

Chapter 1

A Scientific Approach to the Origins of Chinese Civilization

China has one of the earliest recorded civilizations, as witnessed by its ancient historical record,¹ a wealth of historic archaeological remains, and a clear historical continuity covering several thousand years of development.

It is widely acknowledged that Chinese civilization has made great contributions to the world. However, there are still many questions relating to the origin and the early development of Chinese civilization, which remain to be further explored.

The many research projects into the “root” or the origin of Chinese civilization, conducted by generations of scholars, have enabled us to take a deeper scientific approach, and today our knowledge of the origin of prehistoric Chinese civilization has grown gradually closer to the truth.

1.1 Emperors Huang and Yan: The Mythic Age of Chinese Ancient History

Sima Qian (c. 145 or 135 BC–86 BC)² held the title of Grand Historian (*Taishiling*)³ during the Han Dynasty and is regarded as the father of Chinese historiography. In his *Records of the Grand Historian: Annals of the Five Emperors* (*Shiji: Wu Di Benji*),⁴ he records the stories of the Emperors Huang (personal name Xuanyuan),

¹The written history of China can be found as early as the Shang Dynasty (c. 1700–1046 BC), although ancient historical texts such as the *Records of the Grand Historian* (c. 100 BC) and the *Bamboo Annals* (*Zhushu Jinian*) affirm the existence of the Xia Dynasty before the Shang.

²See Chap. 12 for further biographical details of Sima Qian.

³*Taishiling* can also be translated as “Great Historian” or “Prefect of the Grand Scribes.”

⁴*Records of the Grand Historian* covers the period from the five sages of prehistoric times, through the Xia, Shang, Zhou, and Qin Dynasties to the Han Dynasty of Sima Qian’s own time.

Zhuanxu (Gaoyang),⁵ Ku (Gaoxin),⁶ Yao (Fangxun),⁷ and Shun (Chonghua)⁸ covering a period of more than 2,000 years. Actually all of Sima Qian's knowledge concerning the prehistoric events of China's earliest civilizations is reflected in these vivid stories of the Five Emperors (*Wu Di*).⁹ He claimed that the stories came from relevant earlier documents, which also conformed to the Chinese folk legends. He wrote that he traveled constantly, setting his foot on Kongtong in the west, Zhuolu in the north, to the China seacoast in the east and also sailed on the Yangtze and Huai Rivers in the south. Everywhere he went, he conversed with the local aged people, noting that their stories of Five Emperors were widely spread. Although the culture and local customs differed, the basic narrative was roughly the same. From Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian (Shiji)*, it can plainly be seen that in his day the legends of Five Emperors were widely known and accepted.

Based on the *Records of the Grand Historian: Annals of the Five Emperors (Shiji: Wu Di Benji)*, during the time of Emperor Huang (Xuanyuan),¹⁰ different tribes constantly battled each other, and the people suffered much. Therefore, Xuanyuan (Emperor Huang) trained his soldiers to punish those tribes which were unscrupulous in wars against others, and for this reason he won wide support among the tribal peoples. After he defeated the tribes of Emperor Yan (dates uncertain) and Chiyou¹¹ in succession, Xuanyuan was enshrined as the Son of Heaven, Emperor Huang (said to have reigned from 2697 or 2698 BC to 2597 or 2598 BC).

The tribes of Huangdi (the "Yellow Emperor") and Yandi (the "Fire Emperor") were closely connected in prehistoric times. While the tribe of Yandi declined, the tribe of Huangdi was on the rise. Concerning the relationship between Yandi and

⁵Zhuanxu was claimed by Sima Qian to have been a grandson of the Emperor Huang, who headed the Shi Clan in their migration to present-day Shandong. He was said to have prohibited marriage between close kin, encouraged the formation of a patriarchal as opposed to a matriarchal society, reformed the calendar and religion, and composed some of the earliest known music.

⁶Ku was believed to be another descendent from the Emperor Huang, but through an alternative line. Master Lü's *Spring and Autumn Annals (Lüshi Chunqiu)* credits him with ordering the invention of various early percussion and woodwind instruments. He was purported to ride about on a dragon in spring and summer and on horseback in autumn and winter. It is unclear what territory or state he actually ruled.

⁷Yao is upheld as the perfect model of the sage king, who imparted wisdom and responsibility to others. He is said to have become a ruler at 20 and lived to be 119. He is credited with inventing the game of *Weiqi* (better known in Western countries as *Go*).

⁸Shun was the successor to Yao and was in turn succeeded by Yu "the Great" (*Da Yu*), who won renown for his work in flood control and for founding the Shang Dynasty. Shun is remembered for his piety and diligence and for making further contributions to early Chinese music.

⁹The Five Emperors cited here are those given by Sima Qian. Different historical works offer slightly different lists.

¹⁰The connotation of the title *Xuanyuan* indicates that tribes led by Huangdi invented carts.

¹¹Chiyou was said to have been a descendent of the Emperor Yan and a tyrant with a hideous body, consisting of a bronze forehead, 4 eyes, and 6 arms. Some legends give him a bovine appearance, like a kind of horned beast. The Hmong ethnic minority group claim him as an ancestor.

Huangdi, in *Discourses of the States: Discourses of Jin, 4* (*Guoyu: Jinyu, 4*),¹² it is recorded that in the beginning, “Shaodian’s wife Youjiao gave birth to the Yellow Emperor near the Ji River and the Yan Emperor next to the Jiang River which accounted for their different temperaments. Although Shaodian preceded the Yellow and Yan emperors, he was not their father. Therefore, Ji was the first name of the Huangdi family and Jiang the Yandi family. Because of their different characters, the two tribes conflicted with their armies.” Based on this account, the Emperor Yan and the Emperor Huang both originated from the Shaodian tribe. The Jiang River, where the Yandi tribe resided, is a tributary of the Wei River, which lies in present-day Baoji, Shaanxi. The identity of the Ji River has still not been definitively identified, but this waterway should lie close to the Jiang River. It can be, furthermore, inferred that both of the tribes—those of Huangdi and Yandi—originated in Loess Plateau, in northwest China,¹³ and expanded to the Central Plains.

In the time of the Huangdi, spectacular accomplishments were made in the development of Chinese prehistoric society. People began to domesticate cattle and horses, invented the cart and boat, and acquired the techniques of sinking wells, raising silkworms, and silk reeling. It was also a time of invention: the Chinese characters, the Chinese calendar, the *Jiazi* (a cycle system which marks the sequence of day and years), the hat, and the woven apparel are all attributed to the period of Huangdi. The accomplishments in Yandi’s time were mainly to be found in primitive agriculture and culture. In Chinese legend Yandi Shennong¹⁴ tasted a hundred different kinds of herbs while researching herbal medication; therefore, the invention of ancient Chinese medicine is considered another great achievement in the time of Yandi.

Regarding other important tribes in ancient Chinese civilization, some scholars hold the view that the Chiyu tribe ought to be taken into consideration, while others consider the Miao ethnic group as another important tribal alliance which paralleled the Huangdi and Yandi.¹⁵ It is impossible to make an irrefutable conclusion about

¹²In Chinese *Guoyu* is a classical Chinese history book that collected the historical records of numerous states from the Western Zhou to 453 BC.

¹³Zhang Qizhi, chief editor; Liu Baocai, Qian Xun, and Zhou Suping, editors; *Chinese History. Pre-Qin History* (Higher Education Press, 2001)

¹⁴There has been much debate throughout history as to whether or not the Yandi Emperor and the equally mythical Shennong or “Divine Farmer” or “Sacred Farmer” were one and the same. Shennong has been given the epithet *Wuguxiandi* or Emperor of the Five Grains and is credited with having introduced techniques such as plowing, hoeing, and drawing water through wells, which allowed for the development of agriculture in China. He also investigated the properties of many plants, apparently building on the foundation for medical pharmacology laid out by the Yellow Emperor.

¹⁵Scholars like Xu Xusheng and Meng Wentong ever thought that there were three tribe groups that existed in the prehistoric time: the central China *Huaxia* group centered in the Yellow River and Luo River, the eastern Yi ethnic groups centered in Haidai Regions, and the southern barbarian group centered in the Yangtze River and Hanjiang River. In the 1960s, when Su Bingqi was doing research into the cultural relations between central China and southeast China in ancient history, he put forward the division of three cultural regions based on the archaeological culture: Yangshao

the historical and cultural analysis of this era, since the written records of this mythic time are scattered fragments and not completely confirmed.

In the exploration of prehistoric culture in Chinese history, researchers have found that the earlier the time, the more variety and greater distinctions there were between different tribes and communities. Even the relics unearthed from ancient residential sites located only a short distance from each other possess various unique and different features. After many centuries of exchange and communication, the common attributes gradually developed from the different cultures of the various ethnic tribes. The traditional story that Emperor Huang “set the boundary of the other tribes” to make them “harmoniously coexist” appears to coincide with the blending of tribal features in the evolution of Chinese civilization.

1.2 Emperors Huang and Yan in the Eyes of Modern Historians

Since the late Qing Dynasty, Chinese progressive intellectuals have begun to mull over the ancient beliefs of Chinese traditional culture while also welcoming Western historical thoughts. In the early 1920s, the Doubting Antiquity School with the banner of Debates on Ancient History (*Gu Shi Bian*) was on the rise. This surge of thought was significant in smashing the orthodox system of Chinese historiography, for breaking through the constraints of the feudal cultural tradition and emancipating the Chinese national spirit. It also launched a revolution in Chinese historical science.¹⁶

Culture in Central China, Qingliangang-Dawenkou Culture in Southern Shandong and Northern Jiangsu, and Qujialing Culture in the area between the Yangtze River and Han River. After the 1980s, when he was studying the origin of Chinese civilization, he laid a special stress on northern China around the Yanshan Mountains and the Great Wall. He recalled the hypothesis of Three Groups raised by Liang Siyong. When Liang Siyong was doing the archaeological excavation in the former Rehe Province, he thought much of Hongshan Culture as “frontier culture contact areas,” and he held that “as long as the relations of cultural systems in the late Neolithic time on both sides of the Great Wall are confirmed, we can firmly make comparative studies between remote ancient history and the archaeological findings.” Liang Siyong’s hypothesis of three groups may also include south of Northeast China. Tian Changwu also published the hypothesis of four groups, which added a north region represented by the Hongshan Culture to the former ones.

¹⁶*Debates on Ancient History* is a collection of articles of Chinese ancient history research and criticism published between 1926 and 1941. It’s a display of a scientific exploration process with the greatest strength, hottest discussion, and most plentiful achievements at that time in the academic world. After the May Fourth Movement, scholars like Gu Jiegang began to revise their research methods with a Western scientific approach and reconsider Chinese ancient history. He launched a campaign of textual criticism to the ancient history. They published a series of articles of textual criticism to ancient history. These articles were collected together and compiled into *Debates on Ancient History*. There are altogether 7 volumes (9 books). Volumes 1–3 and Volume 5 were edited by Gu Jiegang, Volume 4 and Volume 6 were edited by Luo Genze, and Volume 7 was coedited by Lü Simian and Tong Shuye. There were totally 350 articles (3.25 million

Gu Jiegang (1893–1980),¹⁷ the initiator of the school of “Debates on Ancient History,” proposed the view of a “layered, accumulated, and fabricated Chinese ancient history.” He considered that the emperors in the Ancient Chinese legends each possessed a divine nature and evolved through time from being regarded as humans to being regarded as gods. This accumulation of fabricated history in the ancient classics evolved through the layers of legends in different times. The time sequence of legends occurred contrary to the sequence of the ancient history arrangement recorded in the ancient books. He stated that “[t]he later the time in history, the more fabricated the legendary ancient history will be.” “The most ancient leaders in Chinese people’s minds in the Zhou Dynasty (c. 1046–256 BC) were Yu; by the time of Confucius (551–479 BC), this had become Yao and Shun; by the Warring States Period (475–221 BC), this had become Huang and Yan; by the Qin Dynasty (221–206 BC), this had become the Three Sovereigns¹⁸; then in the Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD), this had become Pangu; and so on.” Moreover, “the later the time in history, the greater the heroes in the legends were amplified.” For instance, Emperor Shun, in Confucius’ time, was just reputed to be a sacred emperor known for “ruling without action,” but later he evolved into being a saint who “first regulated the family and then governed the country” in the *Classic of History*¹⁹: *Canon of Yao (Shangshu: Yaodian)*, and finally he was adorned as a model of filial piety in Mencius’ time.²⁰

Shortly after Gu Jiegang’s research was published, it sparked an unexpected repercussion. Many years later, Gu recalled:

characters) about Chinese ancient history and textual criticism to the Chinese ancient classics published between the 1920s and 1930s collected into this book. Among these articles, some are the textual criticism to the classics such as *Classic of History (Shangshu)*, *Book of Changes (Zhouyi)*, and *Book of Poetry (Shijing)*, and some are the research into Confucianism, Mohism, Taoism, and the Legalist School and the textual criticism to mythology before the Xia Dynasty, the origin of *Yin* and *Yang*, the Five Elements, ancient politics, and the ancient imperial system. Therefore, *Debates on Ancient History* has become a banner of this school of thought.

¹⁷Gu is known for his theory of Chinese diversity, as opposed to the idea of Chinese homogeneity, which is the main assumption of Hanism.

¹⁸The Three Sovereigns (*San Huang*) are listed by Sima Qian as being Shennong (or the “Divine Farmer”), Fu Xi, and Nüwa. The latter two were a brother and sister who legend has it were the sole survivors of a great flood and retired to Kunlun Mountain from whence they went about creating the human race by sculpting and animating figurines of clay. Tales about them vary, but Fu Xi is hailed as the creator of writing (as is Cangjie), fishing, and trapping.

¹⁹The *Classic of History (Shangshu)*, also known as the *Book of History* or the *Book of Documents*, is a work of historical records, which was latterly ascribed to Confucius, but the origins of which are actually mysterious and potentially complex. It consists of an Old Text and a longer New Text. It appears that a scholar named Fu Sheng preserved the Next Text when most copies of the *Shangshu* were destroyed in the third century BC under the edict of book burning issued by the First Emperor Qin Shihuang. The Old Text was purportedly found later on hidden in the wall of a house said to have belonged to the family of Confucius. The accuracy of both versions was the subject of enormous scholarly debate throughout the subsequent dynasties.

²⁰Gu Jiegang, *Discussion about Ancient history Classics With Mr. Qian Xuantong, Debates on Ancient History, Vol. 1* (Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 1982), p. 60

[h]ow could I have imagined that once the letter “Talking about Ancient History with Mr. Qian Xuantong”²¹ (*yu Qian Xuantong xiansheng lun gu shi shu*) was published, it would shock the field of Chinese ancient history like an atomic bomb? Even for me, it’s unbelievable that it had such a remarkable impact, that people in different fields who read ancient history were so affected by this view. Because all through Chinese history, people’s minds were fixed on the principle that our history started from Pangu, who created the earth and the sky,²² and was followed by the Three Sovereigns and the Five Emperors (*San Huang Wu Di*) up until the present. Therefore there was uproar when they heard that there is no Pangu, neither did the Three Sovereigns or Five Emperors ever exist. Many people cursed me, but a few approved. Many people said, with their traditional ideas, that I was bewitched, and brazen enough to smash the holy shrine into nothing!²³

Gu Jiegang’s argument of a “layered, accumulated, and fabricated Chinese ancient history” did blow a storm into the circle of Chinese historians. Qian Xuantong thought it was a brilliant idea, and he “could do nothing but joyfully applaud after reading the letter.”²⁴ Hu Shi²⁵ later remarked that “Mr Gu’s idea of ‘layered, accumulated, and fabricated Chinese ancient history’ has indeed made a great contribution to today’s historical field; we should study it, and experiment with it humbly and carefully, and not allow our stereotype to impede us from embracing this important view.”²⁶ However, many other scholars opposed it. Whenever Gu answered questions from critics, he was apt to enrich and refine his theory. On July 1, 1923, his article “Letter in Answer to Mr. Liu and Mr. Hu” (*Da Liu Hu liang xiansheng shu*) was published. In this he stated that there should be four criteria for overriding the false history. First, “abandon the idea of Chinese homogeneity.” Second, “abandon the idea that the Chinese territory was always united.” Third, “abandon the idea of the personification of antiquity.” Fourth, “abandon the idea that

²¹Qian Xuantong (1887–1939) was a philologist and fellow member of the Doubting History School.

²²In traditional Chinese mythology, Pangu was the first living creator in history. He emerged from a gigantic cosmic egg in which *Yin* and *Yang* first coalesced. Upon hatching he cleaved apart *Yin* and *Yang* with his ax, pushing *Yin* downwards to create the earth and *Yang* upwards to create the sky.

²³Gu Jiegang, *How did I Compile ‘Debates on Ancient History’?* This article was reorganized by Wang Xuhua and was first published in *Chinese Philosophy*, Vol. 2 (SUP Bookstore). In 1981, the article was revised by the author and collected into *Debates on Ancient History*, Vol. 1 (Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 1982), p. 60.

²⁴Qian Xuantong, Letter to Answer Mr Gu Jiegang, *Dushu Magazine*, Vol. 10, June 10, 1923, *Debate on Ancient History*, Vol. 1 (Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 1982), p. 67.

²⁵Hu Shi (1891–1962), a Chinese philosopher, essayist, and diplomat, was a president of Peking University and in 1939 was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature. Hu is widely recognized today as a key contributor to Chinese liberalism and language reform.

²⁶Hu Shi, *Thoughts after the discussion about Ancient History*, *Dushu Magazine*, Vol. 18, Feb 22nd, 1924, *Debate on Ancient History*, Vol. 1 (Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 1982), pp. 189–198.

antiquity was an ideal world.” Gu said “the above four points are the basic principles for distinguishing true history from the false and disordered ancient history. I do believe they are correct.”²⁷

In the past few decades, with continuous new archaeological discoveries, scholars have gradually realized that the many viewpoints of the Doubting Antiquity School were correct and ought to be modified, and the knowledge of the ancient legends should be continually updated. Xu Xusheng²⁸ pointed out in *The Mythic Time of Chinese Ancient History* (*Zhongguo Gudaide Chuan shuo shidai*) that “in the different ethnic groups of early Chinese civilization, their original history was always circulated orally.” He also said that “The main difference between the historical materials from the prehistoric mythical time and those from the historical time is that the latter are more reliable than the former.” Besides those historical facts which were passed on orally and thus easily became “distorted,” “at that time the belief in divine powers prevailed, and people were unable to consider their world view without a mythical context. Therefore it is not easy to separate the true history from the historic legends which have become mingled with myths. For these reasons, the early history of any culture is uncertain and full of contradictions, which is a common problem in studying the ancient peoples.” Moreover, he reassured: “[t]here can always be found some historical truth and the core factors within the ancient legends, which are not fictional.”²⁹

Since the time of the Warring State Period, during the Qin and Han Dynasties, the legends of the “Three Emperors and Five Sovereigns” had long been considered as the original framework for the structure of Chinese history. Although the scholars who have debated ancient Chinese history in the past century have concluded that the legends of the Three Emperors and Five Sovereigns are mythical ancient history modified by posterity, most scholars still consider that there are some true historical truths which remain in these legends. Lewis H. Morgan³⁰ wrote in his book *Ancient Society*: “[i]t is immaterial whether either of the seven so called kings of Rome were real or mythical persons, or whether the legislation ascribed to either of them is fabulous or true,”³¹ and:

[t]he work of society in its totality, by means of which all progress occurs, is ascribed far too much to individual men, and far too little to the public intelligence. It will be recognized

²⁷Gu Jiegang, “Letter to answer Mr Liu and Mr Hu,” *Dushu Magazine*, Vol. 11, July 1, 1923; *Debate on Ancient History, Vol. 1* (Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 1982), pp. 96–102.

²⁸Xu Xusheng (1888–1976) was one of China’s most important and respected archaeologists and historians of the twentieth century.

²⁹Xu Xusheng, *Mythology Age of Chinese Ancient History* (Cultural Relics Press, 1985), pp. 19–20.

³⁰Lewis Henry Morgan (1818–1881) was a pioneering American anthropologist and social theorist, best known for his work on kinship and social structure and his theories of social evolution.

³¹Lewis. H. Morgan, *Ancient Society*, translated by Yang Dongchun, Ma Yong, Ma Ju, Vol. 2 (The Commercial Press, 1987), p. 302.

generally that the substance of human history is bound up in the growth of ideas, which are wrought out by the people and expressed in their institutions, usages, inventions and discoveries.³²

Based on this conclusion, when one researches the relation between civilization and “Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors,” one can explore the truth behind the legends regardless of other distractions.

Some modern scholars think that, because of new archaeological discoveries, historians should take a different perspective regarding Emperor Yan and Emperor Huang. Many scholars now think that the legends of Fuxi, Shennong, and Huang better reflect the embryonic stage and early development of Chinese civilization. The Chinese Archaeologist and Scholar Li Xueqin points out in his book *On Ancient Civilization (Lun Gudai Wenming)* that the “*Records of the Grand Historian* borrowed the idea of Big Dai’s *Book of Rites (Da Dai Li Ji)*³³ which is absorbed from *The Virtues of the Five Emperors (Wu Di De)*. Emperor Huang was ranked first in the *Annals of the Five Emperors (Wu Di Benji)*, which can be considered as a symbol of the birth of Chinese civilization.” The early civilization of China is reflected in Huangdi’s time as establishing the government bureaucracy, observing astronomy to arrange the farming practices, growing hundreds of different crops, and domesticating animals. “Therefore, the idea that Chinese civilization originated from the legends of the Emperors Huang and Yan’s is not something that was discovered by modern scholars, but rather it is a historical statement that circulated for thousands of years.” Li Xueqin also said that “Huangdi and Yandi represent two different traditions, Central China and Southern China, and this classification is quite conducive to our study of ancient history.”³⁴ When reading *Records of the Grand Historian: Annals of the Five Emperors (Shiji: Wu Di Benji)*, one can see that Sima Qian focused on Central China when he narrated the ancient history, but he also acknowledged the existence of a southern Chinese civilization.

1.3 A Civilization of Multi-origin and Great Diversity

The scholars of the Doubting Antiquity School proposed four criteria for exposing false historical views. First, “abandon the idea of Chinese homogeneity.” Second, “abandon the idea that the Chinese territory was always united.” The evidence of the archaeological documents assures that these two criteria now reflect the scientific perception of the origins of Chinese civilization.

³²*Ibid.*

³³Big Dai (*Da Dai*) refers to Dai De, a Confucian scholar of the Han Dynasty. He was active in the reign of the Emperor Yuan of Han (48–33 BC) and helped to compile the 214-chapter-long version of the *Book of Rites (Liji)*. His younger brother, Dai Sheng, was known as Little Dai (*Xiao Dai*). Dai Sheng reduced the *Book of Rites* to 46 chapters and added a further three.

³⁴Li Xueqin, *Ancient Civilization, Stepping out the Time of Doubting Ancient History, Revised Version* (Liaoning University Press, 1997), pp. 41–43.

Archaeological discoveries in recent years have confirmed that Chinese civilization developed widely across the grand territory even in its embryonic stage. For a long time the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River were considered to be the only birthplace of Chinese early civilization, but new evidence shows that several primitive cultures also flourished in other areas in the Neolithic Age.

In the early 1920s, a Swedish scholar named Johan Gunnar Andersson (1874–1960) discovered primitive remains which featured elaborate painted pottery in Majiayao, Lintao, in Gansu Province. Since then, the Neolithic culture in the upper reaches of the Yellow River has been named as the Majiayao Culture (in existence from around 3100–2700 BC). This culture was located mainly in Gansu Province, centered in the Longxi Plain, starting from the Longdong Mountain region in the east and reaching to the Gansu Corridor in the west. Some other sites of Majiayao Culture are also found in northern Gansu, the Gannan (southern Gansu) Mountain region, southern Ningxia, and northeastern Qinghai. The Majiayao Culture is a regional branch of the Yangshao³⁵ Culture; therefore it is also called “Gansu Yangshao Culture” (*Gansu Yangshao Wenhua*).

Painted pottery accounts for 20–50 % of the total pottery found at Majiayao sites and for the burial objects, more than 80 %. Speaking of the painted pottery of different times and areas in China, the Majiayao Culture constitutes the highest ratio. Compared with the other cultures, the painting style of Majiayao pottery features great complexity and variety and with extraordinary regular patterns, from which we can see that the painting technique the Majiayao people used had reached a mature level. The painted areas on the surface of the pottery are much more extensive than in other cultures, with the outer layer and the rim fully painted with detailed flower patterns. The inner layer of some highly intricate pottery and some textured cooking wares were also painted. The artistic patterns of Majiayao painted pottery were mainly borrowed from nature, such as fish, birds, frogs, tadpoles, water waves, blades of grass, and gourds, besides many other patterns which were modified from those natural patterns or some geometrical patterns. The delicacy and brilliance of Majiayao pottery reflect their extraordinary craftsmanship. In the time of the Majiayao Culture, the pottery kiln was built with a square shape, which was different from the round kilns of the Yangshao Culture. A large pottery kiln site was discovered in Baidaogouping, an eastern suburb of Lanzhou, Gansu, which included 12 kilns of 5 groups, and some other kiln ruins. From these kilns, some stone tablets for grinding the pigments and some small dishes for mixing colors were unearthed. Both were tools for the craftsman to employ when painting his pottery. There were even subdivided grids in some small dishes for mixing colors, from which the purple pigment could be easily seen.

³⁵A Neolithic Culture that existed extensively along the central Yellow River in China. It is dated from around 5000 BC to 3000 BC. The culture is named after Yangshao, the first excavated representative village of this culture, which was discovered in 1921 in Henan Province by the Swedish archaeologist Johan Gunnar Andersson.

A pottery basin was unearthed at the Shangsunjia site in Datong, Qinghai, which features a pattern of colored dancers. The whole design consists of 3 groups, and in each group there are five dancers dancing hand in hand, elegantly and gracefully with the same movement. Each arm of the dancers at the two ends of the group was painted with two lines, which possibly evokes the continuous movements of one arm. Moreover, the lines on the lower body of each dancer are considered to be a widely worn ornament by some scholars, or to be waving ribbons by others, or to be a decoration which imitates the tails of birds or animals. Speaking of the origin of the primitive dance, there are apparently related phrases in the *Classic of History: Yi and Ji (Shangshu: Yiji)* such as “when the organ and bells take their place, this makes the birds and beasts begin moving. When the nine parts of the service, as arranged by the Di, have all been performed, the male and female phoenix come with their measured gambolings into the Court.” And the lines continue “when I smite the sounding stone, or gently strike it, the various animals lead each other on to dance.” At that time people played the instruments such as organs and flutes made simply from bamboo, or beat the thin flat stone tablet (an ancient musical instrument) rhythmically, and danced to imitate the birds and animals. All of these records reflect the relationship of the dance with the primitive hunting life. Therefore, it is possible that the dancers on the Shangsunjia pottery are wearing the tail ornaments to imitate birds and animals.

It is noteworthy that there is a mythical story that claims “[s]inging and dancing originated from the eight sons of Emperor Di” noted in *Classic of Mountains and Seas: Classic of Regions Within the Seas (Shan Hai Jing: Hainei Jing)*. In other words, according to ancient mythology, the earliest song and dance was supposed to have originated with the legendary emperors. Nonetheless, the empirical data now shows that primitive singing and dancing existed elsewhere in ancient Chinese culture, found in the relics unearthed in the remote northwest of China.

From among the relics found close to the time of the Shangsunjia pottery basin, there were found some primitive musical instruments. In the Yanshan Majiayao Culture site, Minhe, Qinghai, there were excavated two pottery drums. Cylindrical in the middle and tank-like on one end, the other end was enlarged like a trumpet. There is a ring attached on each end, which could be tied to a rope for the player to hang it on his body. On the trumpet-like end, some small holes and hooks are found, which was assumed to fix the animal skin. In the *Books of Lineages (Shiben)*, there is a record about “the barbarian made drums.” Perhaps this means that the earliest drum was invented by Chinese ethnic minority groups. In addition, a pottery whistle was unearthed in a Liuwan Graveyard, in Ledu, Qinghai, which could blow four different pitch tones.

The primitive culture in the Gansu and Qinghai region, which featured the elegant and brilliant craftsmanship of the pottery art, is also rather conspicuous in the field of Chinese history. A pottery jar with a carved human head, unearthed in Dadiwan, Qinan, Gansu, was found with signs of bonding at the crack. This repair implies that people at that time cherished this pottery ware very much. The vivid depiction and delicate carving of the head on this pottery jar was quite striking, especially the

hairstyle. Besides the neat short hair on the forehead, on the back, and on the two sides, the hair was quite long. In Chaijiaping, Tianshui, Gansu, there was also an unearthened clay pot with a man-shaped sculpture on the mouth. Some other pieces of pottery with human face sculptures were also found in a Liuwan Graveyard, in Ledu, Qinghai. Among them, was a pottery jar bearing a painting of a naked man. Different parts of the man's body were shaped on the jar and picked out with a black pigment. The head and face were clearly painted on the neck of the jar with long hair, and the torso was painted on the belly of the jar with the breast and bellybutton and with the lower body naked. The two arms were clutching his belly with five fingers clearly painted. The cultural implications of this pottery ware still remain unknown, but the artistic value reflected from the brilliant design and craftsmanship is definitely noteworthy.

A buried human couple has also been unearthed at a Majiayao site, suggesting that this was when monogamy was established. Also, the differences between the funeral objects of males and females reveal the gender differences in their social division of labor. The quantity, quality, and variety of objects reflected the disparity between the poor and the rich, thus signifying that the primitive system of collective ownership had come to an end.

After the time of the Majiayao Culture, a primitive people in the upper reaches of the Yellow River named the Qijia People (2400–1900 BC) developed and flourished during the Bronze Age. About 50 copper and bronze artifacts were unearthed in a Qijia Culture site in Huangniangniangtai, Wuwei County, and Dahezhuang, Yongjing County, in Gansu Province. These included a knife, awl, ring, dagger, ax, auger, and some mirrors. The bronze ax unearthed in the Qijiahe site, Guanghe, Gansu, is the largest bronze ware of the Qijia Culture. There were altogether eight bronze mirrors. The one unearthed from graveyard No. 25 in Gamatai, Guinan, Qinghai, was well preserved. It was round, with the diameter of 9 cm and thickness of 0.4 cm. On one side it was flat and smooth, while the other side was decorated with a seven-pointed star pattern, and the rim had a raised edge. From the craftsmanship, it was found to be the product of a double-mold casting. With high-speed neutron radiation analysis, the ratio of copper to tin was measured as 1:0.096. The original handle was damaged, and on one side of the mirror edge, there were two holes for fastening a rope.

To date, the discovered graveyards of the Qijia Culture have mostly been clan public graveyards, and the size of these graveyards corresponds to the size of the clan or the tribe. The funeral objects mainly consist of pottery, stoneware, jade jewelry or artifacts, bone ware, and bronze ware. Also the mandibles of pigs and goats have been found. From the archaeological evidence of some burials, there is a great disparity between the scale of the graveyards and the quality and quantity of the funeral objects. To take the graveyard in Huangniangniangtai, Wuwei, Gansu, as an example, the number of pottery ware specimens in one grave could be as few as one or two and as many 37. The number of jade artifacts could be as few as one or as many as 83. Altogether in the more than 50 graveyards excavated in Qinweijia and Dahezhuang, Yongjing, Gansu Province, more than 550 pig mandibles have been

unearthed; the minimum per graveyard was one and the maximum 68. All of these findings regarding the disparity in quantity of property reveal a hierarchy in social status.

The development of tool production, and especially the development of the metallurgy industry, proves that the people of the Qijia Culture had ascended the first stair of civilization.

In graveyards of the Qijia Culture, 6 “stone circles” (*shi yuanquan*) were discovered. These were constructed using riverbed stones of the same size and the circles each have a diameter of 4 m. It is considered that they were used to designate a place of religious worship. To the northwest of one “stone circle” in Dahezhuang, Yongjing, Dahezhuang, there was left an opening of 1.5 m wide. Around the “stone circle” were scattered many burials, in which numerous bones belonging to oxen and sheep were found. This reveals that religious worship was highly valued and that the progress of the civilization had stepped into a new phase.

The Qijia Culture was mainly spread along the Yellow River in Gansu and Qinghai and some tributaries like the Wei River, Tao River, Daxia River, and Huangshui drainage area. There were also some scattered sites found in southern Ningxia and northwest Inner Mongolia. The Qijia Culture region is roughly the same early dwelling area of the ethnic group named “West Rong” (*Xirong*) by the Han Chinese.

A stone chime excavated in the graveyard of the Qijia Culture in Liuwan, Ledu, Qinghai, was the earliest among the musical instruments unearthed in China. Alongside it, there was also discovered a precious document for studying the Chinese history of music. In addition 36 seashells were unearthed in Liuwan, which indicates that the ancestors of the Qijia Culture maintained economic exchanges with other remote areas.

The ancient Hemudu Culture, first discovered in Hemudu, Yuyao, Zhejiang Province, was a Neolithic Culture in the lower reaches of the Yangtze River. The Hemudu Culture was situated in the Ningbo-Shaoxing Plain along the south bank of Hangzhou Bay and the Zhoushan Islands, from around 5000 BC to 3000 BC. The bone ware manufacturing technique was highly developed in the Hemudu Culture. Bone-made spades, arrowheads, fishing darts, awls, needles, daggers, and chisels have been found in large numbers, suggesting they were widely produced and common in people’s daily lives. Moreover, ornaments such as hairpins, tubes, pendants, and beads were delicately made and smoothly polished. Some of these bone wares are carved with beautiful patterns which reflect the excellent craftsmanship.

Located in the Songze site of the Lake Taihu area, 4 km from the eastern border of Qingpu County, Shanghai, there existed a rich mid-level accumulation of Neolithic culture. Some scholars call it the “Songze Type” or “Songze Period,” while others call it “Songze Culture.” This is thought to have been active between around 3900 BC and 3000 BC. The culture remains of the same type that can be found in Caoxieshan site in Wuxian, Jiangsu Province; the Zhangliangshan and Weidun sites in Changzhou, Jiangsu; and the Qiucheng site in Wuxing, Zhejiang Province.

The stone wares of the Songze Culture were usually smoothly polished. These artifacts included a pierced stone spade and a long stone adze. The tool molds and the materials of pottery are mainly made from rice husks, a fact which also reveals how the economy and the livelihood of the people relied mainly on the rice agriculture.

The Liangzhu Culture (3300–2200 BC), which was located in Yuyao County in Zhejiang Province, inherited the accomplishments of the Songze Culture. The Liangzhu Culture was also mainly to be found along the Lake Taihu area. Its territory bordered with the Qiantang River to the south and with Changzhou City Jiangsu Province to the northwest. The Qingdun site in Hai'an, Jiangsu, was also influenced by Liangzhu Culture.

The discovery of the Qianshanyang site in 1934 and the Liangzhu site in 1936 enabled people to reconsider the precious ancient civilizations in Southeast China. In the last 60 years, the archaeological discoveries of and research into Liangzhu Culture have deepened. The jade ware manufacturing of the Liangzhu Culture is quite outstanding and features rather complicated patterns. The characters carved on the pottery discovered in the Maqiao site, Shanghai, directly reflect the advanced social and cultural progress at that time.

Wood craftsmanship in the Hemudu Culture (5000–3000 BC) also reached a high level. Besides wooden tools such as spades, batons, spears, knives, paddles, sticks, and spinning wheels, many wooden handles for attaching different tools were found. Many architectural components unearthed from the Hemudu sites show their mastery of the tenon joint, including the invention and various applications of the dove joint. A ring-foot wooden bowl with a constricted mouth was also unearthed in the third layer of the Hemudu site. It was painted thinly with a scarlet substance on the outer layer, and although much of the pigment was peeled off, it is still partly shiny. This pigment was verified as raw lacquer. Therefore, this bowl is the earliest example of lacquerware to have been discovered in China so far.

The people of the Hemudu Culture used to live in a unique column-fence style compound which was built higher above the ground using earth mounds, posts, and beams. In the different layers of the Hemudu Culture, there are more than 4,000 relics such as round wooden posts, square posts, beams, pillars, and wooden boards found that all related with this style of architecture. In a site of column-fence architecture found in the fourth layer of Hemudu Culture, more than 220 long round posts are placed tightly side by side. From the layout of these timbers, it can be seen that the size of this house was more than 160 m². Owing to its large size, it is considered to be a communal house, which was possibly divided into several small rooms. In the second of the four layers of the Hemudu site, a wooden-framed shallow well was discovered. This is the earliest water well known in China so far and also the oldest well with a vertical structure. It was said that in the time of Emperor Huang, there was a period when “jade was made into a weapon.” Here “jade” (*yu*) may be referring to a stone material with a pure quality, or quite possibly people had discovered the pure quality of jade when they were manufacturing the stone ware, and then they made delicate ornaments and magnificent ritual ware with

actual jade. The jade ware in Neolithic times reflected the aesthetic sense of the ancestors of the Chinese people, and its application was perhaps related with the primitive religion.

Southeast China has always set the standard for the technique of jade production, and this was also one of its most impressive cultural contributions. Jade production emerged as the outstanding characteristic of the Liangzhu Culture among the primitive cultures of that time. Artifacts, such as jade beads, tubes, pendants, bracelets, *Yuan* (big-hole jade), *Huang* (semi-annular jade pendants), *Cong* (rectangular jade), and *Bi* (round-flat jade), were most carefully polished and carved with elegant patterns. Many graveyards of the Liangzhu Culture contained a great quantity of jade wares. For instance, more than 60 funerary objects were unearthed at the burial ground No. 198 in Caoxieshan, Wuxian, Jiangsu. Among them, there are 5 rectangular jades, 2 round-flat jades, and more than 30 beads, tubes, bracelets, awl-like ornaments, and a pierced ax. Burial ground No. 6 was otherwise destroyed, but 5 rectangular jade and 4 round-flat jade pieces were discovered in that place, and in Burial ground No. 3 in Sidun, Wujin, Jiangsu, 57 round-flat jade objects were found. Based on the records of “Burying the dead with round-flat jade and rectangular jade” in *Rites of Zhou: Office of Spring, Dianrui* (*Zhouli: Chungong, Dianrui*), some scholars deduced that the burial form being described could be called a “Jade Burial” (*Yu lianzang*). In the time of Liangzhu, there appeared to be many good artisans specializing in jade production who were recorded as the “Jade Men” (*Yuren*) in the *Rites of Zhou: Office of Winter, Record of Trade* (*Zhouli: Dongguan, Kaogongji*). The soft sheen of the Liangzhu jade can be likened to a wisdom being handed down from ancient times, and it may also be said to represent the light of Eastern civilization.

The known Neolithic sites in Fujian Province are mainly situated at the lower reaches of the Min River. The Tanshishan Culture, named from the Tanshishan site in Fujian, reflected the distinct features of this period. Notable among the stone wares in Tanshishan is the great variety of adzes. Besides flat adzes and segmented adzes, there was an adze unearthed with one side flat and the other side possessing a V-shape ridge. The geometrically patterned pottery and the painted pottery with a red ribbon design is one of the main features of the Tanshishan Culture.

With its special characteristics, the Hongshan Culture in the Liao River region has drawn great attention. The Hongshan Culture was an agricultural civilization scattered in the north of the Yanshan Mountains and upper reaches of the Liao River 5000 to 6000 years ago. Its name derives from the Hongshan Mountain in Chifeng, Inner Mongolia. So far nearly 1,000 Hongshan sites have been found across the west of Liaoning Province.

The discovery of “the Temple of the Goddess” (*Nü Shen Miao*), the sacrificial altar and the “stone tomb” (*jishi zhong*), located in Niuheliang, Lingyuan, Liaoning, showcased the highest level of ancient civilization in northern China. “The Temple of the Goddess” is a half-submerged architectural remains, or crypt, with a length of 22 m and width of 2–9 m. The length of the main building is about 18.4 m. The main layout is like the Chinese character “” (*ya*). The temple contains several rooms; the shape of the main room is round, and on each side there is a circular side room.

To the north of the main room, there is a rectangular room, and in the south, there are three rooms next to each other. The main structure is symmetrical. Historians have therefore reconsidered the origins of Chinese civilization and Chinese ancient history and now claim that it dates back 5,000–1,000 years more than previously stated. Chinese historians have since enlarged the scope of their research in Chinese ancient history as well, to include the areas from the Yellow River to the west of the Liao River area.

The stone tomb was the basic form of all the Hongshan graveyards. In contrast with the pit graveyards in Northern and Central China, the stone tombs were erected on the highlands around the Temple of the Goddess. In the tomb group, the large central tomb was surrounded by the smaller ones, and the stone fence was built around the tombs as the boundary. The group of stone tombs were centered with a sacrificial altar and arranged in a symmetrical east–west and north–south layout. The size of the central tomb is much larger than the smaller ones, and it also contained more funeral objects. The hosts of the central tombs are all male, which reveals that a patriarchal society was in existence. The sense of a hierarchy had been established and the primitive ritual system had begun to stabilize Chinese social relationships.

In the *Book of Changes* (*Zhouyi*), there is a line which states that “the Original book comes from the Yellow River and Luo River, and then the saints followed it.” In the *Biography of Emperors* (*Diwangshiji*), when speaking about the origin of culture, there are stories of the fish, dragon, tortoise, and phoenix. For example, *Quotes for the Beginners* (*Chuxueji*) quoted the *Biography of Emperors* to state that “the graphic book comes from the fish movements.” The *Carving Jade Collection* (*Diaoyuji*) quoted the *Biography of Emperors*, to say that “the tortoise in the Luo River carried the book out, and the dragon in the Yellow River brought the painting.” The *Collection of Good Fortunes* (*Jirui*) also quoted the *Biography of Emperors* that “the phoenix carried the painting and put it in front of the emperor.” If we believe that in the mythological time, there was the concept of a “totem”³⁶ existing in the ancient Chinese history, then we can say that different cultures from different tribes gradually converged into the mainstream of Chinese culture, just as Wen Yiduo³⁷ said in *The Study of Fuxi* (*Fuxikao*) that “the convergence of totems is the only way of a totem society development.” In this process, “when different totems blended into a complex” he said, “a blended totem is born from the merger of different tribes, ancient Egypt being a good example.” In Chinese history, the northern constellation *Xuanwu*³⁸ originally depicted two separate animals, the tortoise (*gui*) and the snake

³⁶A totem is an emblem of a group of people (family, clan, or tribe) reminding them of their ancestry (or mythic past). It can include an object, a being, or a symbol which represents an animal or plant.

³⁷Wen Yiduo (1899–1946) was an influential poet and literary critic active during the time of the Chinese Civil War and the Second Sino-Japanese War.

³⁸*Xuanwu* can be translated literally into English as “black tortoise,” even though the totem contains a snake as well. *Xuanwu* has lent its name to one of the Four Symbols of Chinese constellations.

(*she*), but now it has become the blending of a tortoise and snake. Something is different here in the blending of the totems, however, in that after those totems are blended, each animal remains unchanged. But with the Chinese dragon (*long*),³⁹ after the melding of different totems, there was developed a totally new one, and the former smaller totem ceased to exist at all. Therefore, the former example can be called the “blended totem,” while the latter can be called the “mixed totem.”⁴⁰

Obviously, from examining these many ancient Chinese cultures, one can see that at the time when primitive cultures were advancing to become more advanced societies, these separate ancient tribes began to merge with one another, which provided the necessary conditions for the birth of modern Chinese civilization.

Concerning the historical analysis of the origin of Chinese civilization, at first the doctrine of “One Central China” (*Zhongyuan Zhongxin*)⁴¹ was the dominant theory. Gradually historians have developed the multi-origin theory, which is also called the “stars in the sky” (*Man Tian Xingdou*) theory. It contends that the early people were definitely scattered across the Chinese territory like the stars in the sky. Su Bingqi⁴² pointed out that

... there used to be a viewpoint that the Yellow River was the cradle of all Chinese people, and our culture first developed from there, then spread around; so the cultures of other regions could only rely on it to develop. It is a one-sided view. In our history, the Yellow River area did make a great contribution, and especially in the time of recorded civilization, it has always been a dominant culture. But at the same time, the ancient cultures in other areas were also developing with their own characteristics. The archeological findings in different places have verified this point. Meanwhile, this influence was mutually beneficial, since as central China influenced other regions, it also received influence from other regions.

Su believed there are six areas that made great contributions to the birth of early Chinese civilization: (1) the area of Shaanxi, Henan, and Shanxi; (2) Shandong and its vicinity; (3) Hubei and its vicinity; (4) the lower reaches of the Yangtze River; (5) Southern China, centered around the Poyang Lake and the Zhujiang River Delta; and (6) Northern China surrounding the Great Wall.⁴³ Some other scholars combine the one origin theory and multi-origin theory together to explain the origin of Chinese civilization and its development. They consider that the multifactor distribution and the “moon supported by the stars” (*zhong xing peng yue*) distribution together formed the Central Plains culture in another sense, which is also the center in the Chinese social and culture development of our ancestors.

³⁹One explanation for the emergence of the dragon symbol is that every time the Emperor Huang defeated another tribe, he incorporated the animal emblems of their insignia into his own, the result being a curious hybrid beast. Alternatively, it is possible that the dragon did emerge from the merger of tribal totems, but without the involvement of this mythical ruler.

⁴⁰Wen Yiduo, *Mythology and Poetry* (Ancient Books Press, 1956), pp. 26 and 27.

⁴¹In Chinese the word “China” is *Zhongguo*, which means “Middle Country.”

⁴²Su Bingqi (1909–1997), an archaeologist based at Peking University, who excavated sites belonging to the Shang and Zhou dynasties, as well as Neolithic Cultures.

⁴³Su Bingqi, *Typological Issues of Archaeological Culture, Selected Articles of Archaeological Study by Su Bingqi* (Cultural Relics Press, 1984), pp. 225–234.

The above analysis is identical with the following conclusion made by Zhang Guangzhi.⁴⁴ He stated that “No matter whether we consider Northern China or Southern China, we can propose a hypothesis that since 4000 BC, several regional cultures with special features and characteristics connected with each other and formed a sphere of interaction.”⁴⁵ He said, moreover:

... this sphere of interaction formed 4000 years ago, which stretched to the Liao River in the North, Taiwan and the Zhujiang River Delta in the South, along the sea coast in the east and Gansu, Qinghai in the West. This can be called the China sphere of interaction or pre-China sphere of interaction, because this pre-historic sphere formed the geographical center in China, and all of the regional cultures in this sphere have played important roles in the formation of Chinese civilization in the time of the Qin and Han Dynasties.⁴⁶

1.4 Primitive Agriculture and the Progress of Civilization

Concerning the symbols that represent the beginning of early Chinese civilization, some scholars advocate that bronze casting, the birth of Chinese characters, and the development of cities should be considered as the basic factors. Other scholars point out that there are limitations in taking those factors as the basic standards. However, for this discussion about the origin of Chinese civilization, it is widely acknowledged that the development of agriculture is considered the basic condition for the progress of any civilization.

The reason why the Emperor Yan was called the “sacred farmer” (*Shennong*) is most likely because the primitive farming techniques reached their first peak level during this time. The archaeological findings agree with the related mythology that the farming economy during the Neolithic Age in China achieved great prosperity.

The social and economic situation of the Yangshao Culture (5000 BC to 3000 BC) could be studied from the Banpo site.⁴⁷ As the people of Banpo began to settle down, agriculture accounted for rather a large ratio of their economy. At the same time, the Banpo people also raised livestock while fishing, hunting, and collecting wild plants.

Su Bingqi compared the quantity of production tools for reaping, logging, fishing, hunting, and weaving, in order to analyze the difference between the Banpo

⁴⁴Zhang Guangzhi (Kwang-chih Chang in Wade-Giles, or K.C. Chang for short) (1931–2001) was a Chinese-American archaeologist and sinologist. He served as vice president of the Academia Sinica and held a Chair at Harvard University.

⁴⁵Zhang Guangzhi, *Chinese Sphere of Interaction and Civilization, Collection of articles for Su Bingqi's 55 Years Anniversary of Archaeological Study* (Cultural Relics Press, 1989), p. 6.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷Banpo is an archaeological site discovered in 1953 and located in the Yellow River Valley just east of Xi'an, China. It contains the remains of several well-organized Neolithic settlements dating from 5600 to 6700 years ago.

Culture and Miaodigou Culture.⁴⁸ The conclusion he made is that “farming, fishing, hunting and logging in the Banpo people’s life were equally important, while the farming dominated the Miaodigou people’s life. Banpo people’s clothing was mostly made from animal skins, while the Miaodigou people mostly wore clothing made of plant fiber.”⁴⁹

The people of the Yangshao Culture period mainly grew millet. In the ashpit No. 15 of the Banpo site, there were several unearthed dippers of millet. An urn of carbonized grain unearthed in Dahe village, Zhengzhou, Henan Province, was verified to be sorghum, and something similar to rice was found in the Quanhui village site. Therefore, some scholars have inferred that it is possible that rice was grown in the Yellow River area. Primitive gardening had also begun in the Yangshao period. Some pottery jars for preserving shepherd’s purse or cabbages were unearthed in house remains No. 38 of the Banpo site.

The socioeconomic development of the Longshan Culture in the middle reaches of the Yellow River was more progressive than that of the Yangshao Culture. The stone production tools were more delicately polished and chipped tools were seldom used. With the discovery of the wooden plow, bone hoe, stone ax, and triangular plow, it can be inferred that the farm production of the Longshan Culture had greatly improved with the innovation of these farming tools. Many reaping tools were found, such as a rectangular serrated stone knife, a half-moon-shaped serrated knife, stone sickle, and mussel sickle, all of which revealed that with the application of these many reaping tools, the crop harvest must have greatly increased.

The cultural remains of the Dawenkou (4100–2600 BC)⁵⁰ reflect how Dawenkou Culture relied mainly on agriculture. In a large cellar of the Sanlihe site, 1 cubic meter of millet was found. This indicates that in the later stages of the Neolithic Age at least, farm production could roughly meet the needs of their society, allowing some surplus for storage.⁵¹ Many archaeological findings from Central China further indicate that the farming economy at this time was stepping into an age of prosperity.

In the fourth layer of the Hemudu site, a large cache of rice was discovered. In some places, the rice, rice husks, and rice straw were mixed together, forming an accumulation layer from 20 cm to over 1 m in depth. The people of the Hemudu Culture also used rice husks and straw as raw materials when they were making pottery. The great quantity and level of preservation of rice in the Hemudu Culture

⁴⁸Miaodigou refers to a phase in Yangshao Culture (c. 4000 BC to 3000 BC). The Miaodigou people were the successors to the Banpo people.

⁴⁹Su Bingqi, “Several Issues about Yangshao Culture, *Journal of Archeology*,” Vol. 11, 1965.

⁵⁰The Dawenkou Culture (*dawenkou wenhua*) is a name given by archaeologists to a group of Neolithic communities who lived primarily in Shandong but also appeared in Anhui, Henan, and Jiangsu, China. The culture existed from 4100 BC to 2600 BC, coexisting with the Yangshao Culture.

⁵¹Institute of Archaeology, Chinese Academy of Social Science, *Archaeological Excavation and Researches in New China* (Cultural Relics Press 1984).

was rarely to be found in the history of Chinese archaeology. It has been verified that the rice of the Hemudu Culture is of the long-grained *indica* variety. The Hemudu rice and rice unearthed in the Luojiajiao site of Tongxiang in Zhejiang are both dated around 5000 BC, which are the earliest rice discoveries found in China so far and also the oldest rice of artificial cultivation known in the world. The stone spade and stone sickle made of the shoulder blade of an ox or deer, also unearthed in the Hemudu site, formed some of the farming tools used by these ancestors.

The people of the Liangzhu Culture (3300–2200 BC) also made a living by farming, and the main crop also was rice. With the evaluation of the rice found in the Qianshanyang site, Zhejiang, it was discovered that these people were already growing two kinds of rice: short-grained (*japonica*) rice and long-grained (*indica*) rice. There were also peanuts, sesame, beans, and melon found in the Qianshanyang and Shuitianpan sites. The farming tools of the Liangzhu Culture are of great variety and delicately manufactured. Among them, the so-called triangular plow (*san jiao xing li xing qi*) was considered as the stone plow attached to the wooden plow bed. Another tool is the so-called sloping-handled knife (*xie bing dao*), which was also considered to be attached with a wooden handle. People used it to stir the plow trench as an “earth breaker” (*po tu qi*).

By exploring the origins of Chinese civilization, one can determine that the invention and accumulation of farming implements and domestic crop production were among the most important conditions for the birth and progress of civilization. Some scholars have pointed out that “starting from agriculture, and gradually developing into the civilization,” is the common direction of historical progress.

The history of growing rice in China can be traced back to 7,000 or 8,000 years ago; the same with millet. Starting from the development of agriculture, nomadic tribes began settling down, and gradually developed domestic livestock and handicraft, thus carving the way for Chinese civilization. This process was not exclusive to China; the same occurred with Western Asia, Egypt and India. Now it is accepted that three revolutions were necessary to the formation of the civilized world: the first is the agricultural revolution, the second, the industrial revolution and the third is the information revolution [...] [t]he so-called agricultural revolution refers to the social changes brought about by the development of agriculture, which is directly related with the origins of human civilization.⁵²

Regarding the relationship between the cultural formation of China’s early civilization and the later Chinese cultural progress, Zhang Qizhi pointed out that the Yandi and Huangdi are the source of ancient Chinese Culture. From a historic viewpoint, the Yandi tribe and Huangdi tribe are considered to be two large clan tribes with close relations, which together made a great impact upon the development of the modern Chinese nation. In the history of the development of Chinese civilization, the advanced cultures of the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring State Period can be called the “original culture” (*yuanchuangxing wenhua*) in recorded history, each forming a complete societal system with their rich

⁵²Tian Changwu, *Social Characters of Yangshao Culture and Some Theoretical Issues related with Origin of Chinese Civilization, Yangshao Culture, Central China Relics*, Special Edition, 1986.

contributions. When conducting research into the sources of Chinese civilization, it is deemed necessary to examine carefully the archaeological projects pertaining to the origins of Chinese civilization. Now with a rich background of archaeological accomplishments, Chinese scholars have proposed many new views about the origin of Chinese civilization. For example, according to Zhang Qizhi: “The late Yangshao Period and Longshan Period are considered the time of Chinese civilization’s origin, and the Period of Yandi and Huangdi is included within it.”⁵³ “The main contribution of the Yandi Period lies in primitive farming and primitive culture.”⁵⁴ “With the development of Chinese archeology, it is easy to verify the close relationship between the primitive agriculture and the origin of Chinese civilization. The archeological findings tell us that more than 7,000–8,000 years ago, the primitive farming in China was quite developed, and this is solid evidence of the origin of Chinese civilization. It can clearly be seen that the legends about Yandi Shennong are not so unreliable.”⁵⁵ The primitive culture cannot be called the “original culture,” but the primitive farming and primitive culture in ancient China have been found to be closely related with the original culture. “The primitive farming in the Yellow River Basin and Yangtze River Basin: specifically, the millet farming in the Yellow River Basin, is considered to be the material basis for the Qilu Culture (Confucian Culture) during the Warring States Period; and the rice farming in the Yangtze River Basin is considered to be the material basis for the Chu Culture (Taoist Culture). The original culture of Confucianism, featuring strength and solidity, enhanced Chinese moral values, and the original culture of Taoism, featuring elegance and purity, enhanced Chinese aesthetic values. Both of these two rivers are the mother river of Chinese culture, and the original culture cultivated by them formed the mainstream of Chinese traditional culture.”⁵⁶

To sum up, the study of the origins of Chinese civilization is an ongoing academic project which needs to be seriously investigated before formulating any final conclusions. Perhaps there is still a long way to go to clearly depict this course of history, but the general framework of ancient China’s historic evolution has become gradually more and more lucid.

Questions

1. Please briefly elaborate on the significance of the origins of Chinese civilization.
2. Please illustrate the relations between the mythology of the Emperor Huang and the Emperor Yan and the Chinese archaeological findings of the post-Neolithic Age with examples.

⁵³Zhang Qizhi, “Civilization Origin and Time of Yandi and Huangdi,” *Guangming Daily*, Aug 23rd, 2002.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

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