

# Ten Things We Need to Know When Teaching about Early China

By Dong Wang

*Since 1996, I have been teaching about early China in various college courses on Eastern civilization, the history of China and Japan, the history of Asian culture, and world history. During the pandemic of spring 2020, while based in northwest Germany, I offered a new online graduate course on cultural heritage and international relations, with students logged in from Africa, Asia, Eurasia, Europe, and North America. This undertaking presented as many technological and academic challenges as it did intellectual stimulation, which awakened a new conscience in me about living, time, place, censorship, antiquity, the surreal, and reality in human history. Indeed, teaching is an art, and as stated in a pedagogical book I read back in the 1980s, no artist can afford not to sharpen his/her skills.<sup>1</sup> The following ten must-knows are gathered from my teaching experience in the United States, Europe, and China (Hong Kong and Shanghai).*

**First,** a practical problem we encounter when making initial preparations for a high school or tertiary course about early China, or in fact any course, is what main textbooks to adopt for the task. Among good options high on my list are books of different styles and lengths: Charles Hucker, *China's Imperial Past: An Introduction to Chinese History and Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 492 pages; Albert M. Craig, *The Heritage of Chinese Civilization* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson, 2010), 208 pages; and Li Feng, *Early China: A Social and Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 368 pages. Hucker's textbook is skillfully organized and easy to use, whereas Craig is highly concise and classy. Written by a specialist in early Chinese history and archeology, Li's book presents an in-depth comprehensive rendering of early human development of politics, society, and culture in China up until the end of the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE).

When the schedule permits, relevant anthologies and source books can accompany these main texts; for example, Wm. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom, eds. *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From Earliest Times to 1600*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 944 pages; and Cyril Birch, eds., *Anthology of Chinese Literature from Early Times to the Fourteenth Century* (New York: Grove Press, 1994), 528 pages. Students also tend to enjoy reading some annotated classical texts such as the *Analects* and *Zhuang Zi* (*Chuang Tzu*). These resources I recommend are based on my own teaching, but readers who are interested in alternative anthological and source materials also used by historians of early China may see additional titles in this note.<sup>2</sup>

**Second,** definitions about early China, Chinese heritage and antiquity, and early civilization in China in existing scholarship vary, and do not always dovetail. The time frame for early China is also indefinite: some scholarly treatments extend early China to include the Tang dynasty (618 CE–907 CE); some limit the definition to the end of the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE); some identify the Qin dynasty (221 BCE–206 BCE), China's first empire, as the end of the formative age of China; whereas others confine it to the end of the Eastern Zhou (770 BCE–256 BCE).<sup>3</sup>

Other terms, such as premodern China, modern China, and late imperial China, are equally problematic. Whether using 1800 or 1840 or 1919 or the seventeenth century as the benchmark for premodern and modern China, or 960–1895/1911 or 1368–1911 or other time periods for late imperial China, dates are often subject to debate. These discrepancies reflect the theoretical fluidity of culture, civilization, heritage, antiquity, and modernity in our changing world. But one primary reason is that such terms are Western inventions in the first place. These terms, when translated into Chinese as *Zaoqi Zhongguo* and *Wanqi dizhi Zhongguo* are foreign-sounding and vague to most Chinese. Only Chinese academics familiar with Western sinology will use these terms in Chinese.

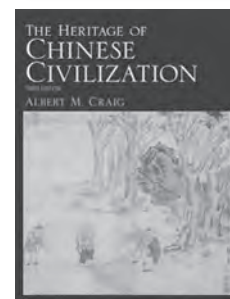
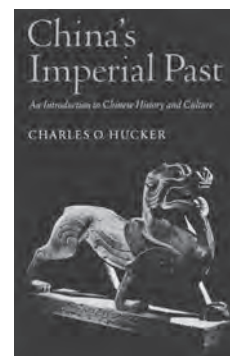




Illustration of Pan Gu featuring horns and a hairy appearance, from the seventeenth century Chinese encyclopedia *Sancai Tuhui* by Wang Qi. Source: *Mythopedia* at <https://tinyurl.com/y5ve6s7l>.

**Third,** to make sense of early China, we must be prepared to explain key terms such as culture, civilization, heritage, tradition, and antiquity. As a concept, culture or civilization refers to an amorphous complex of knowledge, beliefs, ideas, art, morals, law, customs, and “any other capacities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”<sup>4</sup> Both tangible and intangible, heritage is commonly defined as “features belonging to the culture of a particular society, such as traditions, languages, or buildings that were created in the past and still have historical importance.”<sup>5</sup> In legal terms, heritage also alludes to a form of property, referring to simply things handed down from preceding generations. Current scholarship mostly holds that cultural heritage—as an idea, a legal category, and as something in need of protection—emerged out of armed conflict and is embedded within nation-states.<sup>6</sup>

Mediating the past in the present, cultural heritage property is often used to refer to antiquities, cultural relics, artifacts, monuments, ruins, ancient sites, and cultural objects, all interchangeable and expressed as *wenwu* and *wenhua yichan* in contemporary China, alongside *guwu* and *guji*, widely used in modern Chinese history. These phrases denote objects and sites of artistic, archaeological, ethnological, ecological, and historical interest.

**Fourth,** when teaching early China we should know the widely received creation myths, prehistoric legends, and their role in society. One mythology was linked with Pan Gu, the creator of the world, that allegedly first occurred in Xu Zheng’s third-century CE written account. When heaven and earth were still one, they formed a chaos shaped like a hen’s egg. Pan Gu was born in it and grew larger and larger for 18,000 years. Heaven became higher and higher, whereas the earth turned thicker and thicker, with a distance of 9,000 *li* (one *li* is about one-third of a mile) apart. Then sprouting began and divided heaven and earth. Pan Gu’s left eye became the sun, his right eye the moon, his blood rivers, his bones mountains, his flesh soil, his hair the Milky Way, his skin grass and woods, his teeth and bone metals and stones, his marrows pearls and jade, and his sweat rain.

The Daoist text *Dao de jing* (*The Classic of the Way and the Virtue*) gives another account about the origins of the world in the yin and yang dichotomy as one: “The Dao gives birth to the One. The One gives birth to the Two [yin and yang]. The Three give birth to all things as we know them. All living things bear the female nature, [a]nd espouse the male nature. In interacting with each other, these two natures result in a new harmony.”<sup>7</sup> The *Dao de jing*’s version is also not so much a creation myth but an assertion that the *Dao* (Way) is both the origin and nature of all things in existence. The *Huainanzi* (*The Master of Huainan*), a work of the second century BCE, presented an origin of the universe where Nu Wa smelted together five-colored stones to patch up the azure sky and cut off the legs of the great turtle to set them up as the four pillars of heaven. In later sources, beginning with the Eastern Han (25 CE–220 CE), the legendary figure Nu Wa also created human beings by using yellow earth.

Unlike many other creation stories, such as the Biblical narrative in Genesis that originated from the Jewish tradition, no Chinese creation myth or epic recounts ancient folk migrations. In Chinese mythology, “The cosmos was accepted as a given, requiring no explanation.”<sup>8</sup> It did reveal early agricultural and technological development, as well as cultural sages who brought coherence to the construction of Chinese nationalism in later times. By contrast, the Japanese counterpart as seen in *Kojiki* (*Records of Ancient Matters*), written in 712 CE, portrays a polytheist mythic world that helped establish the unique character of the Yamato clan, who founded the early Japanese state.<sup>9</sup>

**Fifth,** seen from prior texts, as well as later, *Shiji* (*The Grand Scribe’s Record*) by Sima Qian (ca. 145 BCE–?), the father of Chinese historiography, many narratives of Chinese early history center on the three benevolent rulers: Emperors/Sages (Sanhuang) Yao, Shun,



A part of the *Dao de jing* manuscript, ink on silk, second century BCE, Han dynasty, unearthed from Mawangdui tomb third, Changsha, Hunan Province, China, Hunan Province Museum. Source: *Wikimedia Commons* at <https://tinyurl.com/y9kxynku>.





Nu Wa and Fu Xi. An ancient hanging scroll unearthed in the Astana Cemetery, Xinjiang, China. Color on silk. Located at the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region Museum.  
Source: Wikimedia Commons <https://tinyurl.com/y3uskwx>.

and Yu the Great; and Five Sovereigns (Wudi) Fu Xi (“Ox-Tamer”), Nu Wa (“Mother Goddess of Chinese Mythology”), Shen Nong (“Divine Farmer and Creator of Fire,” AKA Yandi), Huangdi (“Yellow Emperor”), and Zhuan Xu, an upper echelon of different tribal leaders, all sages and ideal rulers in Chinese legends.<sup>10</sup> These legends have played increasingly greater roles in the construction of Chinese nationalism and cultural identity. To this day, many Chinese see themselves as the offspring of Yandi and Huangdi.

It should be noted that the historicity of distant Chinese antiquity and mythical figures is an open question. In the 1920s, an influential Chinese school of Doubting Ancient History, led by Gu Jiegang (1893–1980), contended that historically transmitted records about early China were an accumulated, layered history of fabrication across time. The later it was in history, the more faked the legendary ancient historiography was, according to Gu in 1926.<sup>11</sup> Gu saw early China in early Chinese retrospective historiography as distorted and invented rhetoric for varied political and social priorities, although he reversed most of his revisionist position in favor of one single, linear tradition of Chinese nation and civilization during the Second Sino–Japanese War of the 1930s–1940s. Despite skepticism toward transmitted texts from antiquity, early Chinese folklores and legends showed not only the dreams and pursuits of peoples living in China Proper (arguably the North China Plain, *Jiuyu*, *Jiuzhou*, *Huaxia*, *Shenzhou*, and the Nine Provinces)<sup>12</sup> but also a tribal, formative, and agro-economic human life with several unstable city/regional states about five millennia ago.<sup>13</sup>

**Sixth**, recent scholarship features alternative ways of looking at early states from the lens of domestication of fire, plants, animals, and grains (mainly wheat, barley, rice, and maize), which made possible concentrated production of food, dense populations, and sedentary communities.<sup>14</sup>

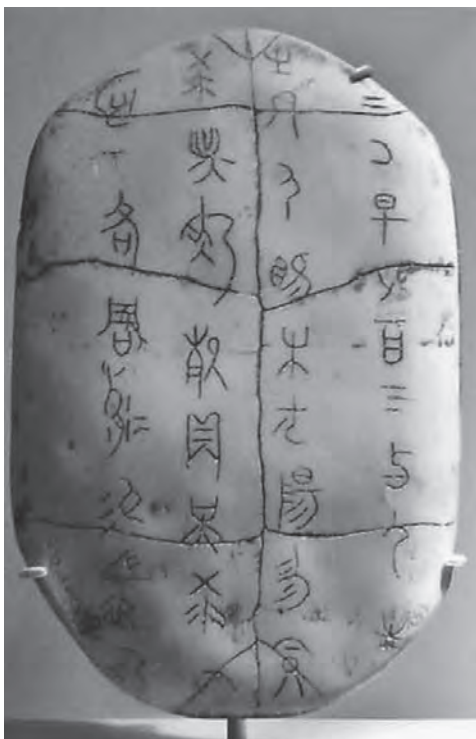
Still, sequential dynastic periodization, together with polity formation, is a prevailing approach to teaching early China and civilizational progress. It is generally understood that the Xia (2070 BCE–1600 BCE), Shang (1600 BCE–1046 BCE), and Zhou (1046 BCE–221 BCE) dynasties were the first three dynasties in China, even though there is no coherent archeological proof

for the existence of the Xia.<sup>15</sup> Early records referring to the Xia were written over 700 years after the Shang dynasty. Two of these texts are the *Guben zhushu jinian* (*Ancient Bamboo Annals*, written in the third century BCE but discovered in the third century CE) and *Shiji*, written approximately in the first century BCE by Sima Qian, but these texts diverge substantially even on the same historical figures, events, and moral didactical orientation. Archaeological cultural periodization of early China—into the pre-Yangshao (ca. 7000 BCE–5000 BCE), Yangshao (ca. 5000 BCE–3000 BCE), and Longshan (ca. 3000 BCE–2000 BCE) periods, all within the Neolithic period of early farming, beginning around 8000 BCE in the Middle East—does not mitigate these problems. A caveat should be exercised that periodization, as a tool, is messier than ordinarily imagined, since a polity or dynasty might fall, but some of its ideas, practices, and institutions continue for decades or centuries.

**Seventh**, the archeological search for the cultural remains of the pre-Xia period and the Xia dynasty often highlights the situation where archeological data do not fit easily into the long-received dynastic chronologies of the Xia and Shang transition. By the fourth millennium BCE, small-scale habitation sites with farming, trade, jades, ceramic vessels, craft specialization, and the social hierarchy of the Yangshao culture were spread across north and south China, including Yangshao in the central Yellow River valley, the Wei River basin,



A representation of Yu, founder of the Xia dynasty by the Song dynasty painter Ma Lin. Hanging silk scroll. National Palace Museum, Taipei.  
Source: Wikimedia Commons at <https://tinyurl.com/hhkrwf5>.



Shang dynasty oracle turtle plastron.  
Source: [China.org.cn](http://China.org.cn) at <https://tinyurl.com/y25stazk>.

Hongshan in northwest China, Majiayao in northwest China, Dawenkou on the east coast, and the Liangzhu and Qujialing on the lower and middle Yangzi River basin. In long processes, these settlement concentrations rose and declined in diverging patterns, as did their polities. Much attention has been afforded the Erlitou site (1900 BCE–1550 BCE), near Luoyang in Henan Province, an ancient capital in the Yiluo River basin of the Yellow River area, widely considered to hold the key to the Xia.<sup>16</sup>

Located on the south bank of the Luo River and divided into four phases of development, the Erlitou archaeological site indicated an early urban center of about 300 hectares (a little over one square mile), occupied by unrelated kin groups. During Erlitou phases 1 and 2, rammed-earth construction foundations for palaces, a drainage system, wagons, elite burials, many pieces of turquoise and jade, and a bronze casting foundry were excavated. Rammed-earth walls and four intersecting roads around the palatial structures were built in Erlitou phase 3, but the number of water wells, storage pits, and other domestic fixtures decreased within the palatial enclosure, which suggests the exclusiveness of a small elite neighborhood in contrast to the turquoise workshop area. Human settlement at Erlitou phase 4 continued to develop, but the production of luxury goods, such as bronze objects, stopped around 1550 BCE and appear to have shifted to Erligang sites in Yanshi, about six kilometers northeast, and Zhengzhou, about eighty-five kilometers to the east, all identified as major cities of the Shang dynasty in the Bronze Age. Population migration occurred often in early China, but the affiliation of Erlitou with the Xia and Shang dynasties still remains open.<sup>17</sup>

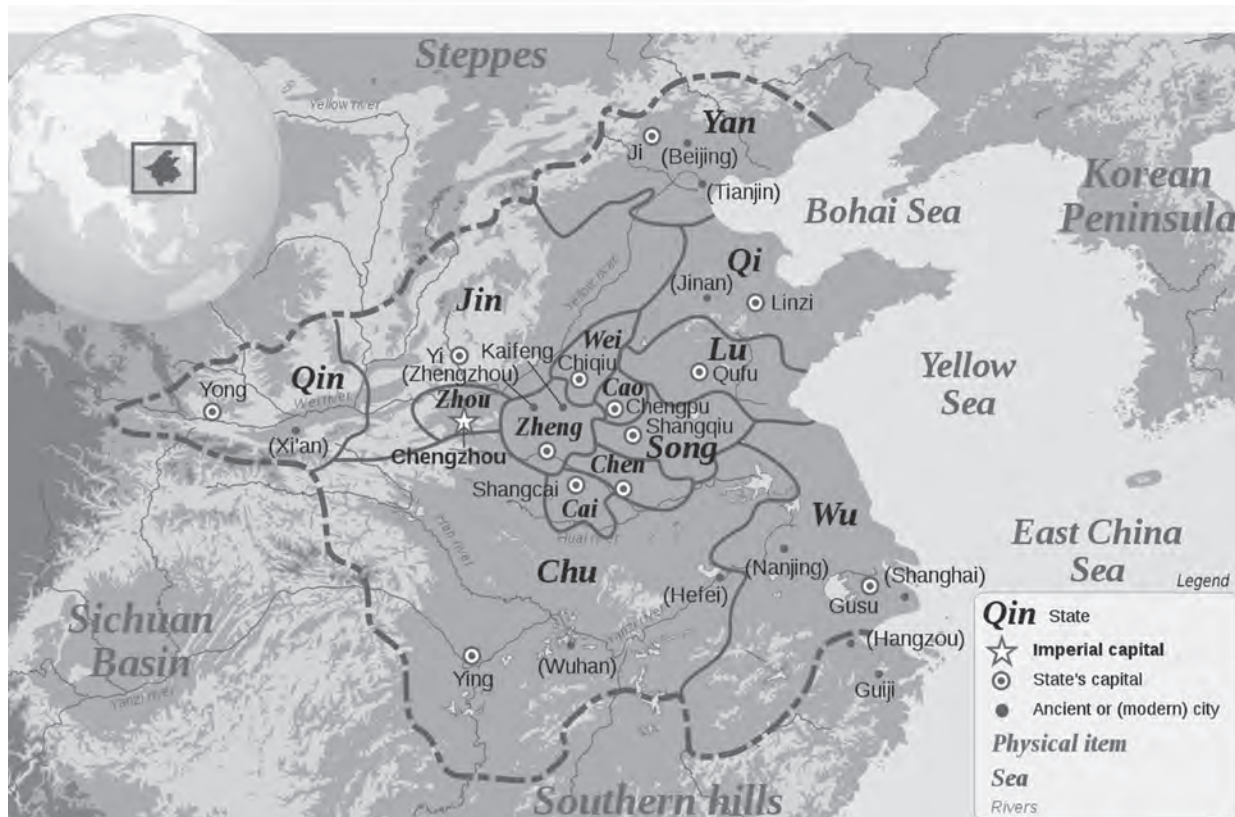
**Eighth,** around 1600 BCE saw the formation of the first formal historic dynasty in China, the Shang, in the sense that family members usually succeeded tribal kingships. Verified by written records from the time, the core cultural deposits of the Shang civilization can be seen in northern Henan, north China, particularly an arc stretching from the modern cities of Luoyang and Zhengzhou south of the Yellow River northward across the river to Anyang.<sup>18</sup> In addition to large cities and state centers, horse-drawn chariots, large buildings, a well-developed bronze technology (ritual objects, helmets, armor, daggers, socketed axes, wine utensils, statues), and a writing system distinguish the Shang from the preceding Neolithic cultures. Written records of over 100,000 oracle bones (cattle and other animal shoulder blades) and turtle shells were found at Yinxu (ca. 1300 BCE–1046 BCE), the Yin ruins first excavated in 1928. This late Shang capital with an area of about thirty square kilometers and a large population in what is now the modern city of Anyang contained the names of the Shang kings. Thirty-one royals of seventeen generations in the Shang state practiced divination rituals and sacrifice offerings, and were concerned with their kingly territories covering most of today's Henan, Hebei, and Shandong provinces.<sup>19</sup> The throne passed from elder brother to younger brother as often as from father to son. The Shang was overthrown by military campaigns, especially in about 1046 BCE at Muye near Anyang, by tribesmen and their allies from the northwestern lands in modern Shaanxi and Gansu, who established the longest-lived dynasty of Chinese history, the Zhou dynasty, under the rule of King Wu ("Martial King"). Note that "dynasty" applies here in a different way to the Shang and Zhou than the Qin and beyond. Like other ancient cultures such as Rome, kingdoms preceded later empires.

**Ninth,** the Zhou dynasty (1046 BCE–256 BCE) consisted of the Western Zhou (1046 BCE–771 BCE) and Eastern Zhou (770 BCE–256 BCE). Zhou's power corridor linked the Wei River valley (Guanzhong, modern Shaanxi Province) to west Luoyang and the Yi-Luo River basin with capitals in Feng and Hao near what is now the city of Xi'an and in Luoyi (present Luoyang). Unlike the Shang, the Zhou mostly left local groups to rule themselves. The Western Zhou court parceled out the conquered territories among royal relatives and allies as the local commanders of the regional city-states or statelets, who were given graded titles of rank similar to English dukes, marquises, earls, viscounts, and barons.

In the Confucian classic *Shujing* (*Book of Documents*), the Zhou dynasty described as an ideal system of political governance and social harmony through kinship, noble rank, lord-vassal relationships, fiefs, manors, knights, and serfs. For three centuries after the conquest of the Shang, Zhou rulers generally maintained order in north China, although threatened by factions in the Huai River, Shandong, and northwest highlands, as well as internal clan fighting. In 771 BCE, the capitals of the Zhou fell to tribes and local communities on its northwestern border, and King You was killed.



## Teaching Asia's Giants: China



Late Spring and Autumn period, fifth century BCE. Source: Wikimedia Commons at <https://tinyurl.com/y4yk4b53>.

The Zhou royal elites decided to flee eastward to the geographically more protected eastern capital at Luoyang.<sup>20</sup> This retreat marked the beginning of the Eastern Zhou Era (770 BCE–256 BCE), embodied by the advent of major classical texts and schools of thought including Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, that constitute what we today understand as the essence of Chinese culture.<sup>21</sup>

The Eastern Zhou time was an age when competing regional states were the main power players in China. The small states of the early Zhou, especially those on the peripheries, had grown into major territorial powers, and many of their rulers had greater economic and military strength than the Zhou king, now dependent upon a small royal domain around Luoyang. The old royal domain in Shaanxi had been entrusted to the feudal lord of Qin. Qin rapidly became a western counterpart of Jin in the north and Qi in the east. By the eighth century BCE, these three north China states and the Chu in the south were the principal centers of power in China. Between them, on the central Yellow River plain, there was the royal Zhou territory alongside several weak states.

The subdivision of the Eastern Zhou period from 770 BCE to 481 BCE is called the Spring and Autumn Era after the name of the preserved chronicles, *Chunqiu*, of a small state of Lu in present-day Shandong, which recorded notable events between these dates, a period considered as the dividing line of antiquity and postantiquity in Chinese classics. During the Spring and Autumn period (770–481 BCE), approximately seventy *guo* (small states) emerged, each more or less independent of the Zhou authority. Regional states constantly shifted alliances to keep the status quo to coexist with each other. Thus, the Zhou kings continued to reign by default, while each local lord was the master in his own territory. Historical struggles primarily involved diplomatic maneuvering and the art of interstate conferencing and negotiations, which has become a subject of serious studies in diplomacy and international relations for conflict solutions and gamesmanship to our own day.

By the fifth century BCE, geopolitics and balance of power changed. Walled cities/regional states went to war constantly to annihilate enemy counterparts using iron weaponry and large numbers of farmer soldiers. Wars were the main purpose of territorial states and their social life. This started another subera of the Warring States (480–221 BCE) Era, named after an ancient book, *Zhanguo ce* (*Intrigues of the Warring States*). The number of contending states declined, and those remaining were called the Seven Powers—mainly the Qin in the west, the Qi in the east, and the Chu in the south, along with the secondary states of Yan, Zhao, Han, and Wei. In the award-winning film *Hero*, frequent references to these seven states or kingdoms occur. The intensification of war demanded greater centralization of resources and power in the states. In the fourth century BCE, regional lords of the Eastern Zhou dynasty began calling themselves kings. In 256 BCE, the last Zhou king was deposed by the Qin state. In 221 BCE, the Qin was able to bring the warring states into its expanse of unification and state-building, a milestone in early Chinese development.

In addition to strong troops and adequate supplies yielded from cultivated and irrigated areas, regional states needed craftsmen, technicians, and men of letters for consultation. Parallel to other places in the world, from the sixth to the third centuries BCE, China Proper witnessed the birth of cultural figures who have had an enduring impact on mankind's thinking about ethics, governance, society, familial relations, and the universe. Among those prominent thinkers were Confucius (ca. 551 BCE–479 BCE, AKA Kong Zi, Master Kong), his disciples Mencius (Meng Zi, ca. 372 BCE–289 BCE), Xunzi, Han Fei Zi, Sun Zi, and others.<sup>22</sup>

A latinization of Kong Zi, Confucius, born in the state of Lu, modern Shandong Province, during the Spring and Autumn period of the Western Zhou, was a teacher and thinker, an emblem of Chinese, East Asian, and some Southeast Asian cultural traditions associated with Confucianism. Some earlier historical texts identified Confucius as descending from a noble clan and holding a number of offices in Lu and other kingdoms. By the Han dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE), Confucius had become an authoritative figure in a number of different cultural domains, and early commentaries show that reading texts associated with him about history, ritual, and proper conduct were important to rulers. The transmitted *Analects* (from the Greek *analekta*, “a selection”; *Lunyu* in Chinese, meaning conversations or discourses) are typically considered as most representative of Confucius's original teachings. Composed of twenty short chapters, the *Analects* is an unorganized corpus of Confucius's quotations and dialogues, passed on by his disciples and assembled after his death.<sup>23</sup> Returning to virtue and a moral order is the solution that Confucius stressed to solve social ills as a path to character formation, a good life, and good governance. The five virtues are *ren* (benevolence), *yi* (righteousness), *li* (ritual propriety), *zhi* (wisdom), and *xin* (trustworthiness). Filial piety (*xiao*), obedience to parents in familial relations, is another important merit prescribed in the *Analects* that has been wielding prime influence in contemporary China and other places.<sup>24</sup>

If Confucius focused on “ought-ness” in society, then Han Feizi's (AKA Master Han) legalism emphasized “must-ness” and Daoism “such-ness.” Legalism in early China, attributed doubtfully to Han Feizi (d. 233 BCE)—a philosopher and politician in the state of Han and Qin during the Warring States—is manifested in the *Hanfeizi*, a stylish, sophisticated, and often-dialectic treatise of fifty-five chapters that concentrates on laws and regulations, rather than personal moral examples, to organize society and to build a strong state. Arguably an antithesis of character ethics, legalism looks at the statecraft of power and mechanisms of control. The *Hanfeizi* also makes the earliest-known commentaries on Laozi and Daoism in two very different and even contradictory chapters.<sup>25</sup> One is concerned with elucidating the Way and its Power through its concrete applications in the world of realpolitik, while the other looks to the inner landscape of the complex self to accomplish the same goal.

For a long time and in Daoist theology, the probable mythical founder of Daoism was considered Lao Zi (approximately sixth century BCE, AKA Old Master, Old Child), whose identity, at best, is not clear.<sup>26</sup> Traditionally, some accounts held that Lao Zi, a contemporary of Confucius, served as a royal archivist of the Eastern Zhou court in Luoyang and that Confucius sought counsel in person with Lao Zi during the former's visit to Luoyang.<sup>27</sup> Despite popularity, these accounts are challenged for being oversimplified with no solid historical basis in contemporary scholarship.<sup>28</sup> Of central importance to Daoism is Zhuang Zi (ca. 369 BCE–286 BCE), both a historical figure and text. With over forty mentions of Confucius in *Zhuangzi*—a work of mystics, parables, parodies, fantasies, and humor rather than exposition—Zhuang Zi, also named Zhuang Zhou, allegedly once worked as a minor official in a place called Meng (probably in the state of Song in present Henan Province, south of the Yellow River) and later became a recluse. To Zhuang Zi, freedom from the world, conventional standards, and judgments was essential: one needed to see with *ming* (clarity, big picture, good strategy) and behave with *wuwei* (effortless action, doing nothing, spontaneity).<sup>29</sup>

**Tenth,** and in conclusion, parallel traditions in early China, Egypt, India, the Eurasian landmass, and the Greco-Roman world did not develop in isolation, independently, or endogenously, but mutually influenced each other through direct human contact as early as the first century CE. Independently of each other, philologist Christopher Beckwith and art historian Lukas Nickel recently pushed this time frame back several centuries, perhaps to the fourth or third centuries BCE. Nickel identifies Hellenic influences on Chinese sculpture in artifacts from the Qin dynasty (221 BCE–206 BCE).<sup>30</sup> Teaching about early China in the twenty-first century involves such a multiplicity of legends, origins, ideas, technologies, forms of organization, and global interaction that cultural essentialism—the notion of one original national essence—loses credibility. The claim that China internalized foreign influences through sinicization (sinification, *Zhongguohua*, *hanhua*) is a double-edged sword: it argues both the diversity of origin and the uniqueness of national character. Yet the diversity of those who became, claimed to be, or were incorporated into the civilizations and statehoods called Chinese in history is astounding. ■

## NOTES

1. Margaret Morganroth Gullette, ed., *The Art and Craft of Teaching* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Danforth Center for Teaching and Learning, 1984), 9.
2. Excellent alternate works that mostly use pinyin to render Chinese terms include Mark Csikszentmihalyi, ed. and trans., *Readings in Han Chinese Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Hackett Publishing, 2006); Wendy Swartz et al., eds., *Early Medieval China: A Sourcebook* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); and John Minford and Joseph M. S. Lau, eds., *Classical Chinese Literature: From Antiquity to the Tang Dynasty*, vol. 1 (New York and Hong Kong: Columbia University Press and Hong Kong University Press, 2000).
3. These three types of periodization of early China can be seen, respectively, in Charles Holcombe, "Rethinking Early East Asian History," *Education about Asia* 11, no. 2 (2006): 9–13; Li Feng, *Early China: A Social and Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Charles Hucker, *China's Imperial Past: An Introduction to Chinese History and Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995); and Wm. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom, eds. *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From Earliest Times to 1600*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).
4. Dong Wang, introduction to *Longmen's Stone Buddhas and Cultural Heritage: When Antiquity Met Modernity in China* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020).
5. See definitions of heritage at *The Free Dictionary*, <https://tinyurl.com/y6y9yc5e>, and *Dictionary.com*, <https://tinyurl.com/yyuugh46>, accessed September 15, 2020.
6. Jane Anderson and Haidy Geismars, eds., introduction to *The Routledge Companion to Cultural Property* (London: Routledge, 2017).
7. Lao Zi, translated and annotated by Lok Sang Ho, *The Dao de jing of Laozi: The Living Dao: The Art and Way of Living a Rich & Truthful Life*, chapter 42, <https://tinyurl.com/y4bd9j8g>, accessed June 20, 2020. A different version of translation by Robert Eno can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/y5anyegb>, accessed June 29, 2020.
8. Hucker, *China's Imperial Past*, 22.
9. For a full text of *Kojiki*, see <https://tinyurl.com/ykt67bu>, accessed June 2, 2020.
10. Sima Qian, *Shiji: Zhou benji disi*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1999), 81–123.
11. Gu Jiegang, *Gushi bian zixu* [autobiographical note to *Critiques of Ancient History*], vol. 1 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2011), 3, 7; and Laurence A. Schneider and Ku Chieh-Kang, *China's New History: Nationalism and the Quest for Alternative Traditions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).
12. The definition of China Proper, or Inner China, a controversial term and largely a Western invention, generally refers to areas within the Great Wall. Harry Harding, "The Concept of 'Greater China': Themes, Variations, and Reservations," *The China Quarterly* 136 (December 1993): 660–686. There are also different opinions of what the Nine Provinces were in China Proper: Swartz et al., *Early Medieval China: A Sourcebook*, 23–24.
13. Gideon Shelach and Yitzhak Jaffe, "The Earliest States in China: A Long-Term Trajectory," *Journal of Archaeological Research* 22 (2014): 327–364.
14. James C. Scott, *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017); and Roel Sterckx, *Food, Sacrifice, and Sagehood in Early China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). An interesting narrative of early central Eurasia with traditional Graeco-Roman, Persian, and Chinese empires at the periphery can be found in Christopher I. Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).
15. Some scholars perceive the Xia as a fictional dynasty constructed by the Zhou people of 1046 BCE–221 BCE, whereas many scholars tend to agree that the history of the Xia could be further known through the combination of archaeological finds with historical documents. Yu the Great was the alleged first chief of the Xia, who successfully dredged riverbeds and opened up drainage channels to divert floodwaters to the sea around the Yellow River valley.
16. Shelach and Jaffe, "The Earliest States in China."
17. Li Liu and Hong Xu, "Rethinking Erlitou: Legend, History, and Chinese Archeology," *Antiquity* 81 (2007): 886–901.
18. Robert L. Thorp, *China in the Early Bronze Age: Shang Civilization* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).
19. Michael Loewe and Edward Shaunessy, eds., *Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 BC* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
20. Li Feng, *Landscape and Power in Early China: The Crisis and Fall of the Western Zhou 1045–771 BC* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2006).
21. See below for further explanation. Christopher I. Beckwith, *Greek Buddha: Pyrrho's Encounter with Early Buddhism in Central Asia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); and Lukas Nickel, "The First Emperor and Sculpture in China," *Bulletin of SOAS* 76, no. 3 (2013): 413–447.
22. Kong is Confucius's last name, whereas Zi is an honorary suffix, as in the case of Meng Zi, Xun Zi, Han Fei Zi, and so forth.
23. There are Four Books and Five Classics whose authorship is credited to Confucius and his disciples: the *Analects*, *Mencius* (*Mengzi*), the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong*), and the *Great Learning* (*Daxue*); as well as the *Book of Songs/Poetry/Odes* (*Shi*), the *Book of Documents* (*Shu*), the *Book of Rites* (*Li*), the *Book of Changes* (*Yi*), and *Spring and Autumn* (*Chunqiu*).
24. Mark Csikszentmihalyi, "Confucius," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://tinyurl.com/y58uch8x/>, accessed August 6, 2020; and Henry Rosemont Jr., *A Reader's Companion to the Confucian Analects* (New York: Palgrave, 2013).
25. Paul R. Goldin, ed., *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Han Fei* (New York: Springer, 2013).
26. Poul Andersen, *The Paradox of Being: Truth, Identity, and Images in Daoism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), 78; and Stephen Eskildsen, *Daoism, Meditation, and the Wonders of Serenity: From the Latter Han Dynasty (25–220) to the Tang Dynasty (618–907)* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2015), 31–32. For a summary of different interpretative approaches and models to historical and living Daoism, see Russell Kirkland, *Taoism: The Enduring Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2004), chapter 1; and Gil Raz, *The Emergence of Daoism: Creation of Tradition* (London: Routledge Press, 2012).
27. Sima Qian, *Shiji: Lao Zi Han Fei Liezhuan disan, 1701–1703*, vol. 3; and Li, *Early China*, 216.
28. Harold David Roth, *Original Tao: Inward Training (Nei-Yeh) and the Foundations of Taoist Mysticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 5–7; and James Robson, ed., *The Norton Anthology of World Religions: Daoism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2015), 77–82, 159–168.
29. Zhuang Zi, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Zhuang Zi, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, trans. Brook Ziporyn (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2009).
30. Beckwith, *Greek Buddha*; Nickel, "The First Emperor and Sculpture in China"; and S. Frederick Starr, *Lost Enlightenment: Central Asia's Golden Age from the Arab Conquest to Tamerlane* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

---

**DONG WANG** is Distinguished Professor of History and Director of the Wellington Koo Institute for Modern China in World History at Shanghai University. She has been a Research Associate at the Fairbank Center of Harvard University since 2002. She currently serves on seven international editorial boards, including the Association for Asian Studies. Her books in English include *Longmen's Stone Buddhas and Cultural Heritage: When Antiquity Met Modernity in China* (2020) and *The United States and China: A History from the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (2013, rev. 2nd ed. forthcoming 2021).