively advanced technology of classical China did not, however, steer Chinese society away from its primary reliance on agriculture (Figure 3.6). Farming technology helped increase the size of the population in the countryside; with better tools and seeds, smaller amounts of land could support more families. But China's solid agricultural base, backed by some trade in foodstuffs among key regions, did permit the expansion of cities and manufacturing. There were many towns with more than 10,000 people; China was probably the most urbanized of the classical civilizations. Nonagricultural goods were mainly produced by artisans, working in small shops or in their homes. Even though only a minority of the workforce was involved in such tasks that used manual methods for the most part, the output of tools, porcelain, and textiles increased considerably, aided in this case as well by the interest in improving techniques.

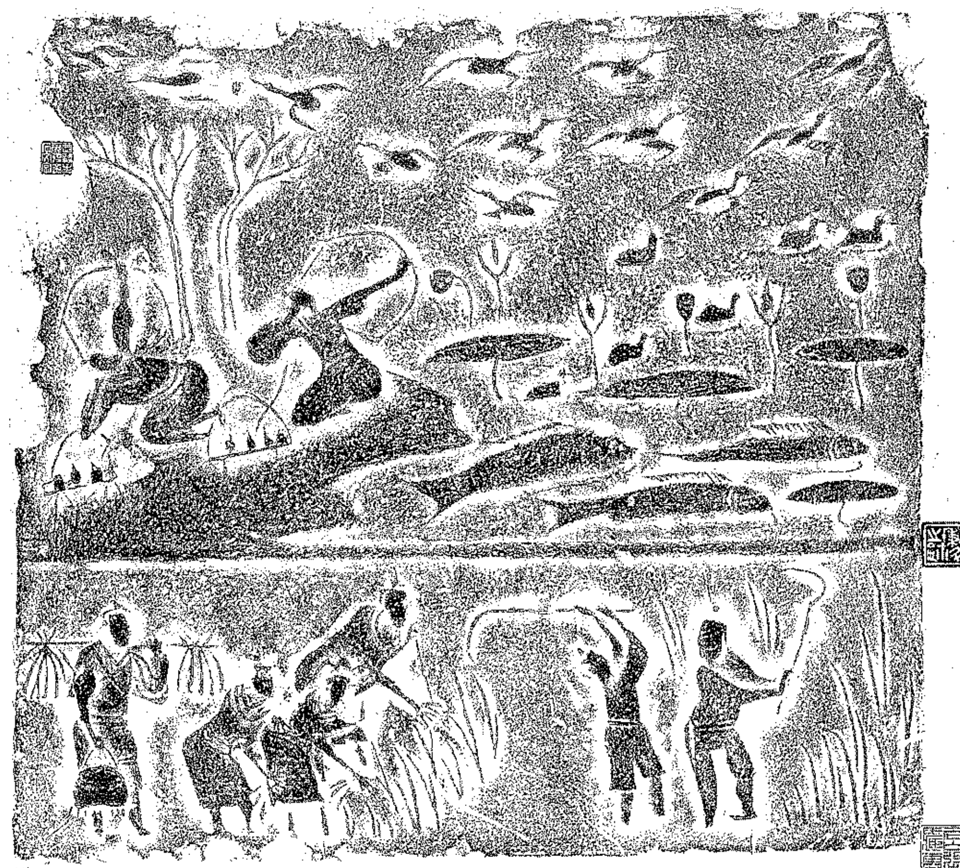


FIGURE **3.6** Han relief on a funeral tile found in the Chengdu region in Sichuan (eastern Han dynasty, 25 C.E.–220 C.E.). The hunting scene in a luxuriant landscape in the upper panel is linked with a scene (lower panel) of peasants working in the fields. Such illustrations enable historians to track the development of tool making and weapons making in ancient civilizations such as China. They also make it possible to study patterns of organization in agrarian and artisan production (for which direct evidence is sparse) as well as the leisure activities of officials and the landed elite.

### Gender and Family Life

In all major social groups, tight family organization helped solidify economic and social views as well as political life. The structure of the Chinese family resembled that of families in other agricultural civilizations in emphasizing the importance of unity and the power of husbands and fathers. Within this context, however, the Chinese stressed authority to unusual extremes. Confucius said, "There are no wrongdoing parents"—and in practice, parents could punish disobedient children freely. Law courts did not prosecute parents who injured or even killed a disobedient son, but they severely punished a child who scolded or attacked a parent. In most families, the emphasis on obedience to parents, and a corresponding emphasis on wives' obedience to husbands, did not produce great friction. Chinese popular culture stressed strict control of one's emotions, and the family was seen as the center of such an orderly, serene hierarchy. Indeed, the family served as a great training ground for the principles of authority and restraint that applied to the larger social and political world. Women, although subordinate, had their own clearly defined roles and could sometimes gain power through their sons and as mothers-in-law of younger women brought into the household. The mother of a famous Confucian philosopher, Mencius, continually claimed how humble she was, but during the course of his life, she managed to exert considerable influence over him. But the basic subordination was clear. A Confucian poet stated, "A woman with a long tongue is a stepping stone to disorder. Disorder does not come down from Heaven—It is produced by women." There was even a clear hierarchical order for children, with boys superior to girls and the oldest son having the most enviable position of all. Chinese rules of inheritance, from the humblest peasant to the emperor himself, followed strict primogeniture, which meant that the oldest male child inherited property and position alike.

## A DISTINCTIVE MIXTURE

**3.5** What were the most important complexities in classical Chinese society?

Chinese civilization coordinated many aspects of politics, culture, and even family life, a key reason that emperors ultimately encouraged Confucianism.

Classical Chinese technology, religion, philosophy, and political structure evolved with very little outside contact. Although important trade routes did lead to India and the Middle East, most Chinese saw the world in terms of a large island of civilization surrounded by barbarian peoples with nothing to offer save the periodic threat of invasion. Nor did Chinese leaders, except to protect their central territory by exercising some control over the mountainous or desert regions that surrounded the Middle Kingdom, have any particular desire to teach the rest of the world. A missionary spirit was foreign to Chinese culture and politics. Of course, China displayed key patterns that were similar to those of the other agricultural civilizations. Further, the spread of Buddhism from India, during and after the Han decline, was a notable instance of a cultural diffusion that altered China's religious map and also its artistic styles. Nevertheless, the theme of separation and superiority, developed during the formative period of Chinese civilization, was to prove persistent in later world history—in fact, it has not entirely disappeared to this day.

### Social and Cultural Links to Politics

Not surprisingly, given the close links between the various facets of their civilization, the Chinese tended to think of their society as a whole. They did not distinguish clearly between private and public sectors of activity. They did not see government and society as two separate entities. In other words, these Western concepts that we have used to define classical China and to facilitate comparisons with other societies do not really fit the Chinese view of their own world. Confucius himself, in seeing government as basically a vast extension of family relationships, similarly suggested that the component Chinese societies were intimately joined.

### Complexities in Classical China

A grasp of Chinese civilization as a whole, however, should not distract us from recognizing some endemic tensions and disparities. The division in belief systems, between Confucianism and Daoism, modifies the perception of an ultimately tidy classical China. Confucianists and Daoists tolerated each other. Sometimes their beliefs coincided, so that an individual who behaved politically as a Confucianist might explore deeper mysteries through Daoist rituals. However, between both groups there was considerable hostility and mutual disdain, as many Confucianists found Daoists superstitious and overexcited. Daoism did not inherently disrupt the political unity of Chinese culture, but at times the religion did inspire attacks on established politics in the name of a mysterious divine will.

Tension in Chinese society showed in the way Confucian beliefs in mutual respect were combined with strict policing. People arrested were presumed guilty and often subjected to torture before trial. The Chinese, in fact, discovered early on the usefulness of alternating torture with benevolence, to make accused individuals confess. In the late Han period, a thief who refused to confess even under severe torture was then freed from chains, bathed, and fed, "so as to bring him in a happy mood"—whereupon he usually confessed and named his whole gang. In sum, both Confucianism and the Chinese penal system supported tight control, and the combination of the two was typically effective; however, they involved quite different approaches and quite different moral assumptions.