5.2 The Han Dynasty Creates a Strong China
The Han Dynasty Creates a Strong China

Liu Bang took the title Gao Zu and set about restoring order and justice.

He continued earlier efforts to unify China, lowered taxes, eased the Qin emperor's harsh Legalist policies.

He appointed Confucian scholars as advisers.

Created strong foundations for the Han Dynasty 206 B.C.E. to 220 C.E.
Emperor Wudi Brings Great Changes

The most famous Han emperor, Wudi, took China to new heights.

His reign 141 B.C.E. to 87 B.C.E.

Strengthened the government and economy.

Chose Confucian men of "wisdom and virtue" as officials.

To train scholars, he set up an imperial university at Xi'an.
Boosted economic growth by improving canals and roads

Granaries set up across the empire so the government could buy grain when it was abundant and sell it at stable prices when it was scarce

Reorganized finances and imposed a government monopoly on iron and salt
A monopoly is the complete control of a product or business by one person or group.

The sale of iron and salt gave the government a source of income other than taxes on peasants.
Wudi followed a policy of **expansionism**, or expanding a country’s territory.

The endless campaign to secure and expand China’s borders earned him the title **“Warrior Emperor”**.

Wudi fought many battles to drive nomadic peoples beyond the Great Wall.
The army added outposts in Manchuria, Korea, northern Vietnam, Tibet, and Central Asia.

Soldiers, traders, and settlers slowly spread Chinese influence across these regions.

To cement alliances with nomads on the western frontier, emperors arranged marriages between nomad chiefs and noble Chinese women.
The Silk Road Links China to the West

Wudi opened up trade routes, later called the **Silk Road**, that would link China and the West for centuries.

During Han times, new foods such as grapes, figs, cucumbers, and walnuts flowed into China from western Asia.

Traders brought horses from Central Asia and muslin cloth from India to China.
Large quantities of silk moved westward to fill a growing demand for the prized fabric.

The Silk Road stretched for more than 4,000 miles, and linked China to the Middle East.

There was not a single route, but a network of intersecting trade routes.
Goods were relayed in stages, from one set of traders to another.

At the western end, trade was controlled by various peoples, including the Persians.

From the Middle East, some trade goods were sent across the Mediterranean to Rome.
Importance of the Silk Road

Growing trade along the Silk Road contributed to the economic prosperity of the Han empire. Important cultural exchanges also took place because ideas as well as goods traveled along the Silk Road.

Missionaries and traders carried Buddhism from India into China. Daoism traveled west out of China into Central Asia and beyond. Much later, the religion of Islam was carried eastward from the Middle East.
Cultural influences spread along the trade route

Turkish folk tales inspired Chinese poetry

Central Asian harpists and dancers introduced their art to the Chinese people

Many Chinese inventions, such as the stirrup, traveled westward
Scholar-officials Run the Government

Han emperors made Confucianism the official belief system of the state.

Confucian scholars ran the many departments in the government.

A scholar-official had to match the Confucian ideal of a gentleman.

Courteous, dignified, and possess a thorough knowledge of history, music, poetry, and Confucian teachings.
The Han Civil Service System

Han emperors adopted the idea that civil servants, government officials, should gain their positions by merit, rather than through family background.

To find the most qualified officials, they set up a system of exams.

These exams were given at the local, provincial, and national levels.
To pass, candidates studied the Confucian classics, a collection of histories, poems, and handbooks on customs.

In theory, any man could take the exams.

In practice, only those who could afford years of study, such as the sons of wealthy landowners or officials, could hope to succeed.

Occasionally, a village or wealthy family might pay for the education of a brilliant peasant boy.

If he passed the exams and obtained a government job, he, his family, and his clan all enjoyed immense prestige and moved up in society.
Confucian teachings about filial piety and the superiority of men prevented women from taking the civil service exam

As a result, women were excluded from government jobs
The civil service system had enormous impact on China for almost 2,000 years. It put men trained in Confucian thought at every level of government and created an enduring system of values. Dynasties rose and fell, but Confucian influence survived.
The Han Empire Falls

The Han dynasty decayed slowly

Court intrigues undermined emperors who could no longer control powerful warlords, or local military rulers

Canals and roads fell into disrepair

Natural disasters were seen as evidence of the anger of heaven

Heavy taxes and crushing debt, many peasants revolted

220 C.E., ambitious warlords toppled the last Han emperor

China broke up into separate kingdoms

Invaders poured over the Great Wall and set up their own states

Many of these newcomers were absorbed into Chinese civilization
Impact of Han China

Han rulers forged a vast and varied land into a united China

They created an empire and set up patterns of government, based on Confucian ideas, that would survive for 2,000 years

Han China deeply influenced East Asia
Confucian ethics spread across most of East Asia and dominated Chinese government and culture.

China would break up and be reassembled over time but Chinese civilization flourished in a united land.

After periods of disunity, a new dynasty would turn to Confucian scholars to revive the days of Han greatness.