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I YU THE GREAT CONTROLLING THE WATERS

Introduction

Yu the Great (around 2200 BC–2101 BC) is said to establish the Xia Dynasty, traditionally considered the first dynasty of China.

According to Sima Qian's famous *Records of the Grand Historian*, Yu was Gun's son; Gun was the son of Emperor Zhuanxu; Zhuanxu's father, Changyi, was the son of the Yellow Emperor. The Yellow Emperor was called one of the ancestors of Chinese civilization.



◉ The stone carved with a pattern of an agricultural tool *leicha* used in Yu's controlling the waters, found at Mount Juci in Yuzhou in Henan Province



◉ The image of Yu grasping a *leicha* to control the waters in a copy of a stone rubbing, found at Wu's Clan Temple in Jiexiang in Shandong Province



Story Time

More than four thousand years ago, the Chinese heartland frequently suffered from floods. Yu's father, Gun, was assigned with designing a system to control the waters. He spent more than nine years building a series of dikes and dams along the riverbanks, but all of them were ineffective. Yu then had orders to continue his father's work.

Yu started with making a careful study of the river systems and attempted to find out why his father's great efforts had failed.

One day, he found a stream running through the high mountains which looked like the natural barriers to the waters. "How could the stream keep

flowing freely through such barriers?" Yu was lost in thought. Gazing at the flowing water and the gaps between mountains, he had an idea. Instead of directly damming the rivers' flow, he created a system of irrigation canals which led floodwater into fields. At the same time, he made great efforts to remove mud and stones from the riverbeds.

Yu's efforts were successful, which also allowed ancient Chinese culture to flourish along the Yellow River, the Wei River, and other waterways of the Chinese heartland. The project made Yu well known throughout China's history and become one of the few Chinese rulers named with the title "Great."



◉ Yu's Gateway in Shaanxi Province, named for Yu's leading the workers to open up this channel which blocked water from flowing

Cultural Links

► The origin of *Huaxia*

Huaxia refers to the Chinese nation. The characters of “Hua” and “Xia” were a pair of synonyms in ancient China.

According to historical texts, the Xia as a tribe was said to develop around the time of Emperor Zhuanxu. As Yu controlled the flood successfully, he took over the throne from Shun and established the Xia Dynasty (2070 BC–1600 BC). It started a period of family or clan control, spanning four thousand years or so.

► *Records of the Grand Historian*

Records of the Grand Historian is a historical work finished by Sima Qian in the Han Dynasty. The work covers the history of a 3,000-year period from the age of the

legendary Yellow Emperor to the reign of Emperor Wu of Han.

In the West, historical works were used to treat history as a continuous or sweeping narrative. *Records of the Grand Historian* set a new model of breaking it up into the overlapping units dealing with famous figures and significant events.

► The Nine Provinces

Yu's experience in controlling the waters is said to have made him know very well about all regions of what was then Han Chinese territory. According to the “Yu Gong Treatise” in the *Book of Documents*, Yu divided the Chinese “world” into nine provinces. The term has now come to be one of the symbolic names for China.

▶ The flood narrative in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*

The flood narrative may provide some insight into the formation and development of different cultures. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which is regarded as the earliest surviving great work of literature, Tablet XI contains a flood story.

It tells that the gods decided to send a great flood. However, a god wanted to save Utnapishtim and instructed him to build a giant ship. With his great effort, the ship was completed. On this ship, Utnapishtim and his entire family, together with his craftsmen and all the animals of the field, survived the waters.



◉ Tablet XI of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, held by the British Museum in London, the United Kingdom

Discussion

1. Why do you think Yu could control the waters successfully?
2. Do you know any other flood narratives? Try to tell what you know.

壹 大禹巧治黄河水

引

据说大禹（公元前 2200 年—公元前 2101 年）建立了中国第一个朝代——夏朝。

根据司马迁的《史记》所著：禹之父曰鲧，鲧之父曰帝颛顼，颛顼之父曰昌意，昌意之父曰黄帝。黄帝被称为“中华文明始祖之一”。



◦ 大禹治水农具“耒耜”的石刻图样
发现于河南禹州具茨山



◦ 大禹手持“耒耜”治水的石拓画
发现于山东嘉祥武氏祠



故事

在 4000 多年前，中华的中原地带常有水患，禹的父亲鲧奉命治水。鲧用了九年多时间在大河两岸筑起许多堤坝，但都没有达到很好的治水效果。之后，由其子禹继承治水大任。

禹首先对河水体系作了一番严密的考察，寻求自己父亲竭尽全力但还是以失败告终的问题所在。

一天，他在崇山峻岭中发现一条溪水奔流不息，这些山脉犹如阻止水流的天然屏障。“为何在这样的屏障之间，水流还能

自由流动不停息？”禹陷入了沉思。凝视着水流和山间的那些山口，他想到了一个办法。一改直接“堵”住河水的方法，他设计了用于灌溉的沟渠体系，可以将洪水引入田地，同时又能将河床中的淤泥和石头沉淀掉。

禹治水成功了，也使得古代中华文化在黄河、渭河和中原地带的其他流域繁荣起来。治水使禹在中国历史上相当知名，并使禹成为被尊称为“大”的少有的几位统治者之一。



◉ 陕西“禹门口”
因大禹带领众人于此凿开堵住水流的山口而得名

文化链接

► “华夏”的起源

“华夏”现被用来指代中国。“华”和“夏”在古代中国被用作一组同义词。

据史书所述，夏作为部族约在颛顼做首领时期发展起来。由于禹治水成功，他继位于舜，当了部落首领并建立了夏朝（公元前2070年—公元前1600年），开启了大约四千年的家族世袭制。

► 《史记》

《史记》是由汉朝司马迁完成的历史巨著，记载了从传说中黄帝时代开始至汉武帝

时代的三千年历史。

西方撰写历史作品常运用连贯的通史叙述方式，而《史记》按著名人物和重要事件分类，将历史分解成相互交叠的片段，建立了一种新体裁。

► 九州

据说大禹治水的经历使他对之后的汉族疆域所有地区都非常了解。据《尚书·禹贡》记载，大禹将“天下”分为九州。“九州”现已成为象征中国的代称之一。

► 《吉尔伽美什史诗》中的洪水故事

通过洪水故事，我们可以深入了解不同文化的形成和发展。《吉尔伽美什史诗》被认为是现存最古老的文学巨著，其中的第11块泥板讲述了一则洪水故事。

诸神决定降临一场大洪水，而一位主神想要救乌塔那匹兹姆，于是就教他建造一艘大船。经过不懈努力，终于造船成功。乌塔那匹兹姆和他所有的家人、工匠们以及所有田地里的动物，乘坐这艘船在洪水中存活了下来。



◉ 《吉尔伽美什史诗》的第11块泥板
英国伦敦大英博物馆展品

讨论

1. 你认为禹为什么能成功治理水患？
2. 你还知道其他的洪水故事吗？请试着讲一下。