



A STORIED HISTORY OF CHINA

COMPILED BY LÜ QIANFEI

TOURISM EDUCATION PRESS

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中国国史故事
A STORIED HISTORY
OF CHINA

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CHAPTER I

THE PREHISTORY PERIOD

China has a history longer than that of any other present-day nation. Her civilization is very ancient, and, moreover, it is the only civilization that has maintained cultural continuity from the second millenium BC until today. Her culture had never at any period broken off as had for example, that of ancient Assyria, Egypt, Greece, Rome or the Byzantine Empire. The pioneering period of her long history, the prehistory period, with its unsteady steps, tramped across a wide space of time. This period of our country, like those of other ancient nations, stretches from the creation of the world out of chaos to the much later period when true history begins. About this period no reliable written history is available. Whatever people learn about it comes from excavations, myths and legends.

1. ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCATIONS

Up to the 20th century archaeological materials were valued according to whether they confirmed or illustrated the past as given in the Classics. Epigraphy was all-important, but objects, without inscriptions were neglected until the early 1920s when organized explorations began. Under the leadership of the Communist Party before and after liberation field work was conducted on a large scale, and a good deal of valuable material was published.

Fossil remains of the early Palaeolithic Ape Man and his stone implements, as well as large quantities of other palaeontological fossils have been found on various occasions since 1929 at Zhoukoudian, fifty kilometres southwest of Beijing. This Chinese Ape Man, also known as the Peking Man, lived in the Pleistocene period

of the Quarternary era, about 500,000 years ago. In 1954 fossil human teeth belonging to the Middle Palaeolithic Age were found in Dingcun village, Xiangfen county, Shanxi Province. A fossil skullcap, the upper and lower jawbones, and three teeth of the ape man were excavated in 1963 and 1964, in Lantian County, Shaanxi Province. The Lantian Man lived some 500,000-600,000 years ago. But the most primitive ape man so far known to have existed in China is Yuanmou Man, who lived about 1.70 million years ago, and whose fossil teeth were discovered in 1965, in Yuanmou County, Yunnan Province. Beside these mentioned above, we have fossil remains discovered in Maba in Guangdong. Changyang in Hubei, Liujiang in Guangxi and in the Yellow River Bend region. They all belong to the Palaeolithic Age.

Neolithic remains distributed over an extensive area have been discovered in many parts of China. The finds include painted and black pottery and small stone implements, belonging to the period between the Palaeolithic and Neolithic Ages. Specimens of painted pottery (also known as Yangshao Culture) have been unearthed in an area extending from modern Henan, Shanxi and Shaanxi to Gansu. Specimens of black pottery (also known as Longshan Culture) have also been unearthed over a wide area, mainly in Shandong and the central plains. Evidence of Microlithic culture had been found in regions north of the Great Wall, and evidence of Neolithic culture of the South China type has been discovered in many areas south of the Yangtze River.

2. SOME LEGENDARY CHARACTERS

Besides these excavations we have plenty of myths and legends. The stories of the pioneers of the Chinese people the Three Sovereigns, the Five Emperors, the Three Sages, the Three Dynasties, and other aspects of the legendary past were much talked of through most of our history. The virtuous conduct and benevolent policies of Yao, Shun, Yu, Tang, and the Zhou founders were grand themes of traditional literature and provided models for traditional education, both official and popular.

The first figure that appears on the horizon of our history is

pan-gu-shi, styled by westerners as the Chinese Adam.

In the beginning of the world, one of our legends relates, the cosmos was a gas that slowly solidified into a colossal stone egg. Out of this egg was born a creature named Pan-gu-shi. He grew at a rate of one zhang (roughly 11 feet) a day. Holding a chisel in one hand and a hammer in the other, he spent his time chopping the stone into two parts. The upper part became the heaven and the lower the earth. When he completed his labors and died, his eyes became the sun and the moon, his breath the wind and clouds, and his voice thunder; his limbs transformed into mountains, his blood into rivers, and his flesh into the soil. His sweat descended as rain. And the fleas and lice on his body were ancestors of all living creatures on earth.

Next after him came the three great rulers, the Tianhuang (the Heavenly Emperor), the Dihuang (the Earthly Emperor) and the Renhuang (the Human Emperor).

These three fabulous creatures form the so-called epoch of the Three Sovereigns in which man lived a life of perfect innocence, and knew neither temptation nor impurity. After these three rulers, the most prominent figures one should mention are perhaps You-chao-shi Sui-ren-shi, Fu-xi-shi, Nu-wa-shi and Shen-nong-shi.

As the Chinese characters are all monosyllabic, each syllable of those names represents a character. The character you means "to have, to possess, to occupy," and chao, "a nest," and shi "a person". So You-chao-shi means "The Nest-builder." Perhaps it was he who taught people to build dwellings as a protection against the animal world. Beasts of all kinds are believed to have lived in perfect peace with mankind. The Primeval man was supposed to subsist on a vegetarian diet, and it was not before he began to kill them for food that animals became hostile to him.

You-chao-shi was followed by Sui-ren-shi. "the Fire-Producer", or the so-called the Chinese Prometheus. Once he observed a bird pecking at a tree and thus producing sparks. The result was the discovery that fire might be produced by rubbing pieces of wood against each other; and this in due course led to the art of cooking. He was at the same time the inventor of the prehistoric knot-writing.

The official name of Fu-xi-shi was Tai-hao, "the Great Almighty". According to those authorities who consider him as the



Pangu separated heaven from earth with a chisel

first real ruler, it was Fu-xi-shi who established order in the social relations of his people, who, before him had lived like animals in the wilds. He is also supposed to have introduced the marriage bond, which was previously unknown. It was he who taught people to hunt, to fish, to keep flocks and to make musical instruments. He is also looked upon as the inventor of those mysterious eight diagrams, the Ba-gua. His capital was called Chen, in the present province of Henan. He is supposed to have reigned for 115 years.

Fu-xi-shi was succeeded by a personage named Nu-wa-shi, who was, according to some legends, his own sister. She did not add much to Fu-xi-shi's work in the way of new phases of civilization, but she is supposed to have achieved in heaven patching. When Fu-xi-shi's evil spirit, his minister Gong-gong, had smashed the vault of heaven, it was Nu-wa who patched it up by melting stones.

If, in following some Chinese authors, we assume Nu-wa to have reigned merely in the name of Fu-xi-shi, the next legendary emperor was Shen-nong-shi. His dynastic appellation was Yan Di. To him is ascribed the invention of the principal agricultural implements and the introduction of field labor, as is indicated by his name, Shen-nong, which may be rendered "Divine Farmer". He also went very deeply into the study of herbs, in order to find remedies for the diseases of his people. He was very successful in his investigations. It is said that in one day he discovered seventy poisonous plants and as many that were antidotes to them. A pharmacopeia (Shen-nong Ben Cao Jing, "The Classic of Shen-nong's Botany") which is in use at the present time is attributed to him. He was worshiped under the title of "The Prince of Cereals" by farmers, and his image could be found in every druggist's store in the old society.

Huang Di (2704-2595 BC) is the third of the series of great emperors grouped by some Chinese historians under the name of "Wu Di" (The Five Emperors). He led an army to fight Chiyou, the leader of barbarian tribes, in Zhuolu in modern Hebei Province. Chiyou would have been overcome, but by enchantments he hid his men in a mist and escaped. Huang Di (also known as Xu-yuan-shi) was, however, a match of him, for he constructed a chariot with a wooden figure always pointing to the south, no matter in what

direction he drove. Guided by this he followed Chiyou into the very midst of the fog in which Chiyou had enveloped him and thus Huang Di captured and slew him. With the overthrow of Chiyou he was elected to the supreme power. He had the good fortune of having wise ministers to aid him in the reforms that he wished to introduce into his administration. He ordered them to construct houses, to compose a calendar, and to make musical and astronomical instruments. He instructed his state historian Cang Jie to invent the art of writing.

One of the most important and permanent of all the inventions of this celebrated Emperor was that of the Sexagenary Cycle which has been used ever since his day in the reckoning of time. But the so called the Ten Stems and the Twelve Branches, two series of symbols combined to form the "Cycle of Sixty", were invented much earlier.

Not satisfied with having created the source of national wealth, the Emperor provided the means for the exchange of produce by inventing cars drawn by oxen. The rivers and lakes of his empire also were soon covered with barges. His soldiers were provided with bows and arrows, swords and lances; and his regiments were taught to follow a standard. Precious stones and pieces of gold and copper were introduced to serve as mediums of exchange.

He was fortunate in having a good queen, named Leizu. She studied rearing of silkworms and invented the principal manipulations, and brought the silk industry to a high state of perfection.

On one of his journeys of inspection the monarch is supposed to have discovered in the neighborhood of Kaifeng a copper mine, which led to the establishment of a foundry in the present province of Henan, where the first sacrificial vessels are supposed to have been cast from the Emperor's models.

He died soon after a glorious reign of about one hundred years.

Yao (2456-2344 BC) Yao and his successor Shun are the most popular figures in ancient Chinese history. Whatever estimable qualities can be imagined in great and good rulers have been ascribed to them.

Yao began his reign at the age of sixteen but he proved to be a man of sagely virtues. His government was so wise and benevolent that even nature seemed to be touched by his virtuous rule,

for the rain fell every ten days and the wind blew every five days. Men, too, dwelt in perfect safety, for every one was honest. No door was shut at night for fear of thieves, for none existed, and if a man had accidentally dropped some article of value on the road, he would find it still there on his return, for no one coveted it.

During his reign a mighty inundation of the Yellow River took place, so vast that the waters were said to have enveloped the mountains and covered the tops of the hills. He appointed one of his ministers, Gun, to devise measures for the relief of the flooded country. But this Gun was not competent for this task and was put to death at last for his incompetency.

After Yao had reigned seventy years, feeling the cares of government too much for him, he asked for a successor and his court officers unanimously recommended to him a man of the name of Shun, whose reputation for filial piety had spread far and wide and had reached even the ears of the Emperor himself. For three years of trial Shun gave the utmost satisfaction to Yao and showed his knowledge of men by introducing the famous Yu to the notice of the Emperor as a competent man to control the ravages of the Yellow River. Then Yao formally installed Shun as a colleague with him in the government of the country.

Yao died in the year 2356 BC in Yang, in the present province of Henan, and was in due time succeeded by his virtuous colleague Shun.

Shun (2256-2205 BC) Shun's father Gusou (a blind old man), having a favorite son by a second marriage, took a dislike to Shun. His blind father and scheming stepmother punished him regularly and on several occasions tried to kill him, to benefit his spoiled half-brother, but Shun always forgave them and persisted in being a filial son and loving brother. At the age of twenty he attracted the notice of the Emperor Yao, who made him his heir, setting aside his own unworthy son, and giving Shun his own two daughters Ehuang and Nuying in marriage.

On the death of Yao, Shun with the modesty that was characteristic of him, for three years refused to ascend the throne. He wished to give an opportunity to Zhu, the disinherited son of Yao, to become the successor of his father. It is presumed moreover that his heart was so filled with sorrow for the loss of Yao that he

felt it would be unbecoming in him to take part in public business before the three years of mourning had elapsed. This Zhu, though unworthy in other respects, seemed to have had the common sense to refuse an honour that he knew he could not worthily sustain. He kept away from the capital and left the throne open to Shun.

Shun reigned independently for fifty years. Plus the twenty-eight years he reigned with Yao, he reigned altogether seventy-eight years. The whole time that he governed, whether as colleague or as sole ruler, was a most busy as well as a prosperous period for his kingdom.

He was gifted with extraordinary mental and physical qualities. He was said to have had double pupils in his eyes, which no doubt added to his quick perception and ready grasp of the principles of good government.

After he had ruled alone thirty-three years Shun appointed Yu to be his colleague and successor to his throne.

He died at the good old age of one hundred and ten, while he was making a visitation through the country, and was buried in Cangwu, on the Jiuyi hills in Ningyuan country, Hunan province. His two wives, Ehuang and Nuying, wept a great deal over the sudden death of their beloved husband. So many bloody tears they had shed that the bamboo nearby, thickly sprinkled with them, became mottled all over. To this, it is said, the mottled bamboo of today owes its origin.

3. THE XIA DYNASTY (2205-1766 BC)

The Great Yu (2205-2197 BC) In the seventy fifth year of Yao, Yu was introduced to his notice by Shun as a person to accomplish the task that his father Gun had failed to accomplish.

Four days after his marriage Yu began his labors, and so absorbed was he in them that though he thrice passed his own door, and on one occasion heard the wailing of his own child, he never entered till the completion of his task. Any one that would dare to cope with such a task in recent years deserves the greatest credit, much more so in the ancient times in which Yu lived.

At last Shun ordered Yu to consult with him about affairs of state and act as his vicegerent. After various attempt to evade this honor Yu finally consented and associated with Shun in the governing of the people.

When Shun died, Yu who did not wish to dispossess his son of the succession, endeavored to withdraw into private life, but the nobles and the people were determined to have him as their ruler, and so after the three years of mourning were over, he was established on the throne, and Shun's son made no efforts to dispute his right to it. He removed his capital first to Pingyang in Shanxi and finally to Xiayi in Shanxi.

Yu was a ruler that desired to stand in the closest relationship to his people, and to be easily accessible to them at all times. Complainters of all kinds would be received by this sovereign himself as soon as possible.

Soon after Yu ascended the throne, Yidi discovered spirits by distillation of various kinds of grain and specimens were brought for Yu to taste. Although he thought them agreeable to the palate, he professed himself much distressed at the discovery. "The days will come" he said, "when some of my successors through drinking this will cause infinite sorrow to the nation." He then expelled Yidi from the country as a man dangerous to the state.

In the fifth year in one of his tours, Yu passed a criminal in chains. He immediately descended from his chariot, and weeping asked him how he got in this condition. The bystanders said, "Great Yu, don't pity this fellow, or weep for him, for he is a bad man and deserves no sympathy." "I weep," replied Yu, "because of the state of things in my kingdom. When Yao and Shun were rulers, their people were of one mind with them, and so were good. Now because of my deficiency in virtue, every man follows the bent of his own will, and so evil prevails."

Up to Yu's time trade had been carried on by barter, but now gold and silver were minted and used as a currency. He showed his benevolence by issuing an order that if any family through poverty had been compelled to sell a son, if they applied to him he would supply them with money to redeem him. In his eighth year he made a tour of visitation and reached Kuaiji in Zhejiang, where he met his nobles. One of these, Fangfeng, he put to death.

because he had shown disrespect to him in not arriving at the meeting in proper time. Before the assembly had finished its discussion, the aged ruler fell ill and died at the advanced age of one hundred.

As ruler, Yu was benevolent and beloved. After his death the people ignored the successor he had designated and turned to Yu's own son for guidance and adjudication of disputes. The son, Qi, was eventually prevailed upon to become ruler himself and the first dynasty in our history was thus created.

Yao, Shun, and Yu are collectively called the Three Sages. And the dynasty that began with Yu's reign is called Xia.

Jie (1818-1766 BC) The seventeenth ruler of this dynasty, Jie, united in his person the most abominable qualities with which a ruler may possibly be charged. He began his reign by punishing those of his vassals who, prompted by deep contempt of his cruel and dissolute character, refused obedience to him. He proceeded to attack the Chief of Shi, who averted the threatened danger by the present of his daughter Meixi to him. She was remarkable for her beauty and with her Jie became infatuated at once.

To please this woman, whose purpose in life seemed to be the desire to do evil, Jie gave himself up to extravagance and cruelty. The details of their abominable acts are fully described by the historians of the period, whose account of Jie's reign surpasses everything recorded in the way of tyranny in the history of the world. As Jie was too proud to take advice, the state of things went from bad to worse. At last, chengtang, or Tang the Completer, revolted, overthrew Jie, and founded the house known as the Shang (or Yin) dynasty.

4. THE SHANG DYNASTY **(1766-1122-BC)**

Tang, or Cheng Tang (1766-1755 BC) Cheng Tang (also known as Shang Tang), who led the "revolution" against Jie, spent seventeen years in fighting this Emperor, who was soon deserted by his former adherents and was made a prisoner and deposed. But Tang undertook the conflict with great reluctance,

and only at last because he was convinced that it was the will of heaven that he should do so. His overthrow of the Xia dynasty was, therefore, in no sense a usurpation. When he came to the throne, he was found to be a good and virtuous ruler. He seems to have subordinated every passion and feeling, and even his own life, to the good of his people. He was full of benevolence not only toward his human subjects, but also toward the animal world. He has been looked up to as a model ruler, whose example every monarch may imitate with advantage.

The dynasty founded by him lasted roughly six hundred years. He was succeeded by his grandson Tai Jia.

The capital of the Shang dynasty was established at first at Bo (Shangqu, Henan), and moved generations later to Yin (Yanshi, Henan) and Chaohe (near Anyang, Henan).

Zhou Xin (better known as Yin Zhou Wang, 1154-1122 BC). This man is one of the most infamous in all Chinese history. He was at once extravagant, a drunkard and a most abandoned character, and yet he was a man of great ability. Physically he was so powerful that he was not afraid to meet the fiercest of wild animals.

He obtained a very beautiful woman, Daji, as prize of war and became infatuated with her. She was not only very licentious, but also excessively cruel. He built her the famous "Stag Tower" and the palace at Shaqiu, both on a most magnificent scale, where the most abominable orgies were carried on night and day. In imitation of the last king of the Xia, a pond was made and filled with spirits. The trees around were hung with all kinds of meat, and drinking and debauchery were carried on without any regard to public opinion. The people became dissatisfied with the heavy taxes levied to meet all these expenses. Zhou Xin had to rule his subjects with greater rigor.

The cruel Daji devised some new modes of punishment, one of which was called the "Roaster," consisting of a copper pillar heated red hot by burning charcoal. The condemned had to walk on it. Both Zhou Xin and Daji were delighted with the agonies of the sufferers.

Another instance of their cruelty is recorded. Once they discovered by chance that when two men waded across a stream the