
UNIT 19 CHINA

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19.1 INTRODUCTION

In Block 2 we discussed Shang civilization in China. Because of the constrain of space in this course we will not be discussing the complete history of China but would focus on some main aspects of the Chinese history before the modern period. In the present Unit we will discuss the state, society and religion in the pre-modern China.

The social and political order of pre-modern China was one of the most stable and most highly organised in the world. It would not be wrong to say that seldom have so many people over such a wide geographical area been bound together by a single political structure and set of social and cultural norms, values and traditions, for such a length of time. The capacity of this order to withstand the shocks of civil war, natural calamities and alien invasion, and to accommodate significant social and economic development and growth of population, particularly in the last thousand years before its final collapse in the 20th century, was truly remarkable. Because of its unusual stability, continuity and sophistication, no student of world history and civilization can afford to be ignorant of the political structure and social system of traditional China, or of the ideological and spiritual outlook on which these were based. In this Unit, you will learn about the main features of the Imperial State and society of traditional China, and the main belief systems of the Chinese, and about how these interacted with and reinforced each other to create a truly unique civilization and way of life.

Pre-modern China has been characterised in many different ways. It has been called a form of “*oriental despotism*”, or a *bureaucratic society*. It has also been characterised as a *gentry society* or a *Confucian society*. What do all

these terms mean? While none of these characterisations by themselves is adequate, in the course of reading this Unit, you will find that they all refer to various key features of China's traditional polity, social structure and value system that distinguish it most clearly from other pre-modern societies.

In this Unit we will take account of the state the scope of Chinese empire and the position of emperor. The bureaucracy in China was unique in ancient and medieval period and played a key role in the affairs of the state. In our discussion of society you will notice that it was predominantly an agrarian society which was dominated by the gentry. The family and clan were basic units of social structure. The last section of the Unit will be devoted to the study of Religion. Here we will discuss Confucianism which was not strictly a religion but influenced the religion and society for a very long period of time. Besides, Confucianism we will also discuss Taoism and Buddhism. Let us begin with the State.

19.2 THE STATE

Perhaps the most remarkable product of traditional Chinese civilization was the Imperial State. With a tradition of more than 2000 years, and lasting in basically unchanged form for nearly 1000 years, its iron frame held China together as a single political unit through most of its recorded history down to modern times. Presiding over it was the Emperor, the "Son of Heaven" whose authority and prestige was acknowledged by peoples even outside China's administrative boundaries. However its most distinctive feature was rule through a highly structured bureaucracy or elite corps of officials, the so-called *mandarins*, who were in the main recruited through a system of examinations based on scholarship.

This state came into being in a recognisable form in 221 B.C., when the ruler of Qin, one of the many feudal states competing for supremacy at that time, unified China and proclaimed himself the First Emperor. For the first time, the entire realm was divided into standard administrative units and ruled directly by the Emperor through his officials. Although this system underwent substantial modifications under later dynasties, and even collapsed altogether for a period of three and a half centuries after the fall of the Han dynasty (around 220 A.D.), it remained the norm and the basic pattern of governing in premodern China.

19.2.1 The Scope of the Chinese Empire

One of the basic tensions in the Chinese Empire was the contradiction between its universalist self-image, and the actual territorial limits of its administrative power. Being the pre-eminent power in East Asia, and separated by formidable mountains, desert wasteland and seas from any other power comparable in size and strength, it was natural that the Chinese considered their Empire to be inclusive of "all under Heaven" (*Tian Xia*). The Emperor of China was seen not just as the ruler of those provinces directly governed by him, but as a benevolent authority presiding over peoples far and near. This image was reinforced by the theory and practice of the so-called *tribute system*, in which envoys of a wide variety of non-Chinese states arrived more or less regularly at the Imperial court to pay their respects to the Emperor bearing gifts that were considered a form of tribute.

The net result was that the boundary between what constituted China and what was outside China was never as clearly demarcated as it would have been, say, in Europe, or as it is in modern times. For the most part, the pattern was as follows: the Emperor directly ruled over a core area of about 18 provinces through a bureaucracy. Regions around the periphery continued to govern themselves according to their own systems, and were by and large left to themselves as long as they did not pose a threat to or openly challenge the authority of the Chinese Emperor. In certain periods, to forestall trouble from those regions, or under a particularly ambitious Emperor, the political and military power of the Chinese Empire was extended into these regions to the west and north. At other times, it was the rulers of these regions who took advantage of conditions of crisis or decay in China proper, and who invaded the Chinese Empire either fully or in part. The most successful of these invasions, however, such as the Mongol and the Manchu conquests, resulted not in the break-up of the Chinese Empire, but only in its continuation in virtually the same form under a new “Son of Heaven”.

19.2.2 The Emperor

The basic function and responsibility of the Emperor in China was to maintain order – both the political-social order and also the natural order of things. In the first sense, the Emperor was the supreme civil and military head. Unlike the Emperor of Japan, for example, he was not a figurehead but the actual head of the government. All officials were directly appointed by him and were directly accountable to him. In all periods, severe punishments could be and were often imposed on officials who fell out of favour with the Emperor. He was expected to personally go through the staggering number of documents and proposals put before him on all matters connected with government, and to take decisions on those. He was the supreme lawmaker and the final court of appeal in all cases. He also commanded the armed forces. Particularly from the 11th century onwards, the Emperors made sure that military power was highly centralised and no regional warlords were allowed to emerge. He was also, in a significant sense, the cultural head of his people, and great importance was attached to his role as the patron of learning and art.

For these reasons, the political system in China has been characterised as a despotism or autocracy. There were, however, some restraints on the arbitrariness of an Emperor. In the first place, because of the great veneration paid to ancestors, the Emperor could not be seen as acting contrary to the precedent set by the Emperors before him, particularly those of his own ruling house. Secondly, there was a tradition of high officials criticising an Emperor who strayed from the accepted norms, and the Emperors were expected to respect their words or at least let them speak without punishment. There was even a specific group of officials known as the censors whose job was to criticise the Emperor when they thought it necessary.

The cosmological role ascribed to the Emperor also put some restraints on his freedom of action. The Emperor was considered to be the intermediary between Heaven and Earth. Not only was he held responsible for maintaining order among men, but he was also held responsible for maintaining the natural order of things. Unusual natural disturbances, such as major earthquakes, floods, the appearance of comets, and so on, were interpreted as omens that all was not well on earth and that the Emperor was failing in his duties. Very often,

natural disasters went hand in hand with social and political unrest, resulting in widespread belief that the Emperor had lost the “Mandate” given to him by Heaven to rule and that his subjects were justified in rebelling against him. The Emperor may have been the “Son of Heaven”; but unlike in some other pre-modern societies, the special relationship with Heaven was not enjoyed by the *individual* who was the Emperor, but was the prerogative of the *institution* – in other words, whoever occupied the imperial throne was considered to be the Son of Heaven and to enjoy Heaven’s Mandate. All Emperors and ruling houses were thus aware of the impermanence of their position, and the theory of the *Mandate of Heaven* was often skillfully manipulated by their advisors and officials to get an Emperor to adopt a particular course of action or to change his ways.

19.2.3 The Bureaucracy

Throughout its long history, China was subjected to as much warfare, internal rebellion, foreign invasions, and changes of the ruling house, as any other society. What then accounts for the unusual stability of its unified imperial state and of the institutions that were part of it? No doubt a key factor was the tradition of rule by an established, centrally-directed bureaucracy, that survived even the most violent upheavals.

Over the course of 2000 years, the bureaucracy in China acquired its own distinctive method and style of functioning, its own elaborate set of rules governing recruitment, promotion, transfer and even appearance and behaviour. Individually, a bureaucrat or official could be treated most arbitrarily by his Emperor and even be put to death. But collectively, the imperial bureaucracy survived even the most tyrannical Emperors, and no Emperor could rule without their expertise in managing the affairs of a realm as vast and complex as China.

The bureaucrats were indeed “experts”, but they were experts in the management of *men and human affairs* in general, and by and large were not technocrats with specialised knowledge of certain subjects. They presided over the key posts in the administration, in much the same way that the members of the civil services in India today are expected to. The civil administration in China was divided into the central and the provincial administration. At the Centre, the highest officials were those who directly dealt with the Emperor – the officials of the Grand Secretariat, and later, of the Grand Council. The routine business of state was divided between the Six Boards (roughly equivalent to our Ministries), dealing with civil appointments, revenue, rites, war, punishments and public works. The provinces were headed by governors or governors-general, below whom were the officials in charge of circuits, prefectures and districts (in descending order of importance). Newly appointed officials usually began by presiding over the administration of a district, and worked their way up the provincial administration or else were appointed to work in one of the Six Boards in the capital.

By far the most distinctive feature of the Chinese bureaucracy as compared to other pre-modern bureaucracies was its method of recruitment. From the 11th century onwards, the majority of officials were recruited through a series of gruelling *examinations* that tested the candidates’ mastery of Confucian scholarship. Examinations were open to all males, irrespective of their background, and were conducted with absolute impartiality, with the identity

of the candidate unknown to the examiner. Except for years of acute political crisis, they were held with amazing regularity once every three years. Preparation for the exams often took twenty years of a man's life, but success at the examinations conferred such immense social prestige on the candidate, besides making him eligible for office (if he passed the examination at the second, provincial, level), that the entire educated class considered success at the examinations their highest aspiration. Since only exceptionally able and well-educated persons succeeded in passing the examinations, the government of imperial China has sometimes been called a *meritocracy*, in which only the most talented and competent persons were given the opportunity to govern. However, it must be remembered that the examinations tested only the mastery of the Confucian classics and the literary style of the candidates.

Just as the Emperor needed his officials in order to rule, the officialdom needed the Emperor to set in motion and preside over the examination system that legitimised their position. However, tension between the Emperor and his bureaucrats was a recurrent theme in China's history. Emperors constantly sought to control the bureaucrats and prevent them from becoming too powerful. Various regulations, such as that which forbade an official from serving in his own district or another which prevented him from remaining at one post for more than three years, were clearly designed to curb the powers of the bureaucrats. Apart from this, Emperors tended to resort to various means, such as the use of spies or eunuchs, to bypass regular official channels. Overall, however, the two institutions of Emperor and bureaucracy worked closely together, and it is this that accounts for the stability and longevity of the imperial Chinese state. The prestige of the bureaucracy also helped to establish the tradition of *civilian rule* as being preferable to military rule in China. At the same time, bureaucratic rule was inherently conservative. While officials were trained to be conscientious in discharging their duties, innovation was by and large discouraged, and most officials tended to literally "rule by the book". This worked well much of the time, but had grave implications for the bureaucracy's ability to function when faced with crisis or challenges of an unprecedented nature.

19.3 CHINESE SOCIETY

In this section, we will deal with the nature of Chinese society as

- an agrarian society
- a gentry-dominated society
- a society centred around the family and clan

19.3.1 An Agrarian Society

Chinese civilization first arose on the basis of settled agricultural communities in the North China plain. The bulk of Chinese society consisted of peasants. From early on, these tillers of the soil were not serfs, unlike their counterparts in some other pre-modern societies, but had the status of freeholders who were obliged to pay taxes directly to the state. Over time, however, the burdens of paying taxes, dealing with rapacious government agents, and eking out a living from diminishing plots of land (since China did not follow a system of primogeniture) caused increasing numbers of peasants to become rent-paying

tenants on the lands of big landowners. As tenants, they continued to be intensely exploited, with rents in some areas amounting to 50% of the harvest. Furthermore, a weak government at the Centre meant even less check on the extortion of landlords and local officials. It also often meant the collapse of dykes, dams and irrigation and drainage systems so necessary to sustain agriculture in the conditions of China, resulting in floods, drought and other calamities. This would in turn result in mass desertion of lands by peasants, a rise in banditry and the proliferation of *secret societies* – a characteristic feature of Chinese society. Secret societies usually began as mutual self-help associations among poor or displaced villagers, which were driven underground by state persecution. However, in times of great social unrest, these secret societies had the capacity to transform themselves into nuclei of major rebel movements that sometimes even succeeded in toppling the ruling dynasty.

In the period from about the 11th to the 13th century A.D., China underwent profound economic transformation within the basic framework of the agrarian economy. Rapidly expanding internal and external trade led to the growing specialisation and commercialisation of agriculture, the widespread use of paper money and sophisticated instruments of credit, and the rise of big merchant families, some of them amassing fabulous wealth. Merchants, however, were never accorded a high social status, and unlike in Europe, the “commercial revolution” in China did not lead to the independent political power of the merchants as a class. Most successful merchant families tended to invest their profits in acquiring land or in striving to obtain official appointments for themselves or their sons, as a means of securing what they had. Nevertheless, the growth of commerce did lead to the proliferation of towns and cities, the spread of literacy and the development of a typically urban culture which made Chinese society of the later imperial era a far cry from that of earlier times.

19.3.2 Gentry-dominated Society

The 11th century also proved to be a watershed in terms of the composition of the ruling class in China. Before that, the ruling class was a kind of aristocracy which owed its dominant position to a combination of high birth, control over huge landed estates and possession of military power. The half century of civil war that engulfed China following the collapse of the Tang dynasty in the 10th century, effectively killed off most of the great aristocratic families and broke up the big landed estates. In the new dispensation that arose after that, the Emperors ensured that military power was firmly centralised in their own hands. Thereafter, the only avenue to enjoy political power was to enter the service of the Emperor – something that could be achieved only by spending long years acquiring an education in the classics of Confucianism that stressed the virtues of loyalty and obedience to one’s superior, and then passing the imperial examinations.

The ruling elite that emerged thereafter has been called the *gentry* – a class distinguished by a combination of landownership, education and government service. The ownership of land was important to sustain the education of the sons of the family over a period of many years before they could begin to contribute to the family fortunes. Later on, a mixture of land and commerce increasingly became the basis of the wealth of gentry families. By virtue of the refinement acquired through education, the gentry members set themselves apart socially and culturally from the rest of the population, and were entitled

to various privileges not available to others. Within the class of gentry, the elite group consisted of the very small number of individuals who actually held imperial office. Access to office, particularly high office, enabled a gentry member to protect his family members and his lands from the exactions of the state, and to acquire more wealth. In this way, gentry families tended to perpetuate themselves, although strictly speaking the status of gentry member was open to any male, even from a poor peasant family, who succeeded in passing the examinations. *Social mobility*, frequently held up as a distinctive feature of pre-modern Chinese society, reflected the ideal rather than the reality.

The gentry-dominated social structure reinforced the imperial political power in various important ways. In the first place, many of the functions of governing and maintaining order at the local level were performed informally by gentry members who did not actually hold office. This included things like building and maintaining dams, bridges, roads, granaries and other public works, running charitable institutions like schools, orphanages and rest houses, adjudicating disputes among the local populace, acting as intermediaries between the people and the district level administration, and even organising militia and irregular armed forces in times of trouble. This ensured that a basic type of administration stayed in place even in times of political upheaval. Secondly, the gentry provided the local know-how that the district magistrate (who was always an outsider and who stayed in office for a short period of time) could not have. They acted as his “eyes and ears”. Thirdly, because their status depended on the regular holding of examinations, the gentry developed a vested interest in the maintenance of the imperial government. It is said that the founding Emperor of the Ming dynasty in the 14th century, when reviewing the grand parade of newly successful examination candidates at Court, remarked gleefully, “All the most talented men of the Empire are in my bag!” Thus, even when a ruling house was overthrown, as long as the new ruling house carried on with the same patterns of government as their predecessors, and held examinations on schedule, they were more or less assured of gentry support.

19.3.3 Family and Clan

The basic unit of Chinese society was the family or household rather than the individual. This was so even in government records and tax registers. The Chinese family was patriarchal, with a strict hierarchy of relationships. Filial piety, or obedience to one’s parents, was one of the cardinal social virtues. This was reinforced by the practice of venerating one’s ancestors, a very important tradition in Chinese society.

The average size of the family in China was not big, particularly among the peasantry. But the ideal of the large joint family, presided over by the family patriarch and with all the sons and their families living under one roof, was cherished and implemented where feasible particularly among the upper class. Even where all members did not live together, kinship links were zealously maintained. This accounted for the typically Chinese phenomenon of large clans, consisting of all those who could trace their kinship with each other through the male line. Clans had certain definite functions in the society. Clan members jointly observed rituals, administered common property such as burial plots and ancestral halls, looked after the welfare of members in need, sponsored the education of talented younger males, settled disputes among themselves, maintained genealogies, imparted moral-ethical training and

education to younger members and enforced discipline. Clans often transcended class lines, containing both wealthier and poorer members, but the existence of clans nevertheless did not mitigate the class divisions in the society as a whole.

In theory, the State approved of large and well-knit families. Families were where people were taught the qualities of obedience, loyalty and respect for hierarchy – all qualities which the imperial government liked to see among its subjects. Families could also be expected to keep in check deviant tendencies among its members, and thus helped the State to maintain order. However, in practice, the State was also wary of clans emerging as rival centres of power, and kept a close watch on the activities and behaviour of the more powerful clans.

19.4 THE RELIGIOUS TRADITION

The prevalence of religion in pre-modern China is one of the subjects most hotly debated among historians, sociologists and anthropologists. On the one hand, by far the most influential and dominant belief system of the Chinese was Confucianism, which was totally unconcerned about questions such as the existence of God or an afterlife, and which had a pronounced this-worldly orientation. China also lacked a tradition of a strong, centrally organised religion or priesthood. On the other hand, no one can deny the Chinese fascination with the supernatural, or the proliferation of gods, goddesses and spirits who were venerated with great devotion by Chinese from all walks of life in countless temples and shrines in every corner of the land. How are these two things to be reconciled? The problem stems mainly from this: the Chinese had both a profound moral/ethical tradition, as well as a rich tradition of religious worship, but their most important moral and ethical beliefs did not *derive* from an organised religion.

In this Unit, we will not bother with the question of whether Confucianism can be considered a religion. What is important is that no discussion of Chinese philosophy and values or of the socio-political order carries any meaning without understanding Confucianism. Therefore, we will discuss the role of Confucianism in pre-modern Chinese society first, and then take a look at other religious traditions in China.

19.4.1 Confucianism

The term Confucianism refers to the teachings of the philosopher Confucius who lived in the 6th century BC. Living in an age of great turbulence and the breakdown of social and political institutions, Confucius' primary concern was to find a way out of the chaos and to restore order and moral values. The centre-piece of his philosophy was the notion that this could be achieved if truly moral men (or "gentlemen") were to emerge. Such men were not born with the right moral qualities, however, but actively cultivated these through education and the observance of rites, propriety and proper relationships. The cardinal relationships in society were considered to be those between parents and child, sovereign and subject, husband and wife, elder brother and younger brother – all relationships between superiors and inferiors – and between friends. Confucius stressed the supreme importance of certain qualities, such as benevolence, filial piety, loyalty, sincerity, and so on. If the right men were in

charge of all affairs, Confucius believed, then peace and harmony and virtue would be restored in the society.

Even during his lifetime, Confucius gathered around him a number of devoted disciples. But it is with the adoption of the teachings of Confucius and his school as the official orthodoxy several centuries later, from the time of the Han dynasty (203 B.C. to 220 A.D.), that Confucianism became an all-pervasive influence. It moulded the behaviour and thinking of Chinese and reinforced their key institutions in various significant ways.

- In the first place, it lent a positive, or pro-active, element to the Chinese outlook. The solution to man's problems lay not in escape from earthly life or the denial of desires, but in actively cultivating the right qualities and rectifying things on this earth.
- It placed great emphasis on education and on public service. The upright scholar-official was the model of the Confucian gentleman.
- It stressed the need for order and performance of one's social and public duties. This made it a most suitable philosophy to reinforce the imperial State.
- It accepted hierarchy in the social order and preached the need for obedience and submission to authority, equating the relationship of a sovereign to his subject with that of parent to child.
- By stressing the notion of rule based on "virtue" or moral authority rather than military power or rules and regulations, it worked to temper or soften the harsher aspects of imperial power, and reinforced the tradition of civilian rule.

19.4.2 Religious Traditions Associated with Confucianism

Confucius himself was hardly concerned with notions of God or an afterlife. Nevertheless, Confucianism as it grew developed a cosmology and metaphysics, some elements of which were derived from ancient pre-Confucian religious traditions, and some of which developed later, partly as a response to the challenge posed by Buddhism and Taoism.

A prominent tradition which came to be accepted as part of the Confucian tradition was the practice of *ancestor worship*, observed by Chinese from all walks of life. The memory of ancestors was kept alive in numerous tangible ways, through various forms of veneration. Apart from this was the notion of *Heaven* and of *Fate*. It was believed that Heaven determined destiny on all matters ranging from affairs of State to the most personal aspects of an individual's life. However, because Heaven, Earth and Man were considered to part of a single trilogy, the actions of men were considered capable of influencing the course imposed on them by Heaven. Trying to predict or understand what Heaven had in store for men, or the practice of *divination*, was another feature of the Chinese religious tradition. The concept of *Yin* and *Yang*, or the unity of negative and positive elements, and of the *Five Elements*, were also part of the Confucian belief system. In later centuries, the rise of *neo-Confucianism*, or the revived version of Confucianism after its temporary eclipse by Buddhism, led to the incorporation of certain other concepts of a metaphysical nature into the doctrine. This included the notion that all things

derived from a single source known as the *Supreme Ultimate*, and consisted of both *li* and *qi*, loosely defined as ‘principle’ and ‘matter’.

19.4.3 Taoism and Buddhism

Undoubtedly, however, the great variety of gods and goddesses and spirits in the Chinese pantheon and the rich tradition of religious worship, owed its origins not to Confucianism but to the influence of Taoism and of Buddhism of the Mahayana variety. Taoism began roughly in the same period that Confucius lived, as a simple mystical philosophy put forward by its founder, Lao Zi. In contrast with Confucianism, Taoism was not concerned with the affairs of society or the State or moral values, but with the exact opposite – with Nature, with spontaneity and a whimsical attitude towards life. However, as it evolved, Taoism took on a variety of elements, including a pantheon of gods and a group of priests which helped it to spread among the masses of people, though it never became an organised religion on the lines of Buddhism. It exerted a profound influence on Chinese poetry and painting, with their lyrical quality and recurrent theme of man-in-Nature. Among the scholar-official class, it offered a kind of philosophical retreat from the rigidity as well as the unending cares and responsibilities of social and public life. It was often said that a scholar-official was a Confucian when in office, and a Taoist when out of office.

Buddhism was absorbed gradually into China after its first introduction from India around the 1st century A.D. Its influence peaked in the 5th to 8th centuries A.D., when it enjoyed the patronage of Chinese rulers, and the Buddhist *sangha* became very powerful. Both Buddhism and Taoism gained ground precisely in those periods when the imperial system was in severe crisis and when Confucianism, as the ideology of the imperial system, suffered from a loss of credibility. In particular, Mahayana Buddhism, with its profound philosophy about the nature of suffering in this world, and its uplifting concept of compassion and salvation for mankind through sacrifice, filled a philosophical and spiritual need among Chinese in this period in a way that Confucianism could not. In the centuries of political chaos and mass dislocation that followed the break up of the Han dynasty, the Buddhist *sangha* that extended beyond the confines of the family and the State provided a vital form of social integration. Although Buddhism’s influence waned with the revival of the imperial system and Confucianism especially after the 10th century, it never faded out altogether as it did in India. Instead, it continued to exert the most lively influence on popular religious life. Along with popular Taoism, it also fulfilled another significant role in Chinese society, as the ideology of many important rebel movements.

19.4.4 Some General Characteristics of Religion in China

In conclusion, some important features of religion in China were as follows:

- It was very eclectic. In other words, as it was practised by the people, the different religious traditions were not considered mutually exclusive. An individual could follow Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism without feeling the need to identify himself with one only. This permitted different traditions to remain in the background, but not disappear completely, when another tradition was on the rise. Full-fledged religious wars among groups of people were almost non-existent.

- The State in general tolerated different religious faiths, and persecuted them only when it was feared that they were becoming rival centres of power or were undermining established social norms. Rarely were persecutions unleashed on the grounds of doctrinal heresy alone. Thus, the 3 or 4 major instances of persecution of Buddhism usually resulted in the disbanding of the monasteries and their lands, and the return of monks and nuns to lay life, rather than in wholesale extermination or reconversion.
- The moral dimension of Chinese deities was not strong. Rather, gods and goddesses were worshipped because of their believed power to help or harm an individual or group.

19.5 SUMMARY

China was a vast country of great diversity, and it is not easy to make generalisations about its traditions and institutions. These were by no means stagnant, and evolved considerably over the course of her long history. Nevertheless, one cannot help being struck by the remarkable continuity and coherence of its traditions and institutions, and the way in which they interacted with and reinforced each other. An agrarian society composed of closely knit families and lineages formed the basis of one of the most sophisticated and powerful empires of the pre-modern world. The social structure and political power were closely intertwined. The Confucian ethical system pervaded both the family and the imperial system, while other great religious traditions lent richness and diversity to the cultural and spiritual life. This entire complex civilization lasted right through to the early 20th century when it was finally brought down by a combination of internal decay and external pressures.

Note on pronunciation:

- *Tian* in Chinese (as in *Tian Xia*) is pronounced as ‘T-yen’
- *Xia* (as in *Tian Xia*) is pronounced as ‘shee-ya’
- *Qin* is pronounced like ‘ch’in’ (with a hard ‘ch’ sound)

19.6 EXERCISES

- 1) Can the emperor be considered as an autocratic head of the Chinese State?
- 2) How the bureaucracy in China was unique? What role did it play in running the state?
- 3) Can *Confucianism* be treated as a religion?
- 4) Write short notes on
 - a) Spread of Buddhism in China
 - b) Family in China

Appendix

Chronology of Major Dynastic Periods

Shang	ca.1751 – 1122 BC
Zhou	1122 – 221 BC
Western Zhou	1122 – 771 BC
Eastern Zhou	770 – 256 BC
Spring and Autumn period	722-468 BC
Warring States period	403-221 BC
Qin (first unification of China)	221 – 203 BC
Han	202 BC – AD 220
Former Han	202 BC – AD 9
Later Han	AD 23 – AD 220
Period of Disunion	220 – 589
Sui	589 – 618
Tang	618 – 906
Five Dynasties	907 – 960
Song	960 – 1279
Northern Song	960 –1126
Southern Song	1127 – 1279
Yuan (Mongols)	1260 – 1368
Ming	1368 – 1644
Qing (Manchus)	1644 – 1911

GLOSSARY

Semitic	:	Races supposed to have descended from Shem, the son of Noah. These include Jews, Phoenicians, Arabs and Assyrians. The Semitic family of languages refers to Hebrew, Arabic and such other used by of the races referred above.
Abrahamic Tradition	:	The tradition of Prophet Abraham which is part of, with some variations, Islam, Judaism and Christianity.
Monotheism	:	Doctrine that there is only one God.
Hijrat	:	Migration of Prophet Muhammad with his followers from Mecca to Medina in 622 A.D.
Hajj	:	Annual Pilgrimage to holy shrine of Kaba in Mecca.
Ummah	:	The Muslim community which believes that Muhammad was a prophet and messenger of God.
Kharaj	:	Land tax.
Zakat	:	A tax levied on Muslims and was to be spent for charitable purposes.
Jiziya	:	Poll tax on non-Muslims.
Hijri	:	The Islamic calendar which starts with the migration of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in 622 A.D.
Manichaeism	:	A sect founded by a Persian called Manichaens.
Iqta	:	Revenue assignments which were given to officials in the form of territories with a right to collect the revenue in lieu of service to the State.
Primogeniture	:	Right of succession belonging to the first born. A rule according to which after the death the whole property or real estate passes to the eldest son.

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