



## The Han Dynasty

**Main Idea** Developments during the Han dynasty improved life for all Chinese.

**Reading Connection** How much time do you spend studying for tests? Find out why some Chinese people spent years studying for one special test.

In 202 B.C. **Liu Bang** (lee•OO BAHNG) founded the Han dynasty. Liu Bang was a peasant who became a military leader and defeated his rivals. He declared himself Han Gaozu—“Exalted Emperor of Han.” Although Han Gaozu threw out the harsh policies of the Qin dynasty, he continued to use censors and also divided the empire into provinces and counties.

**What Was the Civil Service?** The Han dynasty reached its peak under the leadership of **Han Wudi** (HAHN WOO•DEE), which means “Martial Emperor of Han.” He ruled from 141 B.C. to 87 B.C. Because

Wudi wanted talented people to fill government posts, job seekers had to take long, difficult tests to qualify for the bureaucracy. Those with the highest scores got the jobs.

In time, Wudi’s tests became the civil service examinations. This system for choosing Chinese officials was used for 2,000 years. The system was supposed to allow anyone with the right skills to get a government job. However, it actually favored the rich. Only wealthy families could afford to educate their sons for the difficult exams.

Students preparing for these tests learned law and history. More importantly they studied the teachings of Confucius, which had become the official teachings throughout the empire. Students began to memorize the works of Confucius at age seven. After many years of schooling, the students took their civil service examinations. Only one in five passed. Those who failed taught school, took jobs as assistants to officials, or were supported by their families.

**The Chinese Empire Grows** A large bureaucracy was needed to rule the rapidly growing empire. The population had grown from about 20 million under Han Gaozu to more than 60 million under Han Wudi. This happened in part because Chinese agriculture continued to thrive.

Over time, however, problems began to develop. When farmers died, their land was divided among their sons. When their sons died, their land was again divided among their sons. Gradually, over several generations, the amount of land a family had to farm became smaller and smaller. By the middle of the Han dynasty, the average farmer owned only about one acre of land.

With so little land, farm families could not raise enough to live. As a result, many sold their land to aristocrats and became



▲ This painting shows students taking a civil service examination. **Why did the civil service system favor rich job seekers?**

# Linking Past & Present

## Papermaking

**PAST** The Chinese were the first people to make paper. The oldest piece of paper found in China dates from the first century B.C. Papermakers soaked tree bark, hemp, and rags in water and pounded it into pulp. They lowered a bamboo screen into a vat of the pulp and then lifted it out. It held a thin sheet of pulp which dried into a single sheet of paper.



▲ A modern artist demonstrates an ancient way of making paper.

### ▼ Modern papermaking



**PRESENT** Papermaking today is a huge international industry. Most paper is made in paper mills by machines, but the basic process is the same. Instead of tree bark, rags, and hemp, most paper today is made from wood pulp. *Why do you think some modern artists continue to make paper using pulp and a frame?*

tenant farmers. Tenant farmers work on land that is owned by someone else and pay their rent with crops. Eventually, aristocrats owned thousands of acres and became very wealthy, but the peasants remained trapped in poverty.

China's empire grew in size as well as in population. Han armies added lands to the south and pushed Chinese borders westward. The Han dynasty also made the country more **secure**. After Wudi's armies drove back the Xiongnu—the

nomads to the north—China remained at peace for almost 150 years.

During this period of peace, new forms of Chinese literature and art appeared. In literature, the Chinese emphasized the recording of history. Scholars and historians wrote new histories of current events and made copies of old literature.

During the Han dynasty, the focus of art also changed. In earlier periods, artists mostly created religious works for the kings and nobles. Under the Han rulers, many





**WH6.6.7** Cite the significance of the trans-Eurasian "silk roads" in the period of the Han Dynasty and Roman Empire and their locations.

beautiful works of art were created for wealthy families. For example, some wall carvings in the tombs of such families feature scenes of everyday life and historical events. They also include highly decorated products made of the best quality silk.

Although the idea of filial piety had existed in the Zhou dynasty, it became very strong during the Han dynasty as the ideas of Confucius spread and became popular. The stability of the government also helped to strengthen family ties. Although the new scholar class had great influence over the government, the social classes in Chinese society remained the same, and daily life was very similar to what it had been before.

**An Era of Inventions** New inventions during the Han dynasty helped Chinese workers produce more goods and manufacture more products than ever. Millers used newly invented waterwheels to grind more grain, and miners used new iron drill bits to mine more salt. Ironworkers invented steel. Paper, another Han invention, was used by officials to keep government records.

Chinese medicine also improved under the Han. Doctors discovered that certain foods prevented disease. They used herbs to cure illnesses and eased pain by sticking thin needles into patients' skin. This treatment is known as **acupuncture** (A • kyuh • PUHNGK • chuhr).

The Chinese also invented the rudder and a new way to move the sails of ships. These changes allowed ships to sail into the wind for the first time. Chinese merchant ships could now travel to the islands of Southeast Asia and into the Indian Ocean. As a result, China established trade connections with people who lived as far away as India and the Mediterranean Sea.

**Reading Check Identify** Which inventions helped Chinese society during the Han dynasty?

## The Silk Road

**Main Idea** The Silk Road carried Chinese goods as far as Greece and Rome.

**Reading Connection** Many of the things we buy today are made in China. How do these goods get to the United States? Read to learn how goods made in China long ago made it all the way to Europe.

Chinese merchants made a lot of money by shipping expensive goods to other countries. Silk was the most valuable trade product. Some of it went by ship to Southeast Asia. However, most went overland on the **Silk Road**.

**What Was the Silk Road?** Merchants from China began traveling far westward when the emperor Han Wudi sent out a general named Zhang Qian (JAHNG CHYEHN) to explore areas west of China. Zhang had been sent on a mission to find allies for China against its enemies, especially the Xiongnu to the north.

After a journey of about 13 years, Zhang returned to China having failed to find allies for China. However, Zhang had discovered a kingdom far to the west, perhaps in modern-day Kazakhstan, where there were horses of exceptional strength and size.

Emperor Wudi was delighted to hear this because the cavalry of his enemies, the Xiongnu, gave them a great advantage over his army, which was mostly infantry. The emperor encouraged trade to get these horses so that his cavalry could defeat the Xiongnu. The result was the Silk Road, a large network of trade routes stretching 4,000 miles (6,436 km) from western China to southwest Asia. By the A.D. 100s, the various portions of the route were completed.

Merchants used camels to carry their goods across deserts and mountains to central Asia. From there Arabs carried the goods



KEY			
Silk Road	Cloves	Grains	Pearls
Other trade routes	Copper	Horns/Tusks	Sandalwood
Black pepper	Cotton cloth	Leopard skins	Semiprecious stones
Cardamom	Frankincense/Myrrh	Nutmeg	Silk
Cinnamon	Gold	Oils	Teakwood
	Ginger	Papyrus	

### Using Geography Skills

- Movement** What were some trade goods produced by China?
- Region** What regions were near or along the route of the Silk Road?




to the Mediterranean Sea. The trip over the Silk Road was extremely difficult, dangerous, and quite expensive.

The Silk Road was broken up into smaller segments, each traveled by different merchants. This was because the terrain was so difficult and changed so much over the course of the Silk Road. There were high, snowy mountains; vast deserts; and long regions of rocky land, as well as rivers and long plains to cross. It would have been extremely difficult for the same animals and

carts to survive the entire journey. Most merchants traveled part of the journey and then sold their goods to someone else who traveled another portion of the journey. Goods passed from one person to another until they went from China all the way to kingdoms along the Mediterranean Sea.

Merchants had to pay taxes to many kingdoms as they moved the goods east and west. Each person who bought goods then charged higher prices to the next person. For this reason, they carried mostly

## Four Chinese Dynasties

	SHANG	ZHOU	QIN	HAN
<b>When</b>	1750–1045 B.C.	1045–256 B.C.	221–206 B.C.	202 B.C.–A.D. 220
<b>Important Leaders</b>	Numerous kings with large armies and control over the land; ruled from capital city of Anyang	 Wu	 Qin Shihuangdi	 Liu Bang
<b>Main Ideas and Accomplishments</b>	Developed social classes that included farmers, merchants, aristocrats, and royal family	Longest-lasting dynasty in Chinese history; established Mandate of Heaven	Strengthened central government; created single monetary system	Population and landmass grew under Han; opened China to trade and commerce by building Silk Road
<b>Influences on Chinese Culture</b>	Influenced Chinese religion and culture; created Chinese written language	Developed irrigation and flood-control systems to help farmers grow more crops	Introduced use of censors to check on government officials; Qin built the first Great Wall to keep out invaders	Created government's civil service examination; major inventions: steel, paper, acupuncture, advanced sea travel

### Understanding Charts

The four dynasties of early China were separated by brief periods of unrest.

- Under which dynasty was a single monetary system put in place?
- Evaluate** Which dynasty do you think contributed the most to Chinese culture? Why?

high-priced goods such as silk, spices, tea, and porcelain. In return, they earned great wealth.

**The Impact of the Silk Road** General Zhang also told the emperor of a mighty empire to the west with large cities full of people “who cut their hair short, wear embroidered clothes, and ride in very small chariots.” Zhang was describing the Roman Empire.

The trade begun by the Silk Road brought China into contact with many other civilizations. Some merchants traveled by sea. This sea trade linked the

Chinese to civilizations in Southeast Asia, southern India, and Egypt. Both the sea and land trade routes led to an exchange of many different goods and ideas.

Over the years merchants traded many items in addition to silk. These included fruit, vegetables, flowers, grains, and other products. For example, China sent peaches and pears to India, while India sent cotton and spinach to China. In time, Chinese technological advances, such as paper, would also travel to other countries along the Silk Road.

**Reading Check Conclude** Why did merchants carry mostly expensive goods on the Silk Road?