

Lesson Four – Qin and Han Dynasties

- 6.35** List the policies and achievements of the emperor Shi Huang and explain how these contributed to the unification of northern China under the Qin Dynasty and the construction of the Great Wall of China.
- 6.36** Detail the political contributions of the Han Dynasty and determine how they contributed to the development of the imperial bureaucratic state and the expansion of the empire.
- 6.37** Cite significance of the “silk roads” in the period of the Han Dynasty and Roman Empire & their locations.
- 6.38** Describe the diffusion of Buddhism northward to China during the Han Dynasty.

Watch, “Qin Dynasty in Five Minutes or Less”

1. How long was the Qin Dynasty?

2. What was the name of the first emperor of China?

3. What belief system did he use to rule?

4. What were the achievements of the Qin Dynasty?

5. Who feuded with the Legalistic rule of the Qin dynasty?

6. What dynasty would rule after the Qin?

Qin Dynasty

How did the Qin unify China?

During the **Warring States period**, the state of **Qin** (chǐn), in the northwestern part of **China**, developed into one of the strongest powers. It had a centralized government and a strong military. Under the leadership of Qin Shi Huang Di, the Qin armies slowly defeated the other rival states and united China under one rule.

Qin Shi Huang Di (which translates as “Qin First Sovereign **Emperor**” or “Qin First Magnificent Emperor”) became the first emperor of the **Qin dynasty**. Soon he established a strong central government that helped unify China under his control. For example, the new Qin emperor divided China into 36 districts and appointed local officials to govern these areas under his supervision. He also forced all of the powerful families to move to China’s capital, Xianyang, where he could better control their actions.

Qin Shi Huang Di practiced an approach to government that was founded on a philosophy called Legalism. Legalism emphasized strict laws and an efficient government. He was a harsh ruler. He had his political rivals and those he saw as opponents executed. He ordered the arrest and execution of hundreds of Confucian scholars. To discourage dissent he burned all books that did not deal with agriculture, medicine, or historical records about his reign. However, he did not burn the books that were stored in the imperial library.

By unifying China, Qin Shi Huang Di created China’s first empire. Doing this gave the Chinese people a sense of national unity. Indeed, the name *China* comes from the name *Qin*.

What were the major achievements of the Qin Dynasty?

To help maintain a well-run empire, **Qin Shi Huang Di** standardized currency, weights and measures, and the writing system throughout **China**. He also supported many civic improvements, including the construction of large irrigation systems and a large wall to protect the empire.

For centuries, invaders from the north harassed the Chinese. At various times, rulers built walls in an attempt to keep out these invaders. In fact, when **Qin Shi Huang Di** became **emperor**, China had a series of disconnected walls along its northern border. The Qin emperor decided to create one great wall by connecting the walls that already existed. This project was an enormous undertaking and required a massive amount of forced labor. After the Qin **dynasty**, other dynasties, such as the Han, strengthened and added to the wall. More than a thousand years later, the wall

eventually stretched for about 5,500 miles and became known as the [Great Wall of China](#).

Constructed entirely by hand, at places the wall is 25 feet wide at the base and almost 20 feet high. Watchtowers are interspersed along the wall every 100 to 200 yards. Over the years, the wall has fallen into disrepair and been rebuilt. As a result, most of the sections built during the [Qin dynasty](#) no longer remain.

During the reign of Qin Shi Huang Di, the Qin moved into conquered areas. People with useful skills such as craftsmen and artisans were moved into the newly conquered cities. Many others, such as peasants and people with differing views, either were forced to leave the cities or were enslaved.

Qin Shi Huang Di died in 210 BCE. In the 1970s, researchers made an amazing discovery when they excavated his tomb. The researchers unearthed about 8,000 life-sized, terra-cotta figures of soldiers and horses. Similar to the Egyptian practice of burying pharaohs with items they would need in the afterlife, these statues formed an army that was intended to protect the dead emperor from his enemies in the afterlife. The army was even found facing east, the direction from which the Qin dynasty's main rivals had attacked.

After Qin Shi Huang Di's death, his son gained the throne, but he proved to be a weak ruler. The people rebelled against him, and soon civil war broke out again throughout China as the powerful families fought each other for control of the region. In 206 BCE, the Han family defeated its foes and formed a new dynasty.

Answer the following questions using the article.

1. What was the outcome of the Warring States Period?

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2. Who was the leader of the Qin Dynasty?

- A.) Confucius
- B.) Lao Tzu
- C.) Han Feizi
- D.) Qin Shi Huang Di

3. What evidence does the text give that Qin Shi Huang Di was a harsh ruler?

4. Which philosophy did the Qin use in their rule?

- A.) Confucianism
- B.) Taoism
- C.) Legalism
- D.) Buddhism

5. Fill in the blank: "By unifying China, Qin Shi Huang Di created China's first _____."

6. How did Qin Shi Huang Di maintain a well-run empire?

a.
b.
c.
d.

7. Explain the evolution of the Great Wall of China and how it came to be.

8. What was found in Qin Shi Huang Di's tomb?

- A.) Mummified Body
- B.) Treasure
- C.) Terra-cotta army
- D.) Gold Sarcophagus

9. What was the purpose of the terra-cotta warriors?

10. What happened to the Qin Dynasty after Qin Shi Huang Di's death?

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Watch, "The Incredible History of China's Terracotta Warriors"

1. What are some of the things included in the chambers of Qin Shi Huang Di's tomb?

2. What does the term terracotta mean?

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3. Why hasn't Qin Shi Huang Di's tomb been excavated?

4. What other civilizations have we studied that are buried with their possessions?

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Watch, "What Makes the Great Wall So Extraordinary?"

1. What was the Great Wall like before the Qin Dynasty?

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2. What were the natural barriers that surrounded China?

East -

West -

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3. What impact did the Qin Dynasty have on the wall?

4. What impact did the Han Dynasty have on the wall?

5. What impact did the Ming Dynasty have on the wall?

6. Why did the Great Wall lose its purpose?

7. What is the purpose of the Great Wall today?

Watch, "Han Dynasty... In Five Minutes or Less"

1. How long did the Han Dynasty rule?

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2. Why was the Han Dynasty considered the Golden Age of China?

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3. Describe the Han's achievements in the following areas.

Weapons -

Government -

Agriculture -

Industry -

Art -

Medicine and Science -

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Han Dynasty

How did the Han Dynasty expand China?

In 206 BCE, **Liu Bang**, who had led the revolt against the **Qin**, founded the **Han dynasty**. Like the **Qin dynasty**, the Han **dynasty** formed a strong central government. The emperors of the Han dynasty that succeeded Liu Bang proved to be competent leaders, especially the **emperor** Wudi.

In 141 BCE, Wudi gained the throne and soon began to strengthen the armies and take aggressive actions to protect

his empire. Instead of focusing on defending the kingdom, he attacked [China](#)'s enemies and helped expand China's territory. His troops conquered the area that is now southern China and also took control of northern and central Vietnam. Then Wudi conquered what is now northern and central Korea and appointed governors to rule. These governors were loyal to the emperor and ruled their territories according to his laws.

After these conquests, Wudi sent troops across the Gobi Desert to Central Asia. He wanted to suppress a possible threat from the Xiongnu nomadic tribes to the north, to increase the security of China. He also strengthened and added to the existing Great Wall to deter nomadic invaders.

The protection of the Great Wall also helped to improve trade. Large trade caravans used a series of trade routes known as the [Silk Road](#), which followed the path of the wall. These trade routes linked China with the [Roman Empire](#) and enabled the sharing of goods, ideas, and culture between the two great empires.

Wudi's conquests also helped to spread Chinese culture throughout East Asia. For example, ancient Korean pottery resembles northern Chinese pottery so closely that scholars have difficulty telling the two apart. The Chinese writing system and grammar spread to Korea, and then to Japan, even though China never conquered that island nation. [Confucianism](#) also spread to Japan and Southeast Asia.

How was government structured during the Han Dynasty?

[Emperor](#) Wudi made [Confucianism](#) the state philosophy, which strongly influenced Han government and society. Confucianism emphasized moral responsibility, and appointing government officials based on their virtue. In the [Han dynasty](#), the governmental [bureaucracy](#) was organized around the teachings of [Confucius](#). All high-ranking government officials were required to be Confucian scholars.

The structure of the government in Han society was similar to the structure of the family. The emperor was the head of the government and ruled with the [Mandate of Heaven](#). However, to govern the enormous empire, the emperor and central government created a network of specialized local officials who would handle day-to-day tasks. These officials were professional government workers, called civil servants, rather than nobles. Some of these local officials collected taxes. Others regulated religious cults or served as judges in criminal cases. These local officials reported to higher-level officials, who, in turn, reported to officials at an even higher level, with power flowing up to the emperor. This type of specialized network is called a bureaucracy.

Rising Through Merit

The Han government was divided into 12 levels, ranging from clerks to ministers of state. In this system, officials had specialized duties, and certain functions were often duplicated to prevent individual officials from becoming too powerful. Government officials did not inherit their positions. Instead, most government officials began as apprentices at local government offices, where they learned to draft documents and read official directives. Young men, even those from lower-ranking families, could get apprenticeships. Higher-level officials then nominated younger workers for promotions based on the quality of their work.

As officials rose, their education became even more important, so the government established an imperial university, also called the Grand School, to ensure that top-ranking officials would have training in Confucian teachings. The emperor also created a test that officials would take to ensure that they understood the works of Confucius. This system of promotion established an early form of [meritocracy](#), or leadership based on ability, not birth. Hard-working and intelligent workers inside the bureaucracy could be promoted to the highest levels of government.

In some places, powerful families abused this system, nominating relatives to make sure that all government posts were filled with members of the same family. These families could then expect to see their own relatives rise into the higher ranks of government through promotion. Still, the bureaucracy established by the Han [dynasty](#) became a model for governance adopted by later dynasties. Those dynasties also improved the meritocracy by improving the education system and making exams, rather than recommendations, the primary basis for promotion.

What were the major achievements of the Han Dynasty and why did it collapse?

Unlike the [Qin dynasty](#) before it, the [Han dynasty](#) encouraged the cultural development of Chinese society. During the Han [dynasty](#) the arts, literature, and science flourished.

Achievements

In addition to establishing a civil service exam, the Han required that their public servants have some cultural accomplishments. During the Han dynasty, a new form of poetry called *fu* combined prose and rhyme. Also, various writers wrote works of history, philosophy, and politics.

There were also numerous artistic achievements. Painting on the walls of buildings and the interior of tombs was common. Craftsmen expertly created sculptures and pottery that were used in ceremonies as well as daily living. Silk garments and linens became popular and were a major export, traded along the [Silk Road](#).

In addition to these cultural achievements, the Han invented paper and developed clocks, sundials, and a seismograph, an instrument for detecting and measuring earthquakes. The cultural impact of this dynasty was so great that modern Chinese still call themselves the Han people.

Decline

During the later period of Han rule, political conflict and corruption plagued the dynasty. In 184 CE, a large rebellion broke out, led by a group called the Yellow Turbans. This group attempted to overthrow the [emperor](#). The Han formed a huge army at great cost to stop the rebellion. However, in the late stages of the Han dynasty eight of the 14 emperors who ascended to the throne were 15 years old or younger. The families and advisers of these young emperors were usually the true source of power and frequently abused their position for personal gain. This inefficient leadership and corruption hindered efforts to stop the rebellion, which continued for two decades. In 220 CE, the last Han emperor gave up his throne to the son of a powerful warlord named Cao Cao, thereby ending the Han dynasty. However, the Han dynasty left an impressive legacy that had a far-reaching influence.

The early dynasties of [China](#) expanded the empire, organized society, and created a unified culture that extended throughout China and also influenced other regions and civilizations. Some of these influences can still be seen today.

Answer the following questions using the article.

1. What was the impact of the following Han rulers?

Liu Bang -

Wudi -

2. What was the purpose and significance of the Silk Road?

3. The Han government was set up around the teachings of

A.) Legalism

B.) Taoism

C.) Confucianism

D.) Buddhism

4. Describe the bureaucracy that the Han used to govern.

5. Describe how a person could rise through the Han's meritocracy.

6. List the achievements of the Han Dynasty.

7. How did the Han Dynasty decline?

Watch, "The Silk Road: Connecting the Ancient World Through Trade"

1. Describe how goods and information are exchanged

Today -

Ancient Times -

2. Describe the influence of the following

Darius I -
Alexander the Great -
Han Dynasty -

3. Describe some of the exchanges between civilizations that occurred because of the Silk Road.

4. What is the lasting impact the Silk Road has had on our world?

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Activity

Create an encyclopedia entry for the following terms: Qin Dynasty, Han Dynasty, The Great Wall of China, and Silk Road. Include a picture and general description of the term. Use information from your lesson to assist you.

Qin Dynasty	
Picture	Description

Han Dynasty	
Picture	Description

The Great Wall of China	
Picture	Description

Silk Road	
Picture	Description