GREAT CHINESE EMPERORS

TALES OF WISE AND BENEVOLENT RULE

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Guide to Reading

History at a glance
Key events of each period

Questions & Answers
Additional information

Q. The social system of Han courts was started by Ya. How did it do it?
A. When Ya had surveyed the whole earth, he called for Nine Beards to advise him on the Han dynasty. When he had heard an old man named Feng, the Han dynasty was established. The Han dynasty was the first of the great dynasties in China, lasting for over 400 years. It was the period of social and economic development, and the time of cultural and artistic achievements. It was also a period of great technological advancements, such as the invention of the paper, printing, and the compass.

Q. What is the name of the emperor who lived in the Han dynasty?
A. The emperor who lived in the Han dynasty was Emperor Wu. He was the first emperor of the Han dynasty, and is known for his achievements in expanding the empire, consolidating the central government, and promoting the arts and culture. He is also known for his patronage of Confucianism and the development of a strong, centralized government.

Comics
Easy reading
Illustrations
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The Three Sage Kings and the Five Legendary Rulers

Dedicated and benevolent, the Three Sage Kings of ancient China made personal sacrifices to improve the lives of the people. Each of them is known today for a unique contribution.

**Suiren** 三皇之燧人
Discovery of fire-making

**Fuxi** 三皇之伏羲
Creation of the Eight Trigrams

**Shennong (Yandi)** 三皇之神农（炎帝）
Discovery of medicinal herbs

The Five Legendary Rulers ushered in the age of Chinese civilisation.

**Huangdi** (the Yellow Emperor)
五帝之黄帝
Creation of the written script

**Zhuanxu**
五帝之颛顼
Consolidation of the central authority

**Diku**
五帝之帝嚳
Creation of official posts and the Five Ministries

**Yao**
五帝之唐尧
Establishment of state administration

**Shun**
五帝之虞舜
Successful flood control
In ancient times, Man used to eat raw meat. The food was not only hard to stomach, it also created health problems for the people.

Then, about 18,000 years ago, a sage named Suiren stumbled upon some birds pecking on tree trunks, igniting sparks in the process. This inspired him, and he soon discovered that he could drill wood to make fire.

With Suiren’s discovery, Man could enjoy cooked food and was no longer stricken by the ailments associated with raw food. Also, Man began to use fire to keep warm and fend off wild animals.
Fuxi 伏羲

Fuxi, whose surname was Feng, was king for 11 years. He replaced the old method of keeping records by means of knotting cords, and taught the people to carve symbols on rocks and bones instead. Then he taught the people to domesticate animals and make nets to catch fish, birds and wild animals, thus ensuring their food supply all year round.

With the livestock, we need not risk our lives to hunt animals again. We won't have to go hungry in winter.

He also laid down the first marriage laws and advocated the wedding ceremony to affirm the bond between husband and wife, at the same time forbidding undesirable or forced marriages.
These eight symbols represent Heaven, Earth, water, fire, mountain, thunder, wind and marsh. From them, we can explain everything that happens under Heaven.

A keen observer of Nature, he created the Eight Trigrams to depict all natural occurrences, which became the basis for *I Ching* or *The Book of Changes*.

A lover of music, he invented a 35-stringed musical instrument, which enhanced the lives of the people. He was seen as the creator of ancient Chinese culture.
Shennong (Yandi)
神农 (炎帝)

Shennong, also known as Yandi, was born by the rivers. Thus, Jiang became his surname.

He appeared at a time of severe food shortage arising from the fast-growing population. To solve the problem, he tasted and found edible plants to supplement the people’s food supply. Then he invented the ancient rake, the spade, plough and the sickle, and taught them to plough the land and sow the seeds. He also introduced the five cereals for cultivation — rice, two types of millet, wheat and beans, which marked the beginning of Stone Age agriculture and the advent of civilisation in the regions of the Yellow River and Yangtze River. He proceeded to introduce barter trade to help the people exchange their harvest for things that they needed.

Shennong further developed Fuxi’s Eight Trigrams into the 64 hexagrams used in Chinese divination. He also modified Fuxi’s 35-stringed instrument into a five-stringed instrument.

Sir, are you studying Sage King Fuxi’s Eight Trigrams?

I’ve developed 64 divinations from the Eight Trigrams which can be interpreted to explain everything under Heaven.
In particular, he is remembered for tasting hundreds of wild herbs in order to find remedies to treat his people’s illnesses. In the process, he suffered from poisoning, even to the extent of being poisoned 70 times on a particular day. Eventually, he tasted a lethal wild herb which tore his intestines apart, and it became known as duanchangcao*.

Shennong lived for 120 years, and was buried in the county of Lin, Hunan. His tomb still exists today.

* Herb that tears the intestines apart.
Huangdi (The Yellow Emperor)

Huangdi’s name was Gongsun Xuanyuan. As he had settled down by the waters of Ji, he changed his surname to Ji and gave his reign the title of Xiong. Many achievements were attributed to him:

- He invited men of ability to help him innovate and rule the country.
- He commissioned Cangjie to develop the written word, which contributed greatly to the growth of Chinese culture.
- With Qibo, he studied the art of healing and compiled *The Yellow Emperor’s Medicine Classic*.
- He divided the year into its four seasons, and called every 60-year cycle a *jiazi*. The calendar served to guide the people in the timing of ploughing and harvesting.

1. Published by Asiapac. 232pp, comics. ISBN 981-3068-28-0
2. Four seasons: spring, summer, autumn and winter.
- Huangdi’s wife, Leizu, was instructed to turn silk into fabric so the people could be protected from the cold during winter.
- He taught the people to build houses to cope with the annual floodwaters, and designed carriages and boats for better transport. Under his rule, buffaloes were used for ploughing, and horses for drawing carriages.
- At all times, he advocated peace and avoided war. However, in one instance, he dealt a hard blow on Chiyou from the south in order to subdue the rebel who was a threat to peace.

During his reign, the people enjoyed peace and prosperity. With his wide travels and influence, he ushered in the age of civilisation for the Chinese people. Huangdi was 111 years old when he died and was buried in Huangling County in Shaanxi.
Yao was known as Tang Yao in history. Named Fangxun, he was Diku’s son and was as industrious and benevolent as his father. Under his rule, the four seasons were further divided into 24 seasonal divisional points, and crops and vegetables were grown according to these divisional points. As a result, the people enjoyed bumper harvests.

There had been flooding then in the Central Plains for 22 continuous years. At the people’s recommendation, Yao appointed Gun to solve the problem even though he had perceived that Gun was self-opinionated. Gun attempted to control the waters by blocking the water flow, but that resulted in more severe floodings. Yao then implored Heaven’s mercy to curb the floods.
Yao lived a simple life, and after 70 years of rule, he became the first ruler to practise abdication in favour of a younger and more capable ruler, Yu Shun. But that did not take place before Yao bypassed his own son, Danzhu, whom he deemed unfit to rule. He proceeded to test Yu Shun for his virtue and character. Eventually, he gave his two daughters’ hand in marriage to the young man and invited him to be regent. Twenty years later, Yu Shun became the king.

When Tang Yao passed away at the age of 118, the people mourned his passing as if they had lost their own parents. No music was played for three years while they mourned their king of 98 years.

You’re princesses. But I hope you’ll forget your royal birth and keep the house like any common woman. This will allow me to concentrate fully on state affairs.

Perfect. Yu Shun, I agree with that wholeheartedly.
Yu Shun’s name was Yao Chonghua. He lost his mother when he was very young. His stepmother and father ill-treated him, but he remained filial to them. At the foothills of Mount Li, Shun developed a piece of wasteland and tamed an elephant to help him plough the fields. The people at Mount Li were touched by Shun’s great virtue. They stopped fighting among themselves, and Mount Li attracted more and more settlers. In this way, Shun attained his fame when he was only 20, and at 30, he was summoned to King Yao’s service.

The people took Shun as their model and willingly accepted his teachings. Three years later, King Yao offered him the throne, but he declined. He travelled in Yao’s place, and inspected every part of the land. Shun drafted the five rules of etiquette, and other rules and regulations which the dukes and princes had to observe. He also divided the country into 12 states, with each having its administrator. Criminal laws were also carved on utensils and vessels to deter the people from committing offences.

I’ll make an inspection tour every five years to review your work. Those who have made outstanding contributions will be rewarded with carriages and silk.
During his inspection tours, he identified “trouble-makers” — Gun, Gonggong and Huandou who were dishonest, and the Sanmiao tribe who disturbed the regions of River Huai and the Yangtze River. They deserved death but were spared instead. Shun assigned them to trouble spots in the country to manage the people there, including the northern barbarians in Youling, the southern tribes at Mount Chong, and the eastern tribes at Mount Yu. The Sanmiao people were despatched to take care of the western barbarians at Sanwei.

You deserve death for your crimes. But as you’re men of ability and will be able to do some good for the people, I’ll give you a chance to make up for your wrongs.

During the 20 years of his regency, he declined to ascend the throne thrice. Only at the age of 61 did he finally agree to take over Yao’s place. He continued to implement changes at the administrative level, and set up the departments of rites, music, farming, mulberry planting, works, water and land.

You’ve controlled the floodwaters. Please succeed me as king.

Shun finally abdicated in favour of Yu, who did a great job of controlling the floodwaters. He died in the countryside of Cangwu and was buried in Mt Jiuyi. His tomb was known as the Tomb of Ling.