**Chapter Three:**   
Settlers and Migrants: Creation of States in Asia 5000 – 500 B.C.E.

**Chapter Three Focus Questions:**

1. How did Asia’s diverse natural environments shape the different lifestyles of its inhabitants?
2. What were the main characteristics of South Asia’s early urban culture?
3. What does the concept “Indo-European” mean, and how important is it for the study of Eurasia?
4. How did cultural developments in early Indian history shape the structure of society?
5. What factors account for the remarkable cultural continuity of early Chinese states?
6. What are the unique characteristics of the Oxus culture in the early history of Asia?

**Chapter Three Summary:**

Asia is a vast landmass with numerous natural environments, which support primarily two types of livelihood: farming and herding. Within this framework, the early developments of South Asia and East Asia are examined, starting with the great river valleys in India and China. Although sharing many similarities in their large urban states and literature cultures, key differences distinguished them. This chapter will examine the rise and change of societies in the river valleys in India and China, and show how contacts between the settled and nomadic people of Asia were constant, and their uses of the natural environment were complementary. In addition, the role and the importance of the Indo-European speakers to this period of Eurasian history further shows the contacts and connections between the groups. The Counterpoint of this chapter observes how the Oxus culture took advantage of an isolated oases to create an unexpected agricultural society, only to see it vanish over the course of four hundred years.

**Chapter Three Annotated Outline:**

1. Backstory
   * 1. Sometime after the founding of Southwest Asian states, peoples in other parts of Asia also created large political and social entities.
     2. Farmers in Asia’s river valleys, nomadic pastoralists elsewhere.
2. Early Agricultural Societies of South and East Asia 5000 – 1000 B.C.E.
   1. Settled Farmers of the River Valleys
      1. Most of the regions with agricultural potential in Asia lie along might rivers.
      2. The two major regions in Asia were the Indus and Ganges rivers in South Asia, and the Yellow (Huang He) and Yangzi rivers in China.
      3. Farmers first appeared by 7000 B.C.E. in China, where they cultivated rice in the Yangzi Valley and millet in the Yellow River Valley.
      4. Farmers first appeared by 6500 B.C.E. in South Asia, where they cultivated wheat and barley.
      5. Each agricultural region emerged in response to similar environmental opportunities, but each developed distinct cultural characteristics.
   2. Nomadic Herders of the Steppe
      1. At the same time that the early inhabitants of Asia learned to domesticate plants, they also became responsible for the survival of selected animals, which required herders to move around for at least part of the year for pasture.
      2. From about 3000 B.C.E. sheep, goats, and cattle were the most important domesticated animals throughout Asia.
      3. The pastoral lifestyle did not allow people to range over great distances, until around 2000 B.C.E. with the widespread domestication of horses.
      4. As the use of horses advanced, mobility increased, and warfare was revolutionized throughout Asia and beyond.
      5. This increased mobility also led to an increase in shared cultural elements.
3. The Indus Valley Culture 2600 – 1900 B.C.E.
   * 1. The Indus culture is less accessible because the earlier cities disappeared, and the script has not yet been deciphered.
4. Urban Society in the Indus Valley
   * 1. Around 2600 B.C.E. the mature Indus culture emerged.
     2. Many large cities and villages existed, and despite the great distances between them, the urban settlements were very similar.
     3. The large cities show evidence of organization and conscious planning, which Mohenjo-Daro being the best-known and largest, but Harappa being the one scholars often use to refer to the civilization: Harappan.
     4. The remains of Harappan cities present many problems of interpretation.
        1. They suggest political and social structures unlike other early urban cultures.
        2. They show no military activity.
        3. Houses and tombs show no grandiose displays of wealth.
        4. Massive public works, however, suggest an elite group did have authority, but the basis of that authority remains a mystery.
        5. Because of long-distance trade evidence, some propose a merchant class governed.
5. Harappan Crafts and Long-Distance Trade
   * 1. The Harappans imported prized stones to carve valuable objects.
     2. The objects are similar in shape and size, suggesting craftsmen followed standard patterns.
     3. All of the settlements used a unified system of weights and measures.
     4. Writing also shows the important of trade, and although the texts are yet to be deciphered, all of the vast regions of the culture used the same signs.
     5. Further evidence of trade show places like Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf receiving items from the Harappans.
6. The End of the Indus Valley Culture
   * 1. Around 1900 people I the Indus Valley started to leave the great cities and abandon the shared cultural practices.
     2. No evidence of conquest or signs of violence.
     3. More likely it was a combination of a drier climate, lack of food, and arrival of Indo-European-speaking migrants that caused them to leave and/or change their lifestyles completely.
7. The Indo-Europeans 3000 – 1000 B.C.E.
   * 1. The emergence of the Indo-European languages over a vast area of Eurasia was a crucial process in Eurasian history, and likely connected to the interaction between farmers and pastoralists.
8. Indo-European Languages
   1. *Indo-European* does not refer to a race or an ethnic group, but to a group of languages that are related in vocabulary and grammar.
   2. Linguist reason that the languages all evolved from an original ancient language that spread when it speakers migrated.
9. Indo-European Migrations
   1. Speakers of an Indo-European language known as the Arya (“noble”) arrived in South Asia shorlty after 2000 B.C.E.
   2. Where they came from and what motivated their migration is still unresolved.
      1. Some suggest that Indo-European languages spread together with agriculture from Anatolia.
      2. Others believe that speakers of the Indo-European languages were pastoralists who moved *into* farming areas from the southern Russian steppes.
10. Indo-European Speakers and Eurasian History
    1. Indo-European languages gradually came to dominate Eurasia, but more so in Europe than Asia.
    2. Evidence of Indo-European languages moved into southern Asia, on the Iranian plateau, and as far east as the Central Asian provinces of modern China.
    3. The spread of Indo-European languages was one of the most important events in the early history of the entire Eurasian continent.
    4. By the beginning of the Common Era, peoples from the Atlantic Ocean to the western regions of China spoke a variety of related languages that had a common source.
11. India’s Vedic Age 1500 – 500 B.C.E.
    1. Vedic Origins
       1. The new society that developed when the Indo-European speakers migrated into India was based on the Vedas, collections of hymns, songs, prayers, and dialogues.
       2. *Veda* literally means “sacred knowledge,” and the text are written in Sanskrit, but they were not written down until around 500 B.C.E., nearly 1000 years after they were originally composed.
       3. The Vedas depict the Aryas as light-skinned nomadic warriors who conquered the local dark skinned *Dasa* (“enemy”).
    2. Rise of a New Society: Families, Clans, and Castes
       1. People in early Vedic society belonged to extended families along patriarchal lines.
       2. The *Lawbook of Manu* gives an idea of the low status of women in the Vedic age.
       3. Clans (groups of extended families) formed the basis of early Vedic political structure, and the family heads chose a raja (leader).
       4. Around 1000 B.C.E. the concept of the varna system emerged. Varna literally means “color,” but it came to mean something more like “class.”
       5. Over time the structure of Vedic society became more complex, and specialized labor led to subdivisions of the varna system, known as jati.
       6. When Portuguese visitors observed these social groups in the 16th century, they game them the name *casta,* which led to the English designation of the caste system.
       7. One advantage of the varna was that it facilitated the integration of newcomers into Indian society.
    3. Vedic Religion
       1. The Vedas portray a rich religious system, and many of the gods represent forces of nature.
       2. Male gods dominated the Vedic divine world, led by Indra, the war god.
       3. Sacrifice was so central in the Vedic culture that it became connected with creation itself.
       4. The Brahmins’ central role in sacrifices confirmed their uppermost status.
       5. Because only the Brahmins knew the Vedic hymns needed for sacrifices, they may have prevented the use of writing to maintain their stronghold on power. However, it slowed the spread of writing in Indian society.
    4. Developments in Vedic Ideas
       1. After 1000 B.C.E. iron tools began to be used by the Aryas, and they spread eastward, encountering indigenous traditions that influenced their own religious doctrines.
       2. Groups started to reject the Vedic structure and formulate new interpretations of the Vedas in texts known as the *Upanishads.*
       3. The Upanishadsshifted the focus from sacrifice toward an emphasis on living a righteous life, based on reliefs about reincarnation.
       4. The outcome of this reincarnation depended on a person’s karma.
       5. Reincarnation tied all forms of life together into a universal and eternal entity called Brahman, and the aim of the Upanishads was to make people conscious of their atman, and their connection to the Brahman.
12. The Early Chinese Dynasties 2000 – 771 B.C.E.
    1. Re-creating Early China: Literary Traditions and the Archaeological Record
       1. Early Chinese writings (from the Han dynasty) depicted the earlier history of the country as a sequence of similar dynasties, but the archaeology tells a somewhat different story.
       2. Excavations show that from 2000 to 771 B.C.E. large urban centers flourished, where elites lived and surrounded themselves with luxury goods in life, and lavish tombs in death.
       3. China’s early history becomes clearer with the appearance of written language on bones and shells, used for divination.
       4. This script was standardized early, and had a deep effect on Chinese history in that it connected people from a wide geographical area to the same ancient past.
    2. The Growth of States 2000 – 1570 B.C.E.
       1. After 2000 B.C.E. the village cultures that characterized China developed into a more uniform culture.
       2. Bronze played a major part in this change, as the desire of elites stimulated bronze production and required specialized labor.
       3. While some believe that Erlitou, the earliest large urban site in China was the capital of the Xia dynasty, most historians believe that the Xia dynasty never existed, and it was an imposed image of a later state onto an earlier period.
       4. However, many of the cultural elements of Erlitou survived into the succeeding period, which is known as the Shang dynasty.
    3. The Shang Dynasty and the Consolidation of Power 1570 – 1027 B.C.E.
       1. Several major cities in the Yellow River Valley seem to have been successive centers of political power.
       2. These Chinese cities were physical manifestations of Chinese social structure.
       3. Tomb of Queen Fu Hao reveals that she was a highly unusual woman for her time. She took a leading role in divination, actively participated in her husband’s wars, and led them into battle. All roles usually reserved for men.
       4. The cult of ancestors dominated Shang’s ritual and religious ideas. When an important person dies, he or she became an ancestor and joined the group of powers.
       5. Sacrifices were also important to keep ancestors satisfied so they would not cause harm.
       6. The Shang kings enforced rule through military means as well as rituals, and the introduction of chariots after 1500 B.C.E. marked a major technological change in Chinese society.
       7. The large majority of the people, however, lived in poor conditions farming, mining, and providing other services to their masters.
    4. The Early Zhou Dynasty and the Extension of Power 1027 – 771 B.C.E.
       1. During the Shang period, many groups controlled parts of northern China as allies or opponents of Shang rulers.
       2. One group that defeated the last Shang ruler was known as the Zhou.
       3. The new Zhou ruler justified the rebellion with the idea that he had received the Mandate of Heaven.
       4. The Mandate of heaven gave the right to rule to a just and honorable man, and became a check on rulers, which also allowed the possibility of political change.
       5. Zhou political structure was more indirect and decentralized, but it still provided a very strict hierarchy.
       6. Some ritual practices concerning ancestors changes, but many later generations in China saw the Zhou period as very special, with an ideal government and social structure.
       7. However, the Zhou political organization fell apart in 771 when leaders of dependent states started to ignore the king’s commands and fought one another.
13. Counterpoint: The Oxus People: A Short-Lived Culture in Central Asia 2100 – 1700 B.C.E.
    * 1. In Central Asia, a settled society known as the Oxus emerged and disappeared over the course of four hundred years.
      2. In the fertile valleys of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya Rivers, an unexpected agricultural settlement was established where they could live year-round while farming barley and wheat.
      3. While their origins are largely unknown, archaeological finds show very sophisticated metalworking skills, and distinctive luxury goods.
      4. The source of their wealth may have been due to control of overland trade routes.
      5. The Oxus culture vanished around 170 B.C.E., but the culture shows how people throughout world history sought to exploit whatever ecological niche was available.
14. Conclusion
    * 1. Contacts between the settled and the nomadic people of Asia were constant, and the interactions between them were important to both.
      2. The ancient histories of India and China show how long cultural traditions can last.
      3. However, there is not always such continuity everywhere in Asia.
15. Chapter Three Special Features
    1. Seeing the Past: Inscribed Seals from the Indus Valley
       1. The people of the Indus Valley created a script that emerged around 2600 and remained in use until around 1900, before it disappeared forever.
       2. The script is still not deciphered.
    2. Lives and Livelihoods: Chinese Diviners
       1. Like other ancient peoples, the Chinese were preoccupied with predicting the future.
       2. In the Shang period, this stimulated a massive enterprise based on oracle bones.
    3. Reading the Past: The Book of Songs
       1. From the early Zhou period, the Chinese *Book of Songs* covers a large variety of topics.

**Chapter Three Overview (Discussion) Questions:**

**Major Global Development:** The rise of large urban states in Asia and the interactions between nomadic and settled peoples that shaped them.

1. How did peoples living in the far-flung regions of Asia develop societies that had many similarities?
2. What were the unique characteristics of the cultures studied here?
3. Which features of ancient Indian and Chinese society and culture shaped later developments most fundamentally?
4. What common trends in the interactions between settled and nomadic peoples can you discern?

**Chapter Three Making Connections Questions:**

1. How did the development of Indus Valley cities compare with the processes in Southwest Asia and China?
2. How does the social structure of Vedic India compare with those of other ancient Asian and North African cultures?
3. In what ways do the interactions between settled and nomadic peoples explain the historical development of Asia?
4. What are the similarities in burial practices of the ancient cultures we have discussed so far, and what do they suggest about attitudes toward class and religion in these societies?

**Counterpoint: The Oxus People: A Short-Lived Culture in Central Asia.**   
 **Counterpoint Focus Question:** What are the unique characteristics of the Oxus culture in the early history of Asia?

**Chapter Three Special Features:**

**Seeing the Past: Inscribed Seals from the Indus Valley**

1. Although we cannot understand the writing on them, what do these seals tell us about record keeping in the Indus culture?
2. Comparing the two seals, what similarities do you observe? How would you describe the differences?
3. How do the Indus Valley seals differ from the first writings we discussed for other early cutlures?

**Lives and Livelihoods: Chinese Diviners**

1. What areas of life did Shang divination cover?
2. How did oracle bones bolster the king’s role in society?

**Reading the Past: The *Book of Songs***

1. How can one read this poem both as a love song and as a contest song?
2. How does it use the natural environment to convey its message?

**Key Terms**

atman

Brahman

caste system

clan

divination

jati

karma

Mandate of Heaven

pastoralist

raja

reincarnation

varna

Vedas