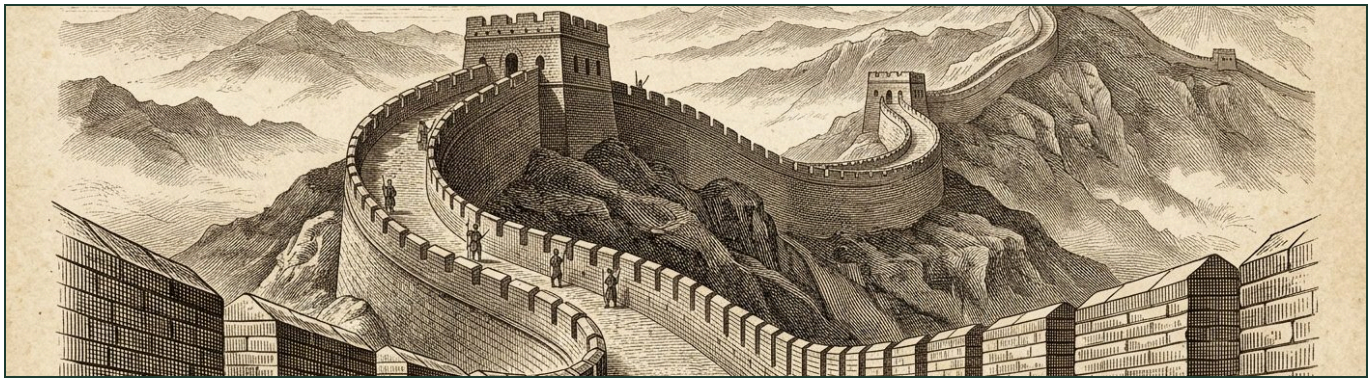


2100 BC – AD 220

Ancient China Timeline

Ancient China produced some of history's most enduring civilizations, giving the world writing, paper, the Silk Road, and two thousand years of dynastic rule.

~1600 BC

Shang Dynasty

The Shang Dynasty — the first confirmed by archaeology — rules from cities along the Yellow River, leaving behind bronze vessels, royal tombs, and the first Chinese writing.

> **Why it mattered:** *The Shang created oracle bone script — one of the world's earliest writing systems — and established ancestor worship, royal court traditions, and bronze-casting that shaped Chinese culture for millennia.*

1046 BC

Zhou Dynasty

The Zhou overthrow the Shang and establish the longest-lasting dynasty in Chinese history, ruling for nearly 800 years.

> **Why it mattered:** *The Zhou period produced Confucius, Laozi, and the Hundred Schools of Thought — a golden age of philosophy that defined Chinese values, government, and ethics for the next two thousand years.*

551–479 BC

Confucius

The philosopher Confucius teaches that social harmony comes from respect, duty, and virtuous government rather than force or fear.

> **Why it mattered:** *Confucianism became the dominant philosophy of Chinese government and society for over two thousand years — shaping education, family life, and statecraft across East Asia.*

475–221 BC

Warring States Period

China fractures into seven competing kingdoms that fight for dominance for over 250 years.

> **Why it mattered:** *The chaos of the Warring States drove thinkers to seek solutions — producing Legalism, Taoism, and other philosophies — and ultimately forced the military and political innovations that led to unification.*

Ancient China Timeline *continued*

221 BC

Qin Shi Huang Unifies China

The king of Qin conquers all rival kingdoms and declares himself the First Emperor — Qin Shi Huang — ruling a unified China.

> **Why it mattered:** *Qin Shi Huang standardized weights, measures, writing, and money across China and began building the Great Wall, creating the foundations of a unified Chinese state that has lasted in various forms to the present.*

210 BC

Terracotta Army

Qin Shi Huang is buried with an army of more than 8,000 life-size terracotta warriors to protect him in the afterlife.

> **Why it mattered:** *Discovered in 1974, the Terracotta Army is one of the greatest archaeological finds in history — a vivid snapshot of the military power and ambition of China's first emperor.*

206 BC

Han Dynasty Founded

Liu Bang overthrows the brutal Qin Dynasty and founds the Han Dynasty, which rules China for over 400 years.

> **Why it mattered:** *The Han Empire became one of the greatest powers of the ancient world — as large as the Roman Empire — and gave China so much of its cultural identity that the Chinese people still call themselves Han.*

~130 BC

The Silk Road Opens

Han Emperor Wu sends diplomat Zhang Qian westward, establishing trade routes that connect China to Central Asia, Persia, and eventually Rome.

> **Why it mattered:** *The Silk Road carried silk, spices, and other goods across Eurasia — but also spread religions, technologies, and ideas, making it one of history's most transformative trade networks.*

AD 105

Paper Invented

Cai Lun, a Han court official, refines the papermaking process, producing cheap, light paper from bark, hemp, and rags.

> **Why it mattered:** *Paper transformed how knowledge was recorded and shared. It eventually spread westward, reaching Europe and reshaping how the entire world preserved and communicated information.*

AD 220

Han Dynasty Falls

The Han Dynasty collapses after years of internal wars, peasant rebellions, and power struggles among nobles, ending four centuries of unified rule.

> **Why it mattered:** *The fall of the Han began four centuries of division — China's equivalent of the Dark Ages — before being reunified under the Sui and Tang dynasties.*