

CHAPTER 5-EARLY SOCIETIES IN EAST ASIA

Moving east from India, we encounter another of the great river valley civilizations. This time the river is the Huang He, or the “Yellow River” of China. The river got its name from the yellow loess soil carried in the water from the north. Like the other rivers studied so far, the Yellow River was a source of fertile soil and led to rapid agricultural growth. Unlike the other rivers, the Yellow River has always caused major floods and is often referred to as “China’s Sorrow.” As with the other river valley civilizations, the control of the river spurred the need for a system of government, beginning with rule of legendary King Yu, the founder of the Xia dynasty (c. 2200 B.C.E.).

Starting in 1766 B.C.E. with the Shang, China began what is known as the “dynastic cycle,” the rise and fall of one dynasty followed by the rise and fall of another and so on, a pattern seen in other cultures. This pattern was a result of and supported by two interlocking ideas. The first was the “mandate of heaven” which stated that the right to rule could be taken away if a ruler was seen as no longer having the support of the gods. The second was the idea that the ruler was the “son of heaven” and ruled because he had the support of the gods.

Land ownership helped create the aristocratic class, the members of whom became the nobility and the hereditary rulers. From there, Chinese society started to separate into various classes. The largest, the peasants, were the lowest class as in many other societies. Also during this period, many of the ideas that remain part of Chinese culture developed, including veneration of the ancestors and patriarchy. Chinese writing also began in the Shang period, evolving from pictographs (graph=write) into its modern form. This writing began a literary tradition in Chinese society that includes the *I Ching*, the Book of Changes. Additionally in Shang China, trade with the surrounding nomadic tribes began and eventually expanded south.

Key Concept 1.3. The Development and Interactions of Early Agricultural, Pastoral and Urban Societies

- II. The first states emerged within core civilizations
- III. Culture played a significant role in unifying states through laws, language, literature, religion, myths and monumental art.