

A Short History of the CHINESE PEOPLE

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Illustrations

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Preface

THE history of the Chinese people cannot often enough be told. Old as it is, new light is being shed on it every year. Meanwhile the Chinese are making history before our eyes. We need, as never before, to understand how they have come in our time to make such a sacrificial defense of a way of life that is theirs as much as it is our own.

The Chinese are different from us; at the same time they are more like us than the people of India, of Annam, or of Japan. At the conclusion of the last war, the writer served for a time with a Chinese labor battalion attached to United States forces in France. Again and again, puzzled American corporals and sergeants helping to direct the battalion remarked to him on the innate likenesses between themselves and the Chinese, despite the barrier of language and difference of custom. They wanted this phenomenon explained; so have others. It is worth while therefore to examine the record, and see how the Chinese people have traveled down the corridors of time from the Old Stone Age to the present.

Another good reason for a study of Chinese history is to make it serve as a foil for our own. Semi-detached from some of the other great civilizations of the world, the Chinese have yet evolved in some ways like ourselves, in some ways not. They have a great historical tradition. So had the Romans; but the Hindus have not. Why? The Chinese learned a great deal about the stars, devised a workable calendar, and made several praiseworthy achievements in mathematics, medicine, engineering, ar-

chitecture, geography, and historical criticism, but did not arrive at a fully rounded scientific method. Again why? There are many such questions that one can pose. Not all the answers are in this book. It is the writer's hope, however, that the reader will have a fuller understanding of the background and a greater ability to get at the answers after he has concluded the last chapter than when he started. Naturally some of the questions can meet only with speculative replies, and these can never give general satisfaction. It seems to the writer, none the less, that a thorough study of Chinese civilization will give every student of history, whether of the peoples of Europe, of western Asia, of the Americas, or of any other region, a better basis for comprehension of that history. Indeed, this is the only way to reach a global understanding.

A final reason is to profit from the empirical knowledge of the Chinese in many fields. To give two examples: It is said of Vice-President Wallace that he has inwardly digested the monographic material on the policies of the eleventh-century statesman Wang An-shih, together with their application and fruit. Another case is that of the United States Department of Agriculture which for years has been actively studying and endeavoring to exploit Chinese experience in afforestation, production of certain crops, soil enrichment, prevention of plant disease, and the like. Similar examples might be cited. They certainly should be increased.

The summary treatment of any subject of so vast a scope as the one under hand is bound to be uneven. Every general history of China yet undertaken suffers from that fault, and the writer is conscious that his is no exception. He hopes, however, that the suggestions made under the heading of Supplementary Readings will afford some remedy. One thing which he has consciously done needs explanation. The chapter on political disunion (Chapter III) is long. The reason for this is threefold: first, a discussion of so confused a period can hardly be abbreviated without

making it nearly meaningless; second, Buddhism and Taoism—particularly the former—came into their own then and vitally affected all areas of Chinese life; and third, this period is the trunk from which much of the culture of Korea and Japan and other contiguous areas sprang; to know them one must have more than a cursory knowledge of the four centuries beginning about A.D. 200.

It remains to acknowledge with gratitude the help the writer has received from many sources: from his students for much they have taught him; from his colleagues for their friendly criticism and aid; from Miss Dorothy Thompson of Harper & Brothers for editorial assistance on the book; from Mr. Henry C. Fenn, for permission to make adaptations of one of his charts; from several people and institutions for permission to use their photographs for illustration; from the writers of many books and papers whose translations he has used and acknowledged in the text; and from many Chinese friends of every age and station. The resulting work is unworthy of their aid, but it goes out with a prayer for indulgence from them all.

L. CARRINGTON GOODRICH

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CHAPTER I

The Beginnings of the Chinese

THE PREHISTORIC PERIOD

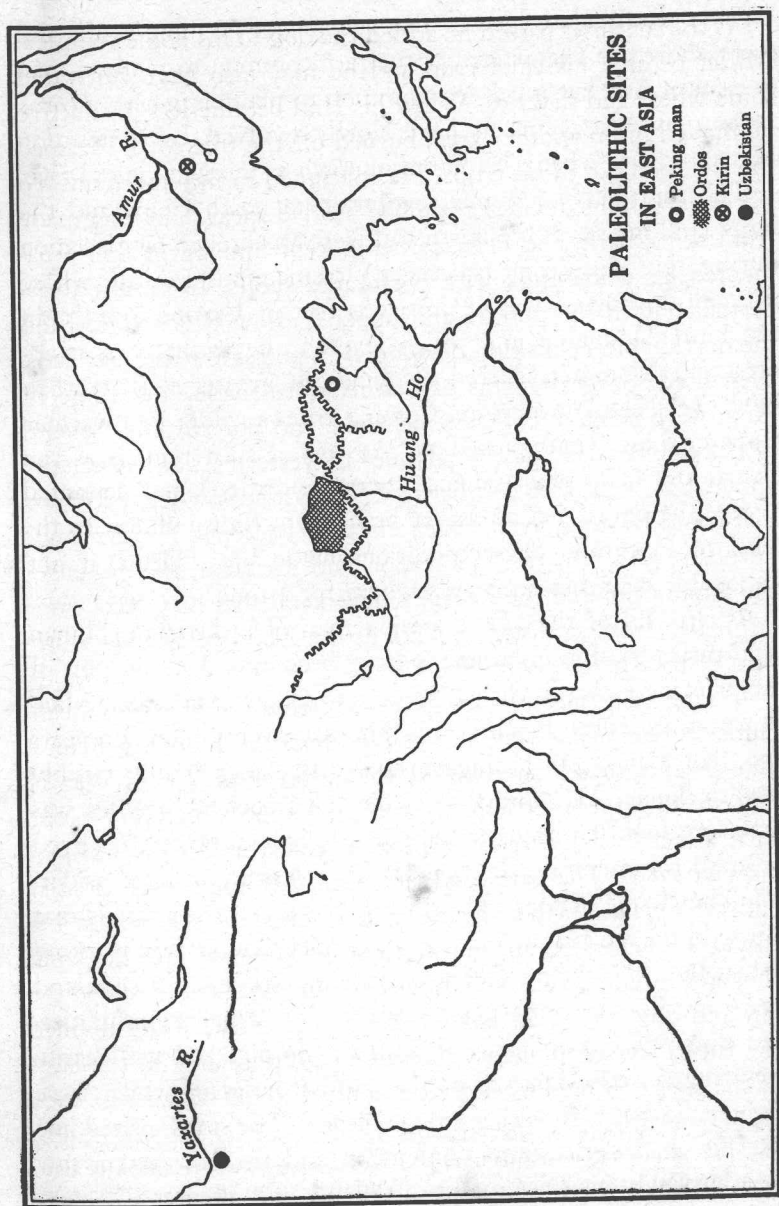
THE history of the Chinese is the story of the gradual peopling of the great river valleys and plains of China, and of this people's expansion and development in their own part of Asia and beyond, on both the mainland and the coastal islands. The legends of China, like the Hebraic, used to put the beginning of the story several millenniums before the Christian era, say five thousand years ago; but recent discoveries have pushed this back to a far earlier time and enabled us to picture the China of today before man ever fished or hunted or tried to wrench a living from its soil.

At a time variously estimated at one hundred thousand to half a million years ago, a species of pre-human animals called hominids appeared in north China. Fossils of these hominids, somewhat more primitive than other fossils of the same age found in other parts of the world, have been discovered in close association with thousands of stone, bone, and horn implements, with charred bones and charcoal ashes, with uneaten bits of food, and with the fossils of many animals, some of them now extinct. These hominids seem to have known how to walk on their two feet and hold their bodies erect. They were not unskilled in fashioning tools and they were familiar with the use of fire. Their brain capacity (850-1220 cc.) was about twice that of the gorilla, chimpanzee, and other higher primates, but somewhat less than that of modern man (average, 1350 cc.). They were

capable of articulate speech. The remains of hominid skulls and teeth show five characteristics that are common to modern man in eastern Asia but much less common to man elsewhere. *Homo sapiens* in Asia seems to have slowly evolved from this pre-human type to what is commonly known as the Mongoloid race.

The continuity of human evolution in north China and the large land masses to the north and west was broken by glaciation during the Middle Pleistocene. A tremendous ice cap, whose average thickness varied from 6500 feet in Europe to 2300 in the Ural Mountains and which leveled off gradually as it approached Mongolia, stirred up winds of greater velocity than have ever been known since. Coming from a colder to a warmer climate, these winds picked up the soil of such regions as the Tarim and Gobi plains (hence their desiccation) and deposited it over the entire Yellow River basin from Kansu almost to the Gulf of Peichihli. These conditions made life difficult, if not impossible, and drove man elsewhere for a time.

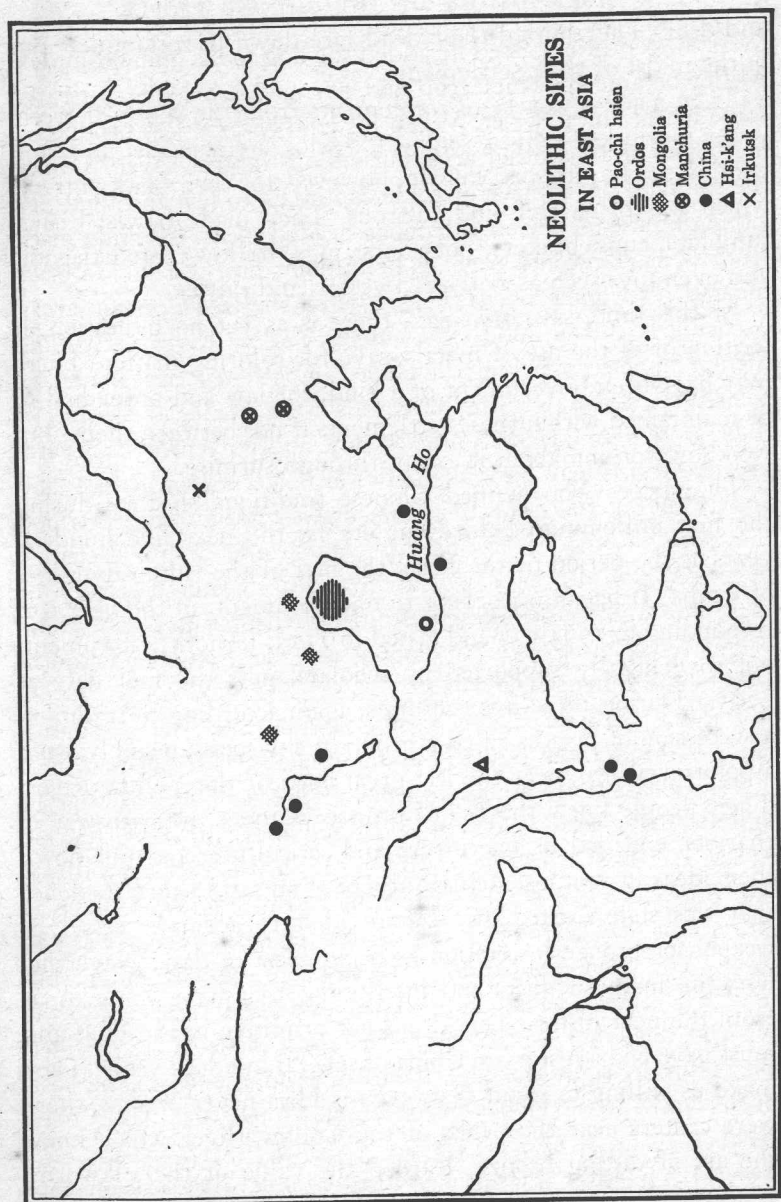
At the end of the glacial period man of a distinctly human type returned, for his remains have been found at the top of the primary loess soil throughout north China, Mongolia, Manchuria, and Siberia. It was at this time, say twenty thousand years ago, that man began to migrate to North America and possibly also to Japan. His ability to make tools such as needles was superior; he often brought stone from great distances; he lived in small communities; and he was doubtless acquiring considerable knowledge of root and leaf crops, fish, and the animals that ran wild on the plains. One find suggests that he was working the surface iron ore for its red powder. By six or seven thousand years ago he was living in pit dwellings in larger communities, had domesticated at least one animal, the pig, and was manufacturing a coarse kind of pottery, some pieces of which were eighteen inches high with pointed bottoms. The stone-bladed hoe was his chief agricultural implement, and the bow and arrow were probably his chief means of defense and offense.



As the centuries passed he added the dog to his home complex. Millet became his chief crop and he may also have cultivated some wheat and dry rice. When his land became less productive he moved on to another area, burned off the tree cover, drained the soil, and put in his crops. He continued to fish and hunt. To aid in defense he devised a bamboo-headed spear. Clothing made from skins, bark, and perhaps hemp kept him warm. He ornamented his womenfolk with perforated shells. In certain areas, particularly in the middle and upper Yellow River valley and the north, pottery-making developed; a potter's wheel may have been used. Several forms of vessels were made, and some of them were painted, both monochrome and polychrome. Several of these forms may have analogues in western Asia, Russia, and India; but one that is peculiar to China is a hollow-legged tripod that could be stood over a fire to heat its contents. For exchange purposes, and also as a decoration and a charm, these men of the Stone Age used the cowry, a little shell that may have come originally from so distant a place as the Maldiv Islands southwest of the Indian peninsula.

In later centuries colonies sprang up from the Shantung headlands to Hangchow Bay and as far inland as Honan province. The seventy sites located before the outbreak of World War II indicate that these settlements averaged approximately 750,000 square feet in size and were commonly surrounded by walls of tamped earth. The partly subterranean dwellings were circular and set on flat earthen floors, in the center of which was the stove. The chief occupation of these people was farming,¹ but they also hunted, fished, and herded animals. In addition to the pig and dog, they had horses, sheep, and cattle. They divined the future by scapulimancy, the art of prophesying on the basis of the cracks formed when heat is applied to the scapulas of oxen

¹ Their experience in the relatively treeless areas in which they lived doubtless proved that "agriculture can feed between twenty and fifty times as many people as the hunt." (K. A. Wittfogel, "The Society of Prehistoric China," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, VIII:169, n. 7 [1939].)

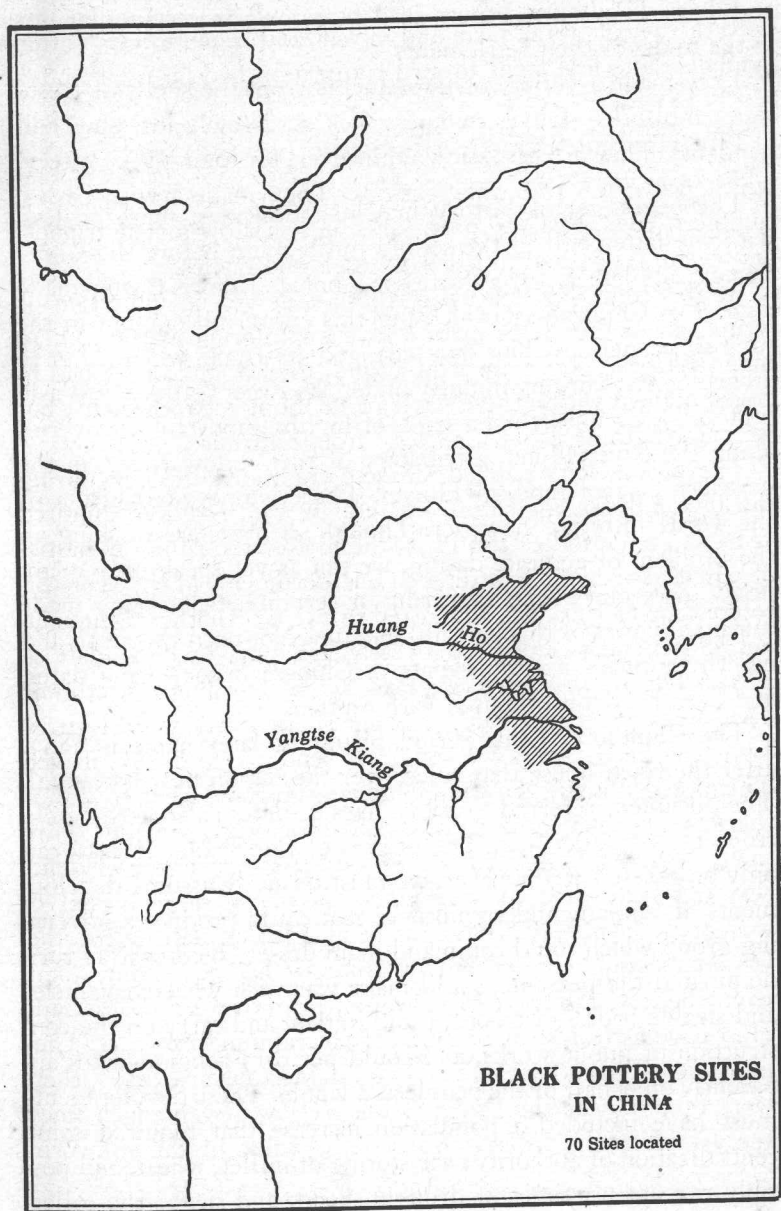


and deer. They buried their dead face down in rectangular pits in the midst of their settlements.

They made a variety of implements from the shells of fresh-water mollusks—knives, scrapers, sickles, arrowheads, pins, and pendants. They are best known, however, for their black pottery, which was often thin and lustrous. They made bowls, basins, tumblers, cups, beakers, pots, jars, jugs, hollow-footed tripods, and even toys such as doll-sized vessels and rattles.

At this time, say 2000 B.C., there is as yet no indication of writing or of the use of metals, save for coloring matter. There may have been government of a kind, for law and order had to be maintained within these settlements if not between them; but we know nothing about it except through surmise.

The scribes who penned Chinese traditional history during the first millennium before our era fix the next five hundred years as the period of the Hsia, the first of the ruling dynasties of China. It began, according to one document, in the year corresponding to 1994 B.C. and lasted to 1523. (Another document, not so generally supported by scholars, puts the first date at 2205.) During these five centuries, again according to tradition, a succession of princes ruled a group of city-states, possibly from a point in Shansi, near the last great bend of the Yellow River. Their people knew the use of bronze weapons, went to war in chariots, engaged in agriculture and sericulture, and put down their ideas in writing. Actually there is no satisfactory evidence that this state existed; we cannot identify a single vessel or weapon or bronze inscription as being Hsia in date. Nevertheless, the many artifacts and inscriptions that have come to us from the next historic period are not primitive in the least and must have had a history in China of several hundred years. They make us willing to grant that, even if Hsia never existed, there were centers near the banks of the Yellow River which knew the art of casting bronze, learned the value of the silkworm,



used the wheel on the farm and in war, and began to use written symbols. The first steps toward civilization had been taken.

THE HISTORIC PERIOD; THE SHANG (*ca.* 1523-1027 B.C.)

The beginning of history in China coincides, more or less, with the latter half of the second millennium before the Christian era. As late as 1924 Professor Thomas Francis Carter made a chart of China's past which put this entire millennium in the prehistoric period. This was changed in 1928, when Chinese archeologists, working initially under the Freer Gallery in Washington, D. C., unearthed a series of highly important discoveries along the River Huan, a tributary of the Yellow River, in the northern part of modern Honan. There is one qualification of the word "historic," however. Though scientists are working on the problem of accurate dating, we can as yet speak only qualifiedly of certain events occurring or certain articles being made during any part of this half millennium. Not until the ninth and eighth centuries B.C. do events in Chinese history have dates, and even they must be used with caution.

The Chinese call this period Shang (a later name is Yin), after the royal house that ruled over the region near its capital. The document referred to above fixes its dates as approximately from 1523 to 1027 B.C. The origins of the Shang dynasty can only be guessed at; however, we must certainly assume developments of fundamental significance that could produce a governing group which could command many lesser chiefs who in turn dominated the peasants, could make war with wheeled vehicles and sizable bodies of troops, could initiate and carry on the construction of public works, and could perform religious rites apparently on behalf of the people as a whole. These developments must have included a population increase that required some centralization of authority; the storing of millet, wheat, and possibly rice against times of drought, flood, and siege; the collec-

