

China: The Classical Dynasties

A review of China's first five dynasties

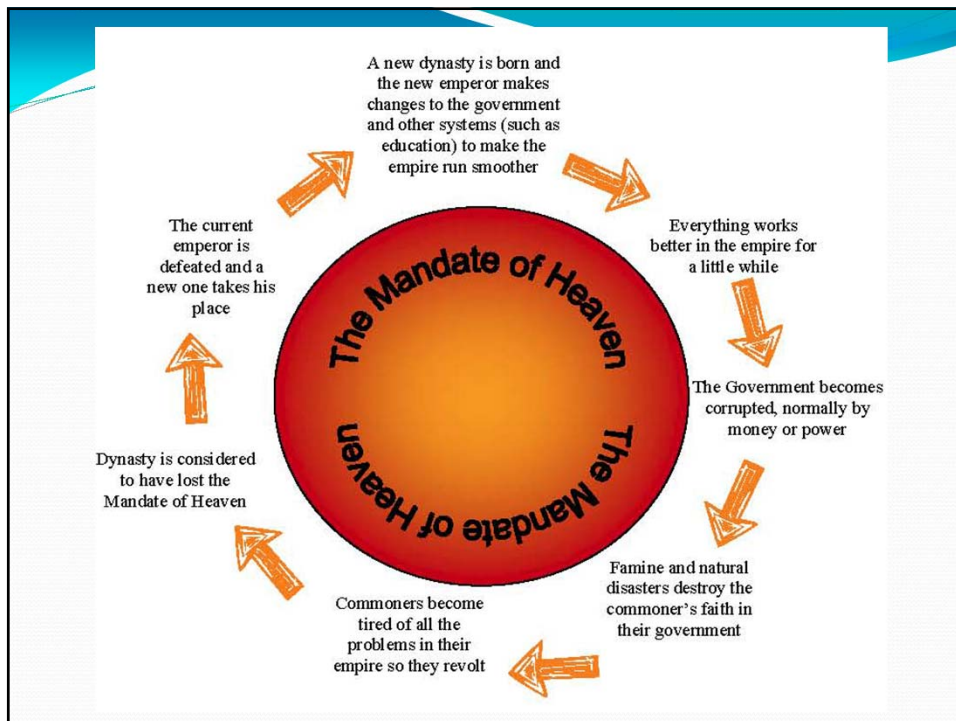
The Shang Dynasty

- 1570-1045 BCE
- Yellow River Valley
- Use of tortoise shells for ancestor worship
- Warriors; built cities with massive walls (30 feet thick in places)
- Use of jade in burials reflect trade and belief in it's magical properties
- Skilled bronze casters
- Buried their warriors with live servants
- Slave revolt overthrew the dynasty



The Zhou Dynasty

- 1045-403 BCE
- Wei River Valley
- “Mandate of Heaven” – moral rulers would be allowed to continue ruling (Shang had been immoral and therefore overthrown)
- Emperor was the center of Chinese society
- Feudal society (powerful nobles governed their own states)
- All possessions of the father passed to his eldest son upon death thereby preserving family wealth and power
- Capital at Xian – beginning of the Silk Road



Period of the Warring States

- Disorder or loose government of Later Zhou devolves into “Warring States Period”
 - Autonomous smaller regions emerge as largely independent nations
 - Feudal lords attempting to gain power
 - Periodic war ensues
 - One among the several emerges to establish a new, far more centralized dynasty
 - Qin Dynasty emerges as the first Chinese “Empire” 221 BCE (pronounced “chin”)

Qin Dynasty: Politics

- Victory in Warring States Period was due to superior military and building loyalty among citizens with land reform
- First Emperor = **Qin Shihuangdi** (221-209 BCE)
 - Strong centralized administration like the Egyptians and Persians
 - Divided China into provinces but maintained strict control
 - Favored Legalism principles
 - Built roads for communication and governing
 - Standardized weights, measures, coins, and laws
 - Standardization of Chinese script/writing
 - Criticized by Confucians and Daoists = executions and book-burnings
 - Forced labor for public projects (defensive walls – early Great Wall)
- Harshness of the Qin regime was its downfall – China’s most cruel ruler



Qin Dynasty: Interactions

- Attacked one state after another until finally had brought China under the sway of a single state
- Shihuangdi moved many noble families from their land to the cities
- Built roads to facilitate communication and movement of armies



Qin Dynasty: Religion

- A period of non-religion / focused on Legalism
- Qin Shihuangdi demanded burning of all philosophical, ethical, historical, and literature books due to their criticism
- People tried to keep opinions to themselves for fear of government

Qin Dynasty:

Arts/Architecture/Agriculture

- Decline in the arts during the Qin dynasty
- *Admonitions for Women* by Ban Zhao
 - Women should be humble, obedient, and subservient
- Built defensive walls (early Great Wall)
- 6,000 terra-cotta warriors in the tomb of Shihuangdi
- Huge construction projects
- Emperor himself was very interested in Daoist practices to prolong his life or to gain immortality

Qin Dynasty: Technology

- Great Wall was started to protect against northern invaders
- Standardized chariot axle widths to deal with ruts in the roads

Qin Dynasty: Economy

- Money, weights, and measures were standardized for smoother transactions
- Land granted for increased agricultural production

Qin Dynasty: Society

- Highly patriarchal
- Exploitation of the peasantry
- State had absolute control of the people
- Nobility lost most of its power
- Few changes from the Zhou
 - Average household size of five
 - Families were the essential unit of an orderly society
 - Children obedient to their elders (filial piety)
 - Women obedient to their husbands

Han Dynasty: Politics

- 200 BCE - 200 CE
- Emperor was supreme judge and law maker
- First Han emperor = **Liu Bang**
 - Consolidated control with persistence and an immensely loyal army
 - Tried to allow provinces to govern themselves but they did not support him during an invasion = central control
- Qin politics carried into the Han dynasty
- Most successful Han emperor = **Han Wudi** (the Martial Emperor)
 - Centralized rule with elaborate bureaucracy
 - Added more canals and roads
 - Founded an **Imperial University**
 - **Scholar-bureaucrats** educated under Confucianism
 - Relied on Legalism to sustain his empire
- Later Han emperors = failed to address **land distribution issues**
 - Dynasty deteriorated into competing factions of bureaucrats, eunuchs, and imperial family members
- Internal weaknesses led to division into regional states

Han Dynasty: Interactions

- Han Wudi pursued imperial expansion
- More roads and canals to expand trade
- Persistent problem from nomads in the northwest (Xiongnu) – highly disciplined army dominated much of central Asia
 - Tried economic and diplomatic appeasement but bribes of tribute and marriages did not have lasting effects
 - Han Wudi defeated the **Xiongnu** along with **Korea** and **Vietnam**
- Silk Roads from east Asia to the Mediterranean
- Population tripled to 60 million by 9 CE
- Persistent famines, devastating floods and droughts

Han Dynasty: Religion

- Focused on ancestor worship
- Families made ritual sacrifices of animals
- Daoism considered the main religion of the dynasty
- Primitive religions still existed
- Folk lore from Daoism and Confucianism

Han Dynasty: Arts/Architecture/Agriculture

- Confucian Education System
- Inequitable land distribution – profitable land in the hands of the wealthy
 - Poor resorted to banditry and rebellion (**Yellow Turban Rebellion**)
 - Han leaders did not want to alienate the large landholders
 - **Wang Mang** (“socialist emperor”) briefly seized the throne and proclaimed a new Xin dynasty while trying to achieve land reform
- **Civil Service Exam** for those involved in government
- **Confucianism** becomes state doctrine
- Learned to craft fine utensils

Han Dynasty: Technology

- Iron metallurgy
- Iron weapons and armor made for a skilled military
- Invention of paper (less expensive than silk scrolls)
- Invention of high accurate sundials and calendars
- Water-power mills
- Censuses
- Invented ship rudders which simplified the steering of sailing vessels
- ** possibly gunpowder **

Han Dynasty: Economy

- Silk production (valued as far away as Rome)
- Large plots of land given to the wealthy
- Development of craft industries
- Higher taxation for military expeditions – eventually needed to confiscate businesses and property as well (hurt the economy because it discouraged investors)
- Heavy taxation on landowners meant nobles paid farmers less money for more work
- High commodity prices

Han Dynasty: Society

- Widening gap between the rich and the poor led to increased social tensions
- Only the wealthy could realistically prepare for the civil service exam
- Stratified society
- Few changes from the Zhou
 - Average household size of five
 - Families were the essential unit of an orderly society
 - Children obedient to their elders (filial piety)
 - Women obedient to their husbands