

CHAPTER 8

THE UNIFICATION OF CHINA

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the unification and expansion of China during the Qin and Han dynasties (221 B.C.E. to 220 C.E.). A rich tradition of the social and political philosophies of Confucians, Daoists, and Legalists was the foundation on which these and later dynasties rested. Some of the significant elements contributing to the unification of China in this period were

- The building of a centralized bureaucracy staffed with professionals educated in Confucian thought and values
- A prosperous economy based on technological and industrial development and long-distance trade
- The standardization of the written language

OUTLINE

I. In search of political and social order

A. Confucius (551–479 B.C.E.) and his school

1. Confucius
 - a) Educator and political advisor
 - b) Sayings were compiled in the *Analects* by his disciples
2. Confucian ideas
 - a) Fundamentally moral and ethical in character
 - b) Thoroughly practical: how to restore political and social order
 - c) Concentrated on formation of *junzi*—"superior individuals"
 - d) Edited and compiled the Zhou classics for his disciples to study
3. Key Confucian values
 - a) *Ren*—a sense of humanity, kindness, benevolence
 - b) *Li*—a sense of propriety, courtesy, respect, deference to elders
 - c) *Xiao*—filial piety, familial obligation
 - d) Cultivate personal morality and *junzi* for bringing order to China
4. Mencius (372–289 B.C.E.), spokesman for the Confucian school
 - a) Believed in the goodness of human nature (*ren*)
 - b) Advocated government by benevolence and humanity
5. Xunzi (298–238 B.C.E.) had a less positive view of human nature

- a) Believed that humans selfishly pursue own interests
 - b) Preferred harsh social discipline to bring order to society
 - c) Advocated moral education and good public behavior
- B. Daoism featured prominent critics of Confucian activism
- 1. Preferred philosophical reflection and introspection, a life in harmony with nature
 - 2. Laozi, founder of Daoism, allegedly wrote the *Daodejing* (*Classic of the Way and of Virtue*)
 - 3. *Zhuangzi* (compendium of Daoist philosophy)
 - 4. The *Dao*—the way of nature, the way of the cosmos
 - a) Elusive concept: an eternal principle governing all the workings of the world
 - b) *Dao* is passive and yielding, does nothing yet accomplishes everything
 - c) Humans should tailor their behavior to the passive and yielding nature of the *Dao*
 - d) Ambition and activism had only brought the world to chaos
 - e) Doctrine of *wuwei*: disengagement from worldly affairs, simple life
 - f) Advocated small, self-sufficient communities
 - 5. Political implications: served as counterbalance to Confucian activism
- C. Legalism
- 1. The doctrine of practical and efficient statecraft
 - a) No concern with ethics and morality
 - b) No concern with the principles governing nature
 - 2. Shang Yang (ca. 390–338 B.C.E.), chief minister of Qin and Legalist writer
 - 3. Han Feizi (ca. 280–233 B.C.E.) synthesized Legalist ideas in essays
 - 4. Legalist doctrine
 - a) The state's strength was in agriculture and military force
 - b) Discouraged commerce, education, and the arts
 - c) Harnessing self-interest of the people for the needs of the state
 - d) Called for harsh penalties even for minor infractions
 - e) Advocated collective responsibility before the law
 - f) Not popular among Chinese, but practical; put end to Period of Warring States

II. The unification of China

- A. The Qin dynasty
 - 1. Qin, located in west China, adopted Legalist policies
 - a) Encouraged agriculture, resulted in strong economy
 - b) Organized a powerful army equipped with iron weapons

- c) Conquered other states and unified China in 221 B.C.E.
- 2. The first emperor was Qin Shihuangdi (221 B.C.E.)
 - a) Established centralized imperial rule
 - b) Project of connecting and extending the Great Wall
 - c) Buried 460 scholars alive because of their criticism against the Qin
 - d) Burned all books except some with utilitarian value
- 3. Policies of centralization
 - a) Standardization of laws, currencies, weights, measures
 - b) Standardization of scripts
- 4. Tomb of the First Emperor, who died 210 B.C.E.
 - a) Tomb was underground palace with army of life-size terra-cotta figures
 - b) Excavation of the tomb since 1974
- 5. The collapse of the Qin dynasty
 - a) Massive public works generated tremendous ill will among the people
 - b) Waves of rebels overwhelmed the Qin court in 207 B.C.E.
 - c) Short-lived dynasty, but left deep marks in Chinese history
- B. The early Han dynasty
 - 1. Liu Bang; persistent and methodical; by 206 B.C.E. restored order
 - 2. Early Han policies
 - a) Sought a middle way between Zhou decentralization and Qin overcentralization
 - b) Han Wudi, the Martial Emperor (reigned 141–87 B.C.E.), emphasized centralization and expansion
 - 3. Han centralization; adopted Legalist policies
 - a) Built an enormous bureaucracy to rule the empire
 - b) Continued to build roads and canals
 - c) Levied taxes on agriculture, trade, and craft industries
 - d) Imperial monopolies on production of iron and salt
 - e) Established Confucian educational system for training bureaucrats
 - 4. Han imperial expansion
 - a) Invaded and colonized northern Vietnam and Korea
 - b) Han organized vast armies to invade Xiongnu territory (nomads from steppes)
 - c) Han enjoyed uncontested hegemony in east and central Asia

III. From economic prosperity to social disorder

- A. Productivity and prosperity during the Former Han

1. Patriarchal social structure
 - a) Women's subordination; Ban Zhao's *Admonitions for Women*
 - b) Children obey and honor parents
 2. Vast majority of population were cultivators
 3. Iron metallurgy: farming tools, utensils, and weapons
 4. Silk textiles; sericulture spread all over China during the Han
 5. Paper production; replaced silk and bamboo as writing material
 6. Population growth: twenty million to sixty million from 220 B.C.E. to 9 C.E.
- B. Economic and social difficulties
1. Expeditions consumed the empire's surplus
 - a) Raised taxes and confiscated land of some wealthy individuals
 - b) Taxes and land confiscations discouraged investment in manufacture and trade
 2. Social tensions, caused by stratification between the poor and rich
 3. Problems of land distribution
 4. The reign of Wang Mang (9–23 C.E.)
 - a) Land reforms by the "socialist emperor"
 - b) Overthrown by revolts, 23 C.E.
- C. The later Han dynasty (25–220 C.E.)
1. Yellow Turban Uprising: revolt due to problems of land distribution
 2. Collapse of the Han
 - a) Factions at court paralyzed the central government
 - b) Han empire dissolved; China was divided into regional kingdoms

IDENTIFICATION: PEOPLE

What is the contribution of each of the following individuals to world history? Identification should include answers to the questions *who, what, where, when, how, and why is this person important?* (Figures with an asterisk are found in the glossary.)

Sima Qian

Confucius (Kong Fuzi)*

The Analects

Mencius

Xunzi

Laozi

*Daodejing**

Xianjiang*

Shang Yang

Zhuangzi

Han Feizi

Maodun

Qin Shihuangdi

Liu Bang

Han Wudi

Wang Mang

IDENTIFICATION: TERMS/CONCEPTS

State in your own words what each of the following terms means and why it is significant to a study of world history. (Terms with an asterisk are defined in the glossary.)

Confucianism*

Ren

*Li**

*Xiao**

Daoism*

*Wuwei**

Legalism*

Qin dynasty*

Han dynasty

Xiongnu

Sericulture

Yellow Turban Uprising

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What are the fundamental ideas and values of Confucianism? Make sure to include the concepts of *ren*, *li*, and *xiao* in your answer.
2. How does Daoism contrast with Confucianism?
3. What were the fundamental principles of Legalism, and how does it differ from Confucianism and Daoism?
4. Why does your book call Qin Shihuangdi “one of the most important figures in Chinese history”?
5. How did the early Han contribute to the unification of China?
6. Discuss the role of the Xiongnu in the history of China during the Han.
7. What were the most significant technological developments during this period of Chinese history?
8. How did the issue of uneven distribution of wealth contribute to the collapse of the Han?
9. How did the educational system develop in China during this period?
10. What was the role of the family in classical China?

INQUIRY QUESTIONS

1. What factors during the Qin and the Han worked against political stability and economic prosperity? How did these factors eventually contribute to the collapse of the Han?
2. Which aspects of Chinese culture during this period were most influenced by Confucianism? By Daoism? By Legalism? Explain your responses.
3. What did the discovery of the Tomb of the First Emperor tell us about China during the Qin?

CONNECTIONS

In fifty words or less, explain the relationship between each of the following pairs. How does one lead to or foster the other? Be specific in your response. (May be done individually or in small groups.)

- Legalism and Qin
- Confucianism and bureaucracy
- Wang Mang and Yellow Turbans
- Sericulture and Han Wudi

MATCHING

Match these figures with the statements that follow.

- | | |
|---------------|-------------------|
| A. Maodun | E. Kong Fuzi |
| B. Shang Yang | F. Qin Shihuangdi |
| C. Laozi | G. Wang Mang |
| D. Mencius | H. Liu Bang |

1. ___ Sage who contributed to the *Daodejing*.
2. ___ Confucian who emphasized the virtue of *ren*.
3. ___ Unifier and founder of the Han dynasty.
4. ___ Powerful First Emperor who built a lavish tomb.
5. ___ Radical minister who seized the throne and attempted a program of land reform.
6. ___ Successful military leader of the Xiongnu.
7. ___ Powerful administrator who based his policies on Legalist philosophy.
8. ___ Important philosopher who wrote the *Analects*.

SEQUENCING

Place the following clusters of events in chronological order. Consider carefully how one event leads to another, and try to determine the internal logic of each sequence.

A.

- ___ Legalist philosophy is embraced by Qin state.
- ___ Liu Bang restores order to China.
- ___ The emperor orders workers to link existing walls together to defend against nomadic invasions.
- ___ Political chaos reigns during the Period of the Warring States.
- ___ Qin Shihuangdi is buried along with an army of life-size terra-cotta figures.

B.

- ___ Fighting factions at the imperial court bring government to a standstill.
- ___ Han Wudi raises taxes and confiscates land from the wealthy.
- ___ Yellow Turbans stage violent revolt that spreads throughout China.
- ___ Wang Mang undertakes a land redistribution program.

QUOTATIONS

For each of the following quotes, identify the speaker, if known, or the point of view or the subject. What is the significance of each passage?

1. "He who exercises government by means of his virtue may be compared to the north polar star, which keeps its place, while all the stars turn toward it."
2. "How virtuous must a man be before he can become a true King? He becomes a true King by bringing peace to the people. This is something no one can stop."
3. "In a strict household there are no unruly slaves, but the children of a kindly mother often turn out bad. From this I know that power and authority can prevent violence, but kindness and generosity are insufficient to put an end to disorder."
4. "In governing men and in serving heaven, there is nothing like moderation. . . . The soft overcomes the hard; the weak overcomes the strong."
5. "No one is glad when a girl is born: by *her* the family sets no store. When she grows up, she hides in her room afraid to look a man in the face."

MAP EXERCISE

Referring back also to Chapter 5, draw on the outline map below the successive boundaries of the Xia, Shang, Zhou, Qin, and Han dynasties. What does this exercise tell you about the expansion and unification of China? Now add the Xiongnu confederation and the wall of China. Why did the emperors have the walls built where they did?

