

3

Han Emperors in China

MAIN IDEA	WHY IT MATTERS NOW	TERMS & NAMES
ETHICAL SYSTEMS The Han Dynasty expanded China's borders and developed a system of government that lasted for centuries.	The pattern of a strong central government has remained a permanent part of Chinese life.	• Han Dynasty • centralized government • civil service • monopoly • assimilation

SETTING THE STAGE Under Shi Huangdi, the Qin Dynasty had unified China. Shi Huangdi established a strong government by conquering the rival kings who ruled small states throughout China. After Shi Huangdi died in 210 B.C., his son proved to be a weak, ineffective leader. China's government fell apart.

TAKING NOTES

Outlining Use an outline to organize main ideas and details.

Han China
- *I. The Han Restore Unity to China*
  - *A.*
  - *B.*
  - *C.*
- *II. A Highly Structured Society*
- *III. Han Technology, Commerce, and Culture*

The Han Restore Unity to China

Rumblings of discontent during the Qin Dynasty grew to roars in the years after Shi Huangdi's death. Peasants were bitter over years of high taxes, harsh labor quotas, and a severe penal system. They rebelled. Rival kings were eager to regain control of the regions they had held before Shi Huangdi. They raised armies and fought over territory.

Liu Bang Founds the Han Dynasty During the civil war that followed, two powerful leaders emerged. Xiang Yu (shee•ANG yoo) was an aristocratic general who was willing to allow the warlords to keep their territories if they would acknowledge him as their feudal lord. Liu Bang (LEE•oo bahng) was one of Xiang Yu's generals.

Eventually, Liu Bang turned against Xiang Yu. The two fought their final battle in 202 B.C. Liu Bang won and declared himself the first emperor of the Han Dynasty. The **Han Dynasty**, which ruled China for more than 400 years, is divided into two periods. The Former Han ruled for about two centuries, until A.D. 9. After a brief period when the Han were out of power, the Later Han ruled for almost another two centuries. The Han Dynasty so influenced China that even today many Chinese call themselves "people of the Han."

▼ Emperor Liu Bang



Liu Bang's first goal was to destroy the rival kings' power. He followed Shi Huangdi's policy of establishing **centralized government**, in which a central authority controls the running of a state. Reporting to Liu Bang's central government were hundreds of local provincials called commanderies.

To win popular support, Liu Bang departed from Shi Huangdi's strict legalism. He lowered taxes and softened harsh punishments. People throughout the empire appreciated the peace and stability that Liu Bang brought to China.

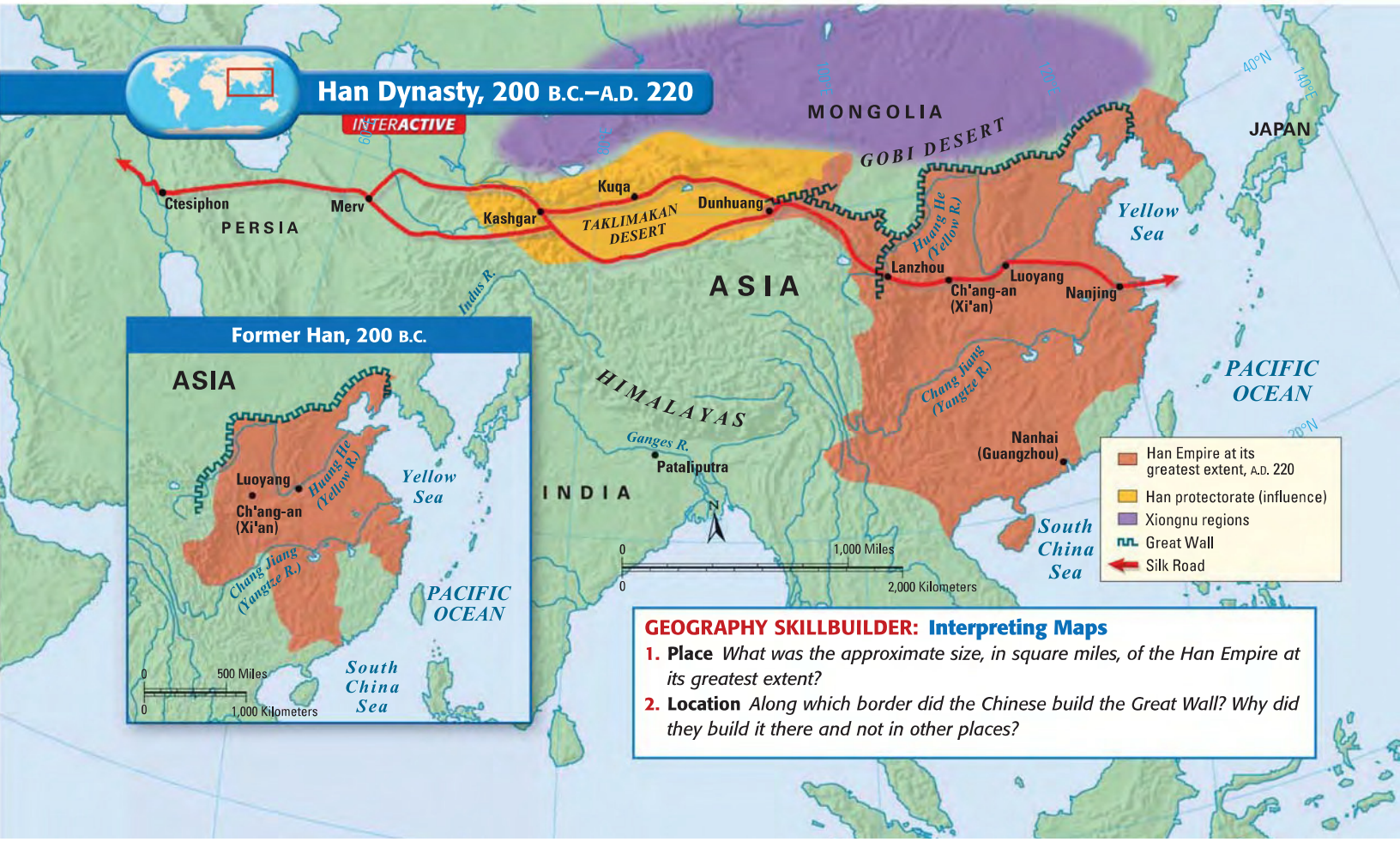
The Empress Lü When Liu Bang died in 195 B.C., his son became emperor, but in name only. The real ruler was his mother, Empress Lü. Although Lü had not been Liu Bang's only wife, she had powerful friends at court who helped her seize power. The empress outlived her son and retained control of the throne by naming first one infant and then another as emperor. Because the infants were too young to rule, she remained in control. When Empress Lü died in 180 B.C., people who remained loyal to Liu Bang's family, rather than to Lü's family, came back into power. They rid the palace of the old empress's relatives by executing them.

Such palace plots occurred often throughout the Han Dynasty. Traditionally, the emperor chose the favorite among his wives as the empress and appointed one of her sons as successor. Because of this, the palace women and their families competed fiercely for the emperor's notice. The families would make alliances with influential people in the court. The resulting power plays distracted the emperor and his officials so much that they sometimes could not govern efficiently.

Vocabulary
Martial means warlike.

The Martial Emperor When Liu Bang's great-grandson took the throne, he continued Liu Bang's centralizing policies. Wudi (woo•dee), who reigned from 141 to 87 B.C., held the throne longer than any other Han emperor. He is called the "Martial Emperor" because he adopted the policy of expanding the Chinese empire through war.

Wudi's first set of enemies were the Xiongnu (shee•UNG•noo), fierce nomads known for their deadly archery skills from horseback. The Xiongnu roamed the steppes to the north and west of China. They made raids into China's settled farmland. There they took hostages and stole grain, livestock, and other valuable items. The early Han emperors tried to buy off the Xiongnu by sending them thousands of pounds of silk, rice, alcohol, and money. Usually, the Xiongnu just accepted these gifts and continued their raids.



GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Maps

1. **Place** *What was the approximate size, in square miles, of the Han Empire at its greatest extent?*
2. **Location** *Along which border did the Chinese build the Great Wall? Why did they build it there and not in other places?*

When Wudi realized that the bribes were simply making the Xiongnu stronger, he sent more than 100,000 soldiers to fight them. To help defeat the Xiongnu, Wudi also made allies of their enemies:

PRIMARY SOURCE

The Xiongnu had defeated the king of the Yuezhi people and had made his skull into a drinking vessel. As a result the Yuezhi . . . bore a constant grudge against the Xiongnu, though as yet they had been unable to find anyone to join them in an attack on their enemy. . . . When the emperor [Wudi] heard this, he decided to try to send an envoy to establish relations with the Yuezhi.

SIMA QIAN, *Records of the Grand Historian*

After his army forced the nomads to retreat into Central Asia, Wudi attempted to make his northwest border safe by settling his troops on the Xiongnu's former pastures. Although this tactic succeeded for a time, nomadic raiders continued to cause problems during much of China's later history.

Wudi also colonized areas to the northeast, now known as Manchuria and Korea. He sent his armies south, where they conquered mountain tribes and set up Chinese colonies all the way into what is now Vietnam. By the end of Wudi's reign, the empire had expanded nearly to the bounds of present-day China.

A Highly Structured Society

Chinese society under the Han Dynasty was highly structured. (See Social History below.) Just as Han emperors tried to control the people they conquered, they exerted vast control over the Chinese themselves. Because the Chinese believed their emperor to have divine authority, they accepted his exercise of power. He was the link between heaven and earth. If the emperor did his job well, China had peace

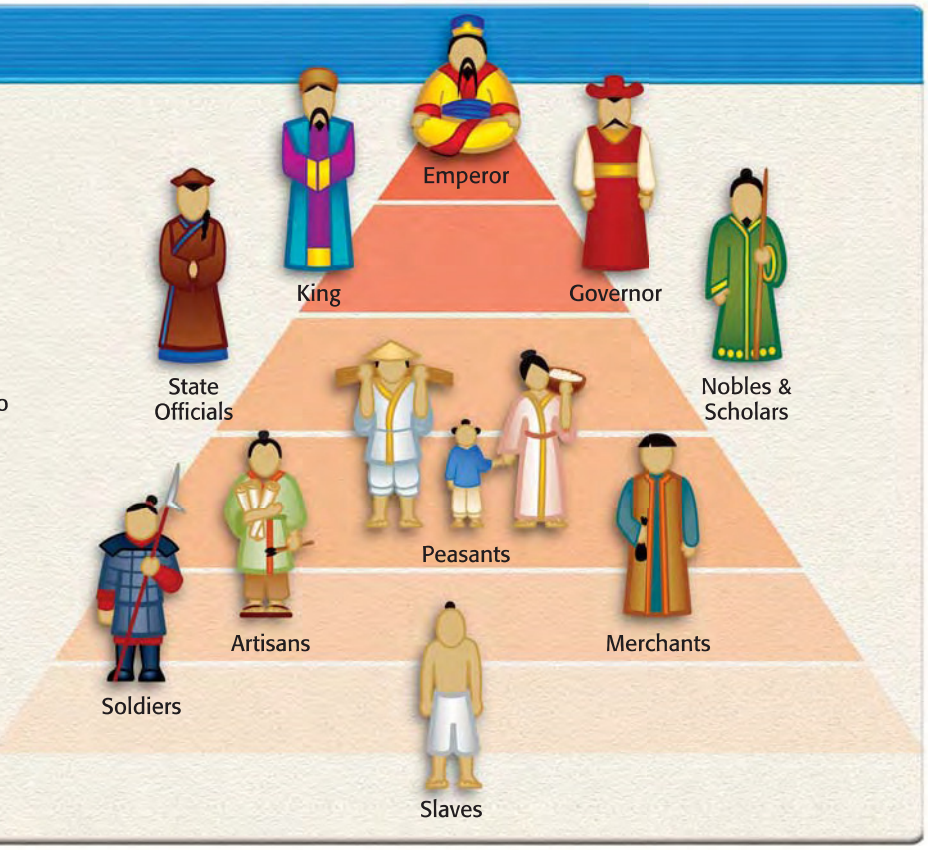
Social History

Chinese Society

Under the Han Dynasty, the structure of Chinese society was clearly defined. At the top was the emperor, who was considered semidivine. Next came kings and governors, both appointed by the emperor. They governed with the help of state officials, nobles, and scholars.

Peasant farmers came next. Their production of food was considered vital to the existence of the empire. Artisans and merchants were below them.

Near the bottom were the soldiers, who guarded the empire's frontiers. At the bottom were enslaved persons, who were usually conquered peoples.



INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY

INTERNET ACTIVITY Create a photo exhibit on Chinese society today. Include pictures of people from various walks of life. Go to **classzone.com** for your research.

and prosperity. If he failed, the heavens showed their displeasure with earthquakes, floods, and famines. However, the emperor did not rule alone.

Structures of Han Government The Chinese emperor relied on a complex bureaucracy to help him rule. Running the bureaucracy and maintaining the imperial army were expensive. To raise money, the government levied taxes. Like the farmers in India, Chinese peasants owed part of their yearly crops to the government. Merchants also paid taxes.

Besides taxes, the peasants owed the government a month's worth of labor or military service every year. With this source of labor, the Han emperors built roads and dug canals and irrigation ditches. The emperors also filled the ranks of China's vast armies and expanded the Great Wall, which stretched across the northern frontier.

Confucianism, the Road to Success Wudi's government employed more than 130,000 people. The bureaucracy included 18 different ranks of **civil service** jobs, which were government jobs that civilians obtained by taking examinations. At times, Chinese emperors rewarded loyal followers with government posts. However, another way to fill government posts evolved under the Han. This method involved testing applicants' knowledge of Confucianism—the teachings of Confucius, who had lived 400 years before.

The early Han emperors had employed some Confucian scholars as court advisers, but it was Wudi who began actively to favor them. Confucius had taught that gentlemen should practice "reverence [respect], generosity, truthfulness, diligence [industriousness], and kindness." Because these were exactly the qualities he wanted his government officials to have, Wudi set up a school where hopeful job applicants from all over China could come to study Confucius's works. A

MAIN IDEA

Making Inferences

A Why would Wudi want his officials to have qualities such as diligence?

After their studies, job applicants took formal examinations in history, law, literature, and Confucianism. In theory, anyone could take the exams. In practice, few peasants could afford to educate their sons. So only sons of wealthy landowners had a chance at a government career. In spite of this flaw, the civil service system begun by Wudi worked so efficiently that it continued in China until 1912.

Han Technology, Commerce, and Culture

The 400 years of Han rule saw not only improvements in education but also great advances in Chinese technology and culture. In addition, the centralized government began to exert more control over commerce and manufacturing.

Vocabulary
Commerce is the buying and selling of goods.

Technology Revolutionizes Chinese Life Advances in technology influenced all aspects of Chinese life. Paper was invented in A.D. 105. Before that, books were usually written on silk. But paper was cheaper, so books became more readily available. This helped spread education in China. The invention of paper also affected Chinese government. Formerly, all government documents had been recorded on strips of wood. Paper was much more convenient to use for record keeping, so Chinese bureaucracy expanded.

Another technological advance was the collar harness for horses. This invention allowed horses to pull much heavier loads than did the harness being used in Europe at the time.

Global Impact



Papermaking

People in ancient China wrote on pottery, bones, stone, silk, wood, and bamboo. Then, about 2,000 or more years ago, the Chinese invented paper. They began to use plants, such as hemp, to make thin paper. In A.D. 105, Ts'ai Lun, a Han official, produced a stronger paper by mixing mulberry bark and old rags with hemp fiber.

The art of papermaking slowly spread to the rest of the world. First, it moved east to Korea and Japan. Then, it spread westward to the Arab world in the 700s, and from there to Europe.

The Chinese perfected a plow that was more efficient because it had two blades. They also improved iron tools, invented the wheelbarrow, and began to use water mills to grind grain. B

MAIN IDEA
Making Inferences
B Which of these inventions helped to feed China's huge population?

Agriculture Versus Commerce During the Han Dynasty, the population of China swelled to 60 million. Because there were so many people to feed, Confucian scholars and ordinary Chinese people considered agriculture the most important and honored occupation. An imperial edict written in 167 B.C. stated this philosophy quite plainly:

PRIMARY SOURCE

Agriculture is the foundation of the world. No duty is greater. Now if [anyone] personally follows this pursuit diligently, he has yet [to pay] the impositions of the land tax and tax on produce. . . . Let there be abolished the land tax and the tax on produce levied upon the cultivated fields.

BAN GU and **BAN ZHAO** in *History of the Former Han Dynasty*

Although the same decree dismissed commerce as the least important occupation, manufacturing and commerce were actually very important to the Han Empire. The government established monopolies on the mining of salt, the forging of iron, the minting of coins, and the brewing of alcohol. A **monopoly** occurs when a group has exclusive control over the production and distribution of certain goods.

For a time, the government also ran huge silk mills—competing with private silk weavers in making this luxurious cloth. As contact with people from other lands increased, the Chinese realized how valuable their silk was as an item of trade.

Global Impact: Trade Networks

INTERACTIVE

Silk Roads

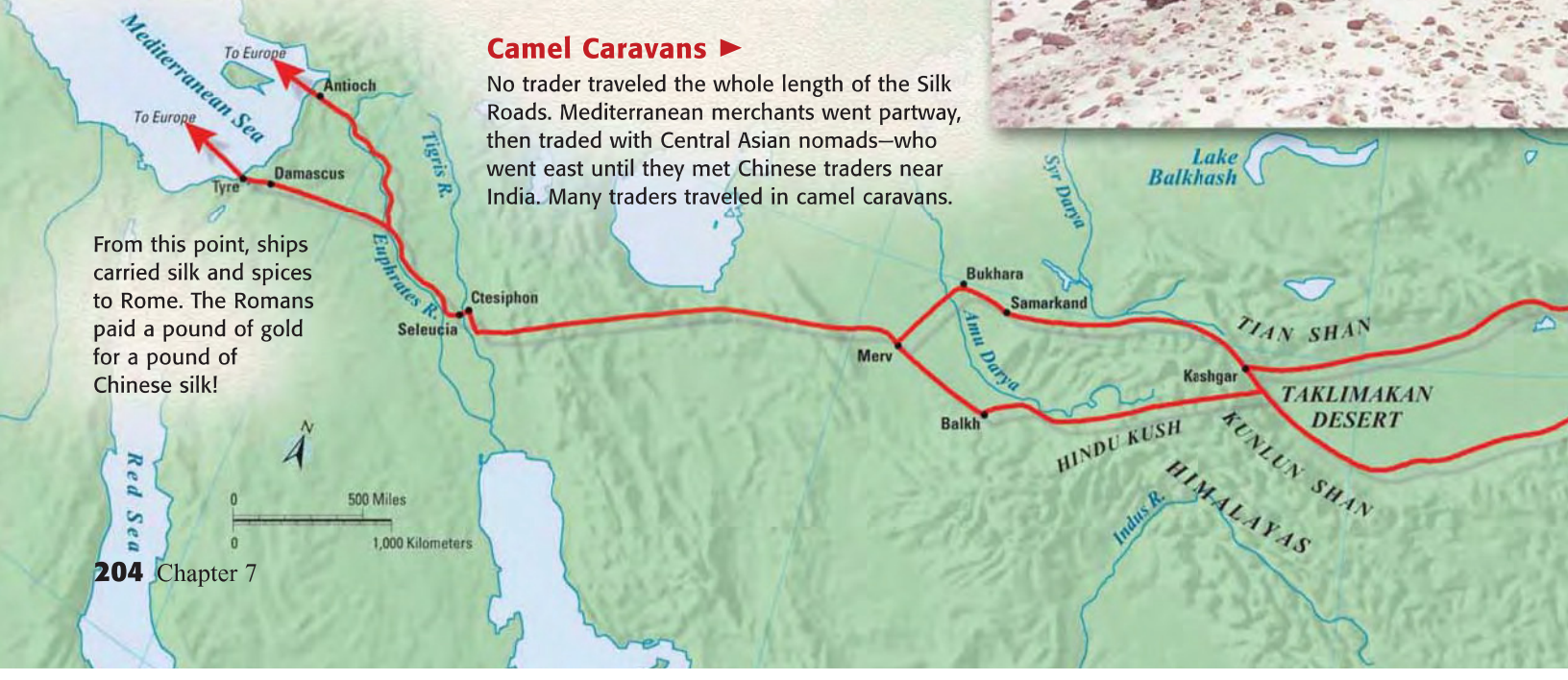
Why would anyone struggle over mountains and across deserts to buy fabric? Ancient peoples valued silk because it was strong, lightweight, and beautiful. Traders made fortunes carrying Chinese silk to the West. Because of this, the caravan trails that crossed Asia were called Silk Roads, even though many other valuable trade goods were also carried along these routes. The Silk Roads also encouraged cultural diffusion.



Camel Caravans ►

No trader traveled the whole length of the Silk Roads. Mediterranean merchants went partway, then traded with Central Asian nomads—who went east until they met Chinese traders near India. Many traders traveled in camel caravans.

From this point, ships carried silk and spices to Rome. The Romans paid a pound of gold for a pound of Chinese silk!



Because of this, the techniques of silk production became a closely guarded state secret. Spurred by the worldwide demand for silk, Chinese commerce expanded along the Silk Roads to most of Asia and, through India, all the way to Rome.

The Han Unifies Chinese Culture

As the Han empire expanded its trade networks, the Chinese began to learn about the foods and fashions common in foreign lands. Similarly, expanding the empire through conquest brought people of different cultures under Chinese rule.

Unification Under Chinese Rule To unify the empire, the Chinese government encouraged **assimilation**, the process of making conquered peoples part of Chinese culture. To promote assimilation, the government sent Chinese farmers to settle newly colonized areas. It also encouraged them to intermarry with local peoples. Government officials set up schools to train local people in the Confucian philosophy and then appointed local scholars to government posts.

Several writers also helped to unify Chinese culture by recording China's history. Sima Qian (SU•MAH chee•YEHN), who lived from 145 to 85 B.C., is called the Grand Historian for his work in compiling a history of China from the ancient dynasties to Wudi. To write accurately, Sima Qian visited historical sites, interviewed eyewitnesses, researched official records, and examined artifacts. His book is called *Records of the Grand Historian*. Another famous book was the *History of the Former Han Dynasty*. Ban Biao (BAHN bee•OW), who lived from A.D. 3 to 54, started the project. After his death, his son Ban Gu (bahn goo) and later his daughter Ban Zhao



Traded Gold ►

Gold was an important trade good. The object to the right is a Chinese gold dagger handle from the Zhou Dynasty. Many artifacts found along the Silk Roads show a mix of Greek, Central Asian, and Indian styles. This indicates that ideas traveled as well as objects.



Patterns of Interaction

Trade Connects the World: Silk Roads and the Pacific Rim

Throughout history, the desire for material goods led to the development of long-distance trade routes such as the Silk Roads. In turn, trade caused cultural diffusion. Similarly today, trade in the Pacific Rim has helped spread many products across the globe.

The Silk Road split in two to skirt the edges of the Taklimakan Desert. Both routes had oases along the way.

Connect *to* Today

1. **Hypothesizing** How might patterns of trade and cultural diffusion have differed if Rome, not China, had learned the secret of making silk?

See Skillbuilder Handbook, Page R11.

2. **Comparing** What are China's top three exports today, and which countries buy those products?

(bahn jow) worked on it. Ban Zhao also wrote a guide called *Lessons for Women*, which called upon women to be humble and obedient but also industrious.

Women's Roles—Wives, Nuns, and Scholars Although Ban Zhao gained fame as a historian, most women during the Han Dynasty led quiet lives at home. Confucian teachings had dictated that women were to devote themselves to their families. However, women made important contributions to their family's economic life through duties in the home and work in the fields of the family farm.

Some upper-class women lived much different lives. As explained earlier, a few empresses wielded great power. Daoist—and later, Buddhist—nuns were able to gain an education and lead lives apart from their families. Women in aristocratic and landowning families also sometimes pursued education and culture. Some women ran small shops; still others practiced medicine.

The Fall of the Han and Their Return

In spite of economic and cultural advances, the Han emperors faced grave problems. One of the main problems was an economic imbalance caused by customs that allowed the rich to gain more wealth at the expense of the poor.

The Rich Take Advantage of the Poor According to custom, a family's land was divided equally among all of the father's male heirs. Unless a farmer could afford to buy more land during his lifetime, each generation inherited smaller plots. With such small plots of land, farmers had a hard time raising enough food to sell or even to feed the family. Because of this, small farmers often went into debt and had to borrow money from large landowners, who charged very high interest rates. If the farmer couldn't pay back the debt, the landowner took possession of the farmer's land.

Large landowners were not required to pay taxes, so when their land holdings increased, the amount of land that was left for the government to tax decreased. With less money coming in, the government pressed harder to collect money from the small farmers. As a result, the gap between rich and poor increased.

Wang Mang Overthrows the Han During this time of economic change, political instability grew. At the palace, court advisers, palace servants, and rival influential families wove complex plots to influence the emperor's choice of who would



▲ Chinese warrior

Comparing Two Great Empires: Han China and Rome

Han Dynasty—202 B.C. to A.D. 220	Roman Empire—27 B.C. to A.D. 476
Empire replaced rival kingdoms	Empire replaced republic
Centralized, bureaucratic government	Centralized, bureaucratic government
Built roads and defensive walls	Built roads and defensive walls
Conquered many diverse peoples in regions bordering China	Conquered many diverse peoples in regions of three continents
At its height—area of 1.5 million square miles and a population of 60 million	At its height—area of 3.4 million square miles and a population of 55 million
Chinese became common written language throughout empire	Latin did not replace other written languages in empire
Ongoing conflict with nomads	Ongoing conflict with nomads
Empire fell apart; restored by Tang Dynasty in 618	Empire fell apart; never restored

SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Charts

1. **Drawing Conclusions** *How long did each empire last? When did they both exist?*
2. **Comparing and Contrasting** *How were Han China and the Roman Empire similar? Different?*



▲ Roman soldier

succeed him as ruler. From about 32 B.C. until A.D. 9, one inexperienced emperor replaced another. Chaos reigned in the palace, and with peasant revolts, unrest spread across the land as well.

Finally, Wang Mang (wahng mahng), a Confucian scholar and member of the court, decided that a strong ruler was needed to restore order. For six years, he had been acting as regent for the infant who had been crowned emperor. In A.D. 9, Wang Mang took the imperial title for himself and overthrew the Han, thus ending the Former Han, the first half of the Han Dynasty.

Vocabulary
A *regent* is a person who rules temporarily while a monarch is too young.

Wang Mang tried to bring the country under control. He minted new money to relieve the treasury's shortage and set up public granaries to help feed China's poor. Wang Mang also took away large landholdings from the rich and planned to redistribute the land to farmers who had lost their land. But this plan angered powerful landholders. Wang Mang's larger supply of money disrupted the economy, because it allowed people to increase their spending, which encouraged merchants to raise prices.

Then, in A.D. 11, a great flood left thousands dead and millions homeless. The public granaries did not hold enough to feed the displaced, starving people. Huge peasant revolts rocked the land. The wealthy, opposed to Wang Mang's land policies, joined in the rebellion. The rebels assassinated Wang Mang in A.D. 23. Within two years, a member of the old imperial family took the throne and began the second period of Han rule—called the Later Han. C

MAIN IDEA
Recognizing Effects
C How did Wang Mang's policies help cause his own downfall?

The Later Han Years With peace restored to China, the first decades of the Later Han Dynasty were quite prosperous. The government sent soldiers and merchants westward to regain control of posts along the Silk Roads. But this expansion could not make up for social, political, and economic weaknesses within the empire itself. Within a century, China suffered from the same economic imbalances, political intrigues, and social unrest that had toppled the Former Han. By 220, the Later Han Dynasty had disintegrated into three rival kingdoms.

In the next chapter, you will learn about the early civilizations and kingdoms that developed in Africa.



▲ Silk was the trade good that linked the Han and Roman empires. This fragment of silk was found along the Silk Roads.

SECTION 3 ASSESSMENT

TERMS & NAMES **1.** For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

• Han Dynasty • centralized government • civil service • monopoly • assimilation

USING YOUR NOTES

2. What was the most lasting development of the Han Empire? Explain.

Han China
I. The Han Restore Unity to China
A.
B.
C.
II. A Highly Structured Society
III. Han Technology, Commerce, and Culture

MAIN IDEAS

3. How did Wudi encourage learning?

4. What role did women play in Han society?

5. How did the Han Chinese attempt to assimilate conquered peoples?

CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING

6. IDENTIFYING PROBLEMS What problem do you think was most responsible for weakening the Han Dynasty? Explain.

7. ANALYZING CAUSES How important were Confucian teachings in the lives of people of the Han Empire? Provide details to support your answer.

8. DRAWING CONCLUSIONS Why was agriculture considered the most important and honored occupation in Han China?

9. WRITING ACTIVITY RELIGIOUS AND ETHICAL SYSTEMS Review the five qualities Confucius said gentlemen should have. Write one **sentence** for each describing the action a government official could take to demonstrate the quality.

CONNECT TO TODAY **CREATING AN ORGANIZATIONAL CHART**

Research information about the current government of the People's Republic of China. Then create an **organizational chart** showing its structure.