

Student Handout 2a – Han Overview Article

When was the Han Dynasty?

The Han Dynasty ran for over 400 years, from 206 BC to 220 AD. It was the second Imperial dynasty after the Qin Dynasty. It was followed by the Three Kingdoms period.

How did it get started?

The Han Dynasty began with a peasant revolt against the Qin Emperor. It was led by Liu Bang, son of a peasant family. Once the Qin Emperor was killed there was a war for four years between Liu Bang and his rival Xiang Yu. Liu Bang won the war and became emperor. He changed his name to Han Gaozu and established the Han Dynasty.



Liu Bang - Founder of the Han Dynasty

Civil Service

One of the first things that Emperor Gaozu did was to establish the civil service. He gathered a number of educated men to help him run the empire. Later Han emperors would establish examinations and schools to make sure that only the most intelligent men would run the government. This method of government would run for over 2,000 years.

Major Advances

The period of the Han Dynasty was a time of invention and science. One of the most important inventions was paper. Paper allowed the government to easily keep records and pass on instructions throughout the empire.

Other important inventions include iron casting, crop rotation, and acupuncture as well as advancements in medicine, mathematics, building, agriculture, engineering, and astronomy.

What was life like?

Many people lived in the cities. Life was nice for the rich who lived in big houses that were finely decorated with carpets and art. They wore silk robes and were well educated. Life in the city was difficult for the poor who lived in crowded houses and often went without food.

Life in the countryside was reasonably comfortable for the majority of peasants. Most of them had to work hard, but they generally had food and shelter. Taxes were reduced during the Han Dynasty and people who tilled the soil were officially respected by the ruling group.

Merchants were generally not respected. However, they were able to become rich, especially with trade improving due to the Silk Road and general peace in the country. Laws were made to make merchants wear white clothes and pay high taxes.

Facts about the Han Dynasty

- The biggest products in the Han economy were iron, salt, copper work, and silk.
- The Silk Road was established during the Han Dynasty. This trade route from China to Europe was a great source of wealth and luxury items.
- Buddhism first came to China during this time.
- Social status was very rigid. There were 20 ranks of status and each level had increased privileges. Merchants were ranked low while craftsmen, doctors, and farmers were ranked fairly high.
- There was a short period when the Han Dynasty was overthrown by the Xin Dynasty. This lasted from 8 - 22 AD. The time before the Xin is often called the Western Han and the time after the Eastern Han.
- The name of the first Han emperor, Gaozu, means "high ancestor." He named his palace Lasting Joy.

Source: "Ancient China for Kids: The Han Dynasty." *Ducksters*. Technological Solutions, Inc. (TSI), Oct. 2013. Web. 7 Oct. 2013 <http://www.ducksters.com/history/china/han_dynasty.php>.

Student Handout 2b – Han Overview Article

The Han Dynasty

In the year 207 B.C., a new dynasty began to rule China. This dynasty was led by a peasant whose name was Liu Bang. Liu Bang had grown tired of the brutal leadership of the Qin Dynasty. Many other people also were tired of the Qin. Liu Bang proclaimed that the Qin had lost the mandate of heaven, or the right to rule the nation. He was able to overthrow them and establish himself as the new emperor of China, and the first emperor of the Han Dynasty.

The Han Dynasty would rule China for the next 400 years. During this time period they would be one of the wealthiest and most powerful nations on Earth. Because of its location amidst high mountains and surrounded on many sides by water, China was isolated from much of the rest of the world. As their civilization flourished and their wealth increased, they were largely unaware of what advancements were taking place in the nations around them.

Chinese Exploration

In 139 B.C., a Han emperor by the name of Wudi sent out one of his generals to explore other nations. This general was a man by the name of Zhang Qian. Zhang Qian and his army marched throughout distant regions visiting other civilizations and nomadic tribes.

The armies of Zhang Qian were viewed as a threat by many of these nomadic tribes, and as a result, these tribes attacked Zhang Qian's army. Zhang Qian himself was captured and kept in bondage for a period of 10 years. After 13 years, Zhang Qian was finally able to return to the emperor and report.

He told Wudi about stories he had heard from the nomadic tribes of a great civilization to the West that equaled the glory of China. This was the first time Wudi had heard anything of any other civilization. Wudi was a smart and wise ruler, who saw the potential for trade between two cultures.

The Silk Road

In order to make trade possible, the Emperor Wudi began to develop what has been called in modern times, the Silk Road. Following this route, merchant traders brought silk from China westward, and glass, linen and gold from the West back into China.

The Silk Road consisted of trails, roads, bridges, and pathways that stretched across nearly 5000 miles (8046km) of land and water. The Silk Road is not one long road, but rather many smaller roads and pathways that were connected, and worn by the use of thousands of travelers over a period of hundreds of years.



The Silk Road would become instrumental in the development and expansion of trade and the accumulation of wealth in both China and Rome, as well as in Egypt and other nations.

Pax Sinica

During the rule of the Han emperors, China enjoyed a 400 year period of peace and prosperity. This period of time is known as Pax Sinica, which means "Chinese Peace." During this time, the Han emperors established a strong central government that was designed to help the people and protect them.

One such innovation was the storage of food. During times of plenty, Han emperors would have great amounts of food put up into storage. Then during difficult times, they would sell these food stores, helping to stabilize food prices.

The Han also abolished the practice of giving powerful government positions to members of the royal family. They wanted the most capable leaders to control government. To insure that the most talented leaders were given government posts, the Han Emperor Wudi instituted a series of written exams. Anyone could take the tests. Those who received the highest scores were given posts in the government.

The End of the Han Dynasty

By 220 A.D., the Han Dynasty had fallen into a weakened state. Warriors from competing areas began fighting one another, throwing China into a period of civil war that would last for many years.



Even though the Han Dynasty had ended, many of the contributions made by this dynasty would become interwoven into Chinese culture and would endure through the ages to modern times.

Source: "The Han Dynasty." KidsPast.com. KidsKnowIt Network. 1998-2013. 7 October 2013
<<http://www.kidspast.com/world-history/0133-han-dynasty.php>>.

Student Handout 2c – Han Overview Article

Han Introduction

This was not the Golden Age of China, but life was very good for many of the people because of the demand for Chinese silk. The creation of the "silk road" - the trade routes across the fierce deserts - allowed trade to flourish more easily with the Roman Empire.

People bonded together into one civilization during Han times. They had a common culture. Even in remote sections, district officials copied the manner of the imperial court. Peasants built homes and plowed their fields in the same way all over China.

Han writing tells us little about their daily life. **Han tombs, however, tell us quite a lot.** The Hans buried clay models of their homes and belongings, in their tombs. Models included details like little clay furniture and little bronze oil lamps.

The Arts and Sciences: So much was lost during the **book burnings of the Qin Dynasty.** The Han people tried very hard to replace the literature that was lost during Qin times, especially the works of Confucius.

They created new works of literature and music. Beautiful murals were painted on the walls of palaces. Scroll painting began. Craftsmen made jade jewelry and carvings, gold ornaments and belt hooks, delicate paintings with wire thin brush strokes. Iron was used for making plows and other cast iron objects. Glazed pottery was brightly painted with lively hunting scenes, mountains, trees, clouds, dragons, tigers, and bears. Their medicine was advanced. They invented acupuncture.

Their science was also advanced. **During Han times, these ancient people invented paper.** They also invented an instrument that told them when an earthquake was happening, somewhere in the Empire, so they could send troops and food to help.

Public Schools: One of the Han emperors (Emperor Wudi), around 100 CE, agreed with Confucius that education was the key to good government. He **started a system of public schools**, for boys only, taught by Confucian teachers. The teachings of Confucius were nationally honored. Schools were set up in each province.

There was a major school, called the Grand School, in the capital. In the beginning, only 50 students were allowed to study at the Grand School. In less than 100 years, enrollment at the Grand School was over 30,000 students.

Jobs: Jobs were given to educated people, as well as nobles. **People were paid for their work.**

Life in the Cities: Only about 10% of the population (1 out of 10 people) lived in the cities. Cities were neatly laid out with main streets and alleyways. Each city was surrounded by a strong wall, made of

earth and stone. As cities are today, the ancient Han cities were centers of government, education, and trade. Most marketplaces, throughout the city, had free entertainment. Musicians played bells, drums, and string instruments, and jugglers and acrobats performed.

The Poor: The poor lived in houses packed together. They had very little food, and little to no sanitation. Many of the young males joined street gangs. Gangs wore distinctive clothes and armor that identified their gang. **Teen gangs roamed the cities**, terrorizing people.

The Rich: The rich rushed to imitate the imperial palace. They built elaborate homes, decorated with drapery, and cashmere carpets. They furnished family tombs with stone lions. On the lions, and on other sculpture, they added inscriptions mentioning how much each item had cost!

The rich lived in comfortable, large houses with many rooms and fireplaces. Each home was built around a central courtyard. They had elaborately carved furniture that showed Greek and Roman influence, and painted stucco walls with floral designs. Other walls were left bare to display paintings or bronze mirrors. Dinner was elaborate. Kids were tutored in science, math, literature, art, religion, and music. Some studied in their homes, and some at the home of their tutor. The rich did not use the public schools. They wore belted robes with long sleeves lined with silk. When it was cold, they wore warm fur coats, made of squirrel and fox skins and leather slippers.

Merchants & Craftsmen: As in Shang times, merchants were hardly recognized as men. Once the canals were built, some merchants and craftsmen became rich. A really successful merchant might ride in a cart with a coachman, buy a title from an emperor, and built a mansion surrounded by pools and gardens. This absolutely infuriated officials and peasants. (The merchants didn't till the soil. They weren't nobles. There ought to be a law to stop them from doing this. For a while, there was a law forbidding merchants from riding in carts and chariots.)

Life in the Country: Country folk were farmers. They lived in one or two story mud houses with tiled or thatched roofs. They had curtains on the windows. Barns and other buildings surrounded the house. At times, several families lived in one house to allow them to work their fields together.

They still did not own their farms, but farms were larger in size, because **families had learned to team up**. This solved a major problem. Together, they were able to produce more food, some years, than they needed, which allowed them to trade food for other items. They still worked very hard. They went to bed at dark and got up at dawn. They dressed in simple clothes. Both men and women wore shirts and pants made of scratchy cloth, and sandals made of straw. They stuffed their clothes with paper and cloth, to stay warm in the winter. They steamed much of their food over boiling water on stoves. In the south, they ate rice, steamed dumplings, and fish, flavored with garlic and onions. In the north, they ate much the same, only they ate wheat instead of rice.

Source: "Han Times." Ancient China for Kids. MrDonn.org. 7 October 2013 <<http://china.mrdonn.org/han.html>>.