CHAPTER THREE

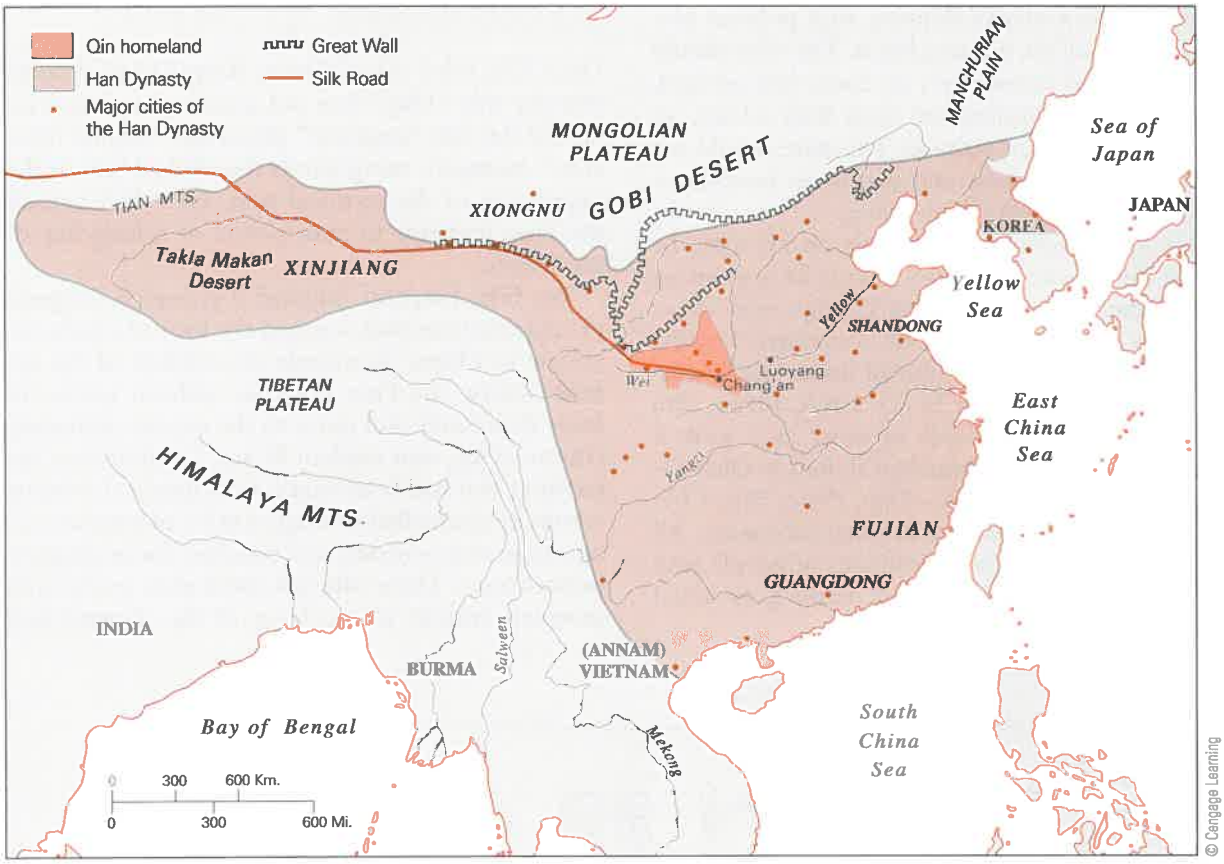
3

The Founding of the Bureaucratic Empire: Qin-Han China (256 B.C.E.–200 C.E.)

Qin's battle-hardened armies destroyed the Zhou royal domain in 256 B.C.E. and the last of the independent states in 221 B.C.E., thus unifying the Chinese realm. Although Qin rule did not last long, the succeeding Han Dynasty retained its centralized bureaucratic monarchy. Both Qin and Han mobilized huge armies to confront the emergence of a powerful enemy to the north, the Xiongnu tribal confederation. In part to deal with the Xiongnu threat, the Han government extended its territories to the east, west, and south.

In contrast to the Qin government, which favored Legalism, the Han government preferred that its officials be learned in the Confucian classics. With these officials, the Han government proved remarkably successful in coordinating administrative control of a population of about 59 million people. Still, the imperial institution proved vulnerable to manipulation by the families of empresses and by palace eunuchs.

The Han Dynasty is the first of the five major dynasties that lasted more than two and a half centuries (Han, Tang, Song, Ming, and Qing), and scholars often look at the Han with these later dynasties in mind. The structure and operation of the government have been major concerns: What enabled Han to succeed where Qin had failed? What was the impact of the centralized state on ordinary people's lives? What were the consequences of the support the government gave to Confucianism? What type of Confucianism did the government support? Later dynasties had difficulties on their northern borders reminiscent of the Han-Xiongnu confrontation, drawing scholars' attention to this initial stage. Was conflict between China and its northern neighbors inevitable given the differences in the economies of the two regions, or could different policies have led to different outcomes? Did the Han Dynasty's great territorial expansion aid it in any way, or was it costly overextension?



Map 3.1 **The Han Empire at Its Maximum Extent, ca. 50 B.C.E.**

THE QIN UNIFICATION (256–206 B.C.E.)

The year 221 B.C.E., one of the most important dates in Chinese history, marks the beginning of the Chinese empire. That year, the state of Qin succeeded in defeating the last of its rivals, thus creating a unified China. (See Map 3.1.) As discussed in Chapter 2, Qin had adopted Legalist principles. Following the counsel of Legalist advisers, Qin had restructured itself in the fourth century B.C.E. The power of the old nobility and the patriarchal family were curtailed to create instead a direct relationship between the ruler and his subjects based on uniformly enforced laws and punishments, administered by officials appointed by the king.

One of the most influential men in Qin in the decades before the conquest was a rich merchant, Lü Buwei (lew boo-way). That a merchant could use his wealth to gain political favor is evidence of the high social mobility of the age. Lü was said to have decided that gaining control of a state offered more opportunities to grow rich than commerce did, and he came up with a scheme to accomplish this by favoring a potential heir to the throne, and then helping the heir succeed to it. Once Lü's protégé became king, Lü became chancellor. There followed a string of stunning victories over other states, allowing Qin to increase its territories steadily. This king died after only three years on the throne; in 247, thirteen-year-old King Cheng came to the throne, with Lü as regent. One of the orders he issued was that common people who had amassed riches through their own enterprise be granted noble ranks. Those so honored included a man who traded silk for animals with the Rong barbarians and a widow who managed the family cinnabar mines.

Lü recruited scholars to come to Qin, where he put them to work on a book that would present a unified philosophy for the unified realm he envisioned. The resulting book, *The Annals of Mr. Lü*, combines

cosmological correlative thinking with political philosophy from all the major schools. The ruler should be tranquil and unassertive, as *Laozi* had advised, but select wise ministers and trust their advice, an essentially Confucian attitude. The state should aid farmers, keep taxes low, and encourage merchants. Filial piety is extolled, as is learning.

After King Cheng began to rule on his own, he sent Lü Buwei away. Lü, seeing that he was losing favor, committed suicide. King Cheng's next chancellor was Li Si (lee se), a fully committed Legalist who, like Han Feizi, had studied under the Confucian scholar Xunzi. With Li Si's astute advice, Qin was able to reorganize each territory as it took it over. By 230 the tide of war had shifted in Qin's favor, and the final six states—Han, Zhao, Wei, Chu, Yan, and Qi—were defeated in rapid succession. All of a sudden Qin had to rule millions of people who had until then been desperately battling to avoid such a fate.

The First Emperor (r. 221–210 B.C.E.)

Once Qin ruled all of China, King Cheng decided that the title "king" was not grand enough and invented the title "emperor" (literarily, "august theocrat," *huangdi*), using words that linked him to the sage rulers of the mythical past. He called himself the First Emperor in anticipation of a long line of successors.

The First Emperor initiated a sweeping program of centralization that touched the lives of nearly everyone in China. To cripple the nobility of the defunct states, the First Emperor ordered nobles to leave their lands and move to the capital, Xianyang (shyen-yahng, near modern Xi'an). To administer the territory that had been seized, he dispatched officials whom he controlled through a mass of regulations, reporting requirements, and penalties for inadequate performance. These officials owed their power and positions entirely to the favor of the emperor and

Figure 3.1 Standardizing the Writing System

had no hereditary rights to their offices. To make it easier to administer all regions uniformly, writing systems were standardized, as were weights, measures, coinage, and even the axle lengths of carts. Private possession of arms was outlawed in order to make it more difficult for subjects to rebel. Thousands of miles of roads were built to enable Qin armies to move rapidly. Transportation was also improved by expanding canals linking rivers, making it possible to travel long distances by boat. Most of the labor on these projects came from farmers who performed required labor service or convicts who worked off their sentences.

The First Emperor shared the Legalist suspicion of intellectual diversity. In 213 B.C.E., after Li Si complained that scholars used records of the past to denigrate the emperor's achievements and undermine popular support, the emperor ordered the collection and burning of all useless writings. The only works excepted were manuals on topics such as agriculture, medicine, and divination. As a result of this massive book burning, many ancient texts were lost.

The First Emperor's Tomb

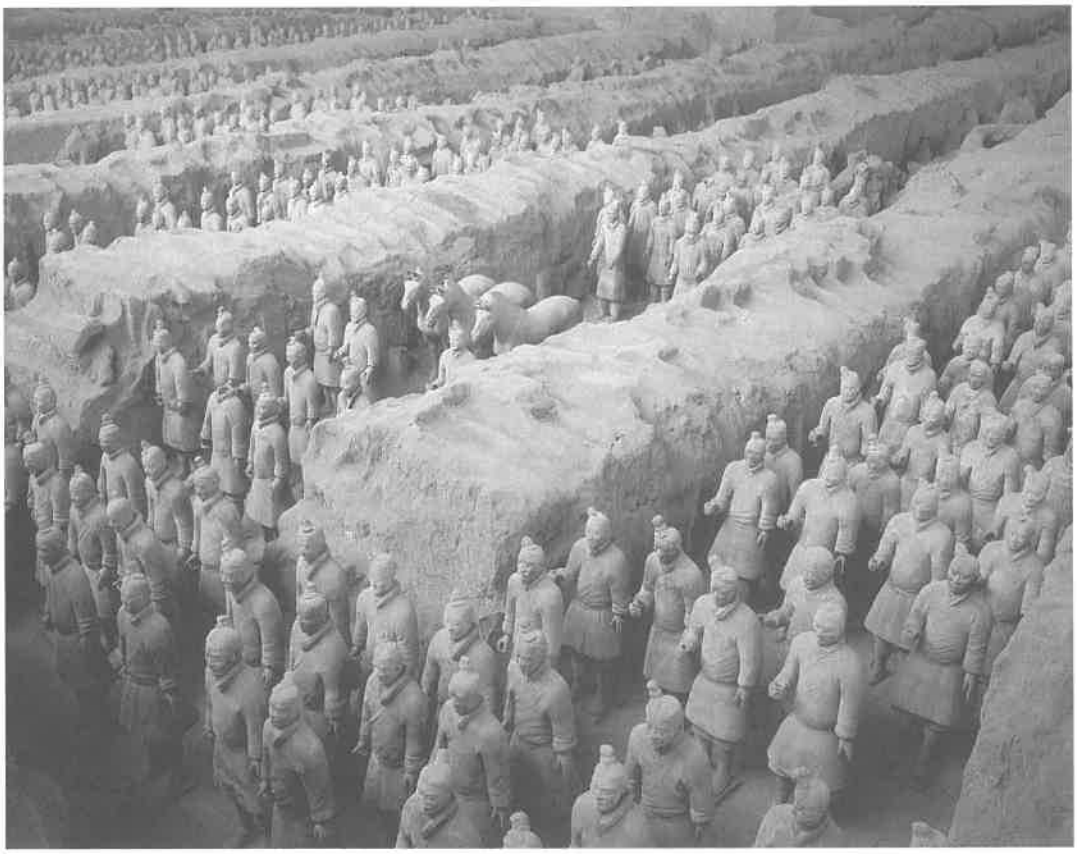
The First Emperor started work on his tomb soon after he came to the throne. In 231 B.C.E., the area around the tomb was made a separate administrative district, and the people of the district were made responsible for the construction and maintenance of the imperial tomb. Twenty years later, thirty thousand families were resettled to the district, and several hundred thousand forced laborers were sent there as temporary workers.

In 1974, about a kilometer from the tomb, a pit was discovered filled with life-sized terra-cotta figures of soldiers. Since then, as archaeologists have probed the region around the First Emperor's tomb, they have found more and more pits filled with burial goods of one sort or another. Sometimes actual objects were used, in other cases, replicas. One pit had two finely made half-size bronze chariots, each drawn by four bronze horses. In another pit were thirty-one rare birds and animals that had been buried alive in clay coffins laid in rows. Although these were real birds and animals (probably from the huge imperial hunting park), they were guarded by a terra-cotta warden. Actual horses were buried in other pits. In many cases, a small pit had a single horse and a terra-cotta groom. In one pit, however, were bones of three hundred horses. There is also a pit where more than a hundred human skeletons have been found; according to inscribed shards, these were conscript and penal laborers who died on the job.

By far the most spectacular of the pits discovered in the vicinity of the First Emperor's tomb are the three that contain the terra-cotta army. Historians had no knowledge of this army, so its discovery was a complete surprise. Pit 1 has more than six thousand figures of warriors arrayed in columns, most of them infantry, but with some chariots near the front. Pit 2 has cavalry plus more infantry and chariots and may represent a guard unit. Pit 3 seems to be the command post, with fewer soldiers. The floor of these pits had been made of rammed earth covered by ceramic tiles (some 256,000 for pit 1). Wooden supports held up roof beams strong enough to keep the roofs from caving in from the weight of the earth above.

The soldiers were made of simple clay formed with molds. Although viewers often described the soldiers as individualized, in reality they were made of interchangeable parts. For instance, there were two basic forms for hands, with fingers straight or curved, but they could appear quite different depending on how they were attached to the sleeves and the angle at which the thumb was attached. Hand finishing—for instance, of the hair—could make figures seem more distinct as well. After the soldiers were molded, they were painted with lacquer, which both preserved them and made them seem more lifelike. These figures carried real weapons, such as spears, halberds, swords, and bows and arrows. The weapons were of high quality (some of the blades are still razor sharp) and were mass-produced in state factories. To ensure quality control, each weapon was inscribed with the name of the worker who made it and the person who supervised him. Each also had a serial number.

Why did the First Emperor want so many replicas of soldiers buried near him? For several centuries, there had been a trend in Chinese burial practice to bury representations rather than real objects in graves. To some extent, this could have been a cost-saving measure: if replicas were just as good as the real thing in the afterlife, why take so much wealth out of circulation by placing it underground? But possibly replicas were considered in some way superior because they caught the unchanging universal aspect of the thing, not one particular manifestation. It is perhaps hard to believe that a ceramic



Laurent Lecat/ akg-images

The First Emperor's Army. The thousands of life-sized terra-cotta soldiers placed in pits near the First Emperor's tomb were originally painted in bright colors, and they held real bronze weapons. They testify both to the emperor's concern with the afterlife and the ability of his government to organize production on a large scale.

representation of a bronze ritual vessel could be as useful in the afterlife as a real bronze one, but one can imagine that a ceramic guard, which will never decay, could be preferable to a mortal one.

The First Emperor's personal fears and beliefs undoubtedly also contributed to his decision to construct such an elaborate underground world. Three times assassins tried to kill him and, perhaps as a consequence, he became obsessed with finding ways to avoid death. He sent a group of young men and women to search for Penglai, the famed isles of immortality in the Eastern Sea. He listened to seers and magicians who claimed to know other techniques for achieving immortality. Was his huge tomb a fallback plan—a way to reduce the sting of death if he couldn't escape it altogether?

Although the First Emperor filled the pits near his tomb with terra-cotta replicas of his minions, his successor saw to it that some human beings were buried there as well. According to Sima Qian, writing in about 100 B.C.E.:

> *The Second Emperor said, "Of the women in the harem of the former ruler, it would be unfitting to have those who bore no sons sent elsewhere." All were accordingly ordered to accompany the dead man, which resulted in the death of many women. After the interment had been completed, someone pointed out that the artisans and craftsmen who had built the tomb knew what was buried there, and if they should leak word of the treasures, it would be a serious affair. Therefore, after the articles had been placed in the tomb, the inner gate was closed off and the outer gate lowered, so that all the artisans and craftsmen were shut in the tomb and were unable to get out.**

*Burton Watson, trans., *Records of the Grand Historian: Qin Dynasty* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 65.

Presumably when the archaeologists excavate the tomb itself, they will find the bones not only of the First Emperor but also of those who accompanied him in death.

Some twentieth-century Chinese historians have glorified the First Emperor as a bold conqueror who let no obstacle impede him, but the traditional evaluation of him was almost entirely negative. For centuries, Chinese historians castigated him as a monster: cruel, arbitrary, impetuous, suspicious, and superstitious.

Qin Law

The Qin was always thought to have had a particularly harsh legal system. However, little was known about its exact provisions until 1975 when 625 bamboo strips inscribed with Qin laws and legal texts were found in a tomb in Hubei province. The tomb was for a man who served the Qin government as a prefectural official. Some of the texts reconstructed from the strips contain statutes related to management of government granaries and labor service. One book explains legal terminology in question-and-answer format.

The penalties imposed by Qin law were hard labor, physical mutilation, banishment, slavery, or death. Labor could last from one to six years. Mutilation included shaving the beard, shaving the head, branding the forehead, cutting off the nose or left foot, or castration. Death also came in several forms, the most severe of which was being torn apart by horse-drawn chariots. To make sure that criminals were caught and offenses reported, Qin set up mutual-responsibility units of five households, whose members were required to inform on each other or suffer the same penalty as the criminal. For particularly heinous crimes, even distant relatives could be enslaved.

Penal labor was a common punishment. Those guilty of theft or homicide were sentenced to long terms. But even those sentenced to pay fines often had to work off their sentence with labor, credited at the rate of eight coins a day (six if one received food rations). Those who owned slaves, oxen, or horses could receive credit for the work they did or they could hire others to work in their place. Men and women were treated differently. Men had heavier work assignments but received larger rations. A man could volunteer for service on the frontier for five years to redeem his mother or sister but not his father or brother.

Government officials had to take similar responsibility for the performance of their departments. Every year in the tenth month, officials had to send in detailed reports to be used for the evaluation of their performance. If they did more or less than expected, they were punished by fines calculated in sets of armor and shields.

The Xiongnu and the Great Wall

As far back as written records allow us to see, the Chinese had shared the Chinese subcontinent with other ethnic groups. To the north were groups that the Shang and Zhou called Rong (rung) and Di. At that time, the economy of these northerners was similar to that of the Chinese settlements, with millet agriculture, animal husbandry, and hunting. Many of these groups were eventually incorporated into the northern Zhou states, which gradually expanded north. Over time, those not incorporated into China seem to have come to depend more and more on animal husbandry, perhaps because the climate grew colder or drier. They took to riding horses before the Chinese did, and by the seventh century B.C.E., many of these groups were making the move to nomadic pastoralism. Families lived in tents that could be taken down and moved north in summer and south in winter as they moved in search of fresh pasture. Herds were tended on horseback, and everyone learned to ride at a young age. Especially awesome from the Chinese perspective was the ability of nomad horsemen to shoot arrows while riding horseback. Their social organization was tribal, with family and clan units held together through loyalty to chiefs selected for their military prowess. At the end of the Zhou period, there were three main groups of nomads in the Northern Zone: the Eastern Hu in the east (northern Hebei-Liaoning region), the Xiongnu in the Ordos (northern Shaanxi-Shanxi), and the Yuezhi (yweh-jih) to the west.

In 215 B.C.E., one of Qin's most successful generals, Meng Tian (muhng tyen), led a huge army (said variously to be one hundred thousand or three hundred thousand strong) to attack the Xiongnu and drive them out of the Ordos region. Once he succeeded, he built forty-four roads to the region and fortified towns, projects that required tens of

thousands of laborers. People sentenced to guard the borders were moved to settle the new fortified towns.

Another way Meng Tian helped secure the area was by deploying a reported three hundred thousand conscripted peasants and convict laborers to build the Great Wall. The Zhou states in the north had all built walls in particularly vulnerable places, and Meng Tian used these walls when possible, connecting them together. The histories do not offer many details on this project, other than saying that the resulting wall was "more than ten thousand *li* long," but "ten thousand" is not meant to be an exact number. It must have been an enormous job, however, because much of it was built using labor-intensive rammed-earth techniques. Moreover, the region was sparsely settled, and food for the workers had to be transported long distances to supply them. Much of the wall crossed mountains, adding to the difficulty of the construction. The Qin Great Wall was farther north than the Great Wall that can be seen today, which was built much later during the Ming Dynasty and was made of brick and stone rather than rammed earth.

The Great Wall did not prove an impassable barrier to the Xiongnu. During Qin times, the chief of the Xiongnu was Touman. The Xiongnu's failure to defend its territory against the Qin armies naturally weakened his authority because Xiongnu chiefs were above all military leaders. Touman's own son Maodun (mow-dun) soon challenged him. Maodun first trained his bodyguards to kill on command, executing anyone who failed to instantly obey his commands that they shoot his favorite horse and favorite concubine. When he was satisfied that they would do what he said, he ordered them to shoot his father and declared himself the Xiongnu chief.

During the next few years, Maodun led the Xiongnu to defeat both the Eastern Hu and the Yuezhi. Some of the Yuezhi simply moved west, but the Eastern Hu were incorporated into the Xiongnu tribal confederation. Maodun also campaigned north of the Gobi, uniting the tribes in modern Mongolia. His quick military victories made him a charismatic leader whom others wanted to follow. Some of the tribes he defeated were incorporated as tribute-paying vassals and others as slaves. By this time, the Qin Dynasty was falling apart, and Maodun was able to reclaim the Ordos region that Qin had taken from the Xiongnu only a few years earlier.

THE HAN DYNASTY (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.)

The First Emperor died in 210 B.C.E. while traveling. He had trusted no one, and at this juncture no one proved trustworthy. The chief eunuch plotted with a younger son to send orders to the heir apparent and General Meng Tian to commit suicide. The younger son became the Second Emperor and had several of his brothers executed. The chief eunuch was elevated to chancellor after he got the Second Emperor to execute Li Si. By this time, the Qin state was unraveling. The Legalist institutions designed to concentrate power in the hands of the ruler made the stability of the government dependent on the strength and character of a single person.

In the ensuing uprisings, many of the rebels called for the restoration of the old states, but this was not what happened. The eventual victor was Liu Bang (lyoo bahng, known in history as Emperor Gao [gow], r. 202–195 B.C.E.). The First Emperor of Qin was from the old Zhou aristocracy. Liu Bang, by contrast, was from a modest family of commoners, so his elevation to emperor is evidence of how thoroughly the Qin Dynasty had destroyed the old order.

Emperor Gao did not disband the centralized government created by Qin but he did remove its most unpopular features. He set up his capital at Chang'an, not far from the old Qin capital. He eliminated some laws, cut taxes, and otherwise lessened the burdens on the people. After a century of almost constant war and huge labor mobilizations, China was given several decades to recover. Responding to the desire to restore the old order, Emperor Gao gave out large and nearly autonomous fiefs to his relatives and chief generals. Very soon he recognized that giving followers independent resources was a mistake, and he spent much of his reign eliminating the fief holders who were not relatives. After his death, the fiefs of imperial relatives were also gradually reduced in size.

Even before Emperor Gao had completed the consolidation of the empire, he came to realize the threat posed by the Xiongnu. In 200 B.C.E. the Xiongnu under Maodun attacked one of the recently appointed kings, who decided to go over to the Xiongnu. With his help, the Xiongnu then attacked the major city of Taiyuan. Emperor Gao personally led an army to retake the region, but his army suffered terribly from the cold. Maodun led a huge army of horsemen to surround the Han army. Given little choice, Emperor Gao agreed to make yearly gifts of silk, grain, and

other foodstuffs to the Xiongnu. The Xiongnu considered this tribute, but the Han naturally preferred to consider it an expression of friendship.

After Emperor Gao's debacle, the early Han emperors concentrated on pacifying the Xiongnu, supplying them not only with material goods but also with princesses as brides (which they hoped in time would lead to rulers with Chinese mothers). These policies were controversial because critics thought they merely strengthened the enemy. Moreover, as they pointed out, no matter how much wealth the Han sent to the Xiongnu, they kept raiding the borders.

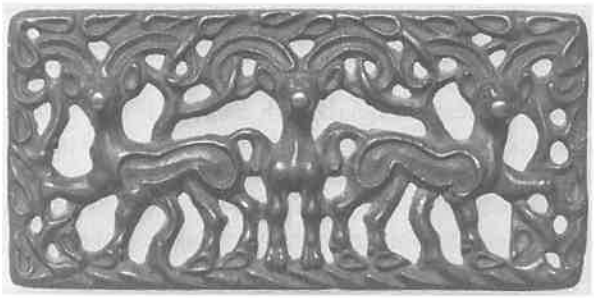
In theory, the Han emperor was all-powerful, but in actuality depended on his chancellor and other high officials for information and advice. Nine ministries were established to handle matters ranging from state ritual to public works. Officials, graded by rank and salary, were appointed by the central government for their merit, not their birth, and were subject to dismissal, demotion, or transfer, much in the way Qin officials had been. Local officials—magistrates and grand administrators—had broad responsibilities: they collected taxes, judged lawsuits, commanded troops to suppress uprisings, undertook public works such as flood control, chose their own subordinates, and recommended local men to the central government for appointments. The main tax was a poll tax of 120 cash (coins) on adults (less for children). Adults also owed a month of labor service each year. Land tax, largely retained by the county and commandery governments, was set at the low rate of one-thirtieth of the harvest.

When Emperor Gao died, his heir was a child, and the empress dowager (the widow of the former emperor) took control until her death, fifteen years later. This Empress Lü is described in the histories as a vicious, spiteful person, and after her fall, her entire family was wiped out. For centuries to come, she would provide an example of the dangers of letting a woman take power, even if she was the mother of the emperor.

The Han emperor who had the greatest impact on Chinese culture and society was Emperor Wu, who came to the throne as a teenager in 141 B.C.E. and reigned for fifty-four years. Unafraid of innovation, Emperor Wu initiated many of the most significant developments in Han culture and government. He took an interest in the arts and patronized both music and poetry. Like many other men of his age, Emperor Wu was fascinated with omens, portents, spirits, immortals, and occult forces, yet he wanted his officials to study Confucian texts.

Emperor Wu expanded the empire through military means. To push the Xiongnu back, he sent several armies of one hundred thousand to three hundred thousand troops deep into Xiongnu territory. These costly campaigns were of limited value because the Xiongnu were a moving target: fighting nomads was not like attacking walled cities. If the Xiongnu did not want to fight the Chinese troops, they simply decamped. Moreover, it was very difficult for Chinese troops to carry enough food to stay long in Xiongnu territory. What they could do was consolidate the land the Xiongnu had vacated by the same methods Qin had used: building forts, appointing officials, and dispatching settlers.

To pay for his military campaigns, Emperor Wu took over the minting of coins, confiscated the land of nobles, sold offices and titles, and increased taxes on private businesses. A widespread suspicion of commerce—from both moral and political perspectives—made it easy to levy especially heavy assessments on merchants. Boats, carts, shops, and other facilities were made subject to property taxes. The worst blow to merchants, however, was the government's decision to enter into market competition with them by selling the commodities that had been collected as taxes. In 119 B.C.E., government monopolies were established on the production of iron, salt, and liquor, enterprises that previously had been sources of great profit for private entrepreneurs. Large-scale grain dealing also had been a profitable business, which the government now took over under the guise of stabilizing prices. Grain was to be bought where it was plentiful and its price low; then it would either be stored in granaries until prices rose or transported to areas of scarcity. This policy was supposed to eliminate speculation in grain, provide more constant prices, and bring profit to the government.



Xiongnu Bronze Belt Plaque. Xiongnu art shows connections to the animal art produced by other nomadic groups along the Eurasian steppe. *(Image Copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art Image: Art Resource, NY)*

The relative success of the Han form of government validated the imperial system, which drew from both Confucian rhetoric and Legalist bureaucratic methods. To put this another way, the Zhou notion of All-Under-Heaven ruled by the paramount Son of Heaven, an idea fully supported by Confucian thinkers, now had attached to it the structures of the centralized bureaucratic empire, indebted though these were to Legalist ideas.

Official Support for Confucianism

Emperor Wu was the first Han emperor to privilege Confucian scholars within the government. He listened to the Confucian scholar Dong Zhongshu, who gave him advice much like Li Si's to the First Emperor. "Because the various schools of thought differ," he said, "the people do not know what to honor," and he advised that "anything not encompassed by the Six Disciplines and the arts of Confucius be suppressed and not allowed to continue further, and evil and vain theories be stamped out."* Emperor Wu soon decreed that officials should be selected on the basis of Confucian virtues, and he established a national university to train officials in the Confucian classics.

The Han government's decision to recruit men trained in the Confucian classics marks the beginning of the Confucian scholar-official system, one of the most distinctive features of imperial China. Because one of the highest duties of the Confucian scholar was to admonish the ruler against misguided policies, officials whose educations imbued them with Confucian values did not comply automatically with the emperor's wishes. Still, emperors found employing Confucian scholars as officials efficient; because of their ingrained sense of duty, they did not have to be supervised as closely as the Legalist model required. That did not mean that emperors took all aspects of the Confucian model of governing to heart themselves or always treated their Confucian officials with respect. Emperor Wu was so averse to criticism that he once had an official executed on the charge that a wry twist of his lips showed that he disapproved in his heart, and the emperor's temper led him to put five of his last seven chancellors to death.

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Wang Mang

The Han practice of hereditary succession to the throne from father to son meant that the heir might be a young child. During the last decades of the first century B.C.E., several boys succeeded to the throne. Adult men of the imperial lineage did not serve as regents; they were regularly sent out of the capital to keep them from interfering in court politics. That left the mothers and grandmothers of the new rulers, along with the women's male relatives, as the main contenders for power during regencies. Wang Mang (wahng mahng) came to power as a relative of Empress Wang (d. 13 C.E.), who for forty years had been influential at court as the widow of one emperor, mother of a second, and grandmother of a third. After serving as regent for two infant emperors, Wang Mang deposed the second and declared himself emperor of the Xin (shin, "New") Dynasty (9 C.E.–23 C.E.).

Although he was condemned as a usurper, Wang Mang was a learned Confucian scholar who wished to implement policies described in the classics. He asserted state ownership of forests and swamps, built ritual halls, revived public granaries, outlawed slavery, limited private landholdings, and cut court expenses. Some of his policies, such as issuing new coins and nationalizing gold, led to economic turmoil. Matters were made worse when the Yellow River broke through its dikes and shifted course from north to south, driving millions of farmers from their homes as huge regions were flooded. Rebellion broke out, and in the ensuing warfare, a Han imperial clansman succeeded in reestablishing the Han Dynasty. The capital was moved from Chang'an to Luoyang. As a consequence, the first half of the Han is called the Western or Former Han and the second half is called the Eastern or Later Han (reminiscent of the Western and Eastern Zhou).

Palace Eunuchs

During the second century C.E., Han court politics deteriorated as the eunuchs (castrated men) who served as palace servants vied with relatives of the empresses for control of the court. For centuries, eunuchs had been a part of palace life, charged with managing the women's quarters. Eunuchs were in essence slaves; a common source seems to have been boys captured from the "southern

barbarians." Court officials looked on palace eunuchs with contempt. Emperors who had grown up with them, however, often saw them as more reliable than officials because they had no outside base of power.

During the Eastern Han period, eunuchs were able to build a base of power within the palace, with the result that weak emperors became their captives rather than their masters. In 124 C.E., a group of eunuchs placed on the throne a child they could manipulate. They gained even more power after 159, when an emperor turned to them to help him oust a consort family faction. In 166 and 169, officials staged protests against eunuch power, but the eunuchs retaliated. In the purges that followed, the protestors were put in jail and banned from office. More than a hundred are said to have died in prison.

INTELLECTUAL, LITERARY, AND RELIGIOUS CURRENTS

Perhaps stimulated by the Qin destruction of books, learning and literature of all sorts flourished in Han times. At the end of the Western Han period, the imperial library had some 596 titles, divided into six categories: classics, philosophy, poetry, military treatises, mathematics and natural science (including astronomy, the calendar, and divination), and medicine. Also important to the history of books in China is the development of paper. Over the course of the Han, various plant fibers were tested, and by the end of the period, paper that had a good, absorbent writing surface was produced. Books were much less cumbersome when written on rolls of paper than on strips of wood or bamboo.

Early in the Han period, a form of Daoism called Huang-Lao Daoism became particularly influential. *Huang* (yellow) refers to the Yellow Emperor and *Lao* to Laozi; both were treated as deities of vast powers. Emperor Wu was attracted to these teachings and tried to make contact with the world of gods and immortals through elaborate sacrifices. He marveled at stories of the paradise of the Queen Mother of the West and the exploits of the Yellow Emperor, who had taken his entire court with him when he ascended to the realm of the immortals. Emperor Wu inaugurated state cults to the Earth Queen in 114 B.C.E. and Grand Unity in 113. In 110 he traveled to Mount Tai to perform a sacrifice to heaven at the peak and a sacrifice to earth at the base. Although claims were made that these sacrifices were of ancient origin, in fact they were designed for him by court ritualists steeped in Huang-Lao ideas. Religious practices among ordinary people were influenced by Huang-Lao ideas but also by a great variety of other ideas about spiritual beings and the forces of the cosmos (see **Documents: Lucky and Unlucky Days**).

Han Confucianism

Confucianism made a comeback during the Han Dynasty, but in a new form. Although Confucian texts had fed the First Emperor's bonfires, some dedicated scholars had hidden their books and others could recite entire books from memory. The ancient books recovered in these ways came to be regarded as classics containing the wisdom of the past. Han scholars studied them with piety and attempted to make them more useful as sources of moral guidance by writing commentaries to them that explained archaic words and obscure passages. A Han Confucian scholar often specialized in a single classic and passed on to his disciples his understanding of each sentence in the work.

The Five Classics
Book of Changes
Book of Documents
Book of Poetry
Spring and Autumn Annals
Book of Rites

Perhaps inspired by the political unification of the realm, some Han Confucians attempted to develop comprehensive understandings of all phenomena. Their cosmological theories explained phenomena in terms of cyclical flows of yin and yang and the five phases (fire, water, earth, metal, and wood). They saw the cosmos as fundamentally moral: natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes were portents indicating that the emperor had failed in his responsibility to maintain the proper balance in heaven and earth.

DOCUMENTS

Lucky and Unlucky Days

Some of our best evidence of common beliefs in Han China is found in the writings of critics such as Wang Chong (wahng chung, 27–ca. 100 C.E.). Wang's lengthy Balanced Discourses *includes refutations of a wide range of beliefs and practices, from the idea that people could become immortals and fly high above the earth to the notion that ghosts could come back to harm people. In the passage here, he attempts to refute the idea that taking action on an unlucky day can cause people harm.*

People today commonly believe in evil influences. They think that when people fall ill or die (or there are repeated calamities, executions, or humiliations), some offense has been committed. If inauspicious days and months are not avoided when starting a project, moving, sacrificing, burying, taking up office, or marrying, then the demons and spirits that one encounters at these ill-fated times will work their harm. Thus illness, disaster, legal penalties, death, even the extermination of a family are all thought to be brought about by not taking care to avoid ill-fated times. In truth, however, this is wild talk....

Rulers anxious about their office and commoners concerned about their bodies believe in this theory and do not raise doubts. Thus when a ruler is about to embark on an enterprise, diviners throng his halls, and when ordinary people have work to be done, they inquire into the best time. As a consequence, deceptive books and false texts have appeared in large numbers....

Rare are the diseases not caused by wind, moisture, or food and drink. After people have gone out in the wind or slept in a damp place, they spend money to find out which noxious influence [has attacked them]. When they overeat, they should practice abstinence, but if their illness does not improve, they say the noxious force has not been identified. If the person dies, they say the diviner was not careful. Among ordinary people, such talk is considered wisdom.

Among the 360 animals, man ranks first. Man is a living creature, but among the ten thousand creatures, man is the most intelligent. But he obtains his lifespan from Heaven and his *qi* from the origin in the same way as the other creatures.... It makes no sense that the misfortune caused by demons and spirits would fall on man alone, and not on other creatures. In man the minds of Heaven and Earth reach their highest development. Why do heavenly disasters strike the noblest creature and not the mean ones?...

If I commit a crime and am arrested by the magistrate and sentenced to punishment, no one says I did something wrong. Instead they say that someone in my family was negligent. If I have not been careful where I lodge or go overboard in food or drink, they do not say I have been immoderate, but that I have disregarded an unlucky time. When people die one after the other and dozens of coffins await burial, they do not say the air is contaminated but that the day of a burial was inauspicious....

The city of Liyang one night was flooded and became a lake. Its residents cannot all have violated taboos on years and months. When Emperor Gao rose, Feng and Pei were recovered, but surely its residents had not all been careful in their choice of hours and days. When Xiang Yu attacked Xiangan, no one survived, but surely its residents had not all failed to pray. The army of Zhao was buried alive by Qin at Changping; 400,000 men died together at the same time. It is hardly likely that when they left home not one of them divined for a propitious time.

Questions for Analysis

1. What are Wang Chong's strongest arguments against lucky and unlucky days?
2. What did Wang Chong think causes illness?

Source: Wang Chong, *Lunheng jiaoshi*, ed. Huang Hui (Taibei: Commercial Press, 1964), 24.1004–12. Translated by Patricia Ebrey.

Correspondences of the Five Phases

	wood	fire	earth	metal	water
seasons	spring	summer		autumn	winter
directions	east	south	center	west	north
weather	wind	heat	thunder	cold	rain
colors	green	red	yellow	white	black
emotions	anger	joy	desire	sorrow	fear
organs	eyes	tongue	mouth	nose	ears

The emperor was of unique importance in this cosmology because he alone had the capacity to link the realms of heaven, earth, and man. The leading Han Confucian scholar Dong Zhongshu (dung jung-shoo, 195?–105 B.C.E.) wanted a ruler who would serve as high priest and fount of wisdom, who would be all-powerful but also deferential to learned scholars. Dong drew on ideas from earlier Confucian, Daoist, and Legalist texts to describe the ruler as the "pivot of all living things," who is "quiet and nonactive" yet "deliberates with his numerous worthies" and knows how to tell if they are loyal or treacherous.*

Sima Qian and the *Records of the Grand Historian*

History writing began early in China. In the early Zhou period, court chroniclers kept track of astronomical matters and advised rulers on the lessons of the past. Two of the Five Classics, the *Book of Documents* and the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, are historical works, the former a collection of documents and the latter a chronicle. By the Warring States period, not only did each of the states compile historical records, but citing examples from the past had become a common way to support an argument.

The art of history-writing took a major step forward in the Han period. During Emperor Wu's reign, two historians, father and son, undertook to write a comprehensive history of the entire past. Sima Tan (se-ma tahn, d. 110 B.C.E.) served as the court astronomer under Emperor Wu and had access to the government archives. His son Sima Qian (se-ma chyen, 145–ca. 85 B.C.E.) carried on his work and brought it to completion.

Before Sima Qian was able to complete his history, he angered Emperor Wu by defending a general who had surrendered to the Xiongnu. As a consequence, he was sentenced to castration and service as a palace eunuch. This punishment was so humiliating that he was expected to choose the honorable alternative of suicide. Sima Qian explained in a letter to a friend why he decided to accept his humiliating sentence: he could not bear the thought that the history would not be completed. "I have compiled neglected knowledge of former times from all over the world; I have examined these for veracity and have given an account of the principles behind success and defeat, rise and fall." His ambitions were large: "I also wanted to fully explore the interaction between Heaven and Man, and to show the continuity of transformations of past and present."† Only by finishing the work could he make up for the dishonor he had suffered.

Like the Greek historians Herodotus and Thucydides, Sima Qian believed fervently in examining artifacts and documents, visiting the sites where history was made, and questioning people about events. He was also interested in China's geographical variations, local customs, and local history. As an official of the emperor, he had access to important people and documents and to the imperial library. He quoted documents when they were available, and in their absence, he invented dialogues to bring events to life. The result of his efforts, ten years in the making, was a massive work of literary and historical genius, the 130-chapter *Records of the Grand Historian.*

The *Records* presents several perspectives on the past. A political narrative begins with the Yellow

*From An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911, edited and translated by Stephen Owen. Copyright © 1996 by Stephen Owen and The Council for Cultural Planning and Development of the Executive Yuan of the Republic of China. Used by permission of W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

†Stephen Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911* (New York: Norton, 1996), p. 141.

Emperor and continues through the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties, down to Sima Qian's own day. It is supplemented by chronological charts with genealogical data and information on the organization of governments. Key institutions are given their own histories in topical chapters on state ritual, court music, the calendar, waterworks, finance, and other matters of concern to the government. Thirty chapters give the separate histories of the main ruling houses of the states of the Zhou period. Biographies of individuals take up more than half the book. Although many of those portrayed played important political or military roles, Sima Qian also singled out other notable men, including philosophers, poets, merchants, magicians, rebels, assassins, and foreign groups like the Xiongnu. At the end of each chapter of biographies, Sima Qian offered his own comments. Sima Qian's experiences with Emperor Wu did not incline him to flatter rulers. Not only did he give ample evidence of Emperor Wu's arbitrariness and policy errors, but he also found many ways to draw attention to those whose merit went unrecognized in their day.

By writing so well, Sima Qian had a profound impact on Chinese conceptions of history and personal achievement. In the centuries that followed, the *Records of the Grand Historian* was read as much for the pleasure of the narrative as for historical data. The composite style, with political narratives supplemented by treatises and biographies, became standard for government-sponsored histories. Subsequent histories, however, usually covered only a single dynasty. The first of these, *History of the Former Han Dynasty*, was the work of three members of the Ban (bahn) family in the first century C.E. (see **Biography: The Ban Family**).

Reeling and Weaving. Many Han tombs had scenes of daily life depicted on their walls. In this example, seated below a finely drawn tile roof are three women reeling, twisting, and weaving silk. The weaver is using a treadle-operated loom.

BIOGRAPHY The Ban Family

Ban Biao (bahn byow, 3–54 C.E.), a successful official from a family with an envied library, had three highly accomplished children: his twin sons, the general Ban Chao (chow, 32–102) and the historian Ban Gu (goo, 32–92), and his daughter Ban Zhao (jow, ca. 45–120).

After distinguishing himself as a junior officer in campaigns against the Xiongnu, Ban Chao was sent in 73 C.E. to the Western Regions to see about the possibility of restoring Chinese overlordship there, lost since Wang Mang's time. Ban Chao spent most of the next three decades in Central Asia. Through patient diplomacy and a show of force, he reestablished Chinese control over the oasis cities of Central Asia, and in 92 he was appointed protector general of the area.

Ban Gu was one of the most accomplished writers of his age, excelling in a distinctive literary form known as the rhapsody (*fu*). His "Rhapsody on the Two Capitals" is in the form of a dialogue between a guest from Chang'an and his host in Luoyang. It describes the palaces, spectacles, scenic spots, local products, and customs of the two great cities. Emperor Zhang (jahng, r. 76–88) was fond of literature and often had Ban Gu accompany him on hunts or travels. He also had him edit a record of the court debates he held on issues concerning the Confucian classics.

The father, Ban Biao, had been working on a history of the Western Han Dynasty when he died in 54. Ban Gu took over this project, modeling it on Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian*. He added treatises on law, geography, and bibliography, the last a classified list of books in the imperial library.

Because of his connection to a general out of favor, Ban Gu was placed in prison in 92, where he soon died. At that time the *History of the Former Han Dynasty* was still incomplete. The emperor called on Ban Gu's widowed sister, Ban Zhao, to finish it. She came to the palace, where she not only worked on the history but also became a teacher of the women of the palace. According to the *History of the Later Han*, she taught them the classics, history, astronomy, and mathematics. In 106 an infant succeeded to the throne, and Empress Deng became regent. The empress frequently turned to Ban Zhao for advice on government policies.

Ban Zhao credited her own education to her learned father and cultured mother and became an advocate of the education of girls. In her *Admonitions for Women*, Ban Zhao objected that many families taught their sons to read but not their daughters. She did not claim daughters should have the same education; after all, "just as yin and yang differ, men and women have different characteristics." Women, she wrote, will do well if they cultivate the womanly virtues such as humility. "Humility means yielding and acting respectful, putting others first and oneself last, never mentioning one's own good deeds or denying one's own faults, enduring insults and bearing with mistreatment, all with due trepidation."* In subsequent centuries, Ban Zhao's *Admonitions* became one of the most commonly used texts for the education of girls.

Questions for Analysis

1. Is it just coincidence that several eminent people came from the same family?
2. What can we infer about women's situations from cases like Ban Zhao?

*Patricia Buckley Ebrey, ed., *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook*, rev. ed. (New York: Free Press, 1993), p. 75.

CHINESE SOCIETY IN HAN TIMES

During the Western Han period, with the establishment of peace and the extension of the empire's frontiers, the Chinese population grew rapidly. The census of 2 C.E. recorded a population of 59 million, the earliest indication of the large size of China's population. These people shared status as subjects of the Han, but their daily lives varied enormously, depending on their social status and where they lived.

Common Farmers

The bulk of the population in Han times (and even into the twentieth century) was made up of farmers

living in villages of a few dozen to a few hundred households. (See Color Plate 4.) Farmers owed labor service to the government of a month per year. Men were also subject to two years of military service, one year near home for training and one year elsewhere for active service.

At the technical level, agriculture continued to make advances. The new and more effective plow introduced during the Han period was fitted with two plowshares, guided by a pair of handles, and was typically pulled by a pair of oxen. Farmers used fans to blow the chaff from kernels of grain, and they used either mortars and pestles or hand mills to grind grain into flour. Irrigation of farmland was aided by brick-faced wells and pumping devices that ranged from a simple pole with an attached bucket and counterweight to a sophisticated machine worked by foot pedals. Because the Han Empire depended on free farmers to pay taxes and provide labor services, the government tried to keep farmers independent and productive. To fight peasant poverty, the government kept land taxes low, provided relief during famines, aided migration to areas where there was vacant land to be opened, and promoted agricultural advancements, such as planting two crops in alternate rows and planting a succession of carefully timed crops. Still, many farmers fell into debt and had to sell their land. Those who did not migrate in search of new opportunities usually became tenant farmers, often accepting quasi-servile status as the dependent of a magnate. Poverty also contributed to the supply of slaves because men could sell their wives or children into slavery to pay debts.

Elite Groups

The old nobility of Zhou times did not survive Qin's destruction of the Zhou states and its determinedly anti-aristocratic policies. Still, Han historical sources are full of references to people who outranked ordinary farmers in wealth and power. Some of these gained power through proximity to the throne. Liang Ji (lyahng jee), whose power derived from his position as father of the empress, was said to have had huge properties and mansions, to have forced commoners to become his slaves, to have used commoners doing labor service to work on his own properties, to have let his retainers extort property and favors, and so on. Members of the imperial clan and the adopted relatives of eunuchs could similarly take advantage of their positions to accumulate wealth and power.

Other groups whose great wealth outraged observers were merchants and manufacturers. Zhao Cuo (jow tsaw) in 178 B.C.E. complained that merchants suffered none of the hardships of farmers, got the best food and clothing, associated with the nobility, and had more power than officials. Sima Qian spoke of how great merchants commanded the services of the poor. If a merchant's wealth was ten times their own, they would behave humbly toward him. If it was a hundred times their own, they would fear him. If it was a thousand times their own, they would work for him. And if it was ten thousand times their own, they would become his servants. Even those with noble titles, he added, depended on these rich merchants for loans.

Government officials had high standing in Han times, though rarely did they have the great wealth of the richest merchants or imperial relatives. In the Western Han, some men rose to high office from modest backgrounds. Kuang Heng (kwahng huhng), for instance, came from a farming family and hired himself out to get the money to study; he eventually became a respected classical scholar and high government official. Yet most of the time, those who could afford to get the education needed to become officials came from families of means, most often landholders.

Access to office was largely through recommendations. At the local level, the county magistrate or commandery grand administrators appointed their own subordinates from among the local educated elite. The grand administrators also made recommendations to the central government of men who were "filial and incorrupt," who then became eligible for higher office. Another route to office was to study with a well-known teacher. Patron–client ties were very important in linking members of the elite, especially in the Eastern Han, when former subordinates and students could be counted on to come to one's assistance in political conflicts.

At the local level, better-off families were expected to act as the leaders of their communities and offer assistance to their neighbors and relatives in need. In the second century C.E., leading families in communities often erected stones inscribed with accounts of their good works, such as building or repairing bridges or shrines. Tombs and funerary monuments of the Eastern Han offer

further evidence of the self-perception of such families. By decorating funerary architecture with pictures of famous filial sons, dutiful women, and loyal ministers, they were portraying their families as steeped in Confucian traditions. Not all those with power at the local level were Confucian scholars, however. Han sources are full of complaints of the "great families" or "powerful men" of local communities who intimidated their neighbors and built up their property by taking advantage of families in debt.

During the course of the Han, the educated elite (called the *shi*, the same term used in Zhou times for the lower level of the aristocracy) came to see themselves as participants, even if indirectly, in national literary, scholarly, and political affairs. The agitation against the eunuchs and consort families in the second century C.E. helped strengthen these feelings. The persecution of the leaders of the movement protesting eunuch power, which took place between 166 and 184, created a large group of articulate, energetic, concerned men excluded from office. Their prestige showed that social honor was something the elite conferred on itself rather than something the government controlled through its appointment of men to office.

The Family

During Han times, both the administrative structure of the centralized state and the success of Confucianism helped shape the Chinese family system. Since Shang times, at least at the highest social levels, patrilineal ancestors had been a central feature of the family. By the time of the registration of the population in Qin and Han times, everyone had patrilineal family names. Han laws supported the authority of family heads over the other members of their families. The state preferred to deal only with the family head and recognized this person's right to represent the family. The family head was generally the senior male, but if a man died before his sons were grown, his widow would serve as family head until they were of age. Family members were also held responsible for each other; for serious crimes, relatives of a criminal were made slaves.

During the Zhou period, inheritance had favored the eldest son, who succeeded to both aristocratic titles and the responsibility to maintain ancestral rites. By Han times, primogeniture in ordinary families applied only to ancestral rites. Family property such as land was divided among all sons. Daughters did not get shares of the family property, though well-to-do families might provide a daughter with substantial goods as her dowry when she married. Because the family farm had to be divided every generation (at least when there was more than one son), a family with several sons risked rapid downward social mobility.

Marriages were arranged by family heads, generally with the bride joining the husband's family. Men could divorce their wives on any of seven grounds, which included barrenness, jealousy, and talkativeness, but could do so only if there was a family for her to return to. There were no grounds on which a woman could divorce her husband, but divorce by mutual agreement was possible.

The legal underpinnings of the family were closely connected to Confucian teachings. It was one of the Confucian ritual texts that first defined the seven grounds for divorce. Confucian ritual texts compiled in Han times also give elaborate descriptions of the proper deference that sons and daughters-in-law should show to parents. The *Book of Rites*, for instance, told daughters-in-law to rise at the cock's crow, wash and dress, and then call on their parents-in-law: "Getting to where they [the parents-in-law] are, with bated breath and gentle voice, they [the daughters-in-law] should ask if their clothes are too warm or too cold, whether they are ill or pained, or uncomfortable in any part; and if they be so, they should proceed reverently to stroke and scratch the place."* Male–female differentiation was much stressed in this book. For instance, in explaining why the man goes to fetch his bride in person, it says, "This is the same principle by which Heaven takes precedence over earth and rulers over their subjects."†

In Han times filial piety was extolled in both texts and art. Pictures of famous filial sons were used to decorate not only the walls of tombs but even everyday objects like boxes. The brief *Classic of Filial Piety* argued that at each level of society, sincere filial devotion leads people to perform their social duties conscientiously and prudently, creating peace and harmony. Stories circulated of exceptional sons who willingly sacrificed their own comfort to amuse their unreasonable parents.

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*James Legge, trans., *Li Ki: Book of Rites* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1885), 1:450, modified.
†Ibid., p. 440.

Ancient Worthies and Paragons of Virtue. A large basket found in a tomb in the Han colony of Lelang (North Korea) is decorated with ninety-four paintings of famous figures from the past, many labeled with their names. *(Central Historical Museum, P'yongyang, North Korea/Werner Forman/Art Resource, NY)*

Other Han texts addressed the virtues women should cultivate. The *Biographies of Exemplary Women*, compiled by Liu Xiang, told the stories of women from China's past who had given their husbands good advice, sacrificed themselves when forced to choose between their fathers and husbands, or performed other heroic deeds. It also contained cautionary tales about scheming, jealous, and manipulative women who brought destruction to all around them. Another notable text on women's education was written by the scholar Ban Zhao. Her *Admonitions for Women* urged girls to master the seven virtues appropriate to women: humility, resignation, subservience, self-abasement, obedience, cleanliness, and industry (see **Biography: The Ban Family**).

CENTRAL ASIA AND THE SILK ROAD

It was during the Han period that the Chinese first learned that theirs was not the only civilization with cities and writing and also that these distant civilizations had been obtaining silk from China from merchants who traveled across Eurasia.

This discovery was made when Emperor Wu decided to send Zhang Qian (jahng chyen) as an envoy to look for the Yuezhi, a group that had moved west after defeat by the Xiongnu several decades earlier and which Emperor Wu hoped would return to fight the Xiongnu for him. Despite being captured by the Xiongnu and delayed several years, Zhang eventually reached Bactria, Parthia, and Ferghana (in the region of modern Afghanistan). However, the Yuezhi, once found, had no interest in returning to help out the Han. In 115 B.C.E., Zhang was sent again, this time to look for another group, which proved just as unwilling to return. Zhang's travels, however, were not totally in vain. From his reports of these two trips, the Chinese learned firsthand of the countries of Central Asia and heard about the trade in silk with other countries farther out, such as Rome. In 104 and 102 B.C.E., a Han general led Chinese armies across the Pamir Mountains to subdue Ferghana. Recognition of Chinese overlordship followed, giving China control over the trade routes across Central Asia, commonly called the Silk Road. (See Map 3.1.) The city-states along this route did not resist the Chinese presence because they could carry out the trade on which they depended more conveniently with Chinese garrisons to protect them. (See **Material Culture: Silk from the Silk Road.**)

Much of the trade was in the hands of Sogdian, Parthian, and Indian merchants who carried silk and other goods by caravans all the way to Rome. There was a market for both skeins of silk thread and for silk cloth woven in Chinese or Syrian workshops. Caravans returning to China carried gold, horses, and occasionally handicrafts of West Asian origin, such as glass beads and cups. Through the trade along the Silk Road, the Chinese learned of new foodstuffs, including walnuts, pomegranates, sesame, and coriander, all of which came to be grown in China. This trade was largely carried by the two-humped Bactrian camel. With a heavy coat of hair to withstand the bitter cold of winter, each camel could carry about 500 pounds of cargo.

MATERIAL CULTURE

Silk from the Silk Road

The Chinese product most in demand outside China was silk. The silkworm had been domesticated in China by the Shang period, and the excellence of Chinese silk technology in Zhou times is well documented through excavations of tombs. Silk is very strong and amazingly fine. A single silkworm can spin a filament 1,000 meters long but a minuscule 0.25 millimeters thick. Several of these filaments have to be twisted together to make the yarns used for weaving. Besides basic flat weaves and light gauzes, Chinese weavers also made patterned weaves, including multicolored ones that required the use of a draw loom to separate the warp threads.

Many fragments of Han period textiles have survived in the arid climate of Chinese Central Asia, at sites along the Silk Road. The piece illustrated here was excavated from tomb 8 at Niya, along the southern arm of the Silk Road. The weave is exceptionally fine, with 220 warp threads per centimeter. The five-color woven design shows clouds, birds, a single-horned beast, and a tiger along with Chinese characters. The inscription, which is the command of a Han emperor to a general leading troops to bring order to the northwest frontier, reads: "The Five Planets appear in the east. This is very auspicious for China. The barbarians will be defeated."

Xijian Institute of Archaeology/Cultural Relics Press

Silk Arm Cover. Excavated at Niya along the Silk Road, this small piece (12.5 by 18.5 cm) is finely woven in five colors: blue, green, red, yellow, and white (the colors of the five planets).

BORDERLANDS

During the Qin and Han periods, the Chinese empire was extended by both armies and by migrants. Emperor Wu sent armies not only into Central Asia but also into northern Korea, where military districts were established to flank the Xiongnu on their eastern border (see Chapter 6). Armies were also sent south, extending the frontiers into what is now northern Vietnam.

In the south, migrants in search of land to till often were the first to penetrate an area. They moved south along the rivers, displacing the indigenous populations, who retreated farther south or up into marginal hillsides. A comparison of the censuses of 2 and 140 C.E. shows that between those dates, between 5 and 10 million people left the north China plain for the Yangzi Valley or places farther south.

The government fostered migration by building garrisons on the frontiers to protect settlers, merchants, and adventurers. Once enough settlers had arrived, the government created counties and sent officials to administer them and collect taxes. Often officials sent to the frontier counties tried to encourage the assimilation of the local population by setting up schools to train local young men in Chinese texts. The products of Chinese industry—iron tools, lacquerware, silks, and so on—were in demand and helped make Chinese merchants welcome.

Nevertheless, Chinese expansion often ran into active resistance. In the region of modern Yunnan, the Dian state was dominated by horse-riding aristocrats who made captured enemies into slaves. They drew wealth from trade conducted in both Chinese coins and cowrie shells. Although the Dian did not have a written language, they were skilled metalworkers whose bronze drums often were decorated with images of people and animals. In 109 B.C.E., Emperor Wu sent an army that conquered Dian (dyen) and made it a tributary state. Although the

Dian repeatedly rebelled, the Han government was able to reestablish its overlordship each time.

The Case of Vietnam

To the north and west of China proper, there were natural boundaries to the Chinese way of life because crop agriculture was not suited to the deserts, grasslands, and high mountains in those regions. The southern boundaries of China proper were not so clear and took centuries to become established. Crops that could be grown in modern Guangdong province could also be grown farther south, especially along the coast in what is today Vietnam. The rivers that are central to this region—both the Red River, which empties into the ocean near modern Hanoi, and the Mekong River, which empties near modern Saigon—start in the highlands of southwest China, and migrants following these rivers would end up in what is today Vietnam. Travel along the coast was also easy, even in early times.

Vietnam is today classed with the countries to its west as part of Southeast Asia, but its ties are at least as strong to China. The Vietnamese appear in Chinese sources as a people of south China called the Yue (ywe) who gradually migrated farther south as the Chinese state expanded. In the Red River valley in northern Vietnam, they mixed with local people who had bronze technology, could kill elephants with poisoned bronze arrowheads, and knew how to irrigate their rice fields by using the tides that backed up the rivers.

The collapse of the Qin Dynasty in 206 B.C.E. had an impact on this area because a former Qin general, Zhao Tuo (jow taw, Trieu Da in Vietnamese), finding himself in modern Guangdong province, set up his own kingdom of Nam Viet (Nan Yue in Chinese) that extended as far south as modern-day Da Nang. Trieu Da/Zhao Tuo called himself the Great Chief of the Southern Barbarians, incorporated local warriors into his army, encouraged the adoption of Chinese material culture, and supported intermarriage between Chinese settlers and the local population. Through these measures, he gained the support of the local people and was able to rule to the age of ninety-three, all the while resisting Han efforts to make him accept vassal status.

After almost a hundred years of diplomatic and military duels between the Han Dynasty and Nam Viet, Emperor Wu sent armies that conquered it in 111 B.C.E. As in Korea, Chinese political institutions were imposed, and Confucianism became the official ideology. The Chinese language was introduced as the medium of official and literary expression. The Chinese built roads, waterways, and harbors to facilitate communication within the region and to ensure that they maintained administrative and military control over it. Over time, Chinese art, architecture, and music had a powerful impact on their Vietnamese counterparts.

Chinese innovations that were beneficial to the Vietnamese were readily integrated into the indigenous culture, but the local elite were not reconciled to Chinese political domination. The most famous early revolt took place in 39 C.E., when two widows of local aristocrats, the Trung sisters, led an uprising against foreign rule. They gathered together the tribal chiefs and their armed followers, attacked and overwhelmed the Chinese strongholds, and had themselves proclaimed queens of an independent Vietnamese kingdom. Three years later, a powerful Chinese army reestablished Chinese rule.

China retained at least nominal control over northern Vietnam until the tenth century, and there were no real borders between China proper and Vietnam during this time. Many Chinese settled in the area, and the local elite became culturally dual, serving as brokers between the Chinese governors and the native people.

MAINTAINING THE EMPIRE

Maintaining the Han Empire's extended borders required a huge military investment. To man the northern defense stations along the Great Wall took about ten thousand men. Another fifty to sixty thousand soldier-farmers were moved to the frontiers to reduce the cost of transporting provisions to distant outposts. Drafted farmers from the interior did not make good cavalry troops, and as a consequence, a de facto professional army emerged on the frontiers, composed of Chinese from the northern reaches of the empire hired as mercenaries, reprieved convicts, and surrendered Xiongnu. In 31 C.E. the Han abolished universal military service, which it had inherited from the Warring States.

In the middle of the first century C.E., a succession struggle among the Xiongnu brought one of the rival claimants and his followers to the Chinese border seeking protection. These "Southern Xiongnu" were permitted to live in Chinese territory, primarily in the Ordos region in the great bend of the Yellow River. In 90 C.E., Chinese officials counted 237,300

Xiongnu living in China, of whom 50,170 were adult males able to serve in the army, and substantial numbers of other non-Han groups were also settled in Chinese territory. With the collapse of the Xiongnu confederation, a group from Manchuria, the Xianbei (shyen-bay), rose to prominence and absorbed many Xiongnu into their tribal structure. The expeditionary armies of the Eastern Han included soldiers from all of these groups; in some campaigns, Han Chinese formed a tiny minority of the soldiers.

During the Han period, China developed a system of diplomacy to regulate contact with foreign powers. States and tribes beyond its borders sent envoys bearing gifts, which the Han emperor responded to with even more lavish gifts for them to bring back. Over the course of the dynasty, the Han government's outlay on these gifts was huge, perhaps as much as 10 percent of state revenue. In 25 B.C.E., for instance, the government gave tributary states twenty thousand rolls of silk cloth and about twenty thousand pounds of silk floss. But although the diplomacy system was a financial burden to the Chinese, it reduced the cost of defense and offered the Han imperial court confirmation that it was the center of the civilized world.

SUMMARY

After unifying China in 221 B.C.E., the Qin Dynasty created a strongly centralized government that abolished noble privilege and kept ordinary people in place through strictly enforced laws. The First Emperor of Qin standardized script, coinage, weights, and measures and had many books destroyed. Building roads for the army facilitated trade and helped establish China as a world power. During the four centuries of the subsequent Han Dynasty, the harsher laws and taxes of the Qin were lifted, though a strong centralized government was retained.

The Qin-Han period was one of great territorial expansion. Expansion to the south was generally initiated by migrants in search of land or trading opportunities. Expansion to the northeast and northwest was connected more to defense. The government mobilized huge armies against the nomadic Xiongnu, who regularly raided settlements in the north, but the Xiongnu remained a potent foe. In part to gain allies against the Xiongnu, Han expanded into the Korean peninsula and more spectacularly into Central Asia, which facilitated trade along the Silk Road.

In contrast to the Qin government, which favored Legalism, the Han rulers came to see the advantages of Confucianism. Officials came to be selected from among men schooled in Confucian learning. Confucian education flourished, with teachers attracting numerous students. The effects of the destruction of books by Qin was largely overcome, and certain books were singled out as classics, works of great intellectual and moral importance. The comprehensive history written in about 100 B.C.E. by Sima Qian was also an intellectual milestone.

The Confucian education of its officials undoubtedly contributed to the Han government's success in coordinating administrative control of a vast territory. The Han government promoted internal peace by keeping land taxes low for the peasantry; by providing relief in cases of floods, droughts, and famines; and by encouraging migration to the south where land was plentiful. As a result, the population grew, reaching about 58 million. Not all political challenges were solved, of course. Of particular concern was the way consort families and eunuchs were able to gain control of the government.

All considered, how different was China after the end of the four centuries of Qin and Han rule? The area that could be called China was greatly expanded. Confucianism had become much more closely identified with the state and with the social elite. A canon of classics had been established. Paper was coming into wider use. By 200 C.E., Chinese officials were much more knowledgeable about the military threats of China's northern neighbors and had much more experience with all sorts of stratagems for dealing with them, such as setting up military colonies and recruiting auxiliary forces. China had knowledge of countries far to its west and knew that trade with them could be advantageous. Perhaps, above all, by the end of the Han period, the centralized bureaucratic monarchy had proved that it could work well; it could maintain peace and stability and allow the population to grow and thrive.

CONNECTIONS

Buddhism in India and Its Spread Along the Silk Road

EAST ASIAN CIVILIZATION WAS NEVER completely isolated from the rest of Eurasia. Wheat and the chariot arrived in China from west Asia in Shang times. Animal art spread across the steppe in late Zhou times. Nevertheless, ancient China had less contact with other early centers of civilization, such as Mesopotamia, India, Egypt, and Greece, than they had with each other. India was geographically the closest of those civilizations, and therefore it is not surprising that it was the first to have a major impact on East Asia. The vehicle of its impact was one of its religions, Buddhism.

Early India differed from early China in a great many ways. Much farther south, most areas of the Indian subcontinent were warm all year. In the region of the Indus River, there had been an ancient literate civilization that was already in decline by 1800 B.C.E. The Aryans, in India by 1000 B.C.E. if not earlier, were Indo-European–speaking people who became the dominant group in north India. The culture of the early Aryans is known from the *Rigveda*, a collection of hymns, ritual texts, and philosophical texts composed between 1500 B.C.E. and 500 B.C.E. but transmitted orally for centuries. The *Rigveda* portrays the Aryans as warrior tribes who glorified military skill and heroism; loved to drink, hunt, race, and dance; and counted their wealth in cattle. It presents the struggle between the Aryans and indigenous peoples in religious terms: their chiefs were godlike heroes; their opponents, irreligious savages.

Early Aryan society had distinguished among the warrior elite, the priests, ordinary tribesmen, and conquered subjects. These distinctions gradually evolved into the caste system with its four hierarchical strata that did not eat with each other or marry each other: priests (Brahmin), warriors or officials, merchants and landowners, and workers. The *Upanishads*, composed between 750 and 500 B.C.E., record speculations about the mystical meaning of sacrificial rites and about cosmological questions of humanity's relationship to the universe. They document a gradual shift from the mythical worldview of the early Vedic age to a deeply philosophical one. Associated with this shift was a movement toward asceticism. In search of a richer and more mystical faith, some men retreated to the forests.

Ancient Indian cosmology imagined endlessly repeating cycles. Central concepts were *samsara*, the transmigration of souls by a continual process of rebirth, and *karma*, the tally of good and bad deeds that determined the status of an individual's next life. Good deeds lead to better future lives, evil deeds to worse future lives—even to reincarnation as an animal. The wheel of life included human beings, animals, and gods. Reward and punishment worked automatically; there was no all-knowing god who judged people and could be petitioned to forgive a sin, and each individual was responsible for his or her own destiny in a just and impartial world. The optimistic interpretation of samsara was that people could improve their lot in the next life by living righteously. The pessimistic view was that life is a treadmill, a relentless cycle of birth and death. Brahmanic mystics sought release from the wheel of life through realization that life in the world was actually an illusion.

The founder of Buddhism was Siddhartha Gautama (fl. ca. 500 B.C.E.), also called Shakyamuni ("sage of the Shakya tribe") but best known as the Buddha ("enlightened one"). Our knowledge of his life is filtered through later Buddhist texts, which tell us that he was born the son of a ruler of one of the small states in the Himalayan foothills in what is now Nepal. Within the Indian caste system, he was in the warrior, not the priest (Brahmin), caste. At age twenty-nine, unsatisfied with his life of comfort and troubled by the suffering he saw around him, he left home to become a wandering ascetic. He traveled south to the kingdom of Magadha, where he studied with yoga masters. Later he took