

北京建筑工程学院学术著作出版基金资助

# Highlights of Chinese Culture

## 聚焦中国文化

(英文版)

贾荣香 夏 岩 孙希磊 著



石油工业出版社  
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藏书章

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### Brief Content

The book gives a refined account of dynasty culture, religion culture, philosophy and ideology culture, dietary culture, costume culture, literature culture, calligraphy and painting culture, business culture, architecture culture, geographical culture and custom culture in succinct English.

The book is presented for foreign readers, including the teachers and students in Confucius academies and for native readers, including college teachers and college students and people working in foreign affairs.

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# 北京建筑工程学院学术著作

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## Preface

Chinese culture, with an unbroken civilization of 5,000 years, is one of treasures in the world. Learning it, studying it and spreading it will offer us a deep experiencing of the world civilization, a typical understanding of the excellent culture and a great developing of the human spirit outcome. Nowadays, more and more Confucius academies are being set up in the world, and studies of Chinese ancient civilization are going into the foreign classes. For the sharing of multi-culture, Chinese culture is of immeasurable significance.

As is suggested in the title of the book, there are two eye-catching points.

Firstly, "Chinese culture" is so rich that it serves as an inexhaustible source for many writers. Our penetration point aims at the great interests for foreign readers and original recognition for native readers. The book comprises both deep culture and elegant culture, both surface culture and folk culture. It also displays both main-stream culture and synchronic sub-culture.

Secondly, "highlights" is the distinction of the book—to refine the quintessence in the grand palace of Chinese culture. We refuse literary translation word for word, and instead we write with succinct English, with deep language competence, with native understanding of Chinese culture and with exchanged view of foreign readers, so as to present an objective and a readable book for the readers, foreign and native alike.

The book is based on culture from pre-history to the National Republic, covering dynasty culture, religion culture, philosophy and ideology culture, dietary culture, costume culture, literature culture, calligraphy and painting culture, business culture, architecture culture, geographical culture and custom culture. We have made great efforts to select the essences from the abundant Chinese culture to entertain the readers.

The writers have made academic attainments in Chinese culture, in cross-culture communication and in translation. Jia Rongxiang, responsible for the whole plan, has examined all the content and written Chapter 2, Chapter 4, Chapter 5, Chapter 7, Chapter 8, Chapter 9 and Chapter 11. Xia Yan has written Chapter 1, Chapter 3, Chapter 6 and Chapter 10. Sun Xilei has taken part in the design of the content. The book is decorated with pictures for better presentation. Some pictures are self-made, and others are taken from historical documents for the purpose to provide a visual effect.

Jia Rongxiang, Xia Yan, Sun Xilei

October 10, 2007

In Beijing



# 前言

中国文化是世界文化的瑰宝,有着延绵不断的五千年文明史。学习、研究、传播中国文化,就是对世界文明的深切感受,对优秀文化的独特领悟,对人类精神产物的发扬光大。随着孔子学院在世界各地兴起,国学走进“洋课堂”,中国文化对世界范围内的多元文化共享具有不可低估的意义。

本书有两个亮点体现在书名上。

第一,“中国文化”:取之不尽,用之不竭,无论多少文人墨客去写,都源源不断。我们对中国文化的切入点是要让外国读者读得津津有味,让中国读者感到“原来如此”。为此,本书既包括深层文化、高雅文化,又包括表层文化、民间文化;既表现不同时期的主流文化,又反映同一时期的亚文化。

第二,“聚焦”:这两个字体现出本书的特色——在泱泱中国文化中,提炼其文化精华,用熟练的英语文字进行创作。我们绝对不是做枯燥的文字翻译,而是以一个外语工作者深厚的语言功底,加上作为一个中国人对中国文化的深刻理解,以及站在外国人角度换位思考看待中国文化,有机地把几个方面衔接在一起,为本书特有的读者群体——外国读者和懂英文的中国读者负责任地呈上一本既客观又具有极强的可读性的好书。

本书突出文化,以文化发展为线索,从史前到清朝、民国,覆盖历朝历代的帝王文化、宗教文化、哲学文化、饮食文化、服饰文化、文学文化、书画文化、商业文化、建筑文化、地理文化以及风俗文化 11 个方面。中国文化博大精深,我们力求撷取各个时期的精华,以飨读者。

本书作者在中国文化和跨文化交际及翻译等领域有颇深的造诣。贾荣香负责全书的整体设计,内容审定,并且撰写第二章、第四章、第五章、第七章、第八章、第九章和第十一章,夏岩撰写第一章、第三章、第六章和第十章,孙希磊参与了文化内容设定。本书配有插图,起到图文并茂的作用。有些插图是自己拟配的,有些是历史资料。目的是用简练的语言和直观的图画,与读者共同体会优秀的中国文化。

鉴于作者撰写水平有限,一定会有不足之处。在此,我们真诚愿意和各位同仁共勉。

贾荣香 夏岩 孙希磊

于北京

2007 年 10 月 10 日

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# Introduction

## 1. A Brief Account of China

China is one of the "Four Ancient Civilizations" in the world, the other three being Egypt (埃及), Babylon (巴比伦) and India (印度). A significant aspect of China is its long cultural and national history. The Chinese people have shared a common culture longer than any other people on the earth. The Chinese writing system, for example, can date back almost 4,000 years. The imperial dynastic system of government, which continued for centuries, was established as early as 221 BC by Qin Shi Huang (秦始皇), founder of the Qin Dynasty. Although specific dynasties were overturned, the dynastic system survived. China was even ruled at times by foreign invaders, such as the Mongols (蒙古人) during the Yuan Dynasty, from 1279 to 1368 AD, and the Manchurians (满族) during the Qing Dynasty from 1644 to 1911 AD, but the foreigners were largely absorbed into the culture of the people they governed.

The dynastic system was overturned in 1911, and a weak republican form of government existed until 1949 when the People's Republic of China was founded.

## 2. The Prehistoric Period

As modern technology develops, archaeological evidence suggests that China is one of the cradles of the human race. The earliest known human in China, whose fossilized skull was unearthed in Shanxi Province in 1963, is believed to date back to 600,000 BC. The remains of Sinanthropus (中国猿人) known as Peking Man dating back to 400,000 BC, were excavated in 1923 at Zhoukoudianzhen (周口店镇) near Peking. Peking Man was closely related to Pithecanthropus (直立猿人) of Java (爪哇) and lived during the Old Stone Age. In the upper caves of Zhoukoudianzhen was found artifacts of a late Old Stone Age man (50,000—35,000 BC), who ranked in age with the Cro-Magnon (克努玛人) of Europe. This was an early form of Homo sapiens (类似现代人的猿人), or modern man, who made tools out of bones as well as stones, made clothes out of animal hides, and knew how to make fire.

Around the 4th or 3rd millennium BC, in the New Stone Age, great changes occurred in the lives of the ancient Chinese. Larger numbers of people began living together at settled places, cultivating land, and domesticating animals. These people made polished stone tools and built shelters in pit dwellings and beehive huts that were covered with reed roofs. Such villages were found mostly in the area of the great bend of the Yellow River on the North China Plain. Despite its severe winters, this area was well suitable for agriculture. In fact, it closely resembled the other cradles of ancient civilizations, such as the valley of the Nile (尼罗河) in Egypt, Indo-Gangetic Plain (印度恒

河平原) or the Mesopotamian Plain (美索不达米亚平原) between the Tigres River (底格里斯河) and the Euphrates River (幼发拉底河).

The people of this period (3000—2000 BC) also developed the art of making pottery for storing food and drink. Two distinct types have been discovered: red clay pots with swirling black designs in the northwest near Yangshao (仰韶) village, and smooth black pottery in northeast China near Longshan (龙山), a site in Shandong Province.

Yet, the earliest part of Chinese history is formed by legends and mythologies, like the ancient Greece and Rome. The Beginning of the World is similar to the Genesis in the Bible. The difference is that the Chinese make no clear distinction between God and Man.

### 3. Chinese Legends and Mythologies



Figure 1 Pan Gu Separates  
Yin (阴) from Yang (阳)

#### 3.1 Pan Gu (盘古) Creates the World

A Chinese legend says that Pan Gu created the world by separating the heaven and the earth from chaos. In the beginning, the universe was like an egg and there was only chaos in the egg. Pan Gu had slept in the egg for over 18,000 years. Then one day, he woke up and cracked the egg into pieces. By separating the heavy and light parts of the egg, he created the heaven and the earth. Pan Gu stood on the earth and held up the heaven using his hands, and then he had grown with the heaven until the form of the world for another 18,000 years. (see Figure 1)

#### 3.2 Nü Wa (女娲) Patches up the Sky

A legend tells how Nü Wa, the mighty goddess, patched up the sky. There was a heavy fighting between two deities, Gong Gong (共工), the God of Water and Zhu Rong (祝融), the God of Fire. They fought all the way from heaven to earth, causing turmoil everywhere. The God of Fire won, and in anger the God of Water struck his head against Buzhou Mountain (不周山), a mythical peak supposed to be northwest of the Kunlun range (昆仑山脉) in southern Xinjiang.

The mountain collapsed and down came the big pillar that held heaven from earth. Half the sky fell in, leaving a big black hole. The earth cracked open, forests went up in flames, floodwaters sprouted from beneath the earth and dragons, snakes and fierce animals leaped out at the people. Many people were drowned and more were burned or devoured. It was an unprecedented disaster.

Nü Wa was grieved that mankind should undergo such sufferings. She decided to mend the sky and end this catastrophe. She melted together various kinds of colored stones and with the molten

mixture she patched up the sky. Then she killed a giant turtle and used its four legs as four pillars to support the fallen part of the sky. She caught and killed a dragon and this scared the other beasts away. She gathered and burned a huge quantity of reeds and with the ashes she stopped the flood from spreading, so that people could live in peace again.

The only trace left of the disaster, as the legend says, was that the sky slanted to the northwest and the earth to the southeast, and so, since then, the Sun, the Moon and all the Stars turn towards the west and all the rivers run southeast.

### 3.3 The "Three Augusts" and "Five Emperors" (三皇五帝)

The "Three Augusts" are Huang Di (黄帝), Yan Di (炎帝) and Chiyou (蚩尤).

Yan Di (abbreviated Yan) and Huang Di (abbreviated Huang), two emperors in ancient Chinese legends, are said to be the earliest ancestors of the Chinese nation. All the Chinese, whether they live in the mainland or in Taiwan, or in Hongkong and Macao, or in other countries, regard themselves as the descendants of Yan and Huang. Sometimes, the term "Yan Huang Zi Sun" (炎黄子孙) or "Descendants of Yan and Huang" is used to mean the Chinese nation. (see Figure 2)



Figure 2 Huang Di

It is said that over 4,000 years ago there lived along the Changjiang River (长江) or the Yangtze River and Huanghe valleys many clan tribes. Of them, the Huang, Yan and Chiyou were the most famous. The Huang tribe lived first in the northwestern part of China (now Shan xi Province), then moved eastward, and remained at last in the mountain valleys in present-day Zhuolu (涿鹿) County, Hebei Province. Still, they led a nomadic life. The Yan tribe lived in an area from the Weihe River (渭河) valley to the middle reaches of the Huanghe. The Chiyou tribe, also known as "Jiuli" (九黎) nationality, lived in the eastern part of China (now the area of Shandong and Henan provinces). In their long years of communications, big wars between the three tribes broke out several times in the northern part of today's Hebei province.

After the Yan tribe moved from the Weihe valley to the middle reaches of the Huanghe, long-drawn-out conflicts between the Yan and Chiyou tribes began. Defeated by the Chiyou tribe, the Yan tribe fled to Zhuolu, Hebei and joined the Huang tribe. Afterwards, the Yan and Huang tribes fought shoulder by shoulder in a big battle against the Chiyou tribe in Zhuolu. The Chiyou tribe was defeated, and Chiyou himself was killed by the victor, the Huang tribe. This is the well-known "Zhuolu Battle" (涿鹿大战) recorded in Chinese history books.

Huang, chief of the Huang tribe, took measures to pacify the members from the Chiyou tribe, so other Chiyou members in the north came and joined the Huang tribe. Hearing that Chiyou had been killed, other tribes came to admire Huang and supported him as emperor. Afterwards, Huang set up

his capital in Zhuolu.

After defeating Chiyu, the Yan tribe, with a view to obtaining hegemony, began a full-scale war against the Huang tribe. The war was fought at Juyang (沮阳), now Huailai (怀来) County bordering Zhuolu, Hebei. The Yan, however, failed and finally yielded to the Huang tribe.

Later on, their descendants moved southward from Hebei to the Huanghe River valley and settled down in the Central Plains. For a long time they lived, multiplied and mixed together, and became the ancient inhabitants in the area of the Central Plains of China. They laid the historical foundation of the Huaxia (华夏) nationality. In the long process of history, the Huang tribe was comparatively strong and developed a fairly advanced civilization, so many inventions and creations made by the laboring people living in primitive society were marked in Huang's name.

Thus, Huang became the representative of the civilization of the Central Plains. As the Huang tribe developed gradually in later times, those inhabitants living in the Central Plains who were from different ancestors took themselves to be the descendants of Huang. Since the Spring and Autumn Period (770—476 BC), these inhabitants had claimed to be the Huaxia nationality, which was renamed the Han nationality in the Han Dynasty. From then on, all people from the Han nationality worshipped Huang as their own ancestor and claimed to be the "Descendants of Yan and Huang" (炎黄子孙).

The Five Emperors are Di Zhi (帝挚), surname Shaohao (少昊氏); residence: Xifang (西方); not by all historians accepted as emperor. Zhuan Xu (颛顼), surname Gaoyang (高阳氏); residence: Pu (濮). Di Ku (帝喾), surname Gaoxin (高辛氏); residence: Bo (亳). Yao (尧), surname Tang (唐) or Taotang (陶唐氏), called Fangxun (放勋); residence: Ji (冀). Shun (舜), surname Yu (虞) or Youyu (有虞氏), called Chonghua (重华); residence: Ji (冀).

Old Chinese sources often speak of the "Three Augusts" and "Five Emperors", but scholars disagree on who these persons are. Some of them regard Fuxi (伏羲), Shennong (神农) and Huangdi (黄帝) as the Three Augusts and Nü Wa instead of Huangdi, and Shaohao, Gaoyang, Gaoxin, Yao and Shun as the Five Emperors.

Like the Greek and Roman histories, the early part of the Chinese history is passed down from generation to generation orally. It is vague, discrepant and unbelievable. Scholars often disagree on who is who. People attribute achievements to individuals although the development of history is made by people themselves.

### 3.4 The Terms of the Chinese People

Early in the Western Zhou Dynasty (in the 11th Century BC), Zhougongdan (周公旦), younger brother of Zhouwuwang (周武王) (the emperor of the Zhou Dynasty), began to build Luoyi (洛邑) (now the city of Luoyang in Henan Province). He thought the area of the Central Plains was located in the middle of the lands in all directions and was the center of China. So, he named the Central Plains the "Central Land" (中原). Because the people living in the Central Plains were from the Huaxia (华夏) nationality, the area was named "Zhong Hua" (中华), meaning "Central

China". After that, the Huaxia nationality mixed gradually with other nationalities and enlarged their areas of activity. As a result, the highly developed culture of the Huaxia nationality was spread step by step all over the country, and "Zhong Hua" became the name of the whole country. Subsequently, the term "Descendants of Yan and Huang" had a broader concept than before.

The mixing and forming of the Zhong Hua nationality at its early stage had close relations with the ancient land of Hebei and its early inhabitants. And contributions were made as well by the ancestors in the land of Hebei to the development of the culture of the Central Plains. So Hebei is one of the birthplaces of the Chinese nation and the cradle of the "Descendants of Yan and Huang".

### 3.5 More Stories about the Ancestors of the Chinese People

3.5.1 According to the Chinese legends, in ancient time, there were fewer people but more animals. A man invented the nest on a tree to protect themselves from being attacked by dangerous beasts. People called him "You Chao Shi" (有巢氏) meaning the nest creator and made him ruler.

3.5.2 At the beginning, people ate meat raw and they got sick. A man made fire by clashing the flints, so cooking began. People were happy and they made him ruler and called him "Sui Ren Shi" (燧人氏) meaning the fire maker.

3.5.3 There a man came along and he caught the animals' litters and raised them up for meat and hide. People called him "Fu Xi Shi" (伏羲氏) meaning animal raiser.

3.5.4 Later on, a man invented farming by planting some seeds collected in the field, so agriculture began. He was called "Shen Nong Shi" (神农氏) meaning God for Agriculture.

### 3.6 *Classic of Mountains and Seas* (*Shan Hai Jing* 山海经)

Some legends and mythologies describe the looks of the prehistoric China and they are scattered in ancient Chinese story books, one of which telling the earliest stories is *Shan Hai Jing*.

*Shan Hai Jing* is firstly an important literature on geography in ancient China. The currently available version includes 18 volumes, among which 5 volumes are *Classic of Mountains* (*Shan Jing* 山经), 8 volumes are *Classic of Seas* (*Hai Jing* 海经), 4 volumes are *Classic of Big Land* (*Da Huang Jing* 大荒经), and 1 volume is *Classic of Mainland* (*Hainei Jing* 海内经). It is said that *Shan Hai Jing* was written by Yu (禹), one of the forefathers of ancient China, but the saying is quite doubtful. In this book, *Shan Jing* and *Hai Jing* form their own specific systems accordingly, while they were finished in different periods. *Shan Jing* contains the description of famous mountains and great rivers, propagation and minerals on the mainland. It is estimated that this part of the book was finished in the early or mid period of the Warring States Period (战国时期) (475—221 BC). *Hai Jing* contains a great deal of alien legends, fairy tales home and abroad, and was written in the Qin Dynasty (秦朝) (221—206 BC) or at the beginning of the Western Han Dynasty (西汉) (206 BC—8 AD).

*Shan Hai Jing*, containing rich legends and fairy tales, is very valuable for historical study, especially helpful for research on primitive society in China, and the primitive surnames, tribes, and knowledge and understanding of the universe, nature and social development.



According to the records in *Shan Hai Jing*, the Yellow Emperor is the heavenly emperor of the west. He is the great grandfather of Zhuan Xu (颛顼) (a legendary ancient emperor). He is also the ancestor of many tribes inside and outside China and the only heavenly emperor listed among San Huang Wu Di, and the only heavenly emperor in *Shan Hai Jing*.

In this book, he is the inventor of farming, craft, vehicle, boat, musical instrument, singing and dancing. Together with his wife (also a legendary goddess), he gives birth to 10 sons and 12 moons, which relate to the astronomy and the calendar. There are still many legends about the water-control of the Great Yu, battle between the Great Yu and Gong Gong (共工), the monster who launches the flood, and so on. Gong Gong, the trouble-maker is a figure like Grendel in Beowulf.

# Chapter 1 Dynasty Culture

## 1. Xia (2200—1750 BC)

China's Dynasty Culture started from the founding of the first dynasty Xia with a remarkable change of the system to succeed the position of the ruler. Before that time, it was done by democratic election (although there was never such a term in ancient China). Yao, the great leader, passed power to Shun by recognizing his abilities. In turn, Shun gave his position to Yu because of his contribution of leading people to fight the flood. But Yu made his son Qi (启) ruler and began the first dynasty in Chinese history. Some people tell different stories. According to *Records of the Historian* (Shi Ji 史记), by Sima Qian (司马迁), Yu passed his position to Yi (益). Qi killed Yi and usurped the power. So, it was Qi who founded the first dynasty Xia (夏).

Before the Xia, the Chinese society was called "Da Tong" (大同) which was a kind of primitive communist society. With the founding the Xia, it is called "Xiao Kang" (小康), as began the private ownership. The royal family owned the whole country. But that was only in name. He was supported by a group of slave owners.

From historical literatures, not much is known about this first Chinese dynasty—in fact, most historians thought that it was a myth. But the archeological record has proven them wrong. Some findings indicate that the Xia had descended from a wide-spread Yellow River valley Neolithic culture known as Longshan (龙山) culture, was famous for its black-lacquered pottery. Even though no known examples of Xia-era writing survive, they almost certainly had a writing system that was the precursor of oracle bones of the Shang Dynasty. (see Figure 3)

The Xia was the beginning of the class society—the Slavery. The exploitation and suppression were severe. The last ruler Jie (桀) was a cruel tyrant. People hated him to such an extent that they said: "When the Sun—you, the ruler will die. We'd rather die with you." (时日何丧, 予及汝偕亡。) Consequently, there was a military mutiny and he was arrested. Xia, the first dynasty was replaced by Shang (商).

The story of Yi Yin (伊尹) helping Cheng Tang (成汤) overthrow the Xia Dynasty. It goes like this:

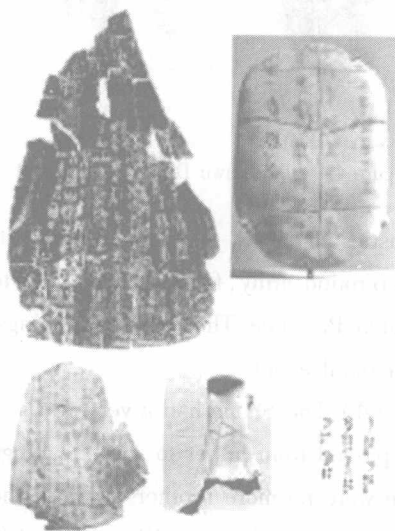


Figure 3 Precursor of the Shang Dynasty's "Oracle Bones" (甲骨文)

*Yi Yin, being a farmer-origin intellectual, is laboring in the field when Cheng Tang, an ambitious general comes to invite him to be his advisor. After several times of sincere begging, Yi Yin is deeply moved by Cheng Tang's personality. He leaves his farmhouse and helps Cheng Tang accomplish his cause.*

## 2. Shang (1750—1040 BC)

The Shang continued to develop the slavery system till it reached its peak. There are four things to know about the Shang:

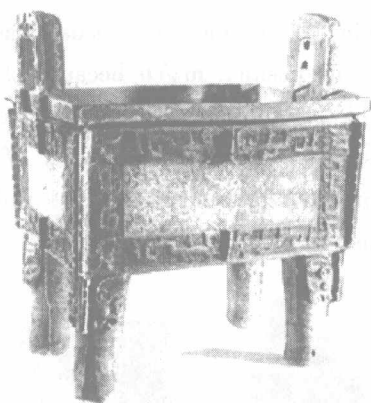


Figure 4 the Simuwu Ding (司母戊鼎)

(1) They possessed the most advanced bronze-working civilization in the world. The Simuwu Ding (司母戊鼎) (see Figure 4), a square pot made of bronze excavated in Anyang (安阳), Henan Province weighs 875 kilos.

(2) Shang's remains provide the earliest and most complete record of Chinese writing scratched out on the shoulder blades of pigs for oracular purposes.

(3) They were quite possibly the most blood-thirsty pre-modern civilization. They liked human sacrifice a lot. If a king died, then more than one hundred slaves would join him in the grave. Some of them would be beheaded first. Some of them were just thrown in still alive. Later dynasties replaced the humans with terra-cotta figures (兵马俑), resulting in things like the underground army, for example, the terra-cotta of the Qin Dynasty exhibited in Xi'an (西安), Shaanxi Province. They also did things like human sacrifice for building consecrations and other ceremonial events.

(4) The Shang had a very odd system of succession; instead of a patrilineal system where power was passed from father to son, the kingship passed from elder brother to younger brother, and when there were no more brothers, then to the oldest maternal nephew.

The last ruler was King Zhou (纣), again a ruthless wicked man, who liked most Chinese rulers, lived in luxury and corruption. He indulged in drinking and womanizing. And here came an evil woman named Da Ji (妲己). She was a Fox Spirit (a seductive woman) who tempted the king into doing bad things, especially persecuting people who gave the king honest advice. This is another typical Chinese story that it is woman that ruins the dynasty. The same kind of excuse can be found in nearly every last court. There is always a woman who is to be blamed.

The men who overthrew the Shang and founded the Western Zhou was Wen Wang (文王), the Literate King and his successor Wu Wang (武王), the Martial King. Wen Wang invites Jiang Ziya (姜子牙), or Jiang Shang (姜尚) to help him succeed. Jiang was already very old and used to go fishing by the Wei River (渭河) with an attempt to be invited. Finally Wen Wang came along and invited him to join him in his cause.