

Chapter 1

Introducing the Chinese Case: Its Origin and Stages of Development

Local Origin of the Chinese

China is the only surviving ancient civilization, and is probably also the world's earliest. Contrary to the conventional view which has been held for many years, as shown in Fig. 1.1, that the Sumerian and Egyptian civilizations are probably the world's oldest, recent archeological discoveries in China and India have shed new light on the possibilities of the very early start of these two civilizations. In any case, the Sumerian, Egyptian and Harappan civilizations have long perished. The much more recent civilizations in the Americas, i.e. Maya, Aztec and Inca had also vanished under the brutal and insane destruction of the Spanish colonists, what remain today being some archeological and cultural relics. Even the ancient writing of the Sumerians and Egyptians were only successfully deciphered about two centuries ago. Thus among the world's ancient civilizations, Chinese civilization not only shared the ideal climatic and geographical situation for the emergence of early agriculture and its increasing prosperity, but also enjoyed a large territorial size of such situation that continues to the present. These two factors, size and continuity, may be part of the reasons that explain the expansion and continuation of the Chinese civilization. The present writing system in China can be directly traced back to the oracle bone scripts of the Shang Dynasty of about 3,500 years ago as detailed in a later chapter. Indeed, they also share many features with character-like inscriptions or ideographs found on porcelains

of the Yangshao Period (仰韶) of about 6,000 years ago. The new discovery of more than 2000 pictographs dating back to 7,000–8,000 years in Damaidi (大麥地), at Beishan Mountain in Ningxia in 2007 may prove that Chinese writing is the oldest in the world, as scholars who studied them had drawn the initial conclusion that they are similar to ancient Chinese characters and can be identified as such (Xinhua, 2008). The Chinese urban culture, shaped by the role, shape, structure and the planning principles of the city, shows a consistent pattern that transacts the proto city of the Longshan Period to the contemporary Chinese city. We believe, therefore, that Chinese civilization and the Chinese city form a unique system that is rooted locally, i.e. it is endogenously derived and is distinct from

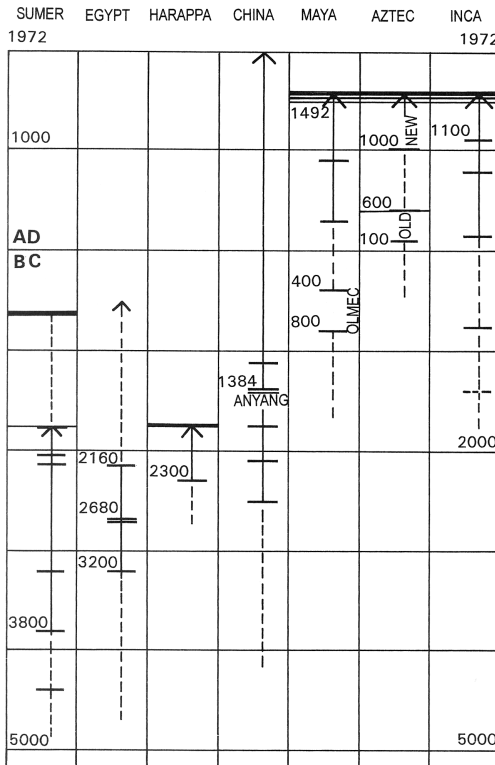


Fig. 1.1. (a) Comparative Dates of the Seven Ancient Civilizations. (b) Locations of the Major Ancient Civilizations.

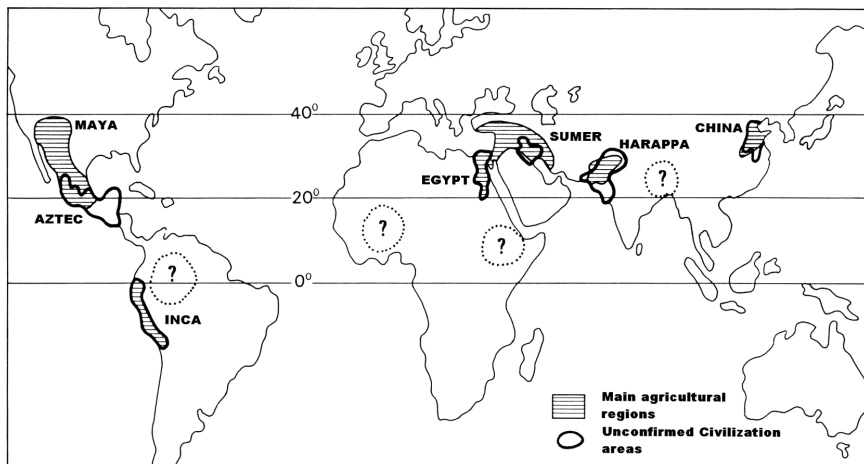


Fig. 1.1. (Continued)

other urban cultures, particularly those of the West that evolved from Europe since the Middle Ages. This system was brewed within the Neolithic settlements some 6,000 years ago. It has hence persisted and defied the conventional urban-rural dichotomy. Underlining such Chineseness is the long developed man-land relationship and its due management under the principles of “Man-Land Unity” and the call of Heaven in the development of a civilized society.

From the 1920s till the present, many Western scholars thought that China had no pre-history. They subscribe to a theory of “invasion” which holds that the Chinese people came from decedents of the alleged earliest hominoid in East Africa — “Lucy”, at around 100,000 years ago (Jacobs, 1996). Chinese civilization, including its agricultural technology and bronze metallurgy, is imported from West Asia or the Near East, to the extent that Shang China is said to be a possible outpost of the Sumers (Daniel, 1968). Scholarly work in China based on recent archaeological finds and analysis of classic texts have largely refuted the “invasion” or migration claims in respect of the origin of the Chinese people and its civilization.

Indeed Asia is one of the continents that was home to the early ape that later evolved into Modern Man. Within the continent most of the fossils of the early man discovered so far were concentrated

in China. Ramapithecus fossils of about 14 million years old — the Kaiyuan Ape was found in Yunnan province. Its later variety, i.e. Lufeng Man of 8 million years ago was also unearthed there. Fossils of those of the earliest hominoid, Australopithecus, were discovered in Shanxi and Anhui. They are the Eastern Man (Dawn Man), and Butterfly Man (Fanchang Man) of 2.5–4.5 million years ago. Thus China ranks with East Africa as one of the two proven cores of early mankind. Remains of the Homo Erectus, direct ancestor of the Homo Sapien, were found almost all over China and cover a wide range of dates from Wushan Man (2.0 million years ago) to Peking Man (500,000 years ago). They evidenced the logical and gradual spread of the human race from southwest China to the rest of the country. Similarly, fossils of both early Homo Sapiens (300,000–100,000 years ago) and late Homo Sapiens (50,000–18,000 years ago) were unearthed in many provinces. These fossils show consistent physical characteristics of the Modern Man in China, i.e. features of the Mongoloid, hence they support strongly the local origin of the Chinese people (China10k.com, 2004; Chan, 1985; Lin, 1989; Zhang, 2003).

Diversity of Early Cultures

State support and encouragement of archaeological diggings and researches in the People's Republic of China (PRC) since 1949 have led to major new discoveries and improved understanding of man's activities and its evolving cultures in the prehistoric times of the Neolithic Age in the country. After entering the Neolithic Age at around 10000 BC, a number of regional cultures had evolved. Domesticated millet and rice were found respectively in the middle reaches of the Huanghe and the Yangzi at around 8000 BC, testifying the local origin of these grains and local dynamics in agricultural development. The multi-centric start of China's agricultural revolution was a product of environmental conditions and man's adaptations. The vast territory of China covers 9.6 million sq km, and on it are varied relief of plateaux, mountains and river plains. Most of the plains that are conducive to early agriculture are in the major river basins of the Huanghe (Yellow River), Yangzi (Changjiang), Zhujiang

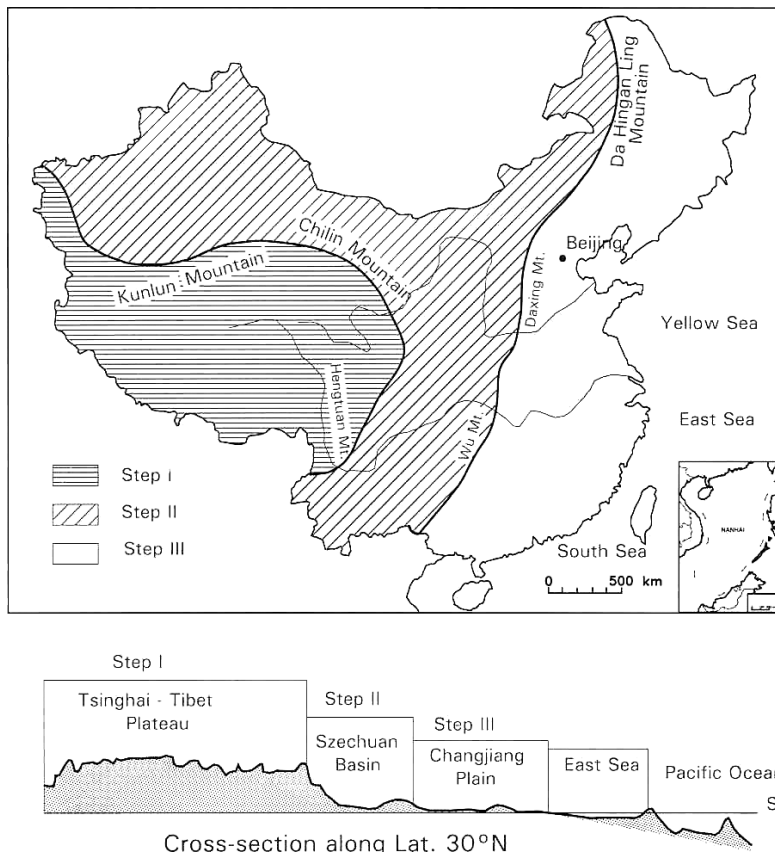


Fig. 1.2. China's Relief Regions and Three Topographic Steps.

and Liaohe (Liao River) that straddle a large range of latitudes and longitudes, resulting in different types of climate (Figs. 1.2, 1.3).

Figure 1.4 shows major regional cultures in China around 5000–4000 BC. These settled communities relied primarily on farming and domesticated animals, supplemented by hunting and gathering. They also developed a distinct Chinese artistic tradition despite notable regional variations in architecture, pottery and burial customs, brought about by communication and cultural exchanges among them as have been evidenced by their artifacts. In North China, two major cultural groups — Yangshao and Dawenkou, and

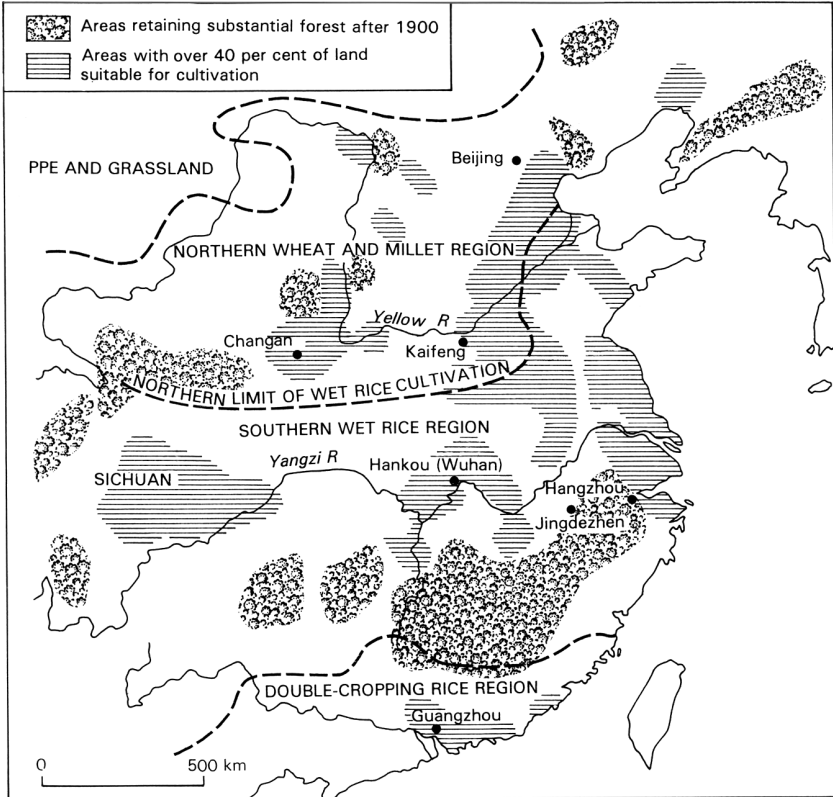


Fig. 1.3. China's Agricultural Land and Forests.

two in South China — Daxi and Hemudu emerged as dominant and affected later developments in China (Table 1.1).

The Yangshao culture was developed from earlier cultures of Cishan, Peilingang and Laoguantai, etc. in the central plains of North China drained by the Huanghe and its tributaries. The region is later called Zhong Yuan (middle earth, 中原) and nicknamed “the cradle of Chinese civilization”. It is also related to the Hongshan culture found north of Bohai Bay that later evolved into the Banshan, Majiayao and Machang cultures. Their artifacts are typified by the painted pottery formed by stacking clay coils into the desired shape and then smoothed with scrapers. They are often painted red and black with the brush. The coastal cultures of Lower Huanghe and Lower

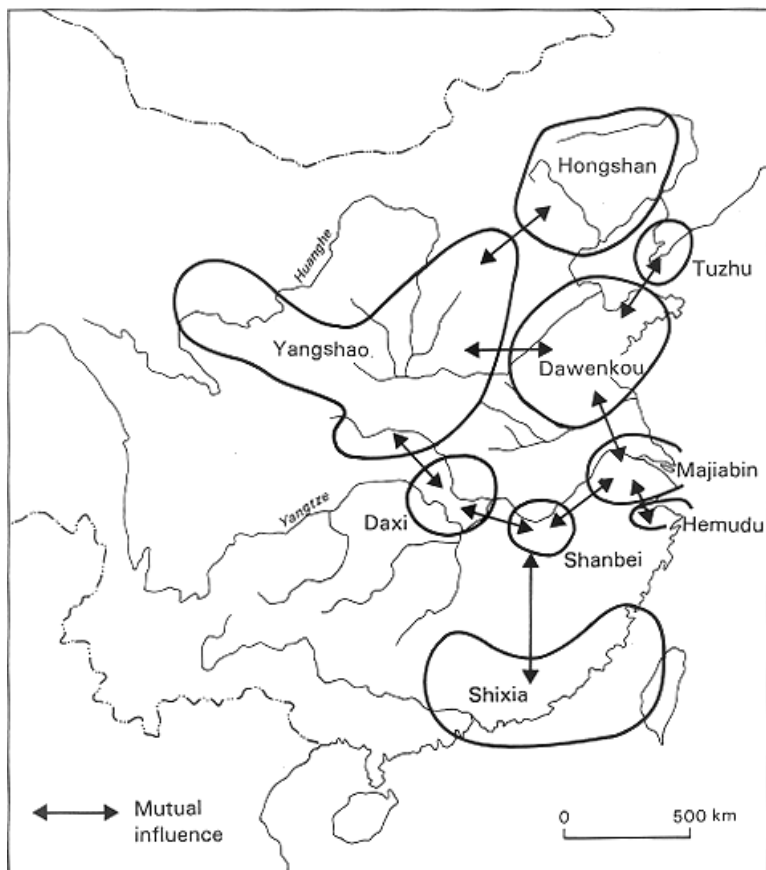


Fig. 1.4. Regional Cultures in Middle Neolithic.

Yangzi are noted for grey and black pottery, distinct tripod stands, and the use of the potter's wheel — the first in China. Jade wares that are symbols of social status and power are also characteristics of these cultures (Table 1.1). To sum up, around 5000 BC, the Chinese were able to make objects out of jade, spunk and weaved cloth, blew melodies in seven musical scales and carved signs in stone, pottery and wood as numeric records or signs of family/tribal ownership or already had a system of writing to be proven by further analysis of the Damaidi finds. About 3000 BC, they raised silkworms, knitted

Table 1.1. Pre-historic Cultures of Huanghe and Yangzi Valleys and their Characteristics.

Date (years before 2000 AD)	Yangzi Culture	Huanghe Culture
7000	Hemudu, Zhejiang: jade, paddy, pottery	Yangshao, Henan, etc.: colored pottery, millet, etc.
6500	Daxi, Hunan: walled city	Banpo, Shaanxi: millet, proto-writing pottery; Dawenkou, Shandong: pottery, proto-writing
5300	Chengyu: walled cities, bronzes; Liangchu, Zhejiang: earthen "pyramid", proto-writing, bronzes	Longshan, all along Huanghe: walled cities black pottery, bronzes
4000	Sanxingdui, Chengdu: dazzling bronzes, undefended walled city of state of Shu	Erlitou, Henan: bronzes, defended walled city of Xia Dynasty

Source: He (2004).

cloth with silk and also developed bronze metallurgy (Zhao, 2002; Wary, 2002; Chang, 2002; Chang, 1999; Barnard, 1983).

The diverse cultures of China's regions evidenced by archaeological finds of the past few decades correlate well with major tribal groups and their major activities told in ancient Chinese texts, especially the first three chapters of China's first official history: *Historical Records*, (*Shi Ji*, 史記), a large volume of 600,000 characters written by Sima Qian (145–86 BC). The three chapters are entitled: "Records of the Five Emperors", "Records of the Xia Dynasty" ("夏本記") and "Records of the Shang Dynasty" ("商本記"). Figure 1.5 shows the approximate geographical locations of the major tribal groups. The Huaxia tribes (華夏族) comprised many, including Taotang, the tribe of Huang Di (Yellow Emperor, 黃帝) and Yao (堯); Xiahou, the tribes of Yu (禹), and Yaoyu, the tribe of Shun (舜). The Huaxia tribes later merged under Huang Di who also became the head of the federation of chiefdoms for the whole of China to form the predominant "Han" race. The Eastern Tribes (Dongyi, 東夷)

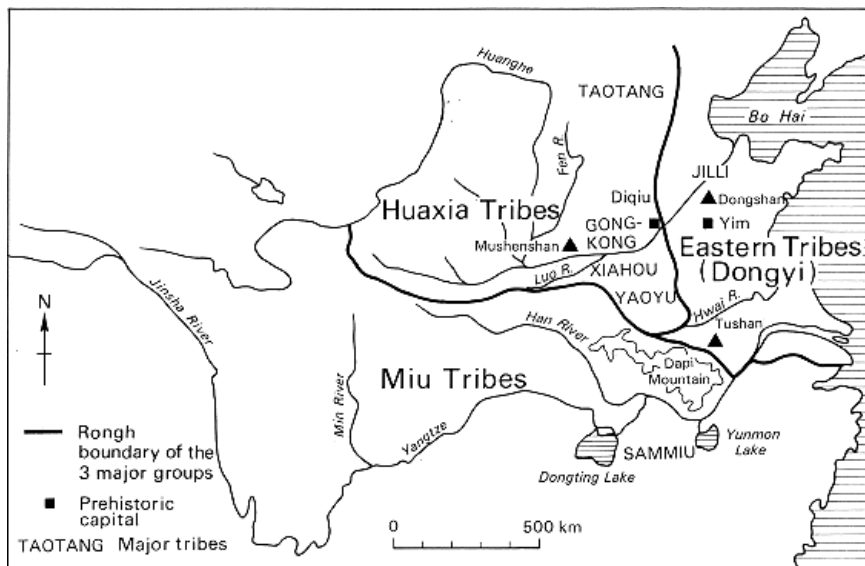


Fig. 1.5. Distribution of Legendary Tribal Groups.

include Chiyou, who was killed by Huang Di in the hegemonic wars for leadership, and the Shang tribe that founded the new dynasty after the Xia.

When Did China Crossed the Threshold of Civilization?

Using the three main indicators of civilized societies, i.e. bronze metallurgy, writing and urban settlements, China had probably crossed the threshold of civilization somewhere in late Yangshao to middle Longshan (3000–2500 BC, 龍山時代) or even earlier as the Damaidi discovery may indicate.

Early bronze wares were found in a number of Yangshao sites (Fig. 1.6) in different parts of the Huanghe basin. The earliest find, a bronze blade, is dated 4675 BC \pm 135, as early as the first found in the Near East. Red copper wares were also found in Hongshan sites (3500 BC) in Northeast China. Unearthed copper wares are increasingly numerous as we approach the Longshan Period (2800–2300 BC). They include foundries, slags and finished wares that

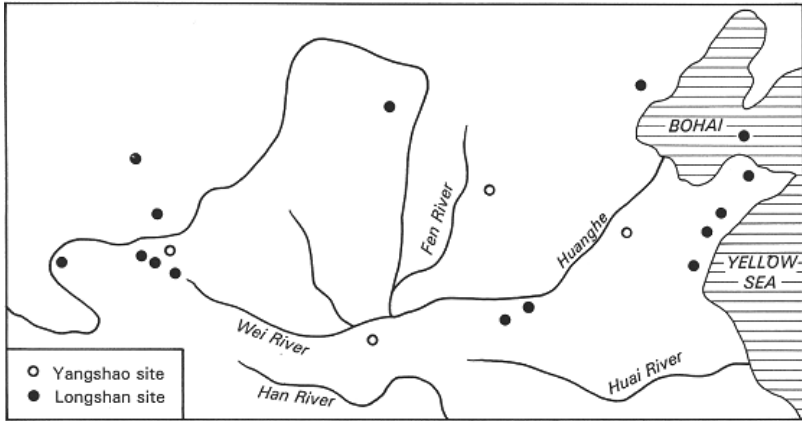


Fig. 1.6. Pre-historic Sites where Copper Bronze wares have been Unearthed.

are of an extended range of utility, as many are small tools and daily utensils, besides articles for worshipping and ceremonies, and decoratives. This long period of development pre-dated the advanced metallurgy of the Xia and Shang dynasties. It has charted and evidenced the path and local origin of gradual development of bronze metallurgy in China.

Cuniform writing on clay tablets of the Sumers dated up to 3100 BC. They contained about 1,500 ideographs. Yet in China, writing was done mostly on bamboo slips and cloth which were highly perishable, especially in the humid and warm weather of the one-third of China near the coast that was most densely settled. They too perished easily in times of major floods which happened particularly frequently in late Longshan and during the middle of the Shang Dynasty. Archaeological evidence supported legends that portrayed the sudden disappearance of the Longshan assemblage and destruction to Longshan city walls in the last century of the third millennium BC and the forced relocation of the Shang capital from present day Zhengzhou to Anyang. The proven surviving earliest writing in China is therefore contained in strange media which were for very limited or special purposes. Marks on pottery have been found from Yangshao to later times. These earlier inscriptions on pottery, such as those found in Banpo (3250 BC) and Dawenkou

(2500 BC) are mostly of a single or a few marks. A few contain several and the maximum found is 12 ideographs. The structure and strokes of these ideographs are close to those of oracle bone inscriptions found 1,200 years later. Many Chinese scholars believed that they are the fore-runners of later Chinese writing.

The accepted earliest writings that survived are oracle bone inscriptions (*jiaguwen*, 甲骨文) and bronze inscriptions (*zhongdingwen*, 鐘鼎文) that belong to late Shang (1300 BC). Oracle bone inscriptions are writing related to divination by the Shang king or his priest to solicit instructions and prophecies from gods. The writing is done either on a piece of tortoise shell or shoulder blade of a cattle, and contains questions asked by the king related to weather, climate and matters of state such as war and peace, and the interpretation of god's answers. Such a practice by the royalty seems to have started only in late Shang and lasted until the Warring States. *Zhongdingwen* is inscribed on ritual/ceremonial bronzewares. Most are from Western Zhou. The one with the longest essay inscribed contained 497 characters, a special ware that King Xuan used to admonish his duke Maogong Yin. The two types of scripts represent a very matured writing system. The total of 150,000 bone pieces so far unearthed contained about 5,000 different characters of which about 1,000 have been decoded. They are very similar to modern Chinese writing.

Due to their perishable nature, the earliest bamboo slip writing survived dated to Western Zhou (1100 BC), while the earliest remains of cloth writing are of the Warring States (500 BC). These early writings are very similar to oracle bone and bronze inscriptions. They share many of the characteristics of modern Chinese writing of more than 3,000 years later. Thus most Chinese scholars agree that the system of writing represented by oracle bone inscriptions should have wider and more popular applications in both trade and administration in the well developed chiefdoms or early states that pre-dated the Shang, possibly extending 2,000–3,000 years back in time to late Yangshao. The recent discovery at Damaidi, as previously mentioned may push the time of emergence of writing in China back to about 7,000 years ago.

With better tools and secured food through agriculture and the domestication of animals, permanent settlements appeared in the plains and lowlands of China's major river basins and the eastern coast, and the Modern Man in China emerged from "pre-tribal" communities of late Paleolithic. A new society, the "tribal" society started and lasted roughly till 3000 BC, at which time there was a major turn, leading to the emergence of the "ancient states". Urban settlements that appeared at the time completed the list of the three indicators for a civilized society. This happened more or less concurrently with the appearance of writing and bronze metallurgy of late Longshan by which time some permanent agriculture-based settlements had grown into incipient cities (Chu, 2001; Yan, 1992, 2000; Chang, 2002; He, 2004).

The earliest legendary chiefdom was allegedly founded by Fuxi about 7700 BC. It was succeeded by Yandi (Fire Emperor) at about 5000 BC. At about 4000 BC, Zhong Yuan and the lower reach of Huanghe, including Shandong, were occupied by the contending forces of Yandi and other off-springs of Fuxi. Among the latter, the Yellow Emperor (Huangdi) finally subdued Yandi's tribe, and then the leading tribe of Dongyi — Chiyou. This was probably the time between late Yangshao and early Longshan. Then, constant warfare had led to the construction of walls on the basis of earlier moats of major settlements for defence. A few of these have survived today. Sima Qian's *Historical Records* has its first chapter devoted to these events. Archaeological finds provided some support to these claims. The later history of the Xia and Shang dynasties recorded by Sima Qian have gained better support from the writing on oracle bones and archaeological finds which have unveiled some of these city sites and their artifacts. In 1973, a book of bamboo slips was unearthed in Hunan at Mawangdui near Changsha. In it, a lost book written 500 years earlier than Sima Qian was quoted many times. This book, entitled *Four Books of the Yellow Emperor*, contains the statecraft of the emperor. It provides new light to the existence of the emperor and events of his time, besides existing archaeological finds. According to Sima Qian, both Yandi and Huangdi's tribes at the time had built a number of cities. The capital of Yandi's tribe is at Yim, and Huangdi's

at Diqu (Fig. 1.5). Archaeological evidence confirmed the existence of incipient urban forms at about 4000 BC in the Huaxia and Dongyi regions, as well as in the middle reach of the Yangzi which will be presented and discussed in ensuing chapters (He, 2004).

As fore-runners of incipient urban settlements, large moated settlements, with their central square and the “big-house”, mark the foundation of early Chinese urbanism, i.e. the patriarchal system of combining the worship of gods (later evolved into the worship of Heaven) and ancestral worship in the Chinese tribal society. Such a trend persisted in the historic development and evolution of the Chinese city till the present.

In Table 1.1, the characteristics of early urban development in Erlitou (Xia dynasty) and those that pre-dated it have been briefly noted. The chronology of the Chinese history is illustrated in Table 1.2. In the forthcoming chapters we shall follow the time sequence to deliberate on the evolution of Chinese civilization as seen through its progressive changes in the city’s role, structure and the urban settlement distribution pattern.

Chapters 2 and 3 will deal with the leap from the large moated village of Late Neolithic to proto-cities in Longshan. These very early settlements have already developed ingredients of the Chinese city of later dynasties.

Chapter 4 heralds the first hereditary empire, the Xia Dynasty. This and Chapters 5 and 6 deal with the establishment of the system of Rites and Heaven and ancestral worships and the spread of such fundamentals of Chinese civilization from its core area to its periphery through the feudal system of the “Sandai” (the 3 dynasties of Xia, Shang and Zhou). The Qin and Han dynasties, as told in Chapter 7, laid the foundation of a bureaucratic state which later dynasties up to the Qing had generally followed. Though the Qin and its preceding Warring States periods saw significant diversions from the Rites, these conventions were strengthened and put into more vigorous practice in the Han Dynasty in general. It leads to the formalization of the Chinese city in its layout and the reconfirmation of its largely administrative and educational roles in a Confucian society (儒家社會).

Table 1.2. Chronology of Chinese History by Dynasty.

Year	Period/Dynasty	Society
Pre-history		
2704–2100 BC	Five Emperors	Late Neolithic, tribal society
2070–1600 BC	Xia	Stone and bronzes, territorial state
Historic		
1600–1046 BC	Shang	Bronzes, territorial state
1046–771 BC	Western Zhou	Bronzes and iron, feudalism
770–221 BC	Eastern Zhou, Warring States	Iron, contending states
221–206 BC	Qin	Empire, unification, authoritarianism
206 BC–220 AD	Han	
220–280	Three Kingdoms	China divided
265–420	Jin	
420–589	Southern dynasties	} China divided
386–534	Northern dynasties	
581–618	Sui	
618–907	Tang	
907–960	Five dynasties	} China divided
902–979	Ten Kingdoms	
960–1279	Song	China divided in South Song
1271–1368	Yuan	Ruled by minority
1368–1644	Ming	
1644–1911	Qing	Ruled by minority
1949–date	Peoples' Republic	Socialist

Chapter 8 treats the second revival of Confucianism (儒學) and its impact on the urban society and the city. Yet it underlines the fact that Confucianism and the qualities of openness and worldliness are not mutually exclusive as illustrated by the urban life and global influence of Tang's capital city Changan. The Song dynasties represent both the revival of Confucianism after China was divided and its disarray for several centuries. In this chapter, Chapter 9, we also point out the new surge of mercantilism and popular urban culture in the new Chinese city of the Song. Again, Confucianism had demonstrated accommodativeness to technological changes and intensified commercial interests.

Both the Ming and Qing dynasties, in Chapters 10 and 11, followed closely the principles of Confucianism in urban growth and management of society. The relationship between Man and Land or Man and Nature (天人關係, 人地關係, 人與自然關係) had perhaps attained its highest level given the state of technology and the dependence of society on an agricultural economy. The self-imposed isolation of both dynasties in their later day from the rest of the world in general had been very unfortunate, leading to the forced opening of China by the West in the later part of the Qing dynasty.

The People's Republic (PRC) again turned against the West in its first 3 decades as revealed in Chapter 12. It followed a new "socialist" course in urban development and city planning and administration. Recently, the PRC has resorted to opening and reform to enhance globalization amid market forces. However, we also noted the persistence of Confucianism in this new round of evolution.

Chapter 13 concludes the Chinese experience by comparing it with major paradigms based on Western experiences. It indicates the uniqueness of the Chinese case and argues that Confucianism is a viable model for man's adaptation to Land and Nature in sustainable urban development.