Review of Chinese History

Part I
NEOLITHIC CHINA

- The Neolithic age traced back to 10,000 BCE.
- Early evidence for Chinese millet agriculture is carbon dated to about 7,000 BCE in the Yellow River valley.
- At Damaidi site in Ningxia, 3172 cliff carvings dating to 6000-5000 BCE were discovered including images of the sun, moon, stars, gods and scenes of hunting or grazing.
Xia Dynasty 2100 B.C.E. - 1700 B.C.E. (Semi-Mythological)?

- The first dynasty to be described in ancient historical records.
- Founded when the sage-king Shun made Yu, an excellent civil servant, emperor.
- Yu was greatly praised by his people for eliminating flooding by organizing the building of canals in all the major rivers.
- Most archaeologists connect the Xia to excavations at Erlitou in central Henan province, where a bronze smelter from around 2000 BC was unearthed.
- The Xia era remains poorly understood.
The Shang Dynasty (1600-1046 BC): The First Archaeologically recognized dynasty to rule China.

- Information about the Shang Dynasty comes from bronze artifacts, oracle bones, turtle shells or cattle scapula on which were written the first recorded Chinese characters, found in the Huang He valley.

- These bones typically had three sections: a question for the oracle (charge), the oracle's answer (prognostication), and whether the oracle later proved to be correct (Verification).
THE ZHOU DYNASTY (1027 – 221 BC, Western Zhou and Eastern Zhou Dynasties)

By the end of the 2nd millennium BC, the Zhou Dynasty began to emerge in the Yellow River valley, overrunning the Shang

The Zhou appeared to have begun their rule under a feudal type system*

The king of Zhou at this time began to use the idea of the Mandate of Heaven to legitimize his rule, a concept that would be influential for almost every successive dynasty

*Feudal: A set of economic, political and familial relationships between the upper classes, designed to maintain control over land. Peasants work the land and are excluded from power and authority.
The Mandate of Heaven

A new dynasty is born and the new emperor makes changes to the government and other systems (such as education) to make the empire run smoother.

The current emperor is defeated and a new one takes his place.

The government becomes corrupted, normally by money or power.

Dynasty is considered to have lost the Mandate of Heaven.

Commoners become tired of all the problems in their empire so they revolt.

Famine and natural disasters destroy the commoner's faith in their government.
THE ZHOU DYNASTY (1027 – 221 BC, Western Zhou and Eastern Zhou Dynasties)

Accomplishments of the ZHOU:

Origin of Chinese philosophy developed to deal with political and social changes (Confucianism, Daoism, Legalism)

Compass invented sometime between 480 - 221 B.C.

Kite - the oldest type of aircraft was invented

Lasted longer than any other dynasty in Chinese history

Developed China's first projects involving hydraulic engineering

Perfection of bronze casting

Refined the calendar
SPRING AND AUTUMN PERIOD (from the second half of the 8th century BC to the first half of the 5th century BC)

Local military leaders began to assert their power and compete. This marks the second phase of the Zhou Dynasty: the Eastern Zhou.

In each of the hundreds of states that appeared, local strongmen held political power and continued their subservience to the Zhou kings in name only.

Chinese philosophy blossomed during this period -- Confucianism, Taoism and Legalism -- partly in response to the changing political world.

This period is marked by a falling apart of the central Zhou power.
By the end of the Spring and Autumn Period, seven powerful states remained.

The years in which these few states battled each other are known as the **Warring States Period**.

The final expansion in this period was undertaken by the King of the state of Qin.
The Qin Dynasty (221–206 B.C.E.)

The unification of China in 221 BC under the First Emperor Qin Shi Huang marked the beginning of Imperial China.

The unified reign of the Qin Emperor lasted only 15 years, yet he managed to unite the Han Chinese homeland under a tightly centralized legalist government at Xianyang (close to modern Xi"an).

A lavish tomb for the emperor, complete with a Terracotta Army, was built near the capital Xianyang.
The Terra Cotta Warriors (bing ma yong): The tomb of Shi Huangdi
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Qin Achievements

Shi Huangdi unified the different states of China:

• Created a system of laws that would apply equally to people in all parts of China
• Set up a new system of money that eliminated local currencies
• Created a uniform system of writing
• Built an extensive network of roads and canals.
• To protect China from invasion, Shi Huangdi built the first section of the Great Wall, a barrier that linked earlier walls that stood near China’s border.
The Han Dynasty (206 BC - 220 CE, Western Han, Xin and Eastern Han Dynasties)

• Rebellion against Qin authority led to the rise of the Han Dynasty.

• The Han embraced the philosophy of Confucianism, which became the foundation of all dynasties until the end of imperial China.

• China made great advances in many areas of the arts and sciences.

• The Han Dynasty pushed the Huns back into the steppes of modern Inner Mongolia. This enabled the first opening of trading connections between China and the West.
The trade connections (of caravan traffic) are often called the "silk route" because the route was used to export Chinese silk to the Roman Empire.
**Han Dynasty, c. 206 BC–AD 220**

**Geography Skills**

1. **Name** What human-built feature marked China’s northern border?
2. **Interpret** Why do you think the Han did not expand farther to the southwest?

*Place* The Han ruled China for 400 years.

[Map of Han Dynasty with key features labeled]
Confucian ideals of government, out of favor during the Qin period, were adopted as the creed of the Han Empire.

Confucian scholars gained prominent status as the core of the civil service.

They became more powerful than local aristocrats under the Han.
Han Dynasty (cont.)

- A civil service examination system also was begun.
- Intellectual, literary, and artistic work was revived and flourished.
Han Dynasty (cont.)

Han power declined because of disputes amongst the landholding classes, invasions and conflicts amongst groups in the government

Rebellion broke out in 184 CE, starting an era of warlords
Social Classes Under the Han

1. **Upper class**
   Made up of the emperor, his court, and scholars who held government positions

2. **Second class**
   The largest, was made up of peasants

3. **Third class**
   Artisans, who produced items for daily life and some luxury goods

4. **Lowest class**
   Merchants, because they did not actually produce anything, but merely bought and sold what others made
The Han made many achievements in art, literature, and learning.

Art and Literature

- Painted realistic scenes from everyday life
- Created new styles of verse, including the *fu* and *shi* styles
- Produced important works of history—Sima Qian wrote a complete history of all the dynasties through the early Han.

Inventions and Advances

- Invented paper and produced books
- Built the **sundial**, a device that uses the position of shadows cast by the sun to tell the time of day
- Designed a **seismograph**, a device that measures the strength of earthquakes
- Practiced **acupuncture**, the practice of inserting fine needles through the skin at specific points to cure disease or relieve pain
Sima Qian (145-87 B.C.E.?), whose Shiji (Historical Records) provides a detailed history from the time of a legendary Xia emperor to that of the Han emperor Wu Di 141-87 B.C.E.).
The Sui, Tang, and Song Dynasties

Main Ideas

• After the Han dynasty, China fell into disorder but was reunified by new dynasties—The Sui, Tang and Ming.

• Historians sometimes call the time of disorder that followed the collapse of the Han dynasty the Period of Disunion.

• The Period of Disunion lasted from 220 to 589.

• War was common during the Period of Disunion.
Sui Dynasty (581–618)

- Reunited the country in 581

- Founded by Emperor Wen of Sui, the Sui Dynasty capital was at Luoyang.

- Saw the reunification of Southern and Northern China and the construction of the Grand Canal.

- Various reforms including the Equal-field system, initiated to reduce the rich-poor social gap. It resulted in better agricultural productivity.

- Coinage was standardized.

- Defense was improved and the Great Wall expanded.
The Sui dynasty declined rapidly because of:

Demands on the people, who paid high taxes and were forced to labor.

Use of resources to complete the Grand Canal and other construction projects, including the reconstruction of the Great Wall.

Costly and disastrous military campaigns against Goguryeo, one of the three kingdoms of Korea.

Popular revolts, disloyalty, and assassination.
The Grand Canal

China’s Grand Canal (left) is the world’s longest human-made waterway. It was built largely to transport rice and other foods from the south to feed China’s cities and armies in the north. Barges like the one above crowd the Grand Canal, which is still an important transportation link in China.
Tang Dynasty (618 –907)

• A new age of prosperity and innovations in arts and technology.

• Buddhism became the predominant religion.

• Capital Chang’an (present day Xian) is thought to have been the world’s largest city at the time.

• Lucrative trade routes along the Silk Road.

• Maintained the civil service system by choosing officials through standardized examinations and recommendations to office.
Map of the Silk Road (Routes).
Tang scientists invented **gunpowder** in the 9th Century by combining saltpeter (potassium nitrate), sulfur, and charcoal.
The Tang period was a golden age of Chinese literature and art. There are over 48,900 poems penned by some 2,200 Tang authors that have survived until modern times. Perfecting one's skills in the composition of poetry became a required study for those wishing to pass imperial examinations.

Celestial horse. Painting by Tang Dynasty artist Han Gan (706-83)
Tang Dynasty (cont.)

• The Dynasty was interrupted briefly when Empress Wu Zetian seized the throne, becoming the first and only Chinese empress.

• From about 860, the Tang Dynasty began to decline due to a series of rebellions within China.

• The political chaos led to what is called the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period (907–960)—ruling groups taking power over various areas of China in rapid succession.
Song Dynasty (960–1279)  Northern Song (960–1127)

- Established its capital in Kaifeng, starting a period of economic prosperity.
- Considered to be classical China’s high point in science and technology.
- Scholar-officials continued to run China’s government during the Song dynasty.
- The spread of literature and knowledge was enhanced by the earlier innovation of woodblock printing and the 11th century innovation of movable type printing.
- Invasions forced the Song to shift the capital to Lin’an (now Hangzhou), thus leading to the term Southern Song Dynasty.
Northern Song

Southern Song
The Dynasty began to decline as a result of:

• Confiscated portions of land owned by the large landowners to raise funds for naval projects. This caused anger and loss of loyalty amongst leading members of the Song society.

• In the Battle of Yanmen on the Pearl River Delta in 1279, the Yuan (Mongol) army crushed Song resistance.
• The most important economic innovation during the Song Dynasty was the widespread use of money. (coins still used)

• The use of money greatly accelerated trade within China and led to the development of credit.
The Mongol Empire included China, and the Mongols ruled China as the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368).

- A ruling dynasty founded by the Mongol leader Kublai Khan, who ruled most of present day China, all of modern Mongolia and its surrounding areas.

- First non-Han dynasty; Capital located in Beijing.

- Kublai Khan consolidated his rule by further centralizing the government
Genghis Khan

Kublai Khan
Life in Yuan China

• Communications were vastly improved.
• The Central Asian trade routes were secured.
• Traffic from West to East increased.
• Missionaries and traders came to China, bringing new ideas, techniques, foods, and medicines.
• Marco Polo arrives to write about the Mongol Empire
Ming Dynasty (1368 –1644)

- During the Yuan Dynasty, there was strong sentiment against the rule of the foreigners. This led to peasant revolts.

- The Mongols were pushed back to the steppes of central Asia and replaced by the Ming Dynasty.
Ming Dynasty

• The dynasty had a strong and complex central government.

• The emperor gave his “Grand Secretaries” (bureaucrats) enormous power.

• This same bureaucracy later prevented the Ming government from making important social and economic changes in China.

Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang
The Ming Dynasty

Great Sea Voyages:
• Under Ming leadership, the Chinese improved their ships and sailing skills.
• The greatest sailor of the period was Zheng He.
• Zheng He’s voyages served as a clear sign of China’s power.

Great Building Projects:
• The Ming were known for their grand building projects.
• Ming emperors built the Forbidden City, a huge palace complex that included hundreds of imperial residences, temples, and other government buildings.
• Ming rulers restored the Great Wall of China.
The small boat - Columbus 85 feet
The large boat - Zheng He 400 feet
Ming Dynasty (cont.)

- Trade brought in massive amounts of silver.
- During last decades of the Ming, the flow of silver into China was reduced.
- The damage to the economy was compounded by the effects on agriculture from the *Little Ice Age*, natural disasters, crop failure and sudden epidemics.
- The breakdown of authority allowed rebel leaders to challenge Ming power.
- In 1638, the non-Han Manchu people began to penetrate the heartland of China.
Yuan and Ming Dynasties  During the Yuan and Ming dynasties, Beijing became China’s largest city and a center of Chinese culture.