

7

CHINA

200 B.C.E. – 910 C.E.

FRACTURE AND UNIFICATION: THE QIN, HAN, SUI AND TANG DYNASTIES

COMMENTARY

China, like the Roman Empire, provides (literally) a textbook example of the attributes of a model empire. All of the classic characteristics described in the introduction to Chapter 5 are present (p. 122). China, no less than Rome, brought “peoples of different languages, religions, ethnic origins, and cultural and technological levels” together “under a single, centralized rule.” It did so by virtue of its ability to mobilize formidable military force and sufficient labor to construct monumental works such as the **Great Wall of China** and the **Grand Canal**; through its vast professional **bureaucracy**, administering sophisticated legal and tax systems; and by imposing a single written language and inculcating a common ideology or belief system throughout the empire. Like Rome, it spread its language, culture and technology throughout its empire and among its neighbors and, in turn, absorbed much from those peoples as well, becoming the center of a cultural **ecumene**. And when Chinese ruling dynasties fell, they were brought low by all the classic causes of imperial disintegration: “failure of leadership; ... overextension of the administration; ...collapse of the economy; ... doubts over the ideology; ... [and] military defeat of the empire by the combined forces of external enemies” and internal revolt (p. 123). The major difference between the Chinese and Roman Empires, however, as Spodek points out, is that, while dynasties have come and gone, China has successfully maintained its imperial continuity and unity – with only two significant interruptions – for over two thousand years since the **Qin** period. The last Roman emperor in the west was deposed in 476 C.E. In 1776, when the United States was born and Edward Gibbon published *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, the Chinese Empire was still a major world power. The reasons behind this Chinese achievement form the major themes of Chapter 7, while the Roman and Chinese Empires are explicitly compared in the last section of the chapter.

One advantage China possessed over Rome and the other empires we have examined is that its “core” area and population were far larger, more contiguous, and more culturally unified. Italy and the Persian heartland, for example, were much smaller than northern China and Italians and Persians comprised a smaller percentage of the population of their respective empires than did the **Han** people of China. Moreover, although successive dynasties pushed China’s borders steadily southward and the empire was often beset by invasions and migrations of northern “barbarians”, these peoples were absorbed into Chinese culture through a process of **assimilation** and **sinicization**; so much so that it was not unusual for the empire to be ruled by a dynasty of non-Chinese origin. Similarly, the alien religion of Buddhism was adapted and assimilated to Chinese traditions. In the Roman and other empires, assimilation was far less intensive, and Rome’s most important “new” religion, Christianity, may have served to weaken it from within. Perhaps the most important factor, however, in accounting for the cohesiveness and longevity of the Chinese Empire, is the growth of the Chinese bureaucracy and the pervasive influence of its Confucian ideology throughout Chinese society. **Confucianism**, rooted as it was in ancient Chinese traditions, taught in academies and practiced in Chinese families, and ultimately reinforced by its status as the core curriculum of the **civil service examinations**, permeated Chinese society at all levels and formed the cement that held it together, even during periods of political disintegration, when the ruling dynasty lost the **Mandate of Heaven**.

Indeed, Chinese culture – especially Confucianism – proved so strong that it thoroughly permeated Vietnam, which China ruled for many centuries, and even neighboring countries such as Korea, which was under Chinese domination for only short periods of time, and Japan, which was never part of the Chinese Empire. The ruling elites of those countries for the most part adopted – and adapted – Chinese culture and institutions voluntarily, in order to enrich their own societies (and oftentimes to strengthen their own rule), even as they fought against direct Chinese political control. This cultural legacy has proven to be even more durable than the empire which produced it, for it continues throughout east Asia today.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

- A. Introduction: the Qin, Han, Sui and Tang Dynasties
- B. The Chinese Empire: How Do We Know?
 - 1. Confucian texts
 - 2. Daoist and Legalist writings
 - 3. Histories
 - PROFILE: Sima Qian, Court Historian
 - 4. Archaeology: gravesites, tombs, inscriptions
- C. The Qin Dynasty: What Do We Know?
 - 1. Military power and mobilization
 - a. Qin Shi Huangdi, the “first august Emperor of Qin”
 - b. The Great Wall
 - 2. Economic power
 - 3. Administrative power
 - a. Commanderies
 - b. Standardization and centralization
 - 4. The fall of the Qin dynasty
- D. Ideologies of Empire
 - 1. Qin Shi Huangdi, Han Feizi and Legalism
 - 2. Daoism: Laozi and the *Dao De Jing*
 - 3. Confucianism
 - a. Confucius
 - b. *Jen* and *junzi*
 - 4. Qin Shi Huangdi, the Legalists and the Confucianists
- E. The Han Dynasty
 - 1. Confucian influence
 - SOURCE: Confucius and *The Analects*
 - 2. Admonitions for women
 - 3. Military power
 - 4. Population and migration
 - a. Expansion southward
 - b. Population decline in the North
 - 5. Economic power
 - 6. SPOTLIGHT: a Han Dynasty Code of Conduct
 - 7. Administrative power
- F. The “Three Kingdoms and Six Dynasties” Period
- G. Buddhism Reaches China
- H. Reunification Under the Sui and Tang Dynasties
 - 1. Achievements of the Sui: the Grand Canal
 - 2. Achievements of the Tang
 - a. Administrative advances
 - b. Technological advances
 - c. Tang culture and Buddhism
 - 3. The fall of the Tang Dynasty
 - a. Overexpansion: the Battle of Talas River
 - b. The An Lushan Revolt

- I. Greater China
 1. Processes of assimilation: “Barbarians” and Chinese
 2. The North and Northwest
 3. The South and Southwest
 4. Vietnam
 5. Korea
 6. Japan

J. China and Rome: How Do They Compare?

IDENTIFICATION TERMS

For each term, students should be able to provide an identification or definition, an approximate date, a geographical location (if relevant) and – most important – a concise explanation of its significance in the context of the chapter. Terms that appear in the *Study Guide* are listed in **bold** font in the first column.

Sima Qian	Qin, Han, Sui and Tang Dynasties	<i>Analects</i>
Daoism	Han Wudi	“the Three Submissions”
Ban Zhao	Dunhuang	Xinjiang
Warring States Period	Qin Shi Huangdi	Yellow Turban Revolt
Nara	Xiongnu	Silk Route
<i>jen and junzi</i>	Great Wall	Grand Canal
sinicization	commanderies	Chang’an
Mandate of Heaven	Liu Bang	Silla Dynasty
Trung Sisters	Legalism	17-Article Constitution
Han Feizi	<i>Dao De Jing</i>	Fujiwara

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After Reading and studying Chapter 7, students should be able to:

1. Enumerate the four major Chinese imperial dynasties of the era and explain the important rulers and achievements of each.
2. Define Legalism and understand its influence on the Qin and later dynasties; be able to detect and cite examples of Legalism influences in Chinese texts of the period.
3. Explain Daoism and its influence on Chinese society and politics; be able to detect and cite examples of Daoist influences in Chinese texts and art of the period.
4. Understand the most important concepts of Confucianism, as they relate to society, government, gender and personal ethics and behavior; be able to detect and cite examples of Confucian influences in Chinese texts and art of the period.
5. Understand and explain the parallel forces of “assimilation” and “sinicization” and the process by which they facilitated the expansion of the Chinese empires.
6. Explain the role and status of women in Chinese society and the important influences on gender dynamics in China.
7. Explain the forces that led to the fall and rise of the different dynasties; as well as those forces that helped preserve Chinese cultural unity during the various interregnums.

SUGGESTIONS FOR LECTURE TOPICS

1. Discuss the major sources for the study of Chinese history, using the various sources as a vehicle to introduce the concepts of historical “bias” and “interpretation.” Demonstrate the importance of knowing the author and provenance of a text or other source in using primary sources.

2. Discuss the over-arching importance of Confucianism in Chinese history, citing specific examples from the text and other sources.
3. Review Spodek's models of imperial rule and imperial decline (from Chapter 5), demonstrating the conformity and/or deviation from them by the various Chinese dynasties. Include a discussion of "hegemony" and "dominance."
4. Compare Legalism and Daoism with Confucianism, with reference to their respective beliefs or attitudes regarding government, ethics, gender, and human relationships.
5. Map Lecture: Using the maps in Chapters 6 & 7 (via Power-Point© or overhead projector), compare the territorial extent and expanse of the Roman and Chinese Empires and their respective policies regarding "assimilation" or local autonomy; and demonstrate their relative cultural influence on their subject peoples and other neighbors.

TOPICS FOR ESSAYS OR CLASS DISCUSSIONS

1. Compare the reasons for the decline and fall of the Qin, Han and Tang Dynasties with the theoretical model for the reasons for the fall of empires at the beginning of Chapter 5 (p. 123). Which of the general causes for imperial decline can be applied in the case of each dynasty? (Cite specific examples?) How did Chinese historians and commentators explain the fall of their imperial dynasties? What factors or events might assume greater importance in their explanations?
2. Group work: What factors cited in the comparative analysis of the Roman and Chinese Empires might be helpful in explaining the reasons for the most obvious "Difference" of all between the two: the fact that, while the Roman Empire disintegrated in the 4th and 5th centuries, C.E., the Chinese Empire lasted – with only several interruptions – into the 20th century? Explain the reasons for your answer.
3. What were the major contributions to the Chinese state and Chinese society of each of the four major dynasties discussed in this chapter; the Qin, Han, Sui and Tang? In what respects could each successive dynasty be said to have built upon the accomplishments of its predecessor?
4. Examine the nature and extent of Chinese influence on the development of one of the following neighboring societies: Korea, Vietnam, or Japan. What were some of the most important examples of Chinese influence in the country you have selected? How and when was Chinese influence exerted on the country?
5. Group work: Write a concise interpretive history of the Qin Dynasty, based solely on the primary sources (including illustrations) available to you in the text. How and by whom was the empire unified? What were its principal accomplishments? How did the emperor view himself and his role? What values and beliefs were most important at the time? Why did the dynasty fall?
6. Debate: Using the available sources in the chapter, compare the competing Chinese philosophies of Legalism and Confucianism and debate their relative effectiveness as "imperial ideologies." What are the most important values of each? How does each ideology view human beings? How does each seek to order and regulate society? What behaviors would be most highly prized in government officials by adherents of each belief system? Cite specific examples from the primary source documents.
7. "China exerted tremendous cultural evidence on her neighbors, but was herself also influenced by outside forces during the Han, Sui and Tang dynasties." Explain this statement, using evidence from illustrations in the text. What "forces" (peoples, religions, etc.) exerted an influence on China during this period, and how?
8. Current events & issues: It has been argued by some observers that the current government of China is in fact more Confucian in its ideology than Communist, while others have argued that Legalism is still that dominant guiding force. Are either of these arguments valid?

ADDITIONAL TEXT RESOURCES (Spodek, 2nd ed.)

Timetables, charts and graphs:	China: From Qin to Tang	(p. 197)
	Early Advances in Weaponry	(p. 202)
	Chinese Dynasties	(p. 224)

Large photographs or illustrations:	Jade burial suit of Princess Tou Wan	(p. 196)
	Terra-cotta army from the tomb of Qin Shi Huangdi	(p. 200)
	Great Wall of China	(p. 201)
	Hill of the Thousand Buddhas, Tang Dynasty	(p. 216)
	The Grand Canal at Suzhou, Sui Dynasty	(p. 219)
	Ceramic model of a group of musicians on a camel, Tang	(p. 221)
	Caravanserai, Kirghizstan, Tang Dynasty	(p. 222)
	Pottery figure of a Ferghana horse, Tang Dynasaty	(p. 223)
	Todai Buddhist temple, Nara, Japan	(p. 226)
Maps:	Classical China	(p. 208)
	Chinese expansion	(p. 209)
	The Tang revival	(p. 218)
	Chinese technology	(p. 220)
	Asian imperial capitals (Chang'an China and Nara, Japan)	(p. 225)
SPOTLIGHT:	A Han Dynasty Code of Conduct (for women)	(p. 212-213)
PROFILE:	Sima Qian: Court Historian	(p. 198)
SOURCES:	Confucius and the Analects	(p. 206-207)

ADDITIONAL PRIMARY SOURCES (*Documents Set & www.prenhall.com/Spodek*)

7-1	Kung Fu-tzu: The “Master” and his persistent legacy
7-2	Government by centralization and mistrust: the Legalist credo of Han Fetzu
7-3	Mencius: the (Confucian) counterattack on Legalism
7-4	Sima Qian: the historian’s historian writes about the builder of the Great Wall [from <i>Historical Records</i>]
7-5	Shin Hunag Ti of Qin: a study in absolutism [from Sima Qian, <i>Historical records</i>]
7-6	Prince Shotoku’s Seventeen Article Constitution (Japan)
7-7	“Kagero Nikki”: a noblewoman’s lot in ancient Japan
www	Tang heyday: Two poetic masters of human insight

AUDIO-VISUAL RESOURCES (videos, DVD’s, CD-ROM and web-sites)

Center for Chinese Studies Library, Berkeley: <http://www.ChinaPage.com> [web-site]

Catalog of sources; bibliographies; and links to hundreds of other Chinese web-sites.

The Great Wall of China: Patrick Fleming, Ambrose Video, 1995. [video; 27 minutes, color]

This video narrates the story of the construction of the Great Wall, the largest man-made object on earth, beginning during the reign of Qin Shi Huangdi, and explains the background of its creation.

History and Culture of Japan: <http://www.pacificu.edu/up/as/japan.html> [web-site]

Surveys all aspects of Japanese history and culture and provides links to other web-sites.

Kong Fu Zi – Confucius: <http://www.albany.net/~geenius/kongfuzi/> [web-site]

Includes a biography, an analysis of Confucius’ teachings, a bibliography and links to other sites.