

CHAPTER 8-THE UNIFICATION OF CHINA

Think about this: You unify a huge territory and most people, if they remember you at all, remember you for the terra-cotta warriors found in your tomb. Such is the fate of Qin Shihuangdi.

This chapter deals first with the major Chinese thinker Confucius (551-479 B.C.E.) and his approach to social order. Confucianism is a system of beliefs focusing on moral and ethical issues. In it, there is no discussion of any type of god and is therefore not considered a religion. The focus of Confucianism is political and social order as exemplified by the *junzi*, “the superior individuals,” and the values of Ren (humanity and kindness), Li (courtesy, respect, and deference to elders), and Xiao (Filial piety and familial obligation). Confucianism relies on the idea that the entire country benefits if the population adheres to these values. Confucius’s sayings were collected in the Analects by his followers and became the primary source for Confucian teaching. Confucian influence is seen today in the rather intense emphasis on education in parts of Asia.

Although Confucianism was the major school of thought during this period, there were competing ideas. Daoism, founded by Laozi, put forth the idea of being passive and yielding as opposed to the active approach of Confucianism. Daoism states that by yielding to the forces of nature, your needs are met. The other competing school was Legalism, put forth in the writings of Shang Yang and Han Feizi. Legalism is a doctrine of practical and efficient statecraft, with the strength of the state found in agriculture and the military, paying little attention to education (differing from Confucianism) and commerce. Legalism calls for harsh penalties and using the self-interest of people for the needs of the state. While not popular, its practicality did bring an end to the Period of the Warring States.

The next part of this chapter concerns the rise of two major Chinese dynasties and the inevitable collapse of both. Qin Shihuangdi, after whom one of these dynasties was named, organized a powerful army and unified China in 221 B.C.E. He established centralized imperial rule, extended the Great Wall, and standardized the currency and law. However, the huge public works policies of his dynasty generated discontent and led to a rebellion that ended the dynasty in 207 B.C.E. In 206 B.C.E. Liu Bing restored order and the Han dynasty peaked with Han Wudi, the Martial Emperor. The Han utilized Legalist policies, established a huge bureaucracy and monopolies, and expanded taxes to keep control. One major contribution of the Han was the increased use of Confucian education to train bureaucrats. This continued to influence Chinese rule for hundreds of years. The Han also expanded their empire into Korea, Vietnam, and into the northern steppes. This expansion, plus rapid population growth, led to increased taxes and social unrest. Problems with land distribution led to the Yellow Turban Revolt in 220 C.E. and although the dynasty was eventually restored, the Han dynasty ended in a rebellion in 23 C.E., its final demise.

Key Concept 2.1. The Development and Codification of Religious and Cultural Traditions

- II. New belief systems and cultural traditions emerged and spread, often asserting universal truths.

III. Belief systems affected gender roles (such as Buddhism's encouragement of a monastic life or Confucianism's emphasis on filial piety).

Key Concept 2.2. The Development of States and Empires

I. The number and size of imperial societies grew dramatically by imposing political unity on areas where previously there had been competing states.

II. Empires and states developed new techniques of imperial administration based, in part, on the success of earlier political forms.

III. Imperial societies displayed unique social and economic dimensions.

IV. The Roman, Han, Maurya and Gupta empires created political, cultural and administrative difficulties that they could not manage, which eventually led to their decline, collapse and transformation into successor empires or states.