

Chapter 8: The Unification of China

Overview

This chapter explores the unification and expansion of China during the Qin and Han dynasties (221 B.C.E. to 220 C.E.). A rich tradition of the social and political philosophies of Confucians, Daoists, and Legalists was the foundation on which these and later dynasties rested. Significant elements contributing to the unification of China in this period included the following:

- The building of a centralized bureaucracy staffed with professionals educated in Confucian thought and values
- A prosperous economy based on technological and industrial development and long-distance trade
- The standardization of the written language

Chapter Outline

I. In search of political and social order

- A. Confucius (551-479 B.C.E.) and his school
 - 1. Confucius
 - a. Educator and political advisor
 - b. Sayings were compiled in the Analects by his disciples
 - 2. Confucian ideas
 - a. Fundamentally moral and ethical in character
 - b. Thoroughly practical: how to restore political and social order
 - c. Concentrated on formation of junzi--"superior individuals"
 - d. Edited and compiled the Zhou classics for his disciples to study
 - 3. Key Confucian values
 - a. Ren--a sense of humanity, kindness, benevolence
 - b. Li--a sense of propriety, courtesy, respect, deference to elders
 - c. Xiao--filial piety, familial obligation
 - d. Cultivate personal morality and junzi for bringing order to China
 - 4. Mencius (372-289 B.C.E.), spokesman for the Confucian school
 - a. Believed in the goodness of human nature (ren)
 - b. Advocated government by benevolence and humanity
 - 5. Xunzi (298-238 B.C.E.) had a less positive view of human nature
 - a. Believed that humans selfishly pursue own interests
 - b. Preferred harsh social discipline to bring order to society
 - c. Advocated moral education and good public behavior
- B. Daoism featured prominent critics of Confucian activism
 - 1. Preferred philosophical reflection and introspection, a life in harmony with nature
 - 2. Laozi, founder of Daoism, allegedly wrote the Daodejing (Classic of the Way and of Virtue)
 - 3. Zhuangzi (compendium of Daoist philosophy)
 - 4. The Dao--the way of nature, the way of the cosmos
 - a. Elusive concept: an eternal principle governing all the workings of the world
 - b. Dao is passive and yielding, does nothing yet accomplishes everything
 - c. Humans should tailor their behavior to the passive and yielding nature of the Dao
 - d. Ambition and activism had only brought the world to chaos
 - e. Doctrine of wuwei: disengagement from worldly affairs, simple life
 - f. Advocated small, self-sufficient communities
 - 5. Political implications: served as counterbalance to Confucian activism
- C. Legalism
 - 1. The doctrine of practical and efficient statecraft
 - a. No concern with ethics and morality
 - b. No concern with the principles governing nature
 - 2. Shang Yang (ca. 390-338 B.C.E.), chief minister of Qin and Legalist writer
 - 3. Han Feizi (ca. 280-233 B.C.E.) synthesized Legalist ideas in essays
 - 4. Legalist doctrine
 - a. The state's strength was in agriculture and military force

- b. Discouraged commerce, education, and the arts
- c. Harnessing self-interest of the people for the needs of the state
- d. Called for harsh penalties even for minor infractions
- e. Advocated collective responsibility before the law
- f. Not popular among Chinese, but practical; put end to Period of Warring States

II. The Unification of China

A. The Qin dynasty

1. Qin, Located in west China, adopted Legalist policies
 - a. Encouraged agriculture, resulted in strong economy
 - b. Organized a powerful army equipped with iron weapons
 - c. Conquered other states and unified China in 221 B.C.E.
2. The first emperor was Qin Shihuangdi (221 B.C.E.)
 - a. Established centralized imperial rule
 - b. Project of connecting and extending the Great Wall
 - c. Buried 460 scholars alive because of their criticism against the Qin
 - d. Burned all books except some with utilitarian value
3. Policies of centralization
 - a. Standardization of laws, currencies, weights, measures
 - b. Standardization of scripts
4. Tomb of the First Emperor, who died 210 B.C.E.
 - a. Tomb was underground palace with army of life-size terra-cotta figures
 - b. Excavation of the tomb since 1974
5. The collapse of the Qin dynasty
 - a. Massive public works generated tremendous ill will among the people
 - b. Waves of rebels overwhelmed the Qin court in 207 B.C.E.
 - c. Short-lived dynasty, but left deep marks in Chinese history

B. The early Han dynasty

1. Liu Bang; persistent and methodical; by 206 B.C.E. restored order
2. Early Han policies
 - a. Sought a middle way between Zhou decentralization and Qin overcentralization
 - b. Han Wudi, the Martial Emperor (reigned 141-87 B.C.E.), emphasized centralization and expansion
3. Han centralization; adopted Legalist policies
 - a. Built an enormous bureaucracy to rule the empire
 - b. Continued to build roads and canals
 - c. Levied taxes on agriculture, trade, and craft industries
 - d. Imperial monopolies on production of iron and salt
 - e. Established Confucian educational system for training bureaucrats
4. Han imperial expansion
 - a. Invaded and colonized northern Vietnam and Korea
 - b. Han organized vast armies to invade Xiongnu territory (nomads from steppes)
 - c. Han enjoyed uncontested hegemony in east and central Asia

III. From economic prosperity to social disorder

A. Productivity and prosperity during the Former Han

1. Patriarchal social structure
 - a. Women's subordination; Ban Zhao's Admonitions for Women
 - b. Children obey and honor parents
2. Vast majority of population were cultivators
3. Iron metallurgy: farming tools, utensils, and weapons
4. Silk textiles; sericulture spread all over China during the Han
5. Paper production; replaced silk and bamboo as writing material
6. Population growth: twenty million to sixty million from 220 B.C.E. to 9 C.E.

B. Economic and social difficulties

1. Expeditions consumed the empire's surplus
 - a. Raised taxes and confiscated land of some wealthy individuals

- b. Taxes and land confiscations discouraged investment in manufacture and trade
 - 2. Social tensions, caused by stratification between the poor and rich
 - 3. Problems of land distribution
 - 4. The reign of Wang Mang (9-23 C.E.)
 - a. Land reforms by the "socialist emperor"
 - b. Overthrown by revolts, 23 C.E.
 - C. The later Han dynasty (25-220 C.E.)
 - 1. Yellow Turban Uprising: revolt due to problems of land distribution
 - 2. Collapse of the Han
 - a. Factions at court paralyzed the central government
 - b. Han empire dissolved; China was divided into regional kingdoms