

AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL INITIATION

Aboriginal girls grew up gradually, but for boys childhood ended quite suddenly. At the age of seven or later a boy was taken away to a special camp with other boys of the same age. He went into a period of training, which might last for six months. During this initiation the boy was told secret stories about a time, called the Dreamtime, when his ancient ancestors were created. He was also kept away from women and younger children.

The boy also had to undergo harsh physical trials. He suffered loneliness and pain, perhaps having a tooth

knocked out, ears or nose pierced, or his flesh cut with special markings. Boys were circumcised, which meant that they had the foreskin of their penis cut off. All boys were decorated with body paint for special ceremonies, and they had a permanent symbol placed on their bodies to show that they had been initiated. When they finally went back home, they were treated as men rather than boys. They knew that they must never tell the women or younger boys the secret things that they had seen and heard during their initiation.



▲ Australian Aboriginal boys undergoing the physical trials of initiation. Many of the trials are similar to those experienced by their ancestors thousands of years ago.

Australian Aboriginal children stayed mostly with their mothers. They learned things by playing games that imitated what adults did. Boys practiced spear-throwing so that they would become expert hunters. Girls played with puppets made out of leaves, acting out family life around the camp. A child's life was happy and carefree, and children learned the skills they would need in later adult life.

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CHINA



▲ A painting from the 13th century showing Chinese farmers threshing and sifting rice. Rice farming is thought to have begun in China as long ago as 7000 B.C.

People were living in the vast region that we now call China long before the beginning of written history. Ancestors of the Chinese people formed farming settlements near two mighty rivers, the Huang He (Yellow) and the Chang Jiang (Yangtze), over 9,000 years ago.

Near the more northern Huang He, or Yellow River, farming families lived in wooden houses plastered with mud and thatched with reeds. They grew a cereal plant called millet, as well as hunting game and fishing in the river. The Huang He is the world's muddiest river, and it was named after its muddy yellow color. It comes from the river's silt, a fine layer of mud and clay that makes the nearby soil especially fertile.

Further south people built houses on stilts on the marshy land next to the Chang Jiang, or "Long River." They used the flooded marshes to grow rice, and archaeologists have discovered an early settlement there dating from about 6000–5000 B.C. Evidence from the site has shown that these early Chinese people used stone tools and kept buffalo, pigs, and dogs.

THE SHANG DYNASTY

By about 3000 B.C. villagers were starting to protect their settlements with earth walls. Communities grew larger under the leadership of strong rulers, many of whom appear in later Chinese legends. Rulers passed power on to their brothers or sons, and the first dynasty, or ruling family, to leave a historical record was the Shang.

THE DISCOVERY OF SILK



▲ A 17th-century painting showing traditional ways of making silk. Silk was one of ancient China's most important exports.

According to a Chinese legend silk was discovered in about 2700 B.C.—a thousand years before the start of the Shang dynasty—in the palace gardens of a ruler named Huangdi. The ruler asked his wife Xilingshi to try to find out what was damaging his mulberry trees. Xilingshi discovered that little worms were eating the mulberry leaves and spinning shiny white cocoons (protective coverings). She took some cocoons into the palace to study them and dropped one into hot water. To her amazement a delicate, gauzy tangle came away from the cocoon, which she found was made of one long slender thread. Xilingshi had discovered silk.

The ruler's wife was so pleased with the fine thread that she took many more cocoons and used their silk to weave a special robe for her husband. She then persuaded him to give her a grove of mulberry trees so that she could have a constant supply of cocoons and silk. It is also said that Xilingshi invented the silk reel, for winding the threads together, and the silk loom, for weaving the threads into material.

We do not know how much of this legend is based on truth, but we do know that the Chinese were the first people to discover how to make silk. They guarded the secret well, and for about 3,000 years only they knew how to produce the material.

The Shang dynasty governed a large region around the Huang He River, and the beginning of their rule is dated at 1766 B.C. Around this time the Chinese learned how to make bronze, a mixture of two metals, copper and tin. The people of the Shang period used this knowledge to make bronze tools, weapons, and vessels.

People of the Shang period were ruled by a priest-king, called the "Son of Heaven" by his people. The spirits of royal ancestors were worshiped and consulted on important decisions, and there were also many gods, especially those of the Sun—who was seen as a

father-figure—and Earth, who was a mother-figure. The Shang kings and their nobles hunted deer, wild boar, tigers, and wolves. It is thought that they had several capitals one after the other, and we know that in about 1400 B.C. they made their capital at Anyang.

Anyang grew into a symmetrical city with palaces and temples for the king and his nobles, who traveled in style in horse-drawn chariots. The houses of ordinary people were made of wattle and daub (a mixture of clay and twigs), with roofs thatched with straw.

Many Shang relics have been found at Anyang, and from these we know

► An oracle bone, dating from the Shang dynasty (1766–1100 B.C.). Oracle bones were used by priests to predict the future and get guidance from the gods. The bones were engraved with questions and then heated until they cracked. The priests then examined the shapes of the cracks carefully to find the answers to their questions.





▲ A decorated bronze cooking vessel from the Shang period (1766–1100 B.C.). To make pots like this, the Chinese first made a wax model, which was covered in clay and fired. Then the liquid wax was poured out, and hot, molten bronze poured into the clay mold and left to cool. Several molds would be needed to make a pot like this one.

that the Shang writing system had more than 3,000 symbols. It was the beginning of what is called Chinese pictographic writing. It appears on pieces of bone and tortoise shells, and more than 10,000 of them have been found at Anyang. They were used as oracles (ways of contacting the gods). Questions were written on the bone or shell, which was then heated until it cracked. The cracks were examined by priests, and supposedly their shapes gave answers to the questions. Shang kings based many important decisions on what the oracle bones told them, such as when to plant crops, when and where to hunt, and when to wage war on their neighbors.

THE CHOU DYNASTY

To the west, the territory was ruled by another dynasty, called the Chou, who were thought of as barbarians by the Shang. Nevertheless, for many years

the two peoples lived peacefully near each other. Then, Chou tribal warriors fought a long, hard battle against the Shang and eventually defeated them.

The Chou became the overall ruling dynasty in about 1050 B.C., and the ruler divided his kingdom into more than 100 states, each headed by a local chief. To control their new lands, the Chou ruler set up a feudal system (a system of government based on lower classes renting land from higher classes) about 2,000 years before a similar system was set up in Europe.

THE FEUDAL SOCIETY

Below the ruler the top class of Chou society was made up of five ranks of noblemen. Each rank rented land from the nobles immediately above them in status, and all the land was farmed by commoners. These ordinary people also looked after their own plots of land, helped by the bottom class of Chou society—the slaves.

The ruler set up his capital at Hao, near present-day Chi'an, which was close to the banks of the Huang He River. Each Chou ruler was succeeded by his eldest son, and they worked hard to keep all the different states together.

In the eighth century B.C., however, a weak Chou ruler caused problems. The ruler's name was Yu, and he was not a very good leader. Yu spent a great deal of time with his mistress, and his behavior greatly angered his nobles, particularly those related to his wife. Eventually, they lost patience with him and overthrew him.

One legend gives a rather colorful account of Yu's downfall. According to the story, one day Yu decided to play a practical joke to amuse his mistress. He ordered that beacons be lit on the hills surrounding the capital, which was a signal to his nobles that the city was under threat of attack. The nobles immediately sent out their armies, only

to find that there was no threat, and it was all a trick. While Yu and his mistress found the soldiers' anger funny, others were less amused. Yu's father-in-law was particularly angry. He gathered forces from tribes in the west and led a real invasion. Once again Yu ordered the beacons to be lit. However, this time the nobles ignored the signal. Yu was killed, and his mistress was carried off by the tribesmen.

THE AGE OF PHILOSOPHY

In 771 B.C. Yu's son—the new ruler—moved the Chou capital farther east to Luoyang. The individual states within the Chou kingdom now began to build more territorial walls, since they were more and more at war with each other. Ambitious local lords fought for power,

which led to growing disorder. Many thinkers tried to find ways of bringing people together in harmony, and among them were two men whose ideas had a lasting impact on Chinese life—Laozi and Confucius.

Laozi (a name that means "Old Philosopher") lived in the sixth century B.C., but we know little about him apart from legends. We do know that he believed the most important thing was for people to live their lives as simply as possible and in harmony with nature. His Tao, or "Way," reflected nature's patterns, and his later followers, called Taoists, tried to live by his teachings. According to legend Laozi tried to leave his home state of Honan when he was an old man. But the border guard, who was a great admirer of the Tao,

▼ This 12th-century Chinese painting shows a dutiful son waiting on his father and mother. In ancient Chinese society, respect for one's parents was seen as very important.



CONFUCIANISM



In the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. the Chinese philosopher Confucius introduced a new way of thinking. Confucius believed that every person should be truthful, brave, and courteous to others. If families behaved in this way, governments and rulers would be well ordered too, so the well-being of an entire kingdom began in ordinary people's homes. Children should obey their parents, and in just the same way ordinary people should obey their rulers. Confucius included many of his rules in sayings. One example of his sayings is, "A gentleman takes as much trouble to discover what is right as lesser men take to discover what will pay."

However, while Confucius believed that people had a duty to obey their rulers and governments, he also believed that these governments had a duty to their subjects. He believed that good behavior by rulers had a greater effect on ordinary people's lives than laws and punishment. Confucius even went as far as to say that corrupt governments should be overthrown by their subjects.

Today, many people call Confucianism a religion, but it has no priests and does not teach the worship of gods. Confucianism is really a philosophy, a guide to morality and good government. The teachings of Confucius proved to be remarkably enduring and had a huge influence on Chinese society for much of the following 2,500 years.

◀ *This 18th-century painting shows the two philosophers Confucius (right) and Laozi.*

would not let him pass until he had written down his teachings, which were only known by word of mouth. Laozi agreed and wrote 81 short poems, which have been studied ever since. Experts now believe that this book, called the *Tao Te Ching* ("The Classic

of the Way and the Virtue"), was probably written by Taoist followers hundreds of years later.

Confucius (551–479 B.C.) is a Latin version of the Chinese title Kongfuzi, which means "Great Master Kong." This was the title given to Kong Qui,

who was born in the Chou state of Lu. Confucius's father died when he was very young, and he worked hard to help his mother. He spent his time studying, as well as practicing archery and music. When he was 22, Confucius became a teacher of history and poetry. In addition to these subjects, he taught his students to think about their lives and the way in which they should live. It is for these teachings that he is still followed 2,500 years later.

CONFUCIUS'S TEACHINGS

Confucius was afraid that squabbles and wars between the different Chou states would lead to the destruction of civilization. He believed that society could be saved if it concentrated on sincerity and honesty. Confucius was given some minor official appointments in Lu, but the ruler of the state ignored his advice, and Confucius resigned in

about 496 B.C. He went into exile with a number of followers and wandered the courts of the kingdom for 13 years.

Toward the end of his life Confucius spent his time teaching and writing, but it is not clear if any of his writings survived. However, his disciples wrote down his sayings in a book called *The Analects*. When Confucius died, he was not very well known. His followers spread his ideas, and by about 200 B.C. his teachings had a great influence on the way that China was governed.

By the time he died, Confucius had seen many of the things that he had been worried about come true. By 479 B.C. the Chou dynasty was finding it difficult to control its territory of seven warring states. There were terrible battles between huge armies with horse-drawn chariots, bronze swords, and deadly crossbows, which had just been invented in China. The

► *A lacquer box from the days of the Han dynasty. Lacquer is a type of varnish made from the sap of the lacquer tree. When skillfully applied to wood, it can produce a beautiful hard finish. The technique of lacquering was invented by the Chinese in about 1200 B.C.*



armies had a total of more than six million soldiers, and in one battle in 260 B.C. more than half a million men were killed. The long reign of the Chou rulers ended just four years later, as the warring states went on fighting.

Among these provinces the north-west state of Ch'in showed both the

greatest ferocity and military discipline. In 221 B.C. the Ch'in ruler, Cheng, was able to declare total victory over his rivals and call himself Ch'in Shihuangdi—the First Emperor of Ch'in.

Shihuangdi became the first emperor of a unified China. Our name for the country—China—comes from

▼ *A painting showing Ch'in Shihuangdi overseeing the burning of books and the execution of many scholars.*



THE INVENTION OF PAPER

Ancient Chinese scholars wrote on strips of bamboo tied together to form books or on wood or cloth made from silk. In 105 A.D. this all changed when Cai Lun, an official at the court of the Han emperor Hoti, invented paper.

The first paper was made from silk rags. Then other fibrous materials were used, such as bamboo, mulberry bark, or hemp. First the raw material was soaked in water to soften it. Then it was boiled and pounded until it formed a pulp. To make a sheet of paper, a fine bamboo mesh (or net) was dipped into the pulpy mixture so that it was

covered with a thin layer of fibers. The mesh was pressed to drain the water off and then left to dry on a heated wall. The finished sheet of paper was then taken off the mesh and brushed flat on a hard surface.

Later, Chinese paper-makers used rags, rope, and old fishnets for the raw material. The paper they made was used for wrapping things and for clothing, as well as for writing. Amazingly, the Chinese managed to keep the art of paper-making a secret from the rest of the world for hundreds of years.



▲ *A picture from the Diamond Sutra, one of the earliest-known printed books. The illustrations were printed from wood blocks onto seven sheets of paper, which were then pasted together to make one long continuous scroll.*

Ch'in (pronounced "chin" or "cheen"). All control was taken away from local chiefs, who were forced to move to the new capital at Chanyang. He divided China into new districts—the officials

who ran the districts were responsible directly to him. He also ordered the building of a network of roads, canals, and bridges throughout the empire. Then he sent huge numbers of workers

THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA

Although separate parts of an earth wall had been built by different northern states as early as 300 B.C., it was Shihuangdi who ordered that these short lengths should be repaired, strengthened, and made into a continuous stone wall to keep out invaders from the north. A force of 300,000 peasants, ex-soldiers, and slaves took 20 years to complete the task. They worked in terrible conditions, especially in the bitterly cold winter. Men who fell ill were thrown into the foundations of the Great Wall, and building went on over their bodies.

When it was completed in about 200 B.C., the wall was about 2,100 miles (3,400km) long. On the outside it was covered with stone slabs, and it was about 30 ft (9m)

high. Along the top was a roadway that was wide enough for chariots to use. Soldiers were posted in watchtowers that were placed every 300 to 600 ft (90–180m). A chain of beacons could be lit to warn soldiers further along the wall of any danger.

Later, other Chinese emperors had Shihuangdi's wall strengthened and lengthened farther, and the last major renovation took place over 1,500 years later. During the Ming dynasty, which controlled China from 1368 to 1644, the Great Wall was gradually rebuilt to a length of more than 3,700 miles (6,000km), from the mountains of northwest China to the Gulf of Bo Hai. Many parts of this wall still exist today.



▲ The Great Wall of China was originally built by the emperor Ch'in Shihuangdi in order to keep out invaders from the north. It has since been rebuilt many times.



▲ This map shows the boundaries of the Shang, Ch'in, and Han dynasties. It also shows the Silk Road and the Great Wall. The Silk Road was the route used from the second century A.D. to transport silk and other luxury goods to the West.

to build a great wall across the north of the empire to keep out possible invading armies.

The "First Emperor" tried to make everything standard throughout the land. He introduced standard weights and measures, and the characters of the written Chinese language were made the same everywhere. Then he ordered a series of bonfires so that all existing writings could be burned, except those on such useful subjects as medicine, farming, and fortune-telling. He did this to keep his critics quiet, to make his people obedient, and to destroy knowledge of the past. Scholars who objected were thrown into a deep pit, and hundreds were killed.

Cheng's nickname was the "Tiger of Ch'in." He was a tough politician and a strong general, but he was afraid of death. In his great palace there were more than 1,000 bedrooms so he could spend each night in a different one in case someone tried to kill him. He also had a special tomb built so that he would be protected after his death.

Cheng's tomb contained a model army of more than 7,000 life-size soldiers, chariots, and horses made of terracotta (fired clay). No two figures are identical, and they all have different faces. This terracotta army originally carried real bronze weapons, but they were stolen by grave-robbers. The tomb was only rediscovered in 1974 by workers digging a well, and it has not yet been completely excavated. There may be more discoveries to be made at the site in the 21st century.

RISE OF THE HAN

Shihuangdi died in 210 B.C. after being emperor for just 11 years, and his son proved to be a weak leader. There were rebellions, and a new dynasty—the Han—gained control in 202 B.C.

The first Han emperor was Liu Bang, a simple farmer's son. Liu set up regional provinces similar to those during Chou times and made peace with the tribes that had threatened to invade China from Mongolia. Liu was an uneducated man, but he did away



with the harsh laws brought in by the "First Emperor." The Han dynasty went on to rule the Chinese empire for more than 400 years, and the majority of today's Chinese population still call themselves Han.

The Han emperors believed in a strong central government. Emperor Wu Ti, who ruled from 140 to 87 B.C.,

▲ *The emperor Yang Ti of the Sui dynasty (581–618 A.D.) pictured in his royal dragon boat on the Grand Canal.*

introduced a civil service examination to select officials. He also founded an imperial university where students learned the Confucian classics, and eventually Confucianism became the state philosophy. Han poets wrote in a particularly clear style that is still famous in Chinese literature, while artists produced beautiful glazed

pottery, and stone carvings. Most of these artists, teachers, philosophers, and civil servants lived in the Han capital, Changan. Like all ancient Chinese towns, Changan was laid out in an orderly, symmetrical style.

MEDICINE

By the time of the Han dynasty medical knowledge was already highly advanced. Chinese doctors had been using the technique of acupuncture for many hundreds of years. Ancient Chinese medicine was based on the idea that in a healthy person there was harmony between opposing forces. Doctors found paths in the body that responded to stimulation by needles and restored the balance between the two main forces of nature, called yin and yang. Yin is the female force, associated with earth and darkness, while yang is the male force, associated

with heaven and light. Acupuncturists insert needles at special points on the body to bring these two forces into line with each other and so relieve pain. This ancient technique is still used all over the world today.

In 25 A.D. the Han capital moved to Luoyang. Around 105 A.D. the Han wish to keep order was helped by the invention of paper, which made record-keeping much easier. The Han empire continued to grow but finally collapsed because of rivalries between generals, imperial advisers, and officials. The dynasty ended in 220 A.D., and for the next 400 years China was again divided into warring states.

China was reunified during the short rule of the Sui dynasty, from 581 to 618. At this time the canal system that had been started hundreds of years before was rebuilt and extended. By 610 Chinese engineers had planned



and built the Grand Canal to link the Huang He River with rivers farther south. This enormous canal made it easier to transport rice and other food from the south to the north of the empire, where more people lived. The Grand Canal of the Sui dynasty was extended even farther in later years and is still in use today.

In 618 a powerful new dynasty took over the empire. The Tang dynasty was

to last for almost 300 years, and this proved to be a golden age for China. Under the Tang emperors the imperial capital at Changan grew to become the largest city in the world, with more than a million people living there. Many foreign traders and scholars visited Changan from the rest of Asia. Buddhism had been brought to China from India some centuries earlier, and now it began to flourish.

► *Two pottery figurines of princesses from the Tang period (618–907 A.D.), showing the clothes and hairstyles fashionable at the time.*



Wu Hou (625–705 A.D.) was one of the most remarkable women in Chinese history. She was at the court of the first Tang emperor, Taizong; and when he died, she entered a Buddhist convent. However, the second Tang emperor, Gaozong, brought her back to court as his favorite concubine, or secondary wife. In 655 she was named empress; and when the emperor fell ill, she took over control of the Chinese government.

Gaozong died in 683, and his son took the title of emperor. But Empress Wu really held the power, and in 690, at the age of 65, she took the throne officially. Empress Wu was a strong ruler who governed with great skill. Her advisers and officials were very loyal to her, and she chose people for their ability rather than their social standing. She also encouraged art and literature.

Many of the noble Chinese families must have disliked Empress Wu. She was not from an aristocratic family, and she did not behave as women were expected to behave in classical China. Women were supposed to obey and serve their husbands, and ladies at court rarely left their own quarters. Among the lower classes women looked after their children and the home. Empress Wu did not conform to the traditional role and was certainly an exceptional woman. For this reason she was ignored by later Chinese historians.

By 705 Empress Wu was 80 years old and growing increasingly weak. Eventually, a group of leading generals and ministers rebelled against her and forced her out of the imperial palace. The former empress died later that year and was succeeded by her son.

In this prosperous age wealthy people led a very comfortable life. They lived in brick and wooden houses with two or three floors and beautiful gardens and courtyards, wore luxurious silk clothes, and had plenty of leisure time. They liked to listen to music and poetry, as well as playing games such as chess and cards. They bought goods made of gold, silver, and jade, and were especially fond of bowls, cups, and other vessels made of porcelain (which we also call china—from chinaware—because it was developed in China during the Tang period). The finest porcelain was kept for the emperor's use; the second grade was for the emperor to give as gifts; and the third grade was for everyone's use.

FOREIGN TRADE

During the Tang period, China expanded its borders and traded with other lands. Many merchants went to and from Central Asia, Persia, and the Mediterranean Sea along the Silk Road, a trade route that was more than 3,700 miles (6,000km) long. The

Chinese took silk, paper, and porcelain eastward, while foreign merchants brought wool and precious metals to China. The markets of Changan would have always been full of activity, and increased trade brought more wealth to the empire's craftsmen and farmers. Ordinary people could also now get government jobs by passing exams and showing their ability.

In 868, however, there was a military revolt against the Tang dynasty, and 13 years later rebels captured Changan. Provincial governors declared their independence from the state's central government, and in 907 the last Tang emperor was toppled.

SEE ALSO:

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