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POWERFUL EMPIRES

FIND OUT

How did the First Emperor unite China?

What were some achievements of Chinese civilization?

What contacts did China have with other cultures?

Let me tell you next of stones that burn like logs," wrote Marco Polo, a European who spent 17 years in China during the late 1200s. The stone, he said, was dug "out of the mountains, where it runs in veins. When lighted, it burns . . . and retains the fire much better than wood." The stones were coal, a fuel that was unknown to Europeans at the time.

In *The Travels of Marco Polo*, Marco Polo described the wondrous sights of China. He told of the emperor's huge palaces and great wealth. His reports that the Chinese used paper money and bathed frequently were especially shocking to Europeans. Both of these practices were unheard of in Europe at that time.

Most Europeans refused to believe any of Polo's stories. Yet in 1276, China probably had the richest and most advanced civilization in the world. By then, the Chinese civilization was already 3,000 years old.

The First Empire

China owed its success in part to energetic and ruthless leaders who made it a strong, unified empire. Under the Zhou dynasty, you will recall, China broke up into warring states. By 221 B.C., the ruler of the state of Qin had conquered his neighbors and overthrown the Zhou dynasty. He then

took the name Shi Huangdi (sher hwang dee), or "First Emperor."

Shi Huangdi believed in Legalist principles. He used harsh means to centralize power in his own hands. In doing so, he laid foundations for Chinese rule that would last until 1911.

Uniting China. To unite the empire, Shi Huangdi imposed several measures. Among them were a single law code, uniform standards for weights and measures, and currency regulations. To improve transportation, he forced peasants to build roads across the empire. Good roads allowed him to move troops quickly to any trouble spot.

The First Emperor also took steps to control knowledge and ideas. He banned all books except Legalist works, and he persecuted Confucian scholars. Qin officials collected and burned books of Confucian teachings. Only books on medicine, agriculture, and technology were spared.

The Great Wall. Shi Huangdi extended Chinese power to the south and west. Using forced labor, he built the Great Wall. In the past, local lords had built walls to defend their lands against nomadic invaders. Shi Huangdi joined and extended these walls across northern China.

Hundreds of thousands of peasants labored under brutal conditions to build the Great Wall. "Every stone cost a human life," wrote a later Chinese historian.

The Great Wall extended 1,500 miles (2,414 km) from east to west. It seldom kept invaders from attacking. It did, however, become a symbol to the Chinese. South of the wall lived the "civilized" farming people of China. North of it lived the nomadic "barbarians."

Expansion Under the Han

Shi Huangdi wanted his dynasty to rule forever, but his harsh policies sparked deep anger. When he died, revolts broke out. Within eight years, Liu Bang (lyoh bong), a peasant leader, had overthrown the Qin and set up a new dynasty, the Han.

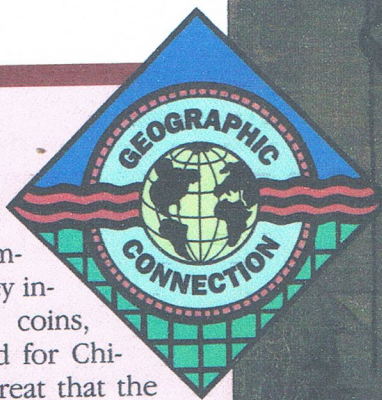
Under the Han dynasty, which ruled from 206 B.C. to A.D. 220, China expanded across

The Silk Road

Along the ancient highway flowed riches of the great empires of the East and West. They included Roman glass, Persian coins, and Chinese silk. The demand for Chinese silk in the West was so great that the route was called "the Silk Road."

The great Silk Road stretched halfway across Asia and linked East Asia and the Mediterranean world. For thousands of years, camel caravans plodded for months on end across shifting desert sands and over icy, barren mountains. A Chinese historian described travel on the desert:

“You see nothing in any direction but the sky and the sands, without the slightest trace of a road, and travelers find nothing to guide them but the bones of men and beasts and the droppings of camels. . . . You hear sounds, sometimes of singing; and it



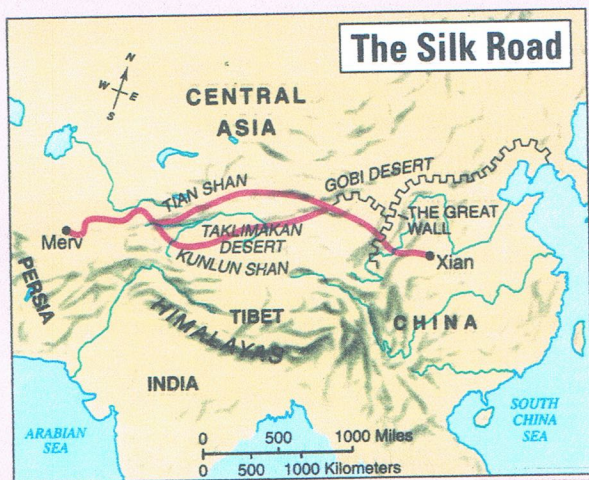
has often happened that travelers going aside to see what these sounds might be have strayed from their course and been entirely lost. ”

In addition to the menace of natural forces, bands of raiders lurked along the route, ready to descend on careless travelers.

Despite the dangers, traders and travelers moved along the Silk Road. They brought new products to China, such as oranges, peaches, and pears. The wheel, writing, weaving, gunpowder, religions, paper, and printing were among the inventions and ideas that spread along the Silk Road.

Throughout its history, China sought to keep peace along the eastern half of the Silk Road, which extended about 4,000 miles (6,400 km) from Xian (SHEE ahn) to Persia. However, local rulers often asserted their independence. Still, the good profits from trade lured people to risk the journey.

1. Why was the Silk Road more than a highway for trade?
2. **Forecasting** How do you think the European discovery of sea routes to Asia affected the Silk Road?



Asia. Powerful emperors used their armies to keep the peace and protect trade. During this period, caravans plodded the length of the Silk Road. They carried Chinese jade, bronzes, and silk westward in exchange for

the goods of India and the Mediterranean world. (See the feature above.)

Chinese travelers returned home with new seeds such as grape and alfalfa. Trade within China expanded, and tea growing

spread from the south to other parts of China. Travelers and merchants also introduced new ideas, such as Buddhism, into China.

Civil service system. Han rulers continued the First Emperor's policy of central control, but they restored Confucian learning. Under the Han, the Chinese developed the idea of a government run by the most talented and learned men.

The Chinese set up an examination system to choose civil servants, or government officials. To pass the exam, candidates for office had to know Confucian teachings as well as Chinese law, history, and traditions. The government set up a university to train scholars for the highest offices. By A.D. 100, about 3,000 students were studying at the university.

The civil service system strengthened China. Under the system, officials gained jobs through merit, not by birth or wealth. Also, the Confucian-educated officials shared the same values and traditions. The common bond helped to unite the vast empire and hold it together as dynasties changed. This system of choosing officials lasted until the early 1900s.

Up Close

Exam Time

The doors are sealed. Soldiers stand guard from watchtowers. Trembling men, young and old, sit in their cells and read the themes the examiners have selected:

“He who is sincere will be intelligent, and the intelligent man will be faithful.

In carrying out benevolence, there are no rules.”

The fate of the men depends on the answers they compose for such essay topics.

For more than 2,000 years, scholars endured the agony of the civil service exams. People from any class could take the exams,

but only the cleverest and best-educated succeeded.

Candidates had to pass grueling exams at the local and the provincial levels before they could take the imperial civil service test. To pass, they had to know the more than 400,000 characters in the Confucian texts by heart. They also had to be able to compose elegant poetic essays on the exam themes.

At exam time, candidates gathered in the “examination hall,” which was actually rows and rows of mud-brick cells. Each cell was barely the height of an average-size man. Candidates brought their own bedding as well as enough food and fuel for the three-day ordeal.

Before candidates entered their cells, guards searched them and their belongings. Day and night, soldiers remained on the lookout for cheating. A cheater brought dishonor not only on himself but also on his family and his tutor.

Was it worth it? One scholar, Ye Shih, wrote of his feelings:

Examination Cells During the 1870s, students took their civil service exams in these huts. Historians believe that only about 1 percent of the students who studied so long and hard for these difficult tests passed them. Those who did pass the exams became respected lifetime civil servants known as mandarins. **Culture** How did the civil service system strengthen China?



“Beginning with childhood, all of a man’s study is centered on one aim alone: to emerge successfully from the three days’ examinations, and all he has in his mind is what success can bring to him in terms of power, influence, and prestige.”

Although Ye Shih was critical of the exams, most candidates accepted them. Those who failed returned again and again. One candidate finally succeeded at the age of 83. ■

Achievements of the Han

Under the Han, Chinese civilization advanced on many fronts. Han astronomers improved the calendar. Other scientists invented a seismograph, or a machine that records the direction of earthquakes.

Medical colleges flourished. Doctors made advances in medical treatment. For example, doctors began to time a patient’s pulse to diagnose illnesses. They developed acupuncture. In this medical treatment, the doctor uses needles inserted under the skin to relieve pain and cure various illnesses. Also, doctors wrote about typhoid fever and the use of anesthetics.

In farming, the Chinese used complex flood control systems, fertilized the soil to increase crop yields, and planted drought-resistant rice. They developed practical tools such as the wheelbarrow, mill wheel, water clock, and sundial.

In addition, the Chinese improved on ideas from other civilizations. For example, they developed the foot stirrup, an advance over stirrups brought from India. They also learned to make paper, an invention that would not reach Europe for another 1,000 years.

Golden Ages in China

Invaders helped to destroy the Han Empire. For the next 1,000 years, various dynasties reunited China. Under the Tang dynasty (618–907) and the Song dynasty (960–1279), China enjoyed long periods of peace. During

these golden ages, the economy prospered and the arts flourished.

Expanding horizons. Under the Tang and Song dynasties, China’s trade increased. Chinese goods and ideas traveled to India and the Persian Empire. Trade brought new goods to China, including cotton, pepper, and dates.

To protect its trade, the Song dynasty built a navy, making China a great sea power. Chinese ships used the sternpost rudder and the magnetic compass. These two inventions would later reach Europe by way of Arab traders.

Foreign merchants and missionaries settled in China’s busy cities. They included Muslims from Persia and Arabia, along with Jews and Christians.

During this time, the Chinese conquered Vietnam. The conquerors carried Chinese ideas about government and society as well as inventions such as printing. Chinese influence also spread to Korea and Japan.

Literature. The Chinese invented block printing and later movable type. The new technology led to greater literacy and an outpouring of books. Poetry was especially popular.

The Tang poet Li Bo (lee bwaw) is one of China’s best-known writers. Li Bo served as court poet for a time. He later spent many years wandering about China. During his travels, he absorbed Daoist teachings about the value of nonaction and detachment from life. In “Fighting South of the Ramparts,” he captures the sadness of war.

“Last year we were fighting at the source of the Sang-kan;
This year we are fighting on the Onion River road. . . .

Where the house of Qin built the Great Wall that was to keep away the Tartars [invaders],
There, in its turn, the House of Han lit beacons of war.
The beacons are always alight,
fighting and marching never stop.
Men die in the field, slashing sword to sword;

The horses of the conquered neigh
piteously to Heaven . . .

Know therefore that the sword is a
cursed thing
Which the wise man uses only if he
must. ”

Painting. Many paintings illustrated a line or thought from a poem. Artists also used nature as subjects and perfected the art of landscape painting. In works of great beauty, Song artists celebrated the grandeur of nature.

Steeped in Daoist traditions, an artist might study a scene in nature for hours or days. Then, with a few strokes of the brush, the artist would suggest the essence, or meaning, of the scene. Artists also painted just a single element of nature, such as a flower or the branch of a tree.

Mongol Conquest

The Song dynasty battled constantly to protect China's borders from invaders. During the early 1200s, Song rulers faced a powerful new threat when the Mongols burst onto the world scene.

Under their fierce leader Genghiz Khan (GEHNG gihs kahn), the Mongols conquered a vast empire. It extended from the Pacific Ocean to the Danube River in Europe. After the death of Genghiz Khan, the huge Mongol Empire was divided among his sons and grandsons.

China under foreign rule. By 1279, Kublai Khan (koo bli kahn), grandson of Genghiz Khan, had extended Mongol power over all of China. At first, the Mongols tried to reduce the role of Confucian scholars and preserve their own culture. For example, Kublai Khan appointed only Mongols and other foreigners to positions of power.

Kublai Khan could not resist powerful Chinese influences, however. In the end, he gave his dynasty a Chinese name, the Yuan (yoo ahn). Also, he left Confucian officials in lower-level jobs.

Mongol achievements. During the reign of Kublai Khan, Marco Polo visited China. For



The Poet Li Bo One poem by Li Bo, shown here, begins: "My friend is lodging in the Eastern Range,/Dearly loving the beauty of valleys and hills./A pine-tree wind dusts his sleeves and coat;/A pebbly stream cleans his heart and ears." This famous poet, a great traveler, wrote many verses about the beauties of nature. **Choice** Why might a writer be especially interested in travel?

many years, Polo worked as an official of the Mongol ruler. As you have read, Europeans found Polo's stories about Chinese wealth and practices hard to believe.

Polo described, for example, the efficient transportation system the Mongols had set up to unite their empire. From Beijing, they built roads to every province. A system of relay riders allowed messengers to carry news across China.

Along the roads flowed trade goods and technical information. Much useful knowledge moved west, including such Chinese

inventions as the magnetic compass, stern-post rudder, mechanical clock, gunpowder, and printing.

Chinese Revival

Marco Polo described Mongol rule at its height. As the Yuan dynasty declined, Chinese resentment against foreign rule led to revolts.

The Chinese finally found a leader in a poor peasant, Zhu Yuanzhang (joo yoo ahn jahng). He drove the Mongols from South China and in 1368 captured Beijing. The peasant general then claimed the Mandate of Heaven. He called himself Ming Hung Wu and set up the Ming dynasty.

The Ming dynasty ruled China from 1368 to 1644. Ming emperors wanted to restore China to the greatness it had achieved under the Tang and Song dynasties. The Ming revived Confucian learning and expanded the civil service. They built a new imperial palace called the Forbidden City in Beijing.

Voyages overseas. Between 1405 and 1433, the Ming dynasty sent several huge fleets to restore Chinese authority at sea and to renew trading ties. Ming ships explored Southeast Asia, India, and the coast of East Africa.

Suddenly, the Ming voyages ended. Historians are not sure why this happened. Perhaps some officials were jealous of the Ming

The Forbidden City The Ming dynasty's complex of palaces and government buildings in Beijing was called the Forbidden City. Only members of the imperial household were allowed to enter it. At the center of this photograph is the Hall of Great Harmony, where the emperor received visitors. **Political System** How did Ming rulers isolate China from the world after the 1430s?



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admirals. Perhaps the emperor needed the money to fight invaders. At the same time, the Chinese cut off contact with the outside world. They placed limits on foreigners and stopped Chinese citizens from traveling abroad.

Isolation. The Ming dynasty isolated China at a time when Europeans were beginning to develop new technologies and explore other lands. As the Chinese turned inward, Europeans slowly advanced and posed a threat to the Middle Kingdom.

Invaders From the Northeast

In 1644, China once again fell under foreign rule. This time, the invaders swept in from Manchuria. The Manchus set up the Qing (chihng) dynasty, which ruled China until 1911. The Qing claimed authority over many states, including Burma, Thailand, Laos, Nepal, Vietnam, and Korea.

Like the Mongols, the Manchus did not want to be absorbed into Chinese civilization. They passed laws forbidding Manchus to marry Chinese people or wear Chinese clothing. Unlike the Mongols, however, Manchu rulers kept Confucian ideas. The Manchus also accepted that the Chinese wished to limit contact with foreigners.

SECTION 4 REVIEW

1. **Identify:** (a) Shi Huangdi, (b) Great Wall, (c) Li Bo, (d) Kubilai Khan.
2. Describe three ways in which the First Emperor united China.
3. How did Chinese civilization advance under the Han?
4. Why are the Tang and Song dynasties considered to be China's golden ages?
5. How did Mongol rule affect China?
6. **Drawing Conclusions** What effect did political unity have on the Chinese civilization?
7. **Writing Across Cultures** Write three history questions each for a civil service exam taken in China and in the United States.

5

ROOTS OF REVOLUTION

FIND OUT

How did China's relations with the West change in the 1800s?

Why were European nations able to gain influence in China?

What were the causes and effects of the "revolution" of 1911?

Vocabulary kowtow, extraterritoriality, sphere of influence

"As your Ambassador can see for himself, we possess all things. I set no value on objects strange and ingenious and have no use for your country's manufactures." With these words, the emperor Qianlong firmly turned down Britain's request for more trading rights in China in the 1700s.

The Chinese felt satisfied that their civilization was superior to any other. After all, their neighbors had adopted Chinese culture. Foreigners were seeking to buy silk, tea, porcelain, and other Chinese goods. Secure in their own world, what did the Chinese need from the "barbarians"?

Qianlong's refusal to end trade restrictions came at a critical moment. By the late 1700s, powerful nations were emerging in Europe. They would soon challenge China's proud image of itself.

A Position of Strength

By the 1500s, the Portuguese had reached India and Southeast Asia. They then sailed on to China, hoping to expand their trading empire.

In China, the powerful Ming emperors placed strict limits on foreign traders. They allowed foreign ships to unload cargoes only at