

Robert W. Strayer

**Ways of the World: A Brief Global
History with Sources**
Second Edition

Chapter 5

Society and Inequality in Eurasia/North Africa,
500 B.C.E.–500 C.E.

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Mother and Child
Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY
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1. What does this statue show?

This statue shows two female figures, presumably mother and child. Both have long hair and wear elaborate headgear, earrings, thick bracelets, and belts. With the exception of a thin shawl that hangs over the mother's right shoulder between her breasts and over her hips, both figures are naked. The mother's bracelets, earrings, belt, and headgear seem more elaborate. The mother is holding the child in one arm on her hip. The faces of both figures are turned toward the spectator.

2. Can you identify the origin of this statue?

This statue stems from the Sunga Dynasty in eastern India, between 185 B.C.E. and 73 B.C.E.

3. Why did the artist choose this image and composition?

This image celebrates the tie between mother and child. The similarity between mother and child stresses the importance of the mother-child relationship for the transmission of values and traditions. The positioning of both bodies toward the spectator underlines the fact that this statue is not so much a celebration of motherly protection but of the mother's role in raising future adults.

I. Society and the State in China

A. An Elite of Officials

1. Emperor Wu Di's imperial academy, 124 B.C.E.
2. Exam system
3. Privilege and prestige

I. Society and the State in China

A. An Elite of Officials

1. Emperor Wu Di's imperial academy, 124 B.C.E.: This emperor created a formal school for future bureaucrats to study the Confucian classics as preparation for government service.
2. Exam system: Entry into the civil service was based on passing a difficult exam on the Confucian classics. The exam was open to all males, regardless of social status; there was an example of a pig farmer who became an imperial advisor. However, as the exam required years of study, only those with access to enough wealth to spend time studying for the exam would succeed. Thus, the system favored the wealthy.
3. Privilege and prestige: Once the candidate passed the exam and became a civil servant, their social status rose immensely. They were celebrated in their home villages and towns and were the source of much family pride. The civil servants enjoyed special carriages and fancy robes, as well as various social privileges. They were frequently hailed as symbols of sophistication for their refined behavior and speech.

I. Society and the State in China

B. The Landlord Class

1. Land as wealth
2. Rise of large estates
3. Wang Mang (r. 8–23 C.E.)
4. Scholar-Gentry

I. Society and the State in China

B. The Landlord Class

1. Land as wealth: Land and agricultural production had been the major source of wealth in China for millennia. During the Qin Dynasty, most land was worked and held by peasant families.
2. Rise of large estates: During the first century B.C.E., population pressures, taxation, and indebtedness led wealthier landowners to buy up the land of economically desperate peasants. The wealthy landlords used their increasing power to avoid taxation and raised armies of their own to challenge the state.
3. Wang Mang (r. 8–23 C.E.): This court official usurped the throne and engaged in a systematic attack on the large estates. A firm Confucian, he believed that a strong and healthy peasant class was the backbone of society. His program of nationalizing and redistributing land, setting limits on the size of landholdings, offering government loans to small farmers, and ending private slavery provoked a strong reaction from the wealthy elite and eventually led to his assassination.
4. Scholar-Gentry: As the landlord class had access to more wealth, they could sponsor their young men to study for the civil service exam. Hence, the government bureaucracy, while open to all who were educated along Confucian lines, was dominated by the wealthy landlords.



Spot Map Yellow Turban Rebellion
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I. Society and the State in China

C. Peasants

1. Pressures on peasants
2. Yellow Turban Rebellion

D. Merchants

1. Shameful profits and dubious morality
2. Restrictions and exclusion from state service

I. Society and the State in China

C. Peasants

1. Pressures on peasants: Rents, taxes, military service, and forced labor to the state, combined with floods and occasional crop failure, all put heavy burdens on the backs of Chinese peasants. In hard times, some toiled in poverty and some succumbed to famine, yet others fled to become beggars or bandits.

2. Yellow Turban Rebellion: Following a series of floods and epidemics, wandering bands of peasants joined together and formed a massive popular movement that reached 360,000 armed followers in 184 C.E. They used Daoism and mystical rituals to unify themselves and called for a coming age of equality and peace. The Han military eventually crushed them, but the rebellion and the military campaign weakened the state, contributing to eventual dynastic collapse.

D. Merchants

1. Shameful profits and dubious morality: While peasants were poor, they were held in high moral esteem by the Confucian state ideology as the backbone of a healthy society. Merchants on the other hand were deemed dishonest and deceitful, and thus of poor moral quality. Furthermore, they were seen as keeping revenue from the state.

2. Restrictions and exclusion from state service: To keep the merchants in check, the state placed various restrictions upon them and excluded them from state service. Nonetheless, some merchants found corrupt officials willing to work with them and schemed to put their

sons into the Confucian bureaucracy. Merchants were also barred from certain economic activity by state monopolies or forced to loan money to the state.

II. Class and Caste in India

A. Caste as Varna

1. Origins? Aryans? Purusha? Timeless or flexible?
2. Brahmin, Kshatriya, and Vaisya (twice born)
3. Shudra and Untouchables

II. Class and Caste in India

A. Caste as Varna

1. Origins?: The origins of the caste system (from the Portuguese “casta,” meaning “race” or “purity of blood”) remain unclear. A conventional explanation points towards an Aryan invasion and subjugation of the indigenous peoples, but this theory has been revised and critiqued by recent scholars. Regardless of its origin, by 500 B.C.E. most Indians saw the caste division of society into four orders as timeless and the natural consequence of the world making up the body of a massive god named Purusha. While these theories saw caste as timeless and unchanging, research indicates moments of fluidity between social groups and ways in which non-Aryan groups were incorporated into the religious or warrior castes.
2. Brahmin, Kshatriya, and Vaisya (Twice born and Aryan?): These classes of priests, warriors, and commoners were deemed to be elites descended from the Aryan invaders. As elites, they were “twice born,” once into their bodies and once into their castes.
3. Shudra and Untouchables: Shudras were held to be non-Aryan who worked as servants of and laborers for the Aryan castes. Later, another category of people beneath the caste ranking and occupying the most unclean professions came to be known as

“Untouchables.”

II. Class and Caste in India

B. Caste as Jati

1. Guilds and professional groups
2. 1,000s of sub-castes
3. Purity, pollution, and privilege
4. *Karma, dharma*, and rebirth

II. Class and Caste in India

B. Caste as Jati

1. Guilds and professional groups: Within the four major castes, people divided into specific professional, guild-like organizations. Members of these hereditary groups looked after their economic interests and policed their members.
2. 1,000s of sub-castes: As professions proliferated in an increasingly complex society, hundreds and then thousands of jatis structured the employment and social world of Indians. Individuals ate and married within their jati, reaffirming their membership in the collective whole.
3. Purity, pollution, and privilege: The system was obsessed with ideas of elite purity and lower caste pollution. Brahmins were particularly worried about physical contact with the lower social orders who cleaned latrines, handled corpses, or worked with meat. The elite castes also enjoyed special privileges that were denied to the subordinated populations.
4. *Karma, dharma*, and rebirth: Tenets of Hinduism served to justify this social inequality. As one's past actions determined one's status at birth and as the jatis were hereditary, many understood *karma* to govern social inequality, giving it religious sanction. Likewise, an individual was obligated to follow their path

in this life not just to be a good member of society but to fulfill their religious obligations in terms of *dharma*.

II. Class and Caste in India

C. The Functions of Caste

1. Localization
2. Security and support
3. Assimilation of new arrivals
4. Exploitation

II. Class and Caste in India

C. The Functions of Caste

1. Localization: As jati membership made one a part of an immediate and self-governing community, there was less of a need for a larger state system to run society.
2. Security and support: The system provided not only an identity but a mechanism of social support and security for vulnerable or unlucky members of a jati.
3. Assimilation of new arrivals: The flexible system allowed for the creation of a new jati for groups that might come into Indian society.
4. Exploitation: This system allowed the wealthy and powerful to rationalize the poorly paid labor of the lower social orders.

III. Slavery: The Case of the Roman Republic

A. Slavery and Civilization

1. "Social Death"
2. Wide diversity of types of slavery

III. Slavery: The Case of the Roman Republic

A. Slavery and Civilization

1. "Social Death": Slavery is an age old institution but it increased dramatically as early civilizations and social inequality formed. Slaves are often described as having a social death as they typically have no rights and are deemed to be permanent outsiders to the society.
2. Wide diversity of types of slavery: Throughout the world and throughout human history, there have been numerous forms of slavery, making generalizations difficult.

III. Slavery: The Case of the Roman Republic

B. The Making of Roman Slavery

1. Greek slavery
2. Vast scale of Roman slavery
3. Prisoners, pirates, and orphans
4. Multiethnic
5. All levels of economy

III. Slavery: The Case of the Roman Republic

B. The Making of Roman Slavery

1. Greek slavery: The rate of slavery was much higher in the Mediterranean world than in India or China. Slave ownership was widespread in Greece with tens of thousands of slaves living in Athens, the alleged cradle of democracy and individual liberty.
2. Vast scale of Roman slavery: Rome also saw massive slave ownership, with the Italian peninsula having a slave population of between 33 and 40 percent. Roman slavery was often concentrated in the hands of the very wealthy and large landowners who might run estates with hundreds of slave laborers.
3. Prisoners, pirates, and orphans: War captives made up most slaves, but pirates and even abandoned children could be enslaved.
4. Multiethnic: As slaves came from the borderlands of the ever-expanding Roman empire, there was no single group of enslaved people (as Africans were enslaved in the late world of the Atlantic Basin). Northern Europeans, Africans, Slavs, Jews, and others all could be caught up in the Roman slave system.
5. All levels of economy: With so much cheap labor coming into Rome, slaves could be found in every sector of the economy, from manual labor in the fields to white-collar work in the cities or even in the gladiatorial blood sports of the coliseums.



Roman Slavery
Bardo Museum Tunis/Gianni Dagli Orti/The Art Archive
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1. Explain the scene of this mosaic and describe the two figures.

This mosaic shows Myro, a slave, pouring a drink from a large vessel on his shoulder into a shallow bowl in the right hand of Fructus, his master. Myro is dressed in a short tunic that is draped over his left shoulder. His arms, legs, and right chest are visible. He is leaning forward toward his master and looks at him. He appears taller and stronger than his master, who is dressed in a long tunic that only reveals his lower arms and feet. He looks down at his bowl and seems to pay little attention to his servant.

2. What does this mosaic tell us about Roman society?

Slavery was at the foundation of Roman society, and this mosaic shows an everyday example of the power relationship between master and servant. The master in this scene does not seem to wield physical force over the slave, and in fact it seems as if the slave might indeed be stronger than his master. But the system of slavery was powerful enough to give masters authority over their slaves even if they could not have wielded much force.

III. Slavery: The Case of the Roman Republic

C. Resistance and Rebellion

1. “Weapons of the weak”
2. Spartacus, 73 B.C.E.

III. Slavery: The Case of the Roman Republic

C. Resistance and Rebellion

1. “Weapons of the weak”: Various forms of slave resistance could be seen in work slowdowns and sabotage. Runaways created a small industry in slave catching. Punishments for slaves murdering their masters were extremely harsh.
2. Spartacus, 73 B.C.E.: The most famous slave revolt was the rebellion of slaves trained for the gladiatorial games. Spartacus led a two-year rampage of revenge up and down the Italian peninsula, freeing slaves, burning estates, and killing masters. Once crushed, the Roman republic crucified some 6,000 captured rebels along the Appian Way as a warning to future rebels.



Spot Map The Rebellion of Spartacus
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IV. Comparing Patriarchies

A. A Changing Patriarchy: The Case of China

1. *Yin and Yang*
2. Confucian teachings: Three Obediences
3. Elite women, mothers and wives, and peasant women
4. Buddhism, Daoism, and pastoral peoples
5. Empress Wu (r. 690-705 B.C.E)

IV. Comparing Patriarchies

A. A Changing Patriarchy: The Case of China

1. *Yin and Yang*: The traditional Chinese conception of the world stressed two primary forces, opposite yet paired. All that was material and lowly was the female *yin*, while the higher spiritual and moral forces were the male *yang*. This unity of opposites helped to rationalize distinctions between men's and women's roles and power within society.
2. Confucian teachings: Three Obediences: Confucian teachings were explicitly patriarchal. For example, women were taught to obey their fathers, their husbands, and the eldest sons when widowed.
3. Elite women, mothers and wives, and peasant women: Women from throughout the various social ranks found ways to exert some form of independent agency. Elite wives could influence their husbands, and concubines could influence their lovers and thus play a role in palace politics. Mothers had some power within the home due to their age, and wives held more esteem than concubines. Due to the economic demands of the agricultural lifestyle, peasant women found it very difficult to live up to Confucian ideals as they had to work in the fields alongside men.
4. Buddhism, Daoism, and pastoral peoples: After the collapse of the Han Dynasty, Confucianism was somewhat discredited and people found new ideas in Buddhism, Daoism, and the lifestyles of the pastoral peoples to the west and north. Frequently these new ways of living were less rigid than the Confucian ideals.
5. Empress Wu (r. 690–705 B.C.E): The great example of an exception to Chinese patriarchy is Empress Wu, a concubine who usurped the throne and governed China for fifteen years. While she moved to institute some reforms for gender equity, her brief reign as a woman was not

repeated.



Chinese Women at Work
Palace Museum, Beijing
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IV. Comparing Patriarchies

B. Contrasting Patriarchies: Athens and Sparta

1. Restriction on elite Athenian women
2. Aspasia (470–400 B.C.E.)
3. Obligations and freedoms of Spartan women

IV. Comparing Patriarchies

B. Contrasting Patriarchies: Athens and Sparta

1. Restriction on elite Athenian women: While Athens saw the expanding rights of male citizens and the formation of a democratic system of participation, elite Athenian women were subject to numerous legal and social restrictions. Indeed, they were not to be named or appear in public. Athens, home of Socrates and Plato, did not open education to women. Women were married off in their teens to men twice their age.
2. Aspasia (470–400 B.C.E.): This foreign born woman became the life companion of Athens' greatest statesman, Pericles. While they never married, they lived together as husband and wife; however, she was not confined to the home, and Pericles treated her as an intellectual equal.
3. Obligations and freedoms of Spartan women: Sparta was the mirror opposite to Athens in many ways. As Sparta created a collective state system that stressed the military prowess of its citizens, the city emphasized physical fitness and toughness. Women were then expected also to be healthy and strong, participating in exercise and dancing. As they were out and about and very active, there were styles of dress that other Greeks found revealing and scandalous. Their main obligation was to produce lots of healthy children who would become strong warriors or child bearers for the state. Marriage ages in Sparta were generally equal.

V. Reflections: Arguing with Solomon and the Buddha

A. Innovations and changes?

B. Enduring patterns and lasting features?

V. Reflections: Arguing with Solomon and the Buddha

A. Innovations and changes? Buddha taught that nothing was permanent and the only constant was change; we can see this in this era with the rise and fall of empires and religions.

B. Enduring patterns and lasting features? Yet many of the processes and ideas of this era would last and would be revived in other forms in later centuries.



Visual Source 5.1 Terentius Neo and His Wife
Scala/Art Resource, NY
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Visual Source 5.2 A Pompeii Banquet
Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples/Roger-Viollet/The Bridgeman Art Library
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Visual Source 5.3 Scenes in a Pompeii Tavern
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Visual Source 5.4 A Domestic Shrine
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Visual Source 5.5 Mystery Religions: The Cult of Dionysus
Werner Forman/Corbis
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