

The Han Dynasty of China: A Chinese Golden Age (206 BCE–220 CE) – Outline

I. Historical setting of the Han

- a. Followed the Qin dynasty
 - i. 221-206 BCE
 - ii. Qin ended in rebellion and civil war due to weak ruler and unrest (206-202 BCE)
- b. Han dynasty was China's second imperial dynasty
 - i. 206 (or 202) BCE-220 CE
 - 1. Over 400 years
- c. Followed by the Three Kingdoms
 - i. 220-265 CE

II. Liu Bang – Emperor Gaozu of Han

- a. Civil war
 - i. Two strong leaders
 - 1. Xiang Yu (aristocratic general)
 - 2. Liu Bang (peasant-class general under Xiang Yu)
- b. 202 BCE
 - i. Liu Bang beat Xiang Yu for good
 - 1. Liu Bang declared start of Han dynasty

III. Two periods of the Han dynasty

- a. Former Han
 - i. Also called the Western Han
 - ii. 206 BCE-9 CE
- b. Interrupted by the Xin dynasty
 - i. Under Wang Mang
 - ii. 9-23 CE
- c. Later Han
 - i. Also called the Eastern Han
 - ii. 25-220 CE

IV. Government under the Han

- a. Centralized government
 - i. Capital cities
 - 1. Chang'an
 - a. 206 BCE-9 CE (all of the Former, or Western, Han) and 190-195 CE (Later, or Eastern, Han)
 - 2. Luoyang

- a. 25-190 CE and 196 CE (most of the Later, or Eastern, Han)
- 3. Xuchang
 - a. 196-220 CE (very end of the Later, or Eastern, Han)
- b. Lowered taxes
- c. Less harsh punishments

V. Empress Lu

- a. One of Liu Bang's widows
- b. Retained power by naming various children as emperor in turn
- c. Example of power gained through the manipulation of court politics
 - i. Families vied for power
 - ii. Alliances among powerful and influential people

VI. Wudi – the martial emperor

- a. Wudi lived 147-87 BCE
- b. Used warfare to expand the Chinese empire
 - i. Northern steppes
 - 1. Xiongnu – steppe nomads from the north and west
 - 2. Commonly raided Chinese villages
 - 3. Traditionally kept at bay through bribery
 - 4. Wudi made allies of the Xiongnu's enemies and sent in 100,000 soldiers
 - 5. Pushed the Xiongnu back
 - 6. Settled soldiers on former Xiongnu lands
 - 7. But the nomads of the steppes provided ongoing conflict
 - ii. Modern-day Korea, Manchuria, Vietnam, etc.
 - 1. Conquered and colonized
- c. Borders under Wudi nearly what they are today

VII. Social classes under the Han – top to bottom

- a. Emperor
 - i. Governors and kings
 - 1. Nobles, scholars, and state officials
 - a. Peasants (farmers)
 - i. Artisans and merchants
 - 1. Soldiers
 - a. Slaves

VIII. Bureaucracy under the Han

- a. Taxes supported the government and military
- b. Merchants
 - i. Paid taxes
- c. Peasants
 - i. Gave the government a portion of their annual crops
 - ii. Each year gave a month of labor (for public works projects) or of military service

IX. Civil service under the Han

- a. Over 130,000 employees
- b. 18 ranks of employees
- c. Civil service exams
 - i. Confucian principles described the qualities that emperors wanted in civil servants
 - ii. Wudi set up a Confucian-themed school
 - iii. Formal examinations in Confucianism, history, law, and literature for civil service positions
 - iv. Theoretically a merit-based system
 1. But poor could not afford to educate their children
 - v. In effect until the downfall of China's last dynasty in 1912

X. Technology under the Han

- a. Paper
 - i. Invented in 105 CE
 - ii. Books became inexpensive to produce; expanded education
 - iii. Bureaucracy grew and became more efficient
- b. Collar harness
 - i. Horses could carry heavier loads
 - ii. Best harness available at the time worldwide
- c. Plow
 - i. The Chinese made one with two blades
 - ii. Much more efficient
- d. Wheelbarrow
 - i. Invented independently (Greeks had invented as well)
 - ii. Central wheel and axle let Chinese wheelbarrows carry very heavy weights
- e. Waterwheel
 - i. Used to power things such as the bellows for smelting iron

XI. Review questions

- a. What dynasty preceded the Han?
- b. Who founded the Han dynasty?
- c. What are the two periods of the Han dynasty?
- d. Imagine that you are a Chinese soldier relocated to former Xiongnu lands. What might your life be like?
- e. Explain how the civil service system both was and was not a merit-based system.
- f. Describe Chinese technological advances under the Han.

XII. Agriculture under the Han

- a. Population of 60,000,000 to be fed
- b. Farming thought to be a pivotal and honored occupation
- c. But in reality small farmers were burdened by government taxes and became heavily indebted to the rich

XIII. Commerce and trade under the Han

- a. Trade and commerce were not respected but were still very important
- b. Government had monopolies
 - i. Salt mining
 - ii. Iron forging
 - iii. Coin minting
 - iv. Alcohol brewing
- c. Government engaged in industry
 - i. Silk weaving
- d. Growth of trade along the Silk Roads

XIV. Silk Roads under the Han

- a. Trade routes across Asia
 - i. To Mediterranean (access to Europe) in the west
 - 1. Chinese silks were sold in the marketplaces of the ancient Roman empire
 - ii. To Yellow Sea and China Sea (access to Japan) in the east
- b. Traded silk and other goods
- c. Cultural diffusion
 - i. Trade goods reflected the many cultures across this trading region

XV. Unification of the Han Empire

- a. Colonization
 - i. Farmers sent to settle new areas
 - ii. Settlers encouraged to marry locals
- b. Assimilation
 - i. Established Confucian schools in colonized areas
 - ii. Chinese became the common written language

XVI. Historians during the Han Period

- a. Sima Qian (145-85 BCE)
 - i. Known as the Grand Historian
 - ii. *Records of the Grand Historian*
 - 1. Told Chinese history from the first dynasties
 - iii. Early version of the historical method
 - 1. Examined artifacts and official records
 - 2. Interviewed eyewitnesses and others
 - 3. Toured historical sites for perspective
- b. Ban Biao (3-54 CE)
 - i. Began writing the *History of the Former Han Dynasty*
 - ii. Completed by his son, Ban Gu, and daughter, Ban Zhao

XVII. Roles of women under the Han

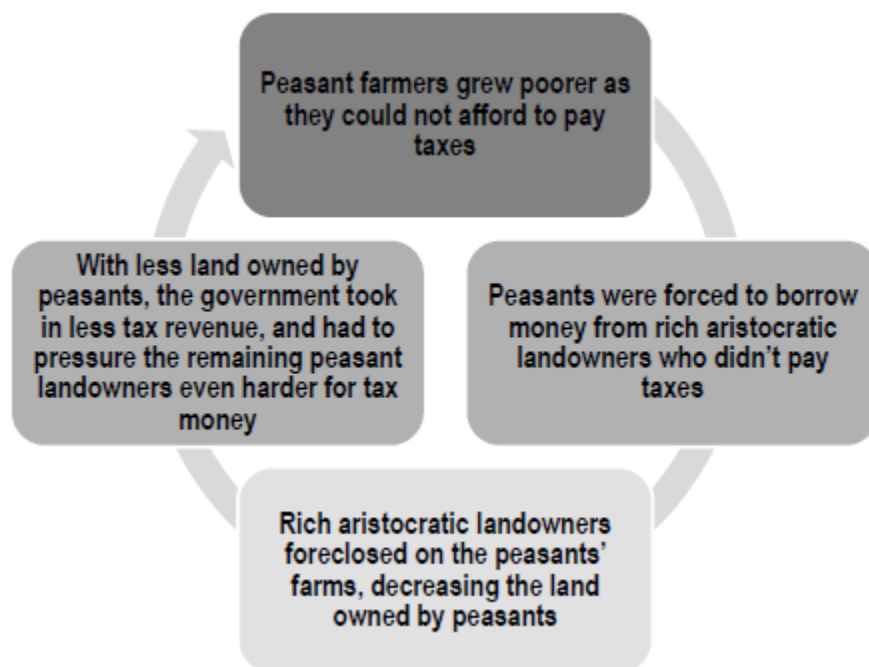
- a. Traditional roles
 - i. Confucianism limited women to the home and to subservience to men (fathers, husbands, sons)

- ii. Women worked hard for their families with little reward
- b. Women with power
 - i. Some women wielded political power because of court alliances (e.g., Empress Lu)
 - ii. Nuns
 - 1. Educated
 - 2. Lived apart from families
 - iii. Medicine practitioners
 - iv. Shop managers
 - v. Writers
- c. Ban Zhao – Paradox?
 - i. Helped finish her father’s *History of the Former Han Dynasty*
 - ii. Wrote *Lessons for Women*
 - 1. Urged women to obey the Confucian social order
 - 2. Also encouraged women to be industrious
 - 3. Went against convention by writing professionally

XVIII. Rich v. poor

- a. Inheritance law was the root cause of the problem
 - i. Land divided among male heirs (sons)
 - ii. Reduced the size of plots with each generation
 - iii. Small farmers couldn’t support themselves and had to borrow money
 - 1. Became indebted to rich, aristocratic landowners
 - 2. These aristocratic landowners did not have to pay taxes
 - iv. Decreased tax revenue for the government
 - 1. Government pressed peasants even harder for taxes
 - v. Rich grew richer and poor grew poorer

XIX. Rich get richer, poor get poorer



XX. Wang Mang

- a. 32 BCE-9 CE – unstable, chaotic period
- b. 3-9 CE – Wang Mang, a Confucian scholar, served as regent for an infant Han emperor
- c. 9 CE – Wang Mang overthrew the Han and became emperor
- d. Wang Mang's ruled called the Xin dynasty

XXI. Xin dynasty under Wang Mang

- a. Changes under Wang Mang
 - i. Minted more money to solve the budget crisis
 1. Led to inflation
 - ii. Established public granaries to feed the poor
 1. Cost more money
 - iii. Land redistribution
 1. Upset wealthy, aristocratic landowners

XXII. End of the Xin dynasty

- a. 11 CE – flood killed thousands and displaced millions
 - i. Not enough food
 - ii. Peasant revolts
 - iii. Wealthy aristocrats joined the revolts
 1. Upset over land redistribution
- b. 23 CE – Wang Mang assassinated
- c. 23-25 CE – chaos
- d. 25 CE – Han family regained power

XXIII. Later (or Eastern) Han dynasty

- a. 25-220 CE
- b. Imperial family eventually regained power after Wang Mang
- c. Initially brought prosperity to China
- d. Eventually fell apart for largely the same reasons that the Former (Western) Han fell apart
- e. Followed by the Three Kingdoms

XXIV. Review questions

- a. How were farmers viewed during the Han dynasty, compared to how they were treated?
- b. In what ways was the Han government engaged in industry?
- c. Imagine that you are an ancient trader along the Silk Roads. What goods would you trade? With what cultures would you interact?
- d. Describe Chinese colonization under the Han dynasty.
- e. What was life like for women under the Han dynasty?
- f. Explain the crisis which allowed Wang Mang to come to power.