What is a tax, and what is a regulation or a penalty? Richard Samuelson is Associate Professor of History at California State University, San
Either way, taxes can’t be completely avoided — we all pay taxes. While the majority of Americans may not know what their tax money is being used for, most of us know that taxes caused the American Revolution — the colonists fought against taxation without representation. The straw that broke the camel’s back for the Revolutionary War was taxation on tea (the Boston Tea Party). Many people (at least my generation) don’t know much more about how or why our anti-tax nation came to have so many taxes. We were not given history or explanations about the current taxes we deal with every day. There ‘Tax’ then developed its meaning to imply something wearisome or challenging. So words like ‘duty’ were used to suggest a more appealing purpose. Political spin has just as long a history as taxation, and neither has been detained unduly by the meaning of words. The written record. China has one of the longest of all written records, and we know that taxes were levied here some 3,000 years ago as the Empire was being established.