

Cause & Effect: ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS



Cause & Effect: Ancient China

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CONTENTS



Foreword	4
Important Events in the History of Ancient China	6
Introduction	8
The Terra-Cotta Army	
Chapter One	12
A Brief History of Ancient China	
Chapter Two	25
How Important Was the Great Wall in the Development of Ancient Chinese Civilization?	
Chapter Three	36
What Effect Did Confucianism Have on the Chinese Moral and Political Outlook?	
Chapter Four	48
How Did the Chinese Invention of Gunpowder Affect Warfare in the World?	
Chapter Five	59
How Did the Silk Road Link China with the Rest of the World?	
Source Notes	71
For Further Research	74
Index	76
Picture Credits	80

FOREWORD



“History is a complex study of the many causes that have influenced happenings of the past and the complicated effects of those varied causes.”

—William & Mary School of Education,
Center for Gifted Education

Understanding the causes and effects of historical events and time periods is rarely simple. The largest and most influential empire of ancient India, for instance, came into existence largely because of a series of events set in motion by Persian and Greek invaders. Although the Mauryan Empire was both wealthy and well organized and benefited enormously from strong rulers and administrators, the disarray sowed by invading forces created an opening for one of India’s most ambitious and successful ancient rulers—Chandragupta, the man who later came to be known in the West as the “Indian Julius Caesar.” Had conditions in India at the time been different, the outcome might have been something else altogether.

The value of analyzing cause and effect in the context of ancient civilizations, therefore, is not necessarily to identify a single cause for a singular event. The real value lies in gaining a greater understanding of that civilization as a whole and being able to recognize the many factors that gave shape and direction to its rise, its development, its fall, and its lasting importance. As outlined by the National Center for History in the Schools at the University of California—Los Angeles, these factors include “the importance of the individual in history . . . the influence of ideas, human interests, and beliefs; and . . . the role of chance, the accidental and the irrational.”

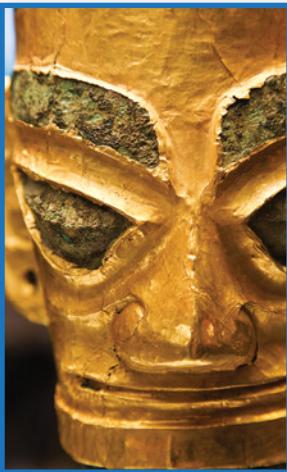
ReferencePoint’s Cause & Effect: Ancient Civilizations series examines some of the world’s most interesting and important civilizations by focusing on various causes and consequences. For instance, in *Cause & Effect: Ancient India*, a chapter explores how one Indian ruler helped transform Buddhism into a world religion. And in *Cause & Effect: Ancient Egypt*, one chapter delves into the importance of the Nile River in the development of Egyptian civilization. Every book

in the series includes thoughtful discussion of questions like these—supported by facts, examples, and a mix of fully documented primary and secondary source quotes. Each title also includes an overview of the civilization so that readers have a broad context for understanding the more detailed discussions of causes and their effects.

The value of such study is not limited to the classroom; it can also be applied to many areas of contemporary life. The ability to analyze and interpret history's causes and consequences is a form of critical thinking. Critical thinking is crucial in many professions, ranging from law enforcement to science. Critical thinking is also essential for developing an educated citizenry that fully understands the rights and obligations of living in a free society. The ability to sift through and analyze complex processes and events and identify their possible outcomes enables people in that society to make important decisions.

The Cause & Effect: Ancient Civilizations series has two primary goals. One is to help students think more critically about the human societies that once populated our world and develop a true understanding of their complexities. The other is to help build a foundation for those students to become fully participating members of the society in which they live.

IMPORTANT EVENTS IN THE HISTORY OF ANCIENT CHINA



1600–1046 BCE
The Shang dynasty develops a sophisticated writing system and begins producing bronze tools.



1046 BCE
The Zhou dynasty, the longest in Chinese history, rises to power.

214 BCE
Qin Shi Huang links and extends sections of the Great Wall.

BCE 1500

1100

600

100



551 BCE
The philosopher Kongfuzi, also known as Confucius, is born.

480 BCE
Sun Tzu writes *The Art of War*, a treatise on warfare.

135 BCE
Han envoy Zhang Qian opens new trade routes to the west along the Silk Road.

221 BCE
Qin Shi Huang unifies China and takes the throne as first emperor.



How Important Was the Great Wall in the Development of Ancient Chinese Civilization?

Focus Questions

1. Do you think the people of ancient China regarded the Great Wall with feelings of pride? Why or why not?
2. What do you think the building of the Great Wall indicates about ancient China's relationship with the outside world? Explain your answer.
3. What effect did the Great Wall have on activities such as trade and agriculture?

In a conceit made for Hollywood, actor Matt Damon, as a foreign mercenary in medieval China, stands atop the Great Wall alongside Chinese troops, intent on repelling an invading horde—not enemy soldiers but mythological monsters. The big-budget film *The Great Wall*, a US-China collaboration directed by Zhang Yimou, trades on the iconic status of the wall, one of the world's most recognizable landmarks. The Great Wall itself is not only an amazing feat of construction but also a symbol of China's imperial past—for both East and West. On his historic 1972 visit to China, American president Richard Nixon said, "It exceeds all expectations. When one stands there and sees the Wall going to the peak of this mountain and realizes that it runs for hundreds of miles, as a matter of fact thousands of miles, . . . I think that you would have to conclude that this is a great wall and that it had to be built by a great people."⁷ Chinese rulers collaborated down the ages to build the wall as a protection against invaders—soldiers, not monsters—and as a boundary enclosing Chinese beliefs and customs.

It offers a glimpse of how the ancient Chinese saw themselves and the sometimes hostile world beyond.

The Longest Wall in the World

The Great Wall of China is one of the greatest architectural achievements in history. It is the longest wall in the world, a series of stone and earth fortifications winding through northern China for more than 13,000 miles (20,921 km) across rugged terrain and steep mountains. Its Chinese name, Changcheng, means “Long Wall.” The Great Wall extends from Jiayuguan in the northwestern province of Gansu to Shanhaiguan on the east coast. The wall’s actual length is perhaps 1,000 miles (1,609 km) greater still since it loops and doubles back on itself across the passes. Its height varies in different sections from 26 feet (8 m) to 46 feet (14 m). Its base measures more than 30 feet (9 m) in width. Its ramparts (the walkways atop the broad walls) allowed five horses to travel along them side by side. There are more than twenty-five hundred watchtowers along the wall’s length, providing a view of the frontier and archery windows from which to shoot arrows at enemy soldiers. Fortresses were built at vulnerable strategic points where attacks were most likely to occur. These were fitted with fortified gate-

houses that could not be breached. Nonetheless, as historian Ann Paludan notes, the wall was more than just a means of holding out enemies. “The wall marked the limits of the civilized world,” writes Paludan. “The character for wall and city is the same in China and carries the idea

of a dividing line or enclosure. Early Chinese walled cities were not built for defensive purposes but for administrative reasons, separating city from field.”⁸ Construction of the wall occurred in different parts of China at different times, involving many dynasties and a long line of emperors. Overall, its history covers more than twenty-three hundred years.

The Beginnings of the Great Wall

Close attention to Chinese history shows that construction of the Great Wall had more to do with peace than war. Quite often its ex-

“The wall marked the limits of the civilized world.”⁸

—Historian Ann Paludan

pansion was an attempt to preserve Chinese culture, boost the economy, and achieve goals of foreign policy. Indeed, the Great Wall is not a single construction but a number of regional walls added to and connected by later dynasties. According to the history journal *China Heritage Quarterly*, “What is promoted in China as a contiguous

Chinese leaders built the Great Wall (pictured) in hopes of preserving their culture and way of life. The wall was intended to separate the civilized world—China—from all others.



length of wall, thousands of years old, and thousands of kilometers long, supposedly constructed to divide nomadic barbarians from the areas of cultivated Chinese centrality, is in fact a series of disjointed walls, tamped mounds, . . . and trenches.”⁹

The Chinese developed techniques for building walls as early as the Spring and Autumn Period. The first scattered sections of what later became the Great Wall date to the Warring States Period of the Zhou dynasty during the fifth century BCE. These sections were built by various feudal states, including Qi, Yan, and Zhao, to defend against rival

A Dilemma at the Eastern Wall



The Great Wall had a mixed record as a fortification. Its earliest forms, featuring low earthen mounds and trenches, were vulnerable to invading forces on horseback or foot. Later dynasties built taller and thicker walls of masonry that presented a more formidable barrier. Nonetheless, the Great Wall was probably more effective as a psychological barrier and an emblem of Chinese power and wealth than as an actual military asset.

In 1644 the Great Wall seemed to be facing a crucial test when a certain decision changed history. General Wu Sangui was in command of eighty thousand Ming troops at Shanhai Pass, the easternmost part of the Great Wall. At that time rebels had seized Beijing, burning and looting the city, taking Wu’s family hostage, and leading the Ming emperor to commit suicide. With the rebels approaching from the south and the powerful Manchus advancing from the north beyond the wall, Wu faced a dilemma. He decided to throw open the gate at Shanhai Pass and allow Prince Dorgon’s Manchu armies through the Great Wall. Wu enlisted Dorgon’s help in defeating the rebels and avenging his family. However, the price of his decision was the fall of the Ming dynasty. Ming partisans blamed Wu Sangui for handing over the empire to the Manchus. “And the Great Wall probably missed its last opportunity to show its worth,” says journalist Riho Laurisaar. “Actually, quite the opposite—it was the last time the Great Wall got to prove that it was not of much use.”

Riho Laurisaar, “The Failure of the Great Wall,” Gbtimes, May 23, 2012. <http://gbtimes.com>.

states and marauding nomads in the north. Advances in architecture at the time had led to the construction of solid walls around major cities, especially capitals. The success of these city walls as protective measures prompted some warlords to build sections of wall outside their cities on borders and across open passes. These sections butted up against natural formations such as rivers, embankments, and steep mountain ridges to form effective barriers against enemy invaders. Since the walls had only to withstand attack by spears and swords, most were formed hastily by tamping down layers of earth and gravel between wooden planks. Many of these earliest sections, which originally lay north of the Great Wall that exists today, have been lost to centuries of erosion. What is left barely resembles a wall anymore. Instead, the remnants look like a rough earthen mound extended across the landscape.

In 221 BCE Qin Shi Huang defeated all rival states to unify China under the Qin dynasty. Qin territory expanded hugely, resulting in a long, porous border between northern China and the Mongolian plains. The new emperor knew he had to control this long border to protect against invaders and limit outside influences. He also wanted to unify people who had always been separated by boundaries of region and village. Qin Shi Huang directed his engineers to connect three main wall sections built by the Yan, Zhao, and ex-Qin states. Parts of these original walls were so weather-beaten or flimsy that they had to be rebuilt or reinforced. Surviving remnants of the Qin wall are about 20 feet (6 m) high and formed of blocks made from mud or the local stone. Laborers for this enormous project numbered more than 2 million, drawn from the armies of Qin Shi Huang's top general, Meng Tian. Work crews also included captured enemy soldiers and convicts from all over China. The first section of the Great Wall took ten years to complete and claimed the lives of countless workers. The Chinese people hated Qin Shi Huang's vanity and harsh rule and took little pride in his elaborate wall. They regarded it not as a symbol of strength or unity but rather as a source of misery for unlucky laborers.

The Han Additions to the Wall

Emperors of the Han dynasty made practical use of the wall concept. They linked long sections to the Qin wall, creating a new barrier that extended for 6,214 miles (10,000 km), the farthest extent of the Great



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9. *China Heritage Quarterly*, "Length Does Matter," no. 6, June 2006. www.chinaheritagequarterly.org.
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Note: Boldface page numbers indicate illustrations.

- afterlife, importance of, 8
agriculture
 canal system and, 19–20, 23
 and percent of fertile land, 12
Alexander the Great, 62
Analects (Confucius), 36, 41–42, 44
art, 66
Art of War; The (Sun), 14
- Bacon, Roger, 56–57, **57**
Beijing
 as Ming capital, 28, 31–32, 33
 museum of traditional culture in, 37
 Olympic Games and Stadium in, 37, 48, **49**
Bell, Daniel, 37–39
Bogda Mountains, 15
Book of Rites (Confucius), 40, 44
Book of the Way, The (Laozi), 44–45
Buddhism
 beliefs of, 45–46
 Confucianism and, 47
 government persecution of, 67–68
 during Period of Disunion, 19
 Silk Road and, 19
 during Sui dynasty, 19
- Cai Guo-Qiang, 48
Calvert, J.B., 57
canal system, 19–20, 23
cannons
 Chinese, 51, **53**, 53–54
 European, 57–58
Cao Cao, 18
Cao Pi, 18
ceramic figurines, 66
Chang'an, 16, 65
Changcheng. *See* Great Wall
charcoal, 50
chess, 67
China Heritage Quarterly, 27–28
Chou En-lai, 47
city-states, 12–13, 14
civil war
 after fall of Tang dynasty, 21–22
 rise of three kingdoms, 18–19
 Zhou dynasty, 15–16
Clydesdale, Heather Colburn, 65–66
Communist China
 Confucianism and, 36, 47
 in South China Sea, 59, 60
- and teachings of Marx and Mao, 36, 47
trade policy, 59–60
compass, invention of, 10
Confucianism
 adoption by Wudi of, 17
 as alternative to Western concepts of democracy
 and personal freedom, 36
 beliefs of
 avoidance of warfare, 51
 benevolence, 41
 duty and activity, 45
 frugality, 21
 government by political meritocracy, 37–39
 interpersonal relations, 41–42
 Buddhism and, 47
 as challenge to legalism, 41
 as civil religion, 40
 under Communist leaders, 36, 47
 importance of education in, 40
 isolation of China and, 47
 return to, 36–37
 rise of, 15
 spread of, 39–40, 42–44
 Taoism and, 47
- Confucius
 life of, 37–39, **38**
 on tyranny, 46
 works of
 Analects, 36, 41–42, 44
 Book of Rites, 40, 44
 Doctrine of the Mean, The, 43–44
 Great Learning, The, 43–44
- Damon, Matt, 25
Dayuan, 62
Doctor Mirabilis, 56–57, **57**
Doctrine of the Mean, The (Confucius), 43–44
Dorgon (Manchu prince), 28
drilling technology, 10
- education, 40
emperors
 divine right and, 14
 See also specific individuals
- fire lances, 54
fireworks, 48, **49**, 52
Footprints of History (Cai), 48
Forbidden City, 23
- Gaozong (Tang emperor), 21
Gaozu (Tang emperor), **20**, 20–21
Ge Hong, 50