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Institute for a Community
with Shared Future
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Early Civilizations and the Birth of Chinese Culture



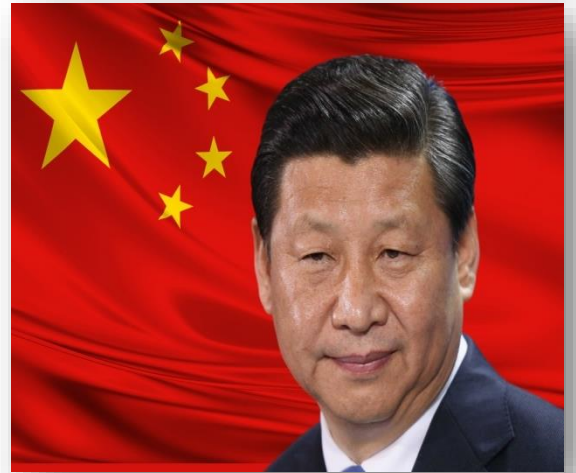
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Abstract:

The key objective of this study is to examine the Early Chinese Civilizations and the rising Chinese Culture. This is only ancient civilization flourishing to this day seems to be a common view in the historical academia and Chinese society as well. Culture is how people actively adjust to their environment and maintains consistency in the face of change. Chinese culture is diverse and multi-sourced, as evidenced by the physical and cultural changes revealed by archeological finds and related historical studies.



Introduction:

Before starting this chapter we must be clear about the two (2) major aspects of this study first is early civilization and second is Culture. Early civilizations were sophisticated ways of living that emerged when people started to build networks of urban settlements, whereas culture refers to the beliefs, practices, and social interactions of a specific group of people or community. There is no denying that the idea of early civilization is evolutionary. It is predicated on the existence of both less complex cultures, some of which gave rise to early civilizations, and more sophisticated societies, which either emerged from or coexisted with early civilizations before eventually replacing them. One of the most interesting periods in the history of early civilizations is the emergence of Chinese culture. The Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties are a few important ancient civilizations that contributed significantly to the development of Chinese culture.



Description:

A line of intelligent rulers who "invented" marriage, clothes, food preparation, and a political structure marked the beginning of Chinese history circa 4000 B.C. The world's oldest continuously existing culture was created in ancient China. The Persians rendered the Cina as "*Cin*" and trade along the *Silk Road* appears to have popularized the name "*China*" which originates from China and spreads throughout the world. The Romans and the Greeks knew the country as '*Seres*', "the land where silk comes from". *Yuanmou Man*, whose bones were unearthed in Yuanmou in 1965, lived in the area 1.7 million years ago, while *Peking Man*, whose skull fossil was found in 1927 CE near Beijing, lived in the region between 700,000 and 200,000 years ago. These discoveries have revealed evidence that these prehistoric people were skilled with fire and the creation of stone implements.

The Neolithic Beginnings:

The start of a settled human lifestyle is what defines the Neolithic era, often known as the New Stone Age. Instead of relying just on hunting and gathering, people learned to domesticate animals and grow vegetables. More advanced stone tools were being used at the same time, which helped with farming and herding animals. This era in China spanned from approximately 7000 BCE to 1700 BCE. Chinese culture initially appeared near the Yellow River before dispersing throughout the country.



Map of Neolithic Era



These cultures were found close to the Yangzi River in the south, the Yellow River in the north, and coastal regions. They were typically named after the site where remains of the culture were first discovered by contemporary archaeologists. The Neolithic people were illiterate. They did, however, leave behind a lot of evidence because they lived in settled communities, such as the bases of their homes, graveyards, tools, and crafts. The archeological record reveals that they tamed pigs and dogs, consumed millet or rice, and produced a great deal of pottery, just like all Neolithic cultures.

Towards the end of Neolithic era, between 5000 and 1700 BCE, cultures on the east and southeast coasts developed intricately shaped gray and black pottery. The forms and decorative patterns of these vessels continued to the Shang dynasty (ca. 1600–1050 BCE) and inspired the craftsmen of bronzes.

Jade carving is another advanced craft invented by Neolithic people. Neolithic jade objects include personal ornaments, such as bracelets, earrings, and pendants, but the most significant items are those designed for ritual or ceremonial use, such as axe heads, blades, and knives.



Pottery Production

Neolithic people's belief in the afterlife and the emergence of social classes. Only influential people were allowed to be buried with these priceless items, particularly jades. These were luxuries, valued for their beauty and ceremonial significance but not essential to life.



Jade Carving Buddha

The fact that only the ruling class could afford them due to their high production costs and need for skilled labor and raw materials indicates that there is an excess of both labor and wealth in society. The arts of Neolithic China not only demonstrate technical sophistication and excellent craftsmanship but also disclose social organization and the emergence of religious ideas.

The Xia, Shang, and Zhou Dynasties:

In China, the Xia dynasty (c. 2100–1600 BCE) is widely seen as the beginning of recorded history, however, its historical existence is still up for discussion. Following the Xia, the Shang dynasty (circa 1600-1046 BCE) took prominence, best known for its advancements in



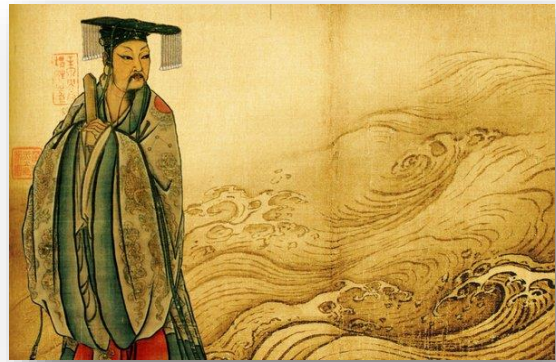
Jade Carving Labor



bronze casting, and writing (oracle bone script). After the Shang dynasty, the Zhou dynasty (1046–256 BCE) brought about significant governmental and philosophical advancements. It was during the Zhou period that the Mandate of Heaven theory was formulated, providing a divine justification for the rule of the king or emperor.

Xia Dynasty:

Small towns and farming communities gave rise to the centralized government; the earliest of them was the ancient Xia Dynasty (c. 2070-1600 BCE). The Xia Dynasty was considered, for many years, more myth than reality until excavations in the 1960s and 1970s CE open sites that argued strongly for its existence. Bronze works and tombs clearly point to an evolutionary stage of progress between disparate Stone Age villages and a recognizable cohesive civilization.



'*Yu the Great*' established the dynasty by working tirelessly for thirteen years to stop the Yellow River from flooding, which regularly ruined the farmers' harvests. Even though he seemed to have passed by his house at least three times, it was stated that he was so devoted to his work that he did not return home once in all those years. His devotion to his work encouraged others to follow in his footsteps. After he had controlled the flooding, *Yu the Great* conquered the Sanmiao tribes and was named successor (by the then-ruler, Shun), reigning until his death. Since Yu created the hereditary succession system, the idea of a dynasty has gained widespread recognition.

Shang Dynasty:



The earliest known era in traditional Chinese history is referred to as the Mythical Period, during which the Xia dynasty is said to have ruled China. The Shang dynasty, the first historically confirmed dynasty, apparently began when the Shang overthrew the Xia sometime around 1760 BCE. The Shang dynasty is the oldest Chinese dynasty whose existence is supported by archaeological finds, but more evidence for the existence of the Xia dynasty may yet emerge. It's estimated that the Shang ruled the Yellow River Valley of China for most of the second millennium BCE, about 1766 to 1046 BCE.

While the Shang dynasty is credited with many achievements to Chinese civilization, four stand out in particular: the creation of writing; the growth of a hierarchical administration; the development of bronze technology; and chariots and bronze weaponry in combat.

The Creation of Writing:

The oracle bone inscriptions are the oldest known form of Chinese writing. Through equating and comparing the inscriptions to contemporary Chinese characters, scholars have demonstrated that the Shang dynasty predated the development of every element of the current writing system. Chinese writing has undergone relatively few changes since it was first developed 3,500 years ago. The sole written records of the Shang era can be found on oracle bones and bronze inscriptions, as Shang papers were initially written on long-since-decomposed strips of bamboo and silk. The oracle bones contain the majority of the information known about the Shang Dynasty because the inscriptions on Shang bronze were sparse and poorly written.



The growth of a Hierarchical Administration:

The Shang political system was hierarchical, with numerous tiers of status and a wide range of specialized roles that were all inherited within noble families. Similar to all hierarchical societies, Shang culture had numerous social rank levels. It made the government more capable of organizing large-scale operations, such as managing a hierarchical administration, controlling the state's numerous territories, planning massive ore mining operations for the production of bronze, leading protracted military campaigns, erecting palaces and walls around cities, or creating elaborate tombs for themselves.

Bronze Technology:

The Shang Dynasty existed during China's Bronze Age. Bronze was a symbol of luxury, power, and wealth at the time. It is evident from the Shang's use of bronze that only individuals in positions of authority within the kingdom were able to use bronze objects. Shang bronzes can be classified as ceremonial food and wine vessels or as weapons. They were primarily utilized for important rites like funerals, festivals, and ancestor and god worship. The bronze pieces' artistry and craftsmanship demonstrate the Shang's proficiency with bronze technology. The Shang perfected a complex process called piece mold casting, which involved making a clay mold, carving a design into it, filling it with molten bronze, breaking the mold, and then finishing the process by adding handles.

Chariots and Bronze Weaponry in Combat:

The advancement of bronze technology and the use of bronze weapons gave the Shang military a great advantage over their enemies and completely changed the way they fought wars. They employed newly created weaponry, such as the compound bow and spear with a bronze tip. The



chariot fundamentally altered the nature of warfare; it was most likely brought from Western Asia. With chariots, commanders could effectively and widely monitor their troops. They also gave soldiers a significant edge over their opponents by making them highly mobile and fast.

Zhou Dynasty:

The Zhou Dynasty, which ruled over ancient China for about eight centuries, was responsible for establishing the unique political and cultural traits that would come to define China over the two millennia. Traditionally, it has been given as 1122 BCE, and that date has been successively revised as scholars have uncovered more archaeological evidence. The Zhou coexisted with the Shang dynasty (c. 1600–1046 BCE) for many years, living just west of the Shang territory in what is now Shaanxi province. They were either at war or a friendly tributary state to the Shang at different points in time. A plan to subjugate the Shang was hatched by one of the Zhou ruling houses, and a major battle was fought, most likely in the middle of the eleventh century BCE.



Zhou

But before the Zhou could unite the entire Shang kingdom, a rebellion occurred. After three years of fighting, the insurrection was put down, and the Zhou established their rule over the entirety of China.

The visual arts of the Zhou dynasty reflect the diversity of the feudal states of which it was composed and into which it eventually broke up. The arts of the Shang dynasty were mainly carried on by the early Xi Zhou. China saw significant developments during the Zhou period. The North



China Plain's grain productivity increased significantly with the introduction of iron, ox-drawn plows, crossbows, and horseback riding. Large-scale irrigation and water-control projects were also implemented for the first time. The visual arts of the Zhou dynasty reflect the diversity of the feudal states of which it was composed and into which it eventually broke up.

China saw significant developments during the Zhou era. The North China plain's grain productivity increased significantly with the introduction of iron, ox-drawn plows, crossbows, and horseback riding. Large-scale irrigation and water-control projects were also implemented for the first time. Building new roads and canals also significantly enhanced the communication network. Towns expanded, trade flourished, currency was formed, chopsticks were used, and the Chinese writing system emerged from its rudimentary origins during the Shang dynasty.

The Silk Road and Beyond:

During the period of 206 BCE to 220 CE, one of the most important developments in ancient China was the creation of the Silk Road. Through the network of trade routes that linked China to Central Asia, the Middle East, and other regions, ideas, technology, and faiths were freely exchanged in addition to commodities like silk, spices, and precious metals. Many places' histories were shaped by the Silk Road, which was essential to the cultural and economic interchange between the East and the West.



Sun Rising of Chinese Culture:

Chinese culture has undergone innovation and change due to exchange, absorption, and adjustment, according to historical realities. Every region has a distinct culture from various eras. There is no unaltered Chinese culture or Chinese cultural tradition; this is defined by the nature of culture. Humans use culture as a means of actively adapting to their environment. It changes and adapts throughout time to meet new demands, overcome obstacles, and adjust to a changing environment. The so-called Chinese culture has been changing in the historical process. Archaeological finds and historical documentation demonstrate how China's culture has changed throughout time in terms of technology, institutions, ideology, and physical aspects. Every historical period has its own distinct physical culture, as evidenced by the physical remains of clothes, food, housing, transportation, and burial customs that have been unearthed through archeological research. These artifacts also demonstrate the enormous shifts in cultural norms over time. For instance painted pottery of the Yangshao Culture, grey pottery, black pottery, and jade of the Longshan Period, bronzeware from the Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties, ironware after the Warring States Period, ceramics after the Tang dynasties have knowledgeable fundamental changes.

The key elements that have persisted throughout China's history include the emphasis on harmony with nature, reverence for ancestors, the significance of moral integrity in governance, and the value put on education and cultural refinement. Additionally, the development of the Chinese writing system during the Shang dynasty has had a lifelong impact, developing over centuries but remaining an integral part of Chinese uniqueness and cultural continuity.



Conclusion:

With 7000 years of history under its belt, the Chinese civilization is regarded as the world's longest continuous civilization. This seven millennia of history has produced a historiography, which has never been seen any part of the world. Ancient China was very powerful civilization, with a strong economy, very organized politics, and many great achievements. Many new concepts and methods of operation were introduced to the world by the early Chinese civilization including Jade crafting. Under its valuable ideological culture, institutional and social operational mode, crafting, technologies, implementation, and socioeconomic life, the Chinese nation developed a remarkable ancient civilization that demonstrates the wealth of unique values and norms found in human culture.

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