Week 2
History and Philosophy of China
The Shaman, I Ching & philosophers

Fu Shi, Yellow Emperor and Yu (Xia)
The Shaman, Shang and I Ching
Rites and Rituals of the Chou
The Taoists/ Lao, Chuang and Lieh Tzu
The Confucians/ Confucius, his followers and Mencius
The Legalists, the Emperor and making it all work
There are numerous examples of several Neolithic cultures of what we now call pre-history that congregated along the Yellow River in China. They were the Peiligang (7,000-8,000 BC), Yangshou and Hougang in Anyang in Henan, Beixin, the Yoeshi clan in Dongyeushi and Longshan in Shandong, and Cishan in Hebei Province. It was from these clans that shamanism took root and from myths and legends an actual person emerged. Fu Xi was first and foremost a teacher and could see how the extension of what he saw as universal truths could be communicated beyond the spoken word. He knew that within the written word there was great power. It was at the clan gatherings he could weave his magic.

Fu Xi could interpret the “oracle” expressed in the cracks of the tortoise shell and transmit a representation of its meaning. He saw how divination, or the connection to nature and the universe or a “god” as defined at that time, could be used and what that meant.

It was the shaman of these early clans who could see things from their beginnings and see a knowable end. It was in this way that Taoism the I Ching and Chinese philosophy was to begin.
Fu Xi – The original Shaman King

Fu Xi is considered a deity that appears in very different functions and with half a dozen of different names. After all my research, I do believe he was either an actual person, or a number of traits attributed to him from many people, who lived in about 2900-3000BC. He was the inventor of nets for hunting and fishing, melody and music, divination with the eight hexagrams, knotted cord for calculating time and space, and the inventor of fire.

From the Han period on (206 BC-220 AD) he becomes the consort of Nü Wa. Together with Nü Wa, he became a creator of the universe as people came to know it and the first proponent of matrimony. From the same time on he was often interpreted as a human ruler with supernatural powers.

What really happened verses what is later expressed or exaggerated as myth or oral history didn’t matter, if future decisions are based on them. The shaman was able to use the “oracle” exposed in the tortoise shell to both explain how and why events have occurred and that by following a certain path events would naturally occur.
The first Spring Festival comments from Fu Xi

Over the centuries the people of Neolithic and pre-history gathered in the spring of each year to see old friends and living innovations, and compare new rites and rituals.

It was here that Fu Xi excelled in teaching the shaman about the meaning of life and the people’s role in nature and the universe.

To the right is what he would said to all the shaman, both men and women at what was to become an annual gathering.

Fi Xi was succeeded by Shennong who is considered to be the father of agriculture and medicine in early China.

Everything Remaining Perfect

Have no fear of the end of heaven and earth. Thereby lacking a place to rest or that you forget to eat or sleep.

Heaven nothing more than the air around us. Where is there that there is no air? Your own weight in it allows you to walk and stand tall breathing in through lungs filled only with it. Always breathing in and out as your inner chi or essence makes itself known to dragons.

The earth nothing more than the soil and water that sustains us. Filling and giving shape to the place we only temporarily call home. As we walk and stand tall with feet forever attached to it. Always letting the earth be the ultimate messenger of nature’s way.

What can the air be but the rainbow, clouds and mist, wind and rain and the four seasons? Simply heaven at its purest.

What can soil be but mountains and hills, rivers and seas, metal and stone, fire and wood? The essence of earth at its fullest.

How can there ever be an end to it?

As all things have beginnings and endings, what will happen must happen. Endings always ending bringing new beginnings that simply begin again.

Fearing the worst will happen is not as it should be. What can eternity be but the innate sense that heaven and earth are simply the same only in different forms for different reasons?

Things just taking shape in the end. Have no concern for final outcomes and know peace. Simply rest easy and eat and drink from the cup that living brings you. With everything remaining perfect to the end.

1/13/95
The Yellow Emperor and the Common Thread

Those officials who did not catch up with the Yellow Emperor, with deep gratefulness, buried the clothes of the Yellow Emperor at the Mountain Bridge. That is what is buried at the monument to the Yellow Emperor in Huangling County, Shaanxi Province today. The legend was told from generation to generation and Chinese people came to believe that at the end of a successful life, a person will rise up to Heaven. In this way, they believed their ancestors also returned to Heaven and were taken good care of. That is why the Chinese worship their ancestors at special events or festivals and in some cases they build ancestral shrines to worship together. "Respectful worship" of ancestors became a major feature of Chinese culture, philosophy, and religion.

There has always been many threads from generation to generation that the shaman, the holy men and women, and others used to connect the Chinese people to their past. It was this connection that helped to confirm their own legitimacy. It was always the establishment of a “knowable beginning” epitomized by an eternal connection to the universe and yin/yang philosophy that carried over from the Xia, the Shang and then the Chou. It always began with the rites and rituals respecting our “ancestors” that gave them a solid footing.
Enlightenment from Heaven and the beginning of Tao meditation

According to Chinese legend, the Yellow Emperor (B.C. 2698 – B.C. 2598) led the Chinese civilization from barbarism to civilization. There were many legends about how the Yellow Emperor pursued the Tao. Historian Sima Qian in his "Historical Records" wrote that the Yellow Emperor got a precious cauldron and divine guidance from Heaven and regarded the Yellow Emperor as a practitioner of complete enlightenment.

The Yellow Emperor was from Qufu

According to Huangfu Mi (215–282), the Yellow Emperor was born in Shou Qiu ("Longevity Hill"), which is today on the outskirts of the city of Qufu in Shandong Province. Early on, he lived with his tribe in the northwest near the Ji River (thought to be the Fen River in Shanxi), later migrating to Zhuolu in modern-day Hebei Province.
The most important book of Chinese medicine and a very important book of Taoist practice is the Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine (黄帝内经), said to have been compiled by the mythical Yellow Emperor. It consists of two parts, the Suwen (素问) "questions of fundamental nature" and the Lingshu (灵枢) "spiritual pivot", a book also called Zhenjing (针经) "Classic of Acupuncture" because the latter is its main content. The book is concepted as a dialog between the Yellow Emperor and Qi Bo (歧伯), his doctor.
A Conversation with the Yellow Emperor or Forever Knowing the Outcome

Knowing no origins. Finding no difference between one thing and another. Death not simply an ending, but the art of transforming from one thing to the next. Knowing neither birth nor death. Life but a shadow, sounds but an echo. Always coming and going as nothing made into something, only to be made into something once again.

Somehow taking shape in the end. Simply coming forward to know the way of virtue. Being born to be unborn. Having shape to be made shapeless. Endings never escaping their end just as whatever is born again can never escape its beginning. Living only as the eternal spirit always merely coming and going. The only possessions that exist belonging to heaven and earth. Each taking care of man’s spirit and remains. Whatever else could there be.

What is man, but what takes shape through infancy, old age and death. Each simply one’s spirit working out the details along the everlasting Way. Coming in with harmony and virtue intact. Later only to find turmoil, as desires rise and fall. With challenges and lessons to be lived and learned. Each serving only as the knapsack of one’s destiny.

Knowing hunger and where morsels must be found. Keeping to one’s internal compass and staying on the course of events that must be followed. Finding comfort in one’s blanket to be kept warm by never contending with anything.

Coming to know old age and knowing that imperfections found since infancy have been simply built upon. Looking forward to death so that you may eagerly try again. 1/8/95

(From the manuscript “My Travels with Lieh Tzu” written by Dan DeCarlo, found on the kongdanfoundation.com).
Shennong – Father of Agriculture and Medicine

Shennong seems to have fit more in the time frame of Fu Xi & Nü Wa, as he is considered one of the Three August Kings. Yet he also is considered as the earliest patriarch of the Chinese tribes, and more than *that!* Shennong seemed to have a very erudite character, who had many notable achievements to his name. He was considered “father” of agriculture, inventor of the plow and of famous Chinese medicines, which he tested on himself. As he legend goes, Shennong’s skin was transparent, and so he could observe the effects of the herbs he tested, through his skin! He is said to have tasted hundreds of herbs to test their medical value. The most well-known work attributed to Shennong is *The Divine Farmer’s Herb-Root Classic.*

Chinese Tea, which acts as an antidote against the poisonous effects of some seventy herbs, is also said to be one of his discoveries. In 2737 B.C., Shennong first tasted tea from tea leaves on burning tea twigs, which were carried up from the fire by the hot air, and landed in his cauldron of boiling water. And thus Shen Nong is venerated as the Father of Chinese medicine. He is also believed to have introduced the technique of acupuncture.
The Xia – The end of the beginning in China

I like to call the beginning of the Xia “The end of the beginning”. The Xia Dynasty was not really a dynasty as we would come to know what a dynasty was to later become. It was a time when a sense of governing became essential. A sense of order connecting what was known and unknown. What the shaman knew and how to deal with the natural world. Especially the annual flooding of the Yellow River basin.

Yu the Great was succeeded unfortunately by those not so great and ultimately the Xia clans fell victim to their neighbors the Shang in 1562BC. Two things occurred during the Xia that had a lasting influence beyond the feats of the great Yu. While there was no written language of the Xia, there was a great influx of people from the southeast who followed the Buddhist religion and they had a written language. Their impact on the people of the Xia and especially the shaman, would have a profound affect on China’s history and philosophical outlook.

Both the woman drumming who is guiding the shaman and the bronze cauldron to the right were used in ceremonial rites during the Xia. Buddhist influence would have a lasting impact on both Chinese history and philosophy. It is said that it was Chuang Tzu’s take on Buddhism combined with his sense of Taoism that would later became Japanese Zen Buddhism many centuries later.
The Dragon Gate (Yu's Doorway) on the Yellow River is a tribute to Yu the Great who was able to take the vision of seeing something at its beginning and through modifying its direction was able to change its course. This was man through his wisdom guiding something that could be both harmful and destructive through floods killing everything in its path, or by rechanneling its direction to cover a much broader area, avert the disastrous flooding. And at the same time provide water for agriculture over a vast area.

Yu the Great became part real and myth because he fit the never-ending story and connectedness of how everything fits together. The ultimate yin/yang opposites that the shaman used repeatedly as the example and reasoning behind their future decisions. For the shaman it truly was as if Yu was heaven sent.

It helps of course that there were no written records from the Xia Dynasty in which he lived. He became immortal partly because he served as a means to an end for what was to become the reasoning and basis of later Chinese philosophy.
The Shaman and the Shang Dynasty

The Shang religion was a mixture of two beliefs: animism and veneration of ancestors. Animism, or what would come to be as the beginning of Taoism is the belief that spirits inhabit all of the objects in the natural world. Veneration of ancestors is the belief that the spirits of family members who have died continued to surround the family and that these relatives are still able to affect the world of the living. The Shang did not believe in just one god. The name shang comes from a flat ritual upturned hand bell employed by shamans.

It was the shaman's responsibility to keep the River god, Ho (Yellow River) pacified so that there would be no flooding. In the court of Wu Ting of the Shang Dynasty, 1225 BC there must have been problems with drought for there are many records of the shaman making offerings for rain. The shaman might also ask about wind, earthquakes, crops, and hunts. The shaman would commune with spirits of the mountains and waters and seek assistance from his totem animal, Almost always the shaman’s totem was the powerful dragon… unless he was a military leader then the bear totem and a shaman king as well.
The Molding together of a “Shang Philosophy” and beginnings of I Ching

It is important to remember that at the beginning of the Shang Dynasty in 1500BC, earlier shamanistic practices had been evolving for thousands of years. The Yellow River Basin had developed numerous sub-cultures all of who had developed their own take on what was the beginnings of what would be known as Taoism and the trigrams as explained by Fu Xi that was becoming what would be called the I Ching, or the Book of Changes. During the 500 year reign of the Shang there were literally hundreds to shaman with varying degree of skill all trying to further define and put into practice the true meaning of what would later be known as the I Ching. It was the ceremonial rites and rituals that were developed during the Shang that would be codified later during the Zhou Dynasty. During this time the Bronze Age flourished and thanks to the shaman a systematic language began to take hold.

Originally, the I Ching consisted solely of the various combinations of yin and yang lines, with no commentary, whatsoever. In fact, it was not until the Shang Dynasty (1566-1121 BC) that the emperor King Wen put together a written explanation of the lines and hexagrams.
King Wen, of the neighboring Zhou, a respected shaman, who lived about 1150BC so angered King Zhou of Shang that he was imprisoned. While in prison and afterward follow-up by his son the Chou of Chou, better defined the meaning of the 64 hexagrams as a manual for correct conduct in such a way that each individual could henceforth be responsible for shaping his or her own fate. The I Ching continues as a book of divination, but even more importantly as a book of wisdom.

There are two primary forces at work in the I Ching, often referred to as yin and yang. These two forces are applied to two alternating states of being and with that the world arises out of their change and interplay. Thus change is conceived of partly as a continuous transformation of the one force and then the other that defines them and what they remain connected to. The eight hexagrams of King Wen are images not so much as objects as states of change. This view is the same as that expressed in the teachings of both Lao Tzu and Confucius. That every event in the visible world is the affect of an "image", that is, of an idea in the unseen world. Perhaps yours or another person's imagination or thoughts. Accordingly, everything that happens on earth is only a reproduction, as it were, of an event in the world beyond our sense perception, or what we can see in the here and now; i.e., what is before us.
A Brief Description of the Meaning of the I Ching

The Shaman, holy men and sages, who are in contact with these higher spheres of the universe know of these ideas through direct intuition and are therefore able to intervene decisively in events in the world. Thus man becomes linked with Heaven, the wisdom of ideas, with earth, and the material world of visible things to form a three-fold knowledge of primal powers.

First, the I Ching shows the images of events and the unfolding of conditions when things are at their beginning; second, the images on which the hexagrams are based serve as patterns for timely action in the situations indicated; and third, the element of judgments. Will a given action bring good fortune or misfortune? Most important the process allows the person; i.e. the, shaman, or whoever who tells the story to become responsible for the outcome... of either good news or bad.

What those later to be known as taoists took away from this was that change was always inevitable and one should wait until the coming change is in your favor and to be prepared to act accordingly. What goes in must come out. It is as Master Ooway on Kung Fu Panda says, when you plant a peach tree it can only grow to be a peach tree.
The Beginnings of 900 years of the Zhou

The Zhou Period of China is directly influenced and defined by the philosophy espoused at the time. The Chou Period can be looked at in several ways. First the Western, then Eastern Period, often referred to as the Spring and Autumn and finally the Warring States Period. Each one served to build on what preceded it in China’s history.

The Western Zhou period (1046-771BC) served as the first half of the Chou Dynasty of ancient China. It began when King Wu of Zhou overthrew the Shang Dynasty at the Battle of Muye.

The dynasty was successful for about seventy-five years and then slowly lost power. The former Shang lands were divided into hereditary fiefs which became increasingly independent of the king. In 771BC, barbarians drove the Chou out of the Wei River valley; afterwards hat real power was in the hands of the king's nominal vassals.
### Kings of the Western Zhou Dynasty

Because Zhou Dynasty was combined by two parts – Western Zhou and Eastern Zhou, this dynasty experienced more rulers than some dynasties in China. Here is a list of the kings of Zhou Dynasty for your reference:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal name</th>
<th>Posthumous name</th>
<th>Reign period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fa</td>
<td>King Wu of Zhou</td>
<td>1046 BC-1043 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song</td>
<td>King Cheng of Zhou</td>
<td>1042 BC-1021 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhao</td>
<td>King Kang of Zhou</td>
<td>1020 BC-996 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xia</td>
<td>King Zhao of Zhou</td>
<td>995 BC-977 BC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>King Mu of Zhou</td>
<td>976 BC-922 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yihu</td>
<td>King Gong of Zhou</td>
<td>922 BC-900 BC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jian</td>
<td>King Yi of Zhou</td>
<td>899 BC-892 BC</td>
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<td>Pifang</td>
<td>King Xiao of Zhou</td>
<td>891 BC-886 BC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Xie</td>
<td>King Yi of Zhou</td>
<td>885 BC-878 BC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hu</td>
<td>King Li of Zhou</td>
<td>877 BC-841 BC</td>
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<td>Gonghe Regency</td>
<td>841 BC-828 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jing</td>
<td>King Xuan of Zhou</td>
<td>827 BC-782 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gongsheng</td>
<td>King You of Zhou</td>
<td>781 BC-771 BC</td>
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The first Sage – Ji Dan, the Duke of Chou

The **Duke of Zhou** was a member of the Chou Dynasty who played a major role in consolidating the kingdom established by his elder brother King Wu. He was renowned in Chinese history for acting as a capable and loyal regent for his young nephew King Cheng and successfully suppressed a number of rebellions, placating the Shang nobility with titles and positions. He is also a Chinese culture hero credited with re-writing the *I Ching* and the *Book of Poetry*, establishing the *Rites of Zhou*, and creating the Book of Chinese classical music. He compiled what was known during his time that would latter to be considered the Confucian classics hundreds of years before Confucius. The remaining classics the *Book of Documents* and *Spring and Autumn Annals* reflected his role in history and Confucius own Analects would mainly document the times of the early Chou and the life an times of Ji Dan, the Duke of Zhou.

His personal name was Dan (旦), he was the fourth son of King Wen of Zhou and Queen Tai Si. His eldest brother Bo Yikao predeceased their father; the second eldest defeated the Shang Dynasty at the Battle of Muye around 1046 BC, ascending the throne as King Wu. King Wu distributed many fiefs to his relatives and followers and Dan received the Ancestral territory of Zhou near present-day Luoyang.
The Duke of Zhou and the Mandate of Heaven

The Duke of Zhou was credited with elaborating the doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven, which countered Shang propaganda that as descendants of the god Shangdi they should be restored to power. According to this doctrine, Shang injustice and decadence had so grossly offended Heaven that Heaven had removed their authority and commanded the reluctant Zhou to replace the Shang and restore order. On a more practical level, the Duke of Zhou expanded and codified his brother's feudal system granting titles to loyal Shang clansmen and even establishing a new "holy" city at Chengzhou in 1036 BC. Laid out according to exact geomantic principles, Chengzhou held King Cheng, the Shang nobility, and even the nine tripod cauldrons symbolic of imperial rule all while the Duke continued to administer the kingdom from the former capital of Haojin.

The duke's eight sons all received land from the king. The eldest son received Lu (future home of Confucius); the second succeeded to his father's fief. In later centuries, subsequent emperors considered the Duke of Zhou a paragon of virtue. The empress Wu Zetian named her short-lived 8th-century Second Zhou Dynasty after him and called him the Honorable and Virtuous King.. He was also known as the First Sage. Although some will cite Confucius as first sage...
Dancing to and with the Stars

From pre-history forward the shaman had been connecting people to the universe through their totem to the stars to illustrate their connection to all things in nature. There was no better way to show the essence of their internal wisdom when following the I Ching and the Tao.

Duke Zhou’s observatory was to chart the universe, the sun and stars to further this sense of connection for all time. Gaocheng Astronomical Observatory, also known as the Dengfeng Observatory, is a World Heritage Site in Duke Zhou Gong’s shrine, Gaocheng Town, near Dengfeng in Henan Province, China. This site has a long tradition of astronomical observations, from the time of the Western Chou up to the early Yuan Dynasty. There is also a gnomon, an early astronomical instrument consisting of a vertical column for determining the altitude of the sun or the latitude of a position by measuring the length of its shadow cast at noon. It is believed that the Duke of Zhou erected the observatory to show the eternal connection between China’s past and future. He has already updated the philosophical writing and literature of his time, Now Ji Dan was attempting to prove its eternal meaning. Five hundred years later Confucius only added to what he had already done.
Transitioning from Western to Eastern Chou

Established during the Western Chou period, the *Li* (propriety) ritual system encoded an understanding of manners as an expression of the social hierarchy, ethics, and regulation concerning material life and the corresponding social practices that later became idealized within Confucian ideology. In other words, they wanted to rectify the abuses of the past they had witnessed in the Shang Dynasty. While the system was initially a respected body of concrete regulations, the fragmentation of the Western Chou period led the rituals to drift towards moralization and formalization in regard to the five orders of Chinese nobility, Ancestral temples (size, legitimate number of pavilions), ceremonial rituals and regulations (number of ritual vessels, musical instruments, people in the dancing troupe, etc.)

It is so divided because the capital cities in the Western Chou of Fengyi (presently in the southwest of Chang'an County, Shaanxi Province) and Haojing lie to the west of the Eastern Chou's capital of Luoyi (present Luoyang, Henan Province). They simply wanted a new capital.

The Western Chou system was much later canonized in the Book of Rites, Book of History and *I Ching* by Confucius and later compendiums of the Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD), thus becoming the heart of the Chinese imperial ideology.
During the Eastern Chou period, Chinese culture spread eastward to the Yellow Sea and southward to the Yangtze. Large feudal states on the fringes of the empire fought among themselves for supremacy but recognized the pre-eminence of the Zhou emperor, the Son of Heaven, who performed a largely ceremonial role. Beginning in the 7th century B.C., the authority of the emperors degenerated and hundred of warlords fought among themselves until seven major kingdoms prevailed.

The Spring and Autumn Annals

Corresponds to the first half of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty. Its name comes from the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, a chronicle of the state of Lu between 722 and 479 BC, which tradition associates with Confucius. The period can also be further divided into three sub-periods:

- Age of regional cultures (Early): 771 BC–643 BC, up to the death of Duke Huan of Qi
- Age of encroachments (Middle): 643 BC–546 BC, up to the peace conference between Jin and Chu
- Age of reforms (Late): 546 BC–403 BC, up to the partition of Jin.
Li Sao (The Lament) is not only one of the most remarkable works of Ch’ü Yüan (340 - 278 B.C.), it ranks as one of the greatest poems in Chinese or world poetry. It was probably written during the period when the poet had been exiled by his king, and was living south of the Yangtze River. The name Li Sao has been interpreted by some as meaning "encountering sorrow," by others as "sorrow after departure." Some recent scholars have construed it as "sorrow in estrangement," while yet others think it was the name of a certain type of music.

This long lyrical poem describes the search and disillusionment of a soul in agony, riding on dragons from heaven to earth. By means of rich imagery and skillful similes, it expresses love of one’s country and the sadness of separation. It touches upon various historical themes intermingled with legends and myths, and depicts, directly or indirectly, the social conditions of that time and the complex destinies of the city states of ancient China. The conflict between the individual and the ruling group is repeatedly described, while at the same time the poet affirms his determination to fight for justice. This passionate desire to save his country, and this love for the people, account for the poem’s splendor and immortality. A few of my favorite lines are below:

Swift jade-green dragons, birds with plumage gold,  
I harnessed to the whirlwind, and behold,  
At daybreak from the land of plane-trees grey,  
I came to paradise ere close of day.  
I wished within the sacred grove to rest,

But now the sun was sinking in the west;  
The driver of the sun I bade to stay,  
Ere with the setting rays we waste away.  
The way was long, and wrapped in gloom did seem,  
As I urged on to seek my vanished dream.
Qu Yuan and the Chu Ci

Qu Yuan (343–278 BC) was a Chinese poet and minister who lived during the Warring States period of ancient China. He is known for his contributions to classical poetry and verses, especially through the poems of the Chu Ci anthology (also known as The Songs of the South or Songs of Chu): a volume of poems attributed to or considered to be inspired by his verse writing. Together with the Shi Jing, the Chu Ci is one of the two great collections of ancient Chinese verse. He is also remembered as the supposed origin of the Dragon Boat Festival.

Chu Ci, (also known as Verses of Chu, Songs of Chu or Songs of the South) is an anthology of Chinese poetry traditionally attributed mainly to Qu Yuan and Song Yu from the Warring States period (ended 221 BC), though about half of the poems seem to have been composed several centuries later, during the Han Dynasty. The traditional version of the Chu Ci contains 17 major sections, anthologized with its current contents by Wang Yi, a 2nd-century AD librarian who served under Emperor Shun of Han. The early (pre-Qin dynasty) Classical Chinese poetry is mainly known through the two anthologies, the Chu Ci and the Shi Jing (Classic of Poetry or Book of Songs).

Chinese traditional shamanism was prominent in Chu, and a large number of the Chu Ci verses describe "spirit journeys".
The Age of Enlightenment - The Dragons

During the Zhou Dynasty, the origins of native Chinese philosophy developed its initial stages beginning in the 6th century BC. The greatest Chinese philosophers, those who made the greatest impact on later generations of Chinese, were Confucius, founder of Confucianism, and Lao Tzu, founders of Taoism. Other philosophers, theorists, and schools of thought in this era were Mozi, founder of Mohism; Mencius, a famous Confucian who expanded upon Confucius' legacy; and Xun Zi, who was arguably the center of ancient Chinese intellectual life during his time, even more so than iconic intellectual figures such as Mencius.
What is man’s place the world and the cosmos? This was the basic question of Chinese philosophy.

Lao Tzu was born during the Spring and Autumn Period, but it is said he came from a very old shaman family dating back to the late Xia or early Shang. He was the first philosopher who tried to explain the Tao in such a way that it could be commonly understood. According to Lao Tzu, Tao, or "the Way", is the source and root of everything, earth, heaven, and everything between. The Way has no starting point and no end. That the Way is nature itself and nature itself is the Way. He actually wrote the *Te Tao Ching* in frustration because he got tired that no one would take his “oral” advice.

Lao Tzu borrowed the notion from the *I Ching* and the shaman that “the Way follows nature” to reveal a common yet profound truth in his book the *Te Tao Ching*: that all things found in the universe including man, and his society, have a natural character. Humans must obey the law of nature and should not put incessant demands on nature. That there was a “universal connectedness” with all things and that what was seen as government and man’s role should reflect this truth. That the powers of those in control of others should answer to this and not their own sense of importance and sense of ego.

This paradox between the roles of Confucian and Taoist advocates became the pivotal argument in mainstream rule and in Chinese philosophical and politic outlook in the world. Do they "obey the laws of nature" or nature, or of humans, and why and how the two be so different?
Chuang Tzu (369 - 286 B.C.) was a leading thinker representing the Taoist strain in Chinese thought. Using parable and anecdote, allegory and paradox, he set forth the early ideas of what was to become the Taoist school. Central in these is the belief that only by understanding Tao (the Way of Nature) and dwelling in unity can man achieve true happiness and be truly free, in both life and death. Witty and imaginative, enriched by brilliant imagery, making sportive use of both mythological and historical personages (including even Confucius), the book, which bears Chuang Tzu’s name, gave real legitimacy to Taoist thought in China beyond Lao Tzu.

Chuang Tzu espoused a holistic philosophy of life, encouraging disengagement from the artificialities of socialization, and cultivation of our natural “ancestral” potencies and skills, in order to live a simple and natural, but full and flourishing life. He was critical of our ordinary categorizations and evaluations, noting the multiplicity of different modes of understanding between different creatures, cultures, and philosophical schools, and the lack of an independent means of making a comparative evaluation. He advocated a mode of understanding that is not committed to a fixed system, but is fluid and flexible and that maintains a provisional, pragmatic attitude towards the applicability of this attitude and how we are to live.
Lieh Tzu wrote a collection of Chinese sayings, stories, and teachings ascribed to Lieh Tzu who, if he existed, lived in China around the 4th century BC. The book reflects early Taoist philosophical notions of the 4th–3rd centuries BC. The text stresses the Tao as the supreme origin of all existence and takes a sometimes hostile stance to Confucianism. Lieh Tzu is the third major figure in philosophical Taoism, after Lao Zhu and Chuang Zhu.

After the Lao-tzu, or the Tao Te Ching and the Chuang-Tzu, the Lieh-Tzu is the third most important text in philosophical Taoism and is probably the most enjoyable to read. It is a collection of stories and fables that give very practical advice on Taoist living. It is also required reading for anyone interested in Taoism.

What is the sage to do but remain adaptable to the situation living springs forth to greet him?

As experience has taught us in our travels, the Way is an individual venture designed with the purpose of freeing us to find our ultimate destination.

As Lieh Tzu tells us to stay free of principle looking to the spontaneity each moment brings forward culminating in today’s lesson.

Lieh Tzu was satisfied to live a simple out of the way existence. Away from others, looking only to his own path he knew he must follow. This meager existence led to much concern from his wife. Who had, at Lieh Tzu's side, come to know many who had become important philosophers of the day and could look to a life lived by others in comfort and happiness.

However, this was not the life Lieh Tzu had chosen. He knew the transformation of his spirit was in staying within the singleness of mind of the life that the reclusive sage must follow. He knew that his writings and thoughts were best when there was no contention present. Simply remaining one with nature. Remaining free to travel with the wind as it blows overhead and off the water. To retreat into the woods to become simply at peace and one with his surroundings just at any given moment. To be present as nature provides the spontaneity his spirit craved finding eternal peace. This was something Lieh Tzu's wife found difficult to live with and understand.

As Lieh Tzu came to be known as a follower of the Tao, many searched him out to share their own thoughts and reflections. In so doing many became concerned for Lieh Tzu's family as he chose to live such a meager existence.

One such visitor later reported Lieh Tzu's situation to Tzu yang, the Chief Minister of Chang, of the province where Lieh Tzu resided. Telling him as follows: "Lieh Tzu is known as a man who possesses the Way. If he is in need while living in your State, it may be thought that you are not a generous patron."

After discussing this with his courtiers, Tzu yang immediately ordered that grain and other
accouterments be sent to Lieh Tzu and his family as soon as possible. Upon its arrival Lieh thanked the messenger, bowed twice, and refused the gift.

After the messenger left, Lieh Tzu's wife glared at him saying: "I have heard that the wives and children of men who possess the Way all live comfortably and happily. But now that starvation shows on our faces and the Duke hears of you and sends you food, you refuse the gift. We must be destined to misery!"

Lieh Tzu responded to his wife: "The Duke did not send us food because he knows me personally. He sent the grain because another man said I was in need. If he should someday decide to condemn me because of something that I have written, that too will be because of the word of other men."

Lieh Tzu continued: "While we may be hungry and in need, by accepting the gifts of Tzu yang, we become tied to him. It is known that Tzu yang is not an able administrator and may someday be removed from office. If we are seen to be in his favor, his downfall may lead to our own."

Lieh Tzu told his wife that while he was sorry the life he had chosen had not lead to the comforts that she had hoped for, she must learn to live within the constraints living with him meant. Or, while it would be followed by great sadness, move on to a life she might enjoy more fully. Within a short time of this encounter, Tzu yang's troubles magnified so much that the people made trouble and Tzu yang was killed.

That Lieh Tzu continued to live in great poverty in pursuing the Tao was well known. That he refused the grain of Tzu yang was widely known as well. This action in itself raised his status among those who knew him. Unfazed, Lieh Tzu simply continued on his way.

"The Duke did not send us food because he knows me personally. He sent the grain because another man said I was in need. If he should someday decide to condemn me because of something that I have written, that too will be because of the word of other men."

Lieh Tzu continued:

As Chuang Tzu’s Perfected Man begins by abandoning the ways of the world, you begin by simply letting go of that which is not significant to the Tao. A new beginning with with an unknowable end. Just as the dragons would have it, they are pleased.

Eternal sacrifice made to capture the moment knowing everything rests on your finding and staying on the road yet to be traveled.

Searching for immortality and freedom to go where no man has gone before. As a sage would find the true reality of all things. Always leading the way.

Knowing that the Tao is everywhere to be found by simply looking and understanding what is and finding one’s own standard within the oneness of virtue.

Eternity existing forever both before and yet to come. As you continually search for your place in the overall scheme of things. With a comfort known as something done repetitively over and over again. A great sense of satisfaction that all becomes and is second nature.

Remain simply within the oneness of everything and pursue nothing ethereal as the reclusive sage. Complete with the knowledge of the Tao and the understanding of what it means.

Know from where you have come and remember simply what you have forgotten. It is all there within yourself to re-discover and re-learn. Keep to the open road as the Perfected Man and know immortality can only follow.
Historical Background of wu wei

Even though it would be Wang Pi’s commentary during the Han dynasty that served as the guiding influence as to what would later define the true essence of the meaning of wu wei, it was the more than two thousand years of the shaman and later facilitators of what would become known as Chinese philosophy over the centuries that finessed both the I Ching and Tao Te Ching that would define what would become known as wu wei. Chuang Tzu did as much or more as anyone to define the true path of the sage, i.e., to be without purpose and to act spontaneously as a way of becoming one with the universe. That the universe, or Tao, moves effortlessly following the natural flow of things without purpose or goal. To be in the natural flow of your eternal essence is to be living in wu wei.

Wang Pi and many others took it a step further saying that wu wei is to be considered as a “mode or way of being”. This fit naturally into the Taoist idea of non-action as an expression signifying the Perfected Man, or Taoist way of life. Letting things take care of themselves following a natural order expressed by yin and yang was the preferred way of life. Best characterized by the sage having no thought of self and having no desires, conversely, it can be equated with emptiness and tranquility one discovers in following his true nature... by following the Tao and those who understood it.
Confucius the man from Lu – Qufu

Kong Qui, better known as Confucius, was born in 551 B.C. in the Lu state of China. His teachings, preserved in the Analects, focused on creating ethical models of family and public interaction, and setting educational standards. He died in 479 B.C. Confucianism later became the official imperial philosophy of China. Confucius, also known as Kong Qui or Kung Fu Tzu, was born August 27, 551 B.C. in Tuo, China. Little is known of his childhood. Records of the Historian, written by Ssu-ma Chien (born 145 B.C.; died 86 B.C.) offers the most detailed account of Confucius’ life. According to Records of the Historian, Confucius was born into a royal family of the Chou Dynasty. Other accounts describe him as being born into poverty. What is undisputed about Confucius’ life is that he existed during a time of ideological crisis in China.

The Major Works of Confucius

Confucius is credited with writing and editing some of the most influential traditional Chinese classics. These include a rearrangement of the Book of Odes as well as a revision of the historical Book of Documents. He also compiled a historical account of the 12 dukes of Lu, called the Spring and Autumn Annals. Lunyu, which sets forth Confucius’ philosophical and political beliefs, is thought to be compiled by his disciples. It is one of the "Four Books" of Confucianism that Chinese philosopher Zhu Xi, a self-proclaimed Neo-Confucian, published as Sishu in 1190. Far-reaching in its influence, Lunyu was later translated into English under the title The Analects of Confucius.
Confucius as Philosopher and Teacher

During the sixth century B.C., competing Chinese states had undermined the authority of the Chou Empire, which had held supreme rule for over 500 years. Traditional Chinese principles began to deteriorate, resulting in a period of moral decline. Confucius recognized an opportunity—and an obligation—to reinforce the societal values of compassion and tradition. His social philosophy was based primarily on the principle of "ren" or "loving others" while exercising self-discipline. He believed that ren could be put into action using the Golden Rule, "What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others." (Lunyu 12.2, 6.30). Confucius’ political beliefs were likewise based on the concept of self-discipline. He believed that a leader needed to exercise self-discipline in order to remain humble and treat his followers with compassion. In doing so, he would lead by positive example. According to Confucius, leaders could motivate their subjects to follow the law by teaching them virtue and the unifying force of ritual propriety.

His philosophy of education focused on the "Six Arts": archery, calligraphy, computation, music, chariot-driving and ritual. To Confucius, the main objective of being an educator was to teach people to live with integrity and virtue. Through his teachings, he strove to resurrect the traditional values of benevolence, propriety and ritual in Chinese society. He relied heavily on the work of the Ji Dan, the Duke of Zhou who preceded him.
Confucius and Mencius

Confucius (551-479 B.C.), looked to the early days of Zhou rule, especially his ideal, the Duke of Zhou, for an ideal social and political order. He believed that the only way such a system could be made to work properly was for each person to act according to prescribed relationships. "Let the ruler be a ruler and the subject a subject," he said, but he added that to rule properly a king must be virtuous. To Confucius, the functions of government and social stratification were facts of life to be sustained by ethical values. His ideal was the junzi (ruler's son), which came to mean gentleman in the sense of a cultivated or superior man.

Mencius (372-289 B.C.), or Meng Zi, was a Confucian disciple who made major contributions to the humanism of Confucian thought. Mencius felt a ruler could not govern without the people's tacit consent and that the penalty for unpopular, despotic rule was the loss of the "mandate of heaven."

The effect of the combined work of Confucius, the codifier and interpreter of a system of relationships based on ethical behavior, and Mencius, the synthesizer and developer of applied Confucian thought, was to provide traditional Chinese society with a comprehensive framework on which to bring order virtually every aspect of life.
Xun Zi and the Beginnings of Legalism

Diametrically opposed to Mencius was the interpretation of Xun Zi (300-237 B.C.), another Confucian follower. Xun Zi preached that man is innately selfish and evil and that goodness is attainable only through education and conduct befitting one’s status. He also argued that the best government is one based on authoritarian control, not ethical or moral persuasion. [Source: The Library of Congress]

Xun Zi’s unsentimental and authoritarian inclinations were developed into the doctrine embodied in the School of Law, or Legalism. The doctrine was formulated by Han Fei Zi who died in 233 B.C., and Li Si who died in 208 B.C. who maintained that human nature was incorrigibly selfish and therefore the only way to preserve the social order was to impose discipline from above and to enforce laws strictly. The Legalists exalted the state and sought its prosperity and martial prowess above the welfare of the common people. Legalism became the philosophic basis for the imperial form of government. When the most practical and useful aspects of Confucianism and Legalism were synthesized in the Han period (206 B.C.-A.D. 220), a system of governance came into existence that was to survive largely intact until the late nineteenth century.
The Confucius Analects and later Han Dynasty Imperial Examinations

The Analects of Confucius, the closest we have to a primary source for his thoughts, relates the discussions with his disciples in short sayings. This book contains a compilation of questions and answers, excerpts from conversations, and anecdotes from Confucius' life, but there is no account of a coherent system of thought, unlike most Western philosophers, Confucius did not rely on deductive reasoning, the law of non-contradiction, logic, or proofs to convince his listeners.

Instead, he used tools of rhetoric such as analogy, aphorism and even tautology to explain his ideas. Most of the time these techniques were highly contextualized. For these reasons, those reading the Analects might find his philosophy muddled or unclear. However, Confucius claimed that he sought "a unity all pervading" (Analects XV, 3) and that there was "one single thread binding my way together." (Analects IV, 15).

During the philosophically fertile period of the Hundred Schools of Thought, great early figures of Confucianism such as Mencius and Xun Zi (not to be confused with Sun Zi) developed Confucianism into an ethical and political doctrine. Ironically, it would be the five Confucius Classics when combined with the legalist views of later Han that would form the context of what was to become the Imperial Examination.
Mozi and the end of the Warring States Period

Mozi, Mo Tzu, (470 BC – 391 BC), original name Mo Di was a Chinese philosopher during the Hundred Schools of Thought period (early Warring States period). Born in Tengzhou, Shandong Province, China, he founded the school of Mohism, and argued strongly against Confucianism and Taoism. During the Warring States period, Mohism was actively developed and practiced in many states, but fell out of favor when the legalist Qin Dynasty came to power. During that period, many Mohist classics were ruined when Qin Shi Huang carried out the burning of books and burying of scholars. The importance of Mohism further declined when Confucianism became the dominant school of thought during the Han Dynasty, until mostly disappearing by the middle of the Western Han Dynasty. This period of competing schools of thought was to end.

With the final battles fought with armies of well over a half million men, the Qin finally came to power bringing an end to the Zhou. This brought on the unification of China and the new era of the Chin. Legalism justifying the new dynasty’s plan for domination was beginning.