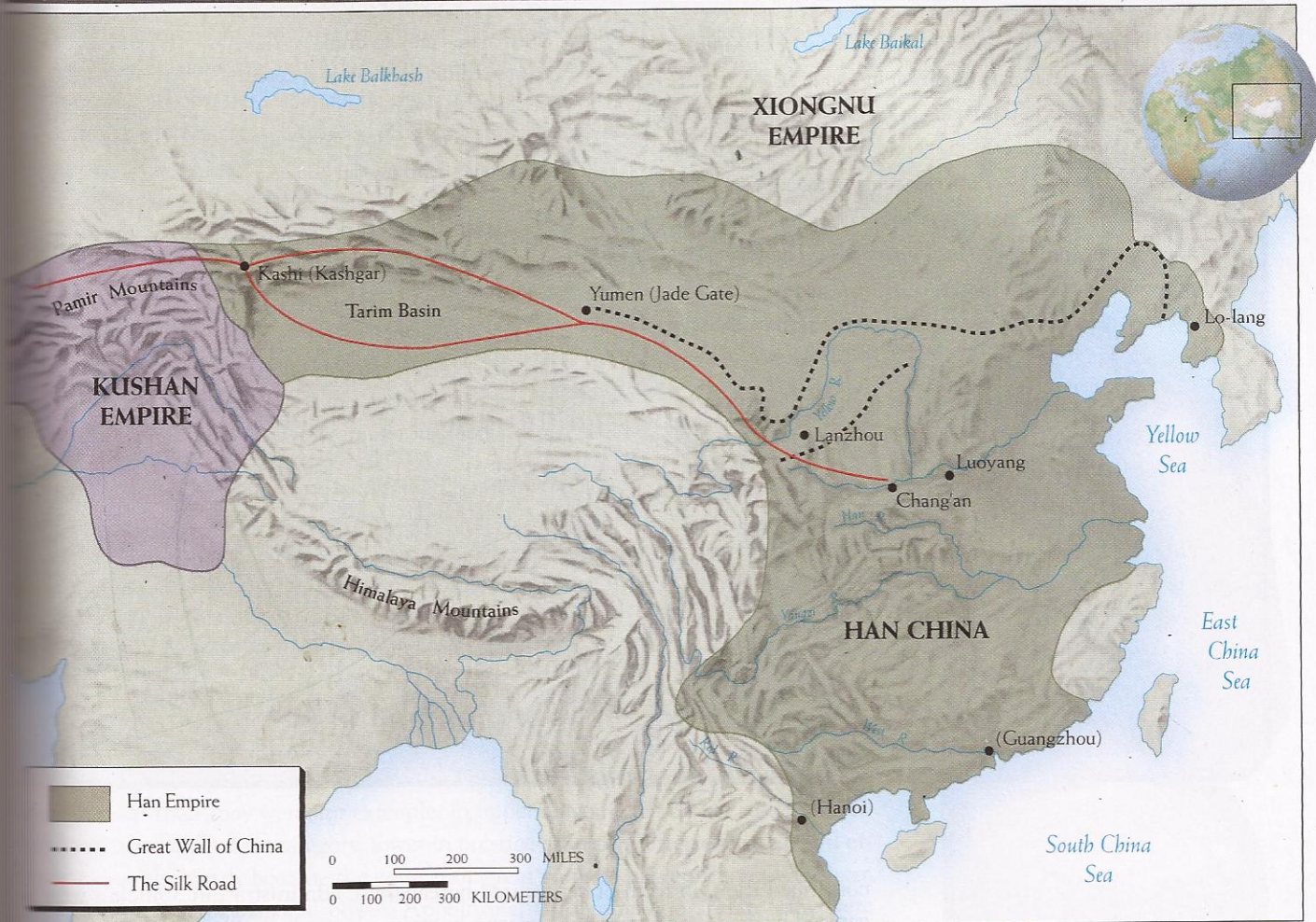


## MAP EXPLORATION

To explore this map further, go to <http://www.myhistorylab.com>



MAP 7-2. The Han Empire 206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.

At the peak of Han expansion, Han armies advanced far out into the steppe north of the Great Wall and west into Central Asia. The Silk Road to Rome passed through the Tarim Basin to the Kushan Empire, and on to western Asia and the Middle East.

**Why did** the Han seek to expand their empire to the west and south?

At the Yumen (Jade Gate) outpost at the eastern end of the Tarim basin. From this outpost, Chinese influence was extended over the rim oases of Central Asia, establishing the Silk Road that linked Chang'an with Rome (see Map 7-2).

### GOVERNMENT DURING THE FORMER HAN

To demonstrate how different they were from the Qin, early Han emperors set up some Zhou-like principalities, small, semiautonomous states with independent lords. But this was a token gesture. The principalities were closely superintended and then dismantled after several generations. Despite repudiating the Qin, the Han basically

#### Silk Road

Trade route from China to the West that stretched across Central Asia.





## DOCUMENT

## Chinese Women among the Nomads

The first of these selections is the lament of Xijun, a Chinese lady sent by Wudi in about 105 B.C.E. to be the wife of a nomad king of the Wusun people of Central Asia. Once there, she found her husband to be old and decrepit. He saw her only once or twice a year, when they drank a cup of wine together. They could not converse, as they had no language in common. The second selection, written centuries later, is by the Tang poet Du Fu, who visited the village of another woman sent to be the wife of a nomad king.

- **WHAT** does the fate of the women in these poems suggest about the foreign policy of the rulers of ancient China?

1.

My people have married me  
In a far corner of Earth;  
Sent me away to a strange land,  
To the king of the Wu-sun.  
A tent is my house,  
Of felt are my walls;  
Raw flesh my food

With mare's milk to drink.

Always thinking of my own country,

My heart sad within.

Would I were a yellow stork

And could fly to my old home!

2.

Ten thousand ranges and valleys approach the Ching Gate

And the village in which the Lady of Light was born and bred. She went out from the purple palace into the desert-land; She has now become a green grave in the yellow dusk.

Her face!—Can you picture a wind of the spring? Her spirit by moonlight returns with a tinkling Telling her eternal sorrow.

<sup>1</sup> Source: From *Chinese Poems* by Arthur Waley. Copyright © 1946 by George Allen and Unwin Ltd., an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers Ltd. Reprinted by permission of the Arthur Waley Estate.

<sup>2</sup> Source: From *The Jade Mountain* translated by Witter Bynner. Copyright 1929 and renewed 1957 by Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Random House, Inc. Used by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Random House, Inc.

continued the Qin form of centralized bureaucratic administration. Officials were organized by grades and were paid salaries in grain, plus cash or silk. They were recruited by sponsorship or recommendation: Provincial officials had the duty of recommending promising candidates. A school established at Chang'an was said to have 30,000 students by the Later Han. Bureaucracy grew until, by the first century B.C.E., there were more than 130,000 officials—perhaps not too many for a population that had reached 60 million.

During the Han Dynasty, this “Legalist” structure of government became partially Confucianized. It did not happen overnight. The first Han emperor despised Confucians as bookish pedants—he once urinated in the hat of a scholar. But Confucian ideas proved useful. The Mandate of Heaven provided an ethical justification for dynastic rule. A respect for old records and the written word fit in well with the vast bookkeeping the empire entailed. Gradually the Confucian classics were accepted as the standard for education. Confucianism was seen as shaping moral men who would be upright officials, even in the absence of external constraints. Increasingly, laws were interpreted and applied by men with a Confucian education.

The court during the Han Dynasty exhibited features that would appear in later dynasties as well. All authority centered on the emperor, the all-powerful “son of heaven.” When the emperor was weak, however, or ascended to the throne when





still a child, others competed to rule in his name. Four contenders for this surrogate role appeared and reappeared through Chinese history: court officials, the empress dowager, court eunuchs, and military commanders.

Court officials were selected for their ability to govern: They staffed the apparatus of government and advised the emperor directly. Apart from the emperor himself, they were usually the most powerful men in China, yet their position was often precarious. Few officials escaped being removed from office or banished once or twice during their careers. Of the seven prime ministers who served Wudi, five were executed.

Of the emperor's many wives, the empress dowager was the one whose child had been named as the heir to the throne. Her influence sometimes continued even after her child became an adult emperor. But she was most powerful as a regent for a child emperor. On Gaozu's death in 195 B.C.E., for example, the Empress Lu became the regent for her child, the new emperor. Aided by her relatives, she seized control of the court and murdered a rival, and when her son was about to come of age, she had him killed and a younger son made the heir, thus continuing her rule as regent. When she died in 180 B.C.E., loyal adherents of the imperial family who had opposed her rule massacred her relatives.

Court eunuchs came mostly from families of low social status. They were brought to the court as boys, castrated, and assigned to work as servants in the emperor's harem. They were thus in contact with the future emperor from the day he was born, became his childhood confidants, and often continued to advise him after he had gained the throne. Emperors found eunuchs useful as counterweights to officials. But to the scholars who wrote China's history, the eunuchs were greedy half-men, given to evil intrigues.

Military leaders, whether generals or rebels, were the usual founders of dynasties. In the later phase of most dynasties, regional military commanders often became semi-independent rulers. A few even usurped the throne. Yet they were less powerful at the Chinese court than they were, for example, in imperial Rome, partly because the military constituted a separate category, lower in prestige than the better-educated civil officials. It was also partly because the court took great pains to prevent its generals from establishing a base of personal power. Appointments to command a Han army were given only for specific campaigns, and commanders were appointed in pairs so that each would check the other.

Another characteristic of government during the Han and subsequent dynasties was that its functions were limited. It collected taxes, maintained military forces, administered laws, supported the imperial household, and carried out public works that were beyond the powers of local jurisdictions. But government in a district that remained orderly and paid its taxes was left largely in the hands of local notables and large landowners. This pattern was not, to be sure, unique to China. Most premodern governments, even those that were bureaucratic, floated on top of their local societies and only rarely reached down and interfered in the everyday lives of their subjects.

## THE SILK ROAD

Roman ladies loved diaphanous gowns of Chinese silk. Wealthy Chinese coveted Roman glass and gold. There was not a single camel train that traveled from Chang'an all the way to Rome. Instead, precious cargoes, moving more easily than persons, were passed across empires, like batons in relay races, from one network of merchants to another.

## QUICK REVIEW

### The Han Court

- ◆ Authority centered on the emperor
- ◆ When emperor was weak, others competed for power
- ◆ Court officials were chosen on the basis of their ability to govern



**Funerary Figure.** This kneeling figure is from the Han Dynasty.

**Does this statue seem to represent a particular person? Why or why not?**





During the Han and later dynasties, the route began with a network of Chinese or Central Asian traders that stretched from the Chinese capital to Lanzhou in north-eastern China, through the Gansu corridor to Yumen or later Dunhuang. It then crossed the inhospitable Tarim basin, intermittently under Chinese military control, from oasis to oasis, to Kashi (Kashgar). From Kashi, the route continued in a northerly sweep to Tashkent, Samarkand, and Bukhara or in a southerly sweep to Teheran, Baghdad, and Damascus, and finally on to the Mediterranean ports of Tyre, Antioch, and Byzantium (Constantinople), which traded with Rome. (See Map 7–2.) Of the goods that departed Chang’an, only a minute portion reached Rome, which was not a destination as much as the center of the westernmost trade network. Only the thinnest trickle of Roman goods reached China.

The Silk Road, and the alternate oceanic route, point up China’s isolation from other high centers of civilization. Goods were in transit more than half a year; the distance was measured in thousands of miles; camel caravans at times traveled as little as 15 miles a day. The route was hazardous, the climate extreme. Crossing deserts and mountain passes, travelers experienced cold, hunger, sandstorms, and bandits.

Most Chinese foreign trade was with their immediate steppe neighbors. The Chinese exported silk, lacquer, metal work, and later jewels, musk, and rhubarb (a digestive aid). They imported horses for their army, cattle, sheep, donkeys, and jade from Khotan and also woolens, medicines, indigo, and the occasional exotic animal. Only the most precious goods made their way to distant empires. Silk—light, compact, and valuable—was ideal. The Romans and Chinese had only the vaguest idea of where the other was located and knew nothing of the other’s civilization. Romans thought silk came from a plant.

Exotic goods hawked in distant bazaars lend an aura of romance to the “Silk Road,” but its true significance was as a transmission belt. In an early age China may have borrowed the chariot, compound bow, wheat, domesticated horses, and the stirrup from western Asia. Even the idea of mold-casting bronze may have come from beyond China’s frontiers. Chinese technologies of paper making, iron casting, water-powered mills, and shoulder collars for draft animals, and later the compass and gunpowder, spread slowly from China to the West. Seeds of plants went in both directions, as did germs. During the Later Han, the Roman Empire lost a quarter of its population to an epidemic that, some say, appeared in China forty years later with equally dire results. During the fourteenth century, bubonic plague may have spread through the Mongol Empire from southwestern China to Central Asia to the Middle East, and then on to Europe as the Black Death. Missionary religions traveled east on the Silk Road: Buddhism toward the end of the Han Dynasty and Islam centuries later.


## DECLINE AND USURPATION

During the last decade of Wudi’s rule in the early first century B.C.E., military expenses ran ahead of revenues. His successor cut back on military costs, eased economic controls, and reduced taxes. But over the next several generations, large landowners began to use their growing influence in provincial politics to avoid paying taxes. State revenues declined. The tax burden on smaller landowners and free peasants grew heavier. In 22 B.C.E., rebellions broke out in several parts of the empire. At court, too, decline set in. There was a succession of weak emperors. Intrigues, nepotism, and factional struggles grew apace. Even officials began to sense that the dynasty no longer had the approval of heaven. The dynastic cycle approached its end.

### QUICK REVIEW

#### Decline of the Han

- Scheming, dissension, and violence in court
- Large landowners gained power
- Free farmers fled south
- Popular rebellions suppressed by generals, who then seized power

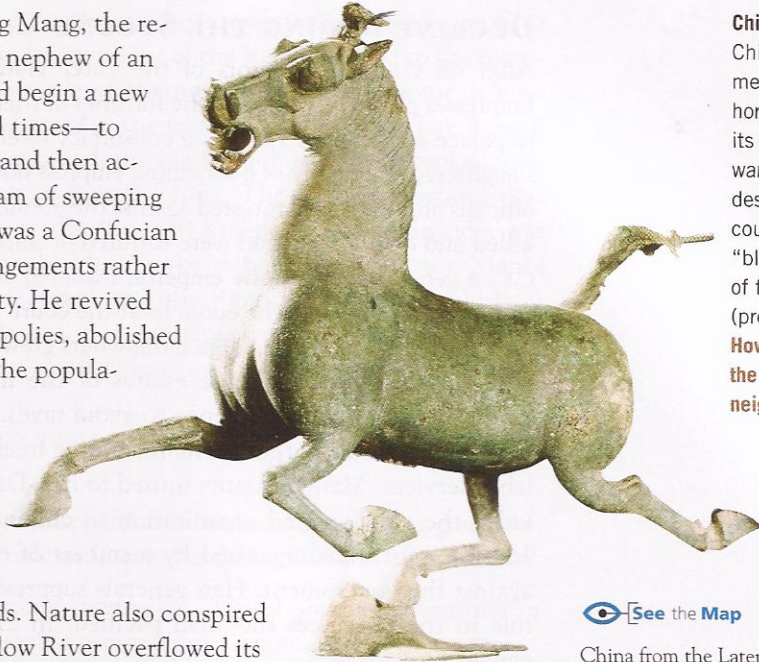
 Watch the Video  
The Silk Road: 5,000 miles and  
1,500 Years of Cultural Interchange  
at [myhistorylab.com](http://myhistorylab.com)





Many at the court urged Wang Mang, the regent for the infant emperor and the nephew of an empress, to become the emperor and begin a new dynasty. Wang Mang refused several times—to demonstrate his lack of eagerness—and then accepted in 8 C.E. He drew up a program of sweeping reforms based on ancient texts. He was a Confucian yet relied on new institutional arrangements rather than moral reform to improve society. He revived ancient titles, expanded state monopolies, abolished private slavery (about 1 percent of the population), made loans to poor peasants, and then moved to confiscate large private estates.

These reforms alienated many. Merchants disliked the monopolies. Large landowners resisted the expropriation of their lands. Nature also conspired to bring down Wang Mang: The Yellow River overflowed its banks and changed its course, destroying the northern Chinese irrigation system. Several years of poor harvests produced famines. The Xiongnu overran China's northern borders. In 18 C.E., a secret peasant society rose in rebellion. In 23 C.E., rebels attacked Chang'an, and Wang Mang was killed and eaten by rebel troops. He had tried to found a new dynasty from within a decrepit court without an independent military base. The attempt was futile. Internal wars continued in China for two more years until a large landowner, who had become the leader of a rebel army, emerged triumphant in 25 C.E. Because he was from a branch of the imperial family, his new dynasty was viewed as a restoration of the Han.



**Chinese Galloping Horse.** China traded with steppe merchants to obtain the horses needed to equip its armies against steppe warriors. Especially desired by the Chinese court were the fabled “blood-sweating” horses of far-off Ferghana (present-day Tajikistan). **How were horses used by the Chinese and by their neighbors?**

 See the Map

China from the Later Zhou Era to the Han Era at [myhistorylab.com](http://myhistorylab.com)

## CHRONOLOGY

### THE DYNASTIC HISTORY OF CHINA'S FIRST EMPIRE

256–206 B.C.E.	Qin Dynasty
206 B.C.E.–8 C.E.	Former Han Dynasty
25–220 C.E.	Later Han Dynasty

## LATER HAN (25–220 C.E.) AND ITS AFTERMATH

### FIRST CENTURY

The founder of the Later Han moved his capital east to Luoyang. Under the first emperor and his two successors, there was a return to strong central government and a *laissez-faire* economy. Agriculture and population recovered. By the end of the first century C.E., China was as prosperous as it had been during the good years of the Former Han. The shift from pacification and recuperation to military expansion came earlier than it had during the previous dynasty. During the reign of the first emperor, south China and Vietnam were retaken. Dissension among the Xiongnu enabled the Chinese to secure an alliance with some of the southern tribes in 50 C.E., and in 59 C.E. Chinese armies crossed the Gobi Desert and defeated the northern Xiongnu. This defeat sparked the migrations, some historians say, that brought those nomadic warriors to the southern Russian steppes and then, in the fifth century C.E., to Europe, where they were known as the Huns of Attila. In 97 C.E. a Chinese general led an army to the shores of the Caspian Sea. The Chinese expansion in inner Asia, coupled with more lenient government policies toward merchants, facilitated the camel caravans that carried Chinese silk across the Tarim basin and, ultimately, to merchants in Iran, Palestine, and Rome.

**WHY DID** the Han Dynasty collapse?







## DECLINE DURING THE SECOND CENTURY

After 88 C.E. the emperors of the Later Han were ineffectual and short-lived. Empresses plotted to advance the fortunes of their families. Emperors turned for help to palace eunuchs. In 159 C.E. a conspiracy of eunuchs in the service of an emperor slaughtered the family of a scheming empress dowager and ruled at the court. When officials and students protested against the eunuch dictatorship, over a hundred were killed and over a thousand were tortured or imprisoned. In another incident in 190 C.E., a general deposed one emperor, installed another, killed the empress dowager, and massacred most of the eunuchs at the court.

In the countryside, large landowners grew more powerful. They harbored private armies. Farmers on the estates of the mighty were reduced to serfs. The landowners used their influence to avoid taxes. Great numbers of free farmers fled south for the same purpose. The remaining freeholders paid ever-heavier taxes and labor services. Many peasants turned to neo-Daoist religious movements that provided the ideology and organization to channel their discontent into action. In 184 C.E. rebellions organized by members of the religious movements broke out against the government. Han generals suppressed the rebellions but stayed on to rule in the provinces they had pacified. In 220 C.E. they deposed the last Han emperor.

## AFTERMATH OF EMPIRE

For more than three and a half centuries after the fall of the Han, China was disunited. For several generations it was divided into three kingdoms, whose heroic warriors and scheming statesmen were made famous by wandering storytellers. These figures later peopled the *Tale of the Three Kingdoms*, a great romantic epic of Chinese literature.

Chinese history during the post-Han centuries had two characteristics. The first was the dominant role played by the great aristocratic landowning families. With vast estates, huge numbers of serfs, fortified manor houses, and private armies, they were beyond the control of most governments. Because they took over many of the functions of local government, some historians describe post-Han China as having reverted to the quasi-feudalism of the Zhou. The second characteristic of these centuries was that northern and southern China developed in different ways.

In the south, a succession of six, ever-weaker states had their capital at Nanjing. Although these six southern states were called dynasties—and the entire period of Chinese history from 220 B.C.E. to 589 C.E. is called the Six Dynasties era after them—they were in fact short-lived kingdoms plagued by intrigues, usurpations, and coups d'état; frequently at war with northern states; and in constant fear of their own generals. The main developments in the south were (1) continuing economic growth and the emergence of Nanjing as a thriving center of commerce; (2) the ongoing absorption of tribal peoples into Chinese society and culture; (3) large-scale immigrations of Chinese fleeing the north; and (4) the spread of Buddhism and its penetration to the heart of Chinese culture.



**A Green Glazed Pottery Model of a Later Han Dynasty Watchtower (87.6 x 35.6 x 38.1 cm).** Note the resemblance to later Chinese Buddhist pagodas.

**How might watchtowers have been used during the Later Han dynasty?**





In the north, state formation depended on the interaction of nomads and Chinese. During the Han Dynasty, Chinese invasions of the steppe had led to the incorporation of semi-Sinicized Xiongnu as the northernmost tier of the Chinese defense system—just as Germanic tribes had acted as the teeth and claws of the late Roman Empire. But as the Chinese state weakened, the highly mobile nomads broke loose, joined with other tribes, and began to invade China. The short-lived states that they formed are usually referred to as the “Sixteen Kingdoms.” One kingdom was founded by invaders of Tibetan stock. Most spoke Altaic languages: the Xianbi (proto-Mongols), the Tuoba (proto-Turks), and the Ruan Ruan (who would later appear in eastern Europe as the Avars). But differences of language and ancestry were less important than these tribes’ similarities:

1. All began as steppe nomads with a way of life different from that of agricultural China.
2. After forming states, all became at least partially Sinicized. Chinese from great families, which had preserved Han traditions, served as their tutors and administrators.
3. All were involved in wars—among themselves, against southern dynasties, or against conservative steppe tribes that resisted Sinicization.
4. Buddhism was as powerful in the north as in the south. As a universal religion, it acted as a bridge between “barbarians” and Chinese—just as Christianity was a unifying force in post-Roman Europe. The barbarian rulers of the north were especially attracted to its magical side. Usually Buddhism was made the state religion. Of the northern states, the most durable was the Northern Wei (386–534 C.E.), famed for its Buddhist sculpture.

## HAN THOUGHT AND RELIGION

Poems describe the splendor of Chang’an and Luoyang: broad boulevards, tiled gateways, open courtyards, watchtowers, and imposing walls. Most splendid of all were the palaces of emperors, with their audience halls, vast chambers, harem quarters, and parks containing artificial lakes and rare animals and birds. But today little remains of the grandeur of the Han. Whereas Roman ruins abound in Italy and circle the Mediterranean, in China nothing remains above ground. Only the items buried in tombs—pottery, bronzes, musical instruments, gold and silver jewelry, lacquerware, and clay figurines—give a glimpse of the rich material culture of the Han period. Only the paintings on the walls of tombs tell us of its art. But a wealth of written records conveys the sophistication and depth of Han culture. Perhaps the two most important areas were philosophy and history.

### HAN CONFUCIANISM

A major accomplishment of the early Han was the recovery of texts that had been lost during the Qin persecution of scholars. Some were retrieved from the walls of houses where they had been hidden; others were reproduced from memory by scholars. Debate arose regarding the relative authenticity of the old and new texts—a controversy that has continued until modern times. In 51 B.C.E. and again in 79 C.E. councils were held to determine the true meaning of the Confucian classics. In 175 C.E. an approved, official version of the texts was inscribed on stone tablets.

**WHAT WAS** the extent of Buddhist influence under the Han?







The first dictionary was compiled in about 100 C.E. Containing about 9,000 characters, it helped promote a uniform system of writing. In Han times, as today, Chinese from the north could not converse with Chinese from the southeastern coast, but a common written language bridged differences of pronunciation, contributing to Chinese unity. Scholars began writing commentaries on the classics, a major scholarly activity throughout Chinese history. Scholars learned the classics by heart and used classical allusions in their writing.

Han philosophers also extended Zhou Confucianism by adding to it the teachings of cosmological naturalism. Zhou Confucianists had assumed that the moral force of a virtuous emperor would not only order society but also harmonize nature. Han Confucianists explained why. Dong Zhongshu (ca. 179–104 B.C.E.), for example, held that all nature was a single, interrelated system. Just as summer always follows spring, so does one color, one virtue, one planet, one element, one number, and one officer of the court always take precedence over another. All reflect the systematic workings of yang and yin and the five elements. And just as one dresses appropriately to the season, so was it important for the emperor to choose policies appropriate to the sequences inherent in nature. If he was moral, if he acted in accord with Heaven's natural system, then all would go well. But if he acted inappropriately, then Heaven would send a portent as a warning—a blue dog, a rat holding its tail in its mouth, an eclipse, or a comet. If the portent was not heeded, wonders and then misfortunes would follow. It was the Confucian scholars, of course, who claimed to understand nature's messages and advised the emperor.

It is easy to criticize Han philosophy as a pseudoscientific or mechanistic view of nature, but it represented a new effort by the Chinese to encompass and comprehend the interrelationships of the natural world. This effort led to inventions like the seismograph and to advances in astronomy, music, and medicine. It was also during the Han that the Chinese invented paper, the wheelbarrow, the stern-post rudder, and the compass (known as the “south-pointing chariot”).

## HISTORY

The Chinese were the greatest historians of the premodern world. They wrote more history than anyone else, and what they wrote was usually more accurate. Apart from the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and the scholarship of Confucius himself, history writing in China began during the Han Dynasty. Why the Chinese were so history-minded has been variously explained: because the Chinese tradition is this-worldly; because Confucianists were scholarly and their veneration for the classics carried over to the written word; because history was seen as a lesson book (the Chinese called it a mirror) for statesmen, and thus a necessity for the literate men who operated the centralized Chinese state.

The practice of using actual documents and firsthand accounts of events began with Sima Qian (d. 85 B.C.E.), who set out to write a history of the known world from the most ancient times down to the age of the emperor Wudi. His *Historical Records* consisted of 130 substantial chapters (with a total of over 700,000 characters) divided into “Basic Annals”; “Chronological Tables”; “Treatises” on rites, music, astronomy, the calendar, and so on; “Hereditary Houses”; and seventy chapters of “Biographies,” including descriptions of foreign peoples. A second great work, *The Book of the Han*, was written by Ban Gu (d. 92 C.E.). It applied the analytical schema of Sima Qian to a single dynasty, the Former Han, and established the pattern by which each dynasty wrote the history of its predecessor.

### QUICK REVIEW

#### Chinese Historians

- ◆ Greatest historians of premodern world
- ◆ History seen as a lesson book for statesmen
- ◆ Practice of using actual documents and firsthand accounts began with Sima Qian (d. 85 B.C.E.)

#### Read the Document

Sima Qian, *The Life of Meng Tian*,  
Builder of the Great Wall  
at [myhistorylab.com](http://myhistorylab.com)



## NEO-DAOISM

As the Han Dynasty waned, it became increasingly difficult to implement the Confucian ethic in the sociopolitical order. Some scholars abandoned Confucianism altogether in favor of **Neo-Daoism**, or “mysterious learning.” A few wrote commentaries on the classical Daoist texts that had been handed down from the Zhou. The *Zhuangzi* was especially popular. Other scholars, defining the natural as the pleasurable, withdrew from society to engage in witty “pure conversations.” They discussed poetry and philosophy, played the lute, and drank wine. The most famous were the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove of the third century C.E. One sage was always accompanied by a servant carrying a jug of wine and a spade—the one for his pleasure, the other to dig his grave should he die. Another wore no clothes at home. When criticized, he replied that the cosmos was his home, and his house his clothes. “Why are you in my pants?” he asked a discomfited visitor. Still another took a boat to visit a friend on a snowy night, but on arriving at his friend’s door, turned around and went home. When pressed for an explanation, he said that it had been his pleasure to go, and that when the impulse died, it was his pleasure to return. This story reveals a scorn for convention coupled with an admiration for an inner spontaneity, however eccentric.

Another concern of what is called Neo-Daoism was immortality. Some sought it in dietary restrictions and yoga-like meditation, some in sexual abstinence or orgies. Others, seeking elixirs to prolong life, dabbled in alchemy, and although no magical elixir was ever found, the schools of alchemy to which the search gave rise are credited with the discovery of medicines, dyes, glazes, and gunpowder.

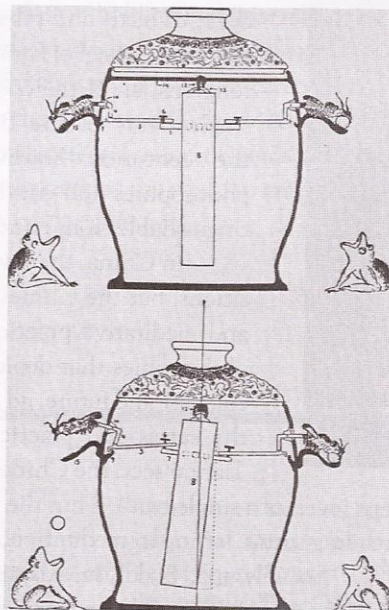
Meanwhile, popular religious cults arose among the common people. Since they included the Daoist classics among their sacred texts, these popular cults are also called Neo-Daoist. Like most folk religions, they contained an amalgam of beliefs, practices, and superstitions. They had a pantheon of gods and immortals and taught that the good or evil done in this life would be rewarded or punished in the innumerable heavens or hells of an afterlife. These cults had priests, shamans who practiced faith healing, seers, and sorceresses. For a time, they also had hierarchical church organizations, but these were smashed at the end of the second century C.E. Local Daoist temples and monasteries, however, continued until modern times. With many Buddhist accretions, they furnished the religious beliefs of the bulk of the Chinese population. Even in recent decades, these sects flourished in Taiwan and Chinese communities in Southeast Asia. They were suppressed in China in the Maoist era but were revived during the 1990s.

## BUDDHISM

Central Asian missionaries, following the trade routes east, brought Buddhism to China in the first century C.E. It was at first viewed as a new Daoist sect, which is not surprising because early translators used Daoist terms to render Buddhist concepts. **Nirvana**, for example, was translated as “not doing” (*wuwei*). In the second century C.E., confusion about the two

### Neo-Daoism

A revival of Daoist “mysterious learning” that flourished as a reaction against Confucianism during the Han Dynasty.



**A Chinese Seismograph.** The suspended weight swings in the direction of the earthquake. This moves a lever, and a dragon drops a ball into the mouth of one of the four waiting ceramic frogs.

**How did the “mysterious learning” of Neo-Daoism contribute to science, technology, and medicine?**

**Nirvana** In Buddhism the attainment of release from the wheel of *karma*.





religions led to the very Chinese view that Laozi had gone to India, where the Buddha had become his disciple, and that Buddhism was the Indian form of Daoism.

As the Han sociopolitical order collapsed in the third century C.E., Buddhism spread rapidly. (There are parallels to the spread of Christianity at the end of the Roman Empire.) Although an alien religion in China, Buddhism had some advantages over Daoism:

1. It was a doctrine of personal salvation, offering several routes to that goal.
2. It upheld high standards of personal ethics.
3. It had systematic philosophies, and during its early centuries in China, it continued to receive inspiration from India.
4. It drew on the Indian tradition of meditative practices and psychologies, which were the most sophisticated in the world.

By the fifth century C.E. Buddhism had spread over all of China (see Map 7–3). Occasionally it was persecuted by Daoist emperors, but most courts supported Buddhism. The “Bodhisattva Emperor” Wu of the southern Liang Dynasty three times gave himself to a monastery and had to be ransomed back by his disgusted courtiers. Temples and monasteries abounded in both the north and the south. There were communities of women as well as of men. Chinese artists produced Buddhist painting and sculpture of surpassing beauty, and thousands of monk-scholars labored to translate sutras and philosophical treatises. Chinese monks went on pilgrimages to India. The record left by Fa Xian, who traveled to India overland and back by sea between 399 and 413 C.E., became a prime source of Indian history.

The Tang monk Xuanzang went to India from 629 until 645. Several centuries later, his pilgrimage was novelized as *Journey to the West*. The novel joins faith, magic, and adventure.

A comparison of Indian and Chinese Buddhism highlights some distinctive features of its spread. Buddhism in India had begun as a reform movement. Forget speculative philosophies and elaborate metaphysics, taught the Buddha, and concentrate on simple truths: Life is suffering, the cause of suffering is desire, death does not stop the endless cycle of birth and rebirth; only the attainment of *nirvana* releases one from the “wheel of *karma*.” Thus, in this most otherworldly of the world’s religions, all of the cosmic drama of salvation was compressed into the single figure of the Buddha meditating under the Bodhi tree. Over the centuries, however, Indian Buddhism developed contending philosophies and conflicting sects and, having become virtually indistinguishable from Hinduism, was largely reabsorbed after 1000 C.E.

In China, there were a number of sects with different doctrinal positions, but the Chinese genius was more syncretic. It took in the sutras and meditative practices of early Buddhism. It took in the Mahayana philosophies that depicted a succession of Buddhas, cosmic and historical, past and future, all embodying a single ultimate reality. It also took in the sutras and practices of Buddhist devotional sects. Finally, in the Tiantai sect, the Chinese joined together these various elements as different levels of a single truth. Thus the monastic routine of a Tiantai monk would include reading sutras, sitting in meditation, and also practicing devotional exercises.

Socially, too, Buddhism adapted to China. Ancestor worship demanded heirs to perform the sacrifices. Without progeny, ancestors might become “hungry ghosts.” Hence, the first son was expected to marry and have children, whereas the second son, if he were

### Read the Document

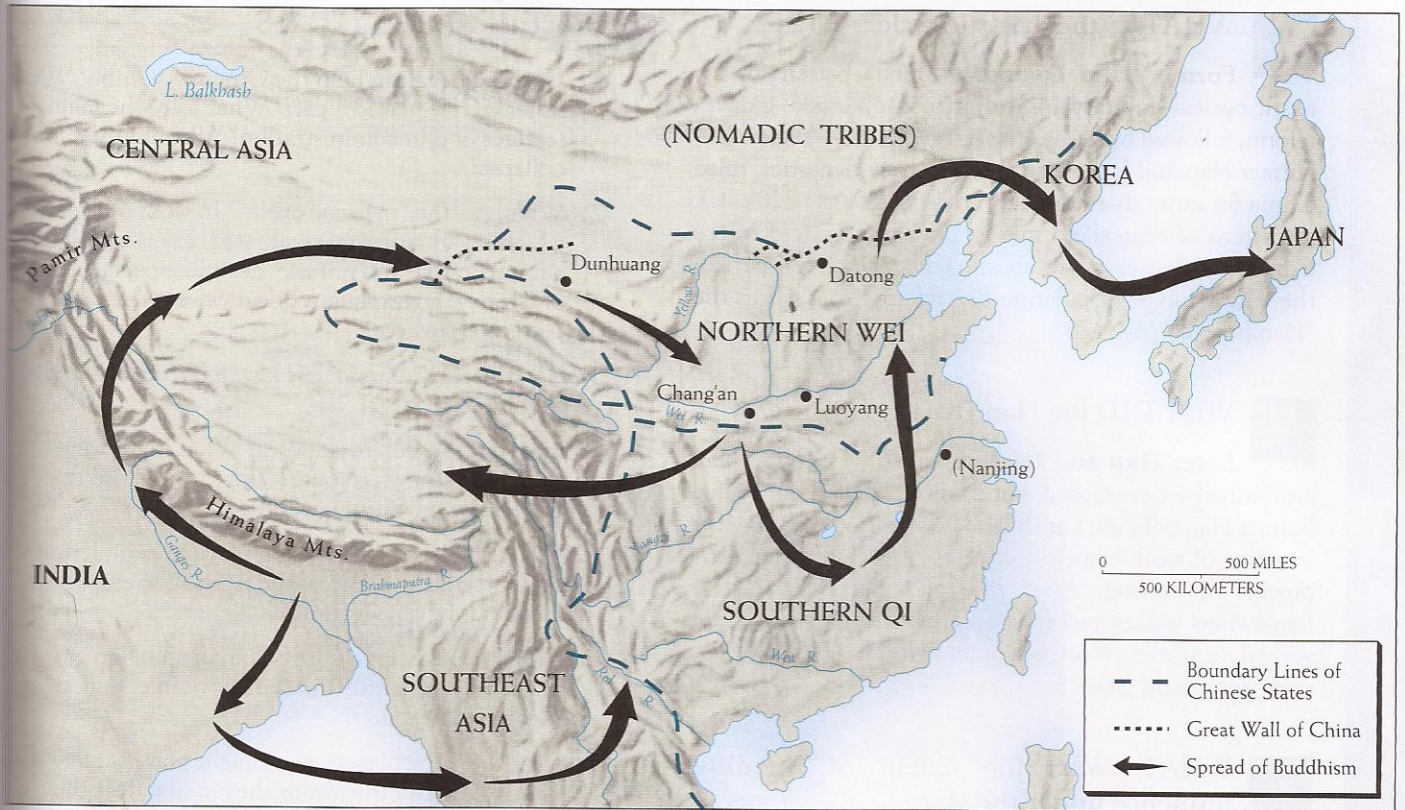
Faxien, Record of Buddhist Countries, Chapter Sixteen at [myhistorylab.com](http://myhistorylab.com)



**A mendicant friar of the Tang Dynasty.** He is accompanied by a tiger, indicating the extent to which he has become one with nature and with his own true nature.

**In what ways did the Chinese adapt Buddhism to fit their culture?**





**MAP 7-3. The Spread of Buddhism and Chinese States in 500 C.E.**

Buddhism originated in a Himalayan state in northwest India. It spread in one wave south to India and on to Southeast Asia as far as Java. But it also spread into northwest India, Afghanistan, Central Asia, and then to China, Korea, and Japan.

**What is** the relationship between the spread of Buddhism and trade?

so inclined, might become a monk. The practice also arose of holding Buddhist masses for dead ancestors. Still another difference between China and India was the more extensive regulation of Buddhism by the state in China. Just as Buddhism was not to threaten the integrity of the family, so Buddhism was not to reduce the taxes paid on land. As a result, limits were placed on the number of monasteries, nunneries, and monastic lands, and the state had to give its permission before men or women abandoned the world to enter a religious establishment—though these regulations were not always enforced.

## SUMMARY

**HOW DID** the Qin unify China?

**Qin Unification of China.** The state of Qin unified China in 221 B.C.E. through military conquest. To the north it built the Great Wall to prevent incursions by the nomadic Xiongnu peoples. It ruled through a

centralized bureaucracy in line with its Legalist philosophy. But the pace of its reform was so frenetic and its legal punishments were so harsh that it alienated its people. The Qin collapsed after the death of the First Emperor. *page 175*