

# CHAPTER VI OUTLINE

## I. Opening Vignette

- A. *Caste continues to be central to present-day India.*
- B. *The period 1750–present has challenged many social structures once thought to be immutable.*
  - 1. series of revolutions destroyed monarchies and class hierarchies
  - 2. abolition of slavery
  - 3. women’s movement
  - 4. Gandhi’s effort to raise status of “untouchables”
- C. *Patterns of inequality generated social tensions during the “second-wave” civilizations, too.*
- D. *Classical civilizations were hierarchical and patriarchal, but they varied in how they organized their societies.*

## II. Society and the State in Classical China

- A. *Chinese society was shaped more by state actions than were other societies.*
  - 1. immense social prestige and political power of state officials
  - 2. officials as cultural and social elite
- B. *An Elite of Officials*
  - 1. world’s first professional civil service
  - 2. 124 B.C.E.: Wudi established an imperial academy for officials
    - a. around 30,000 students by end of Han dynasty
    - b. written examinations used to select officials
    - c. system lasted until early twentieth century
  - 3. favored the wealthy, who could educate sons
    - a. closeness to the capital, family connections important
    - b. it was possible for commoners to rise via education
  - 4. system developed further in later dynasties
  - 5. bureaucrats had great prestige and privileges
- C. *The Landlord Class*
  - 1. by first century B.C.E., small-scale peasant farmers had been displaced by large landowners and tenant farmers
  - 2. state opposed creation of large estates throughout Chinese history, without much success
    - a. large landowners could often evade taxes
    - b. large landowners sometimes kept independent military forces that could challenge imperial authority
    - c. land reforms by usurper Wang Mang (r. 8–23 C.E.) impossible to enforce
  - 3. landowners benefited both from wealth and from prestige of membership in the bureaucracy (“scholar-gentry”)
- D. *Peasants*
  - 1. in Chinese history, most of population have been peasants
    - a. some relatively prosperous, some barely surviving
    - b. tenant farmers in Han dynasty owed as much as two-thirds of crop to landowners

2. periodic peasant rebellions
  - a. Yellow Turban Rebellion in 184 C.E. provoked by flooding and epidemics
  - b. peasant revolts devastated the economy and contributed to overthrow of Han dynasty
  - c. Chinese peasant movements were often expressed in religious terms

#### ***E. Merchants***

1. Chinese cultural elite disliked merchants
  - a. stereotyped as greedy and profiting from work of others
  - b. seen as a social threat that impoverished others
2. periodic efforts to control merchants
  - a. sumptuary laws
  - b. forbidden to hold public office
  - c. state monopolies on important industries (salt, iron, alcohol)
  - d. forced to make loans to the state
3. merchants often prospered anyway
  - a. won their way to respectability by purchasing estates or educating their sons
  - b. many officials and landlords were willing to work with them

### ***III. Class and Caste in India***

#### ***A. Caste as Varna***

1. the word “caste” comes from Portuguese word *casta* meaning “race” or “purity of blood”
2. caste may have evolved from encounter between Aryans (light-skinned) and natives (dark-skinned)
  - a. certainly grew from interaction of culturally diverse peoples
  - b. development of economic and social differences between them
  - c. economic specialization and culture apparently more important than notions of race
3. ca. 500 B.C.E., there was clear belief that society was divided into four great classes ( *varna*), with position determined by birth
  - a. three classes of pure Aryans (the “twice-born”): Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaisyas
  - b. far below them were the Sudras, native peoples in very subordinate positions
4. Varna theory: the four groups were formed from the body of the god Purusha; immutable
  - a. reality: considerable social change in ancient India
  - b. frequent conflict between Brahmin and Kshatriya groups
  - c. absorption of “tribal peoples” within Aryan groups
  - d. Vaisya varna evolved into business class
  - e. Sudra varna became peasant farmers
  - f. emergence of untouchables below Sudras

#### ***B. Caste as Jati***

1. social distinctions based on specific occupations, organized as guilds (*jatis*)
  - a. blended with varna system to create full caste system
  - b. thousands of jatis as primary cell of social life
  - c. each of four great classes divided into many jatis (sub-castes)

2. clearly defined social position
  - a. marriage and eating together only permitted within individual's jati
  - b. each jati has particular duties, rules, obligations
3. ideas of ritual purity and pollution applied to caste groups
4. inherent inequality supported by idea of *karma*, *dharma*, and rebirth
  - a. birth into a caste determined by good or bad deeds (karma) of a previous life
  - b. rebirth in a higher caste is determined by performance of present caste duties (dharma)
5. threat of social ostracism for violating rules of the jati
6. individuals couldn't raise social status, but whole jatis could improve social standing

### ***C. The Functions of Caste***

1. caste was very local, so it focused loyalties on a restricted territory
  - a. made empire building very difficult
  - b. caste as a substitute for the state
2. caste provided some social security and support (care for widows, orphans, the destitute)
3. caste was a means to accommodate migrants and invaders
4. made it easier for the wealthy and powerful to exploit the poor

## ***IV. Slavery in the Classical Era: The Case of the Roman Empire***

### ***A. Why did slavery emerge in the First Civilizations? There are various theories:***

1. domestication of animals provided a model for human slavery
2. war, patriarchy, and private property ideas encouraged slavery
3. women captured in war were probably the first slaves
4. patriarchal "ownership" of women may have encouraged slavery

### ***B. Slavery and Civilization***

1. Slavery as "social death": lack of rights or independent personal identity
2. Slavery was long-established tradition by the time of Hammurabi (around 1750 B.C.E.)
3. almost all civilizations had some form of slavery
  - a. varied considerably over place and time
  - b. classical Greece and Rome: slave emancipation was common
  - c. Aztec Empire: children of slaves were considered to be free
  - d. labor of slaves varied widely
4. minor in China (maybe 1 percent of population)
  - a. convicts and their families were earliest slaves
  - b. poor peasants sometimes sold their children into slavery
5. India: criminals, debtors, war captives were slaves
  - a. largely domestic
  - b. religion and law gave some protections
  - c. society wasn't economically dependent on slavery

### ***C. The Making of a Slave Society: The Case of Rome***

1. Mediterranean/Western civilization: slavery played immense role
  - a. Greco-Roman world was a slave society
  - b. one-third of population of classical Athens was enslaved
  - c. Aristotle: some people are “slaves by nature”
2. at beginning of Common Era, Italy ’s population was 33 to 40 percent slaves
  - a. wealthy Romans owned hundreds or thousands of slaves
  - b. people of modest means often owned two or three slaves
3. how people became slaves:
  - a. massive enslavement of war prisoners
  - b. piracy
  - c. long-distance trade for Black Sea, East African, and northwest European slaves
  - d. natural reproduction
  - e. abandoned/exposed children
4. not associated with a particular ethnic group
5. little serious social critique of slavery, even within Christianity
6. slavery was deeply entrenched in Roman society
  - a. slaves did all sorts of work except military service
  - b. both highly prestigious and degraded tasks
7. slaves had no legal rights
  - a. could not marry legally
  - b. if a slave murdered his master, all of the victim’s slaves were killed
  - c. manumission was common; Roman freedmen became citizens

### ***D. Resistance and Rebellion***

1. cases of mass suicide of war prisoners to avoid slavery
2. “weapons of the weak”: theft, sabotage, poor work, curses
3. flight
4. occasional murder of owners
5. rebellion
  - a. most famous was led by Spartacus in 73 B.C.E.
  - b. nothing on similar scale occurred in the West until Haiti in the 1790s
  - c. Roman slave rebellions did not attempt to end slavery; participants just wanted freedom for themselves

## ***V. Comparing Patriarchies of the Classical Era***

### ***A. Every human community has created a gender system.***

1. at least since the First Civilizations, the result has been patriarchy
2. men regarded as superior to women
3. men had greater legal and property rights
4. public life as male domain
5. polygamy was common, with sexual control of females of family
6. notion that women need male protection and control

7. patriarchy varied in different civilizations
8. interaction of patriarchy and class: greatest restrictions on upper-class women

### ***B. A Changing Patriarchy: The Case of China***

1. in the Han dynasty, elite ideas became more patriarchal and linked to Confucianism
  - a. thinking in terms of pairs of opposites described in gendered and unequal terms: *yung* (masculine, superior) vs. *yin* (feminine, inferior)
  - b. men's sphere is public; women's sphere is domestic
  - c. "three obediences": woman is subordinated to father, then husband, then son
2. woman writer Ban Zhao (45–116 C.E.): female inferiority reinforced by birth rituals
3. subordination wasn't the whole story
  - a. a few women had considerable political authority
  - b. some writers praised virtuous women as wise counselors
  - c. honor given to the mothers of sons
  - d. dowry was regarded as woman's own property
  - e. value of women as textile producers
  - f. a wife had much higher status than a concubine
4. changes following the collapse of the Han dynasty
  - a. cultural influence of nomadic peoples/less restriction
  - b. by Tang dynasty (618–907), elite women regarded as capable of handling legal and business affairs, even of riding horses
  - c. major sign of weakening patriarchy: reign of Empress Wu (r. 690–705 C.E.)
  - d. growing popularity of Daoism provided new women's roles

### ***C. Contrasting Patriarchies in Athens and Sparta***

1. Athens and Sparta were substantially different in views about women
2. Athens: increasing limitations on women 700–400 B.C.E.
  - a. completely excluded from public life
  - b. represented by a guardian in law; not even named in court proceedings
  - c. Aristotle: position justified in terms of women's natural "inadequacy" compared to males
  - d. restricted to the home
  - e. married in mid-teens to men 10–15 years older
  - f. role in life: domestic management and bearing sons
  - g. land normally passed through male heirs
  - h. women could only negotiate small contracts
  - i. most notable exception: Aspasia (ca. 470–400 B.C.E.)
3. Sparta: militaristic regime very different from Athens
  - a. need to counter permanent threat of *helot* rebellion
  - b. Spartan male as warrior above all
  - c. situation gave women greater freedom
  - d. women encouraged to strengthen their bodies for important task of childbearing
  - e. men were often preparing for or waging war, so women had larger role in household

4. Sparta, unlike Athens, discouraged homosexuality
  - a. other Greek states approved homoerotic relationships
  - b. Greek attitude toward sexual choice was quite casual

## ***VI. Reflections: Arguing with Solomon and the Buddha***

### ***A. What is more impressive about classical Eurasian civilizations: change or enduring patterns?***

1. Ecclesiastes—basic changelessness and futility of human life
2. Buddhism—basic impermanence of human life

### ***B. Clearly, some things changed.***

1. Greek conquest of the Persian Empire
2. unification of the Mediterranean world by the Roman Empire
3. emergence of Buddhism and Christianity as universal religions
4. collapse of dynasties, empires, and civilizations

### ***C. But the creations of the classical era have been highly durable.***

1. China 's scholar-gentry class
2. India 's caste system
3. slavery largely unquestioned until nineteenth century
4. patriarchy has been most fundamental, durable, and taken-for-granted feature of all civilizations
  - a. not effectively challenged until twentieth century
  - b. still shapes lives and thinking of vast majority of people
5. religious and cultural traditions started in the classical age still practiced or honored by hundreds of millions of people