

Chapter Summary

The First Chinese Empires

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

How can differing philosophies influence a culture?

What factors can help a dynasty stay in power?

Three major schools of thought emerged in ancient China: Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism. In general, all three philosophies focused on worldly matters, such as the nature of human beings and how to create a stable society. These various philosophies were employed during the Qin and Han dynasties. Qin Shihuangdi, the founder and sole emperor of the Qin dynasty, united China under a single monetary system, new infrastructure, and a centralized bureaucracy. After the fall of the Qin, the Han dynasty continued some of the Qin's ideas about bureaucracy but expanded and refined them. Under the Han, Chinese culture flourished, marking it as a classical civilization—one of China's greatest.

Schools of Thought in Ancient China

- In general, Chinese philosophers focused on worldly matters and society.
- The teachings of Confucius were focused on duty and humanity.
- The philosophy of Daoism presents proper forms of human behavior.
- Legalism proposed that society needed a strong ruler to keep people serving his interests.

The Qin Unify China

- Qin Shihuangdi worked to unify China economically and geographically.
- Qin Shihuangdi left behind a wealth of information for historians and archaeologists.
- Qin Shihuangdi initiated a large-scale building project to keep out invaders near China's northern frontier.

- The Qin dynasty made many administrative and political changes in China.
- The Qin dynasty fell after the death of Qin Shihuangdi.

The Han Dynasty

- The first Han emperor adopted Confucianism as the new state philosophy but kept the Qin system of a merit-based bureaucracy.
- Under the Han emperors the Chinese Empire expanded.
- The new technologies developed during the Han dynasty contributed to its economic success.
- The Han dynasty fell as a result of internal corruption, widespread unrest, and nomadic raids.