Chapter 8 - The Unification of China

1. Before we get into the unification of China, we need to go back and do a little background.
   1. Chinese history is organized into dynasties - families or groups that ruled China during a certain period of time.
   2. One of the reasons that China is a difficult place to understand is that there really isn’t much difference between any of the dynasties. IOW, Chinese history is one 2500 year span of history unbroken by distinguishing characteristics
   3. Everytime we come back to China, we’re going to do a bit of review of the dynasties we’ve already covered and we’ll start that today
      1. Xia Dynasty - half mythical/half historical - marked by the mythical hero Yu the Engineer, first attempt to provide flood control of Yellow River, first organization of society
      2. Shang Dynasty - toppled the tyrannous Xia king, monopolized the copper and tin mines, produced large quantities of bronze weapons
      3. Zhou Dynasty - toppled the tyrannous Shang king, used iron weapons to do it, attempted to monopolize iron mines but failed, developed concept of Mandate of Heaven
      4. The Period of Warring States (403-221 BCE) ended the Zhou Dynasty as iron weapons became prevalent and several groups attempted to take control of all of China.
2. Period of Warring States
   1. Although this was a period of political instability, it offered people a chance to think philosophically about what society was and what an individual’s role in society was.
   2. Three philosophies emerged from the PWS that attempted to combat instability. Each of these philosophies would go on to greatly influence China and the rest of the world.
3. Kong Fuzi (aka Confucius) (Key Text - Analects)
   1. A minor bureaucrat who attempted to become an advisor to the Emperor, but was never successful
      1. He was much more successful as an educator than a government official
   2. His ideas were not religious, but moral and ethical
   3. Ideas dealt with personal relationships - 5 general categories (father-son; older brother-younger brother; ruler-subject; husband-wife; friend-friend)
      1. Confucianism deals with knowing one’s place in these relationships and how each party in the relationship should behave.
      2. If everyone follows the correct behavior for each relationship, everything will be peaceful and stable.
   4. He also taught that people should read history, philosophy and poetry from the Zhou Dynasty.
      1. He claimed that if selfless, educated people (people he called *junzi-* superior people) were in government, it would be best for everyone.
   5. Three Confucian Values - doing these things makes one a *junzi*
      1. *ren* - humanity or kindness
      2. *li* - propriety (doing what is necessary of your position with respect)
      3. *xiao* - filial piety, especially of your elders
   6. Different Confucian interpretations
      1. Confucius was very broad in how to apply the principles, so his disciples interpreted them very differently.
         1. Mencius focused on *ren* - government should be benevolent and unobtrusive (light taxes, avoid wars, support education)
         2. Xunzi focused on *li* - clear rules to check individual interests and punish those that don’t check their individual interests in favor of the collective
4. Daoism - Laozi (Key Text - Daodejing)
   1. Laozi (who may not have actually existed) favored introspection rather than Confucian social activism.
      1. Dao - the Way of Nature or of the Cosmos
         1. Retreat from society and from government
         2. Live simply - activism makes things worse (think chinese finger trap)
         3. No education
         4. These proscriptions are called *wuwei*
      2. *Wuwei* said that problems of instability will be solved when fewer people try to solve the problems of instability
   2. One could be both a Confucian and a Daoist - Confucian publicly and Daoist at home
      1. The two concepts were not necessarily mutually exclusive
5. Legalism
   1. Neither Confucianism nor Daoism actually solved the political instability; Legalism did
   2. This philosophy was focused entirely on the state
   3. Shang Yang and Han Feizi were the most prominent Legalist thinkers
      1. Both were realists that believed that benevolence and niceness would solved nothing.
      2. Only laws and strict punishments for breaking those laws could solve problems
         1. Not only individual laws and punishments, but collectively as well
         2. Everyone needs to observe everyone else for improprieties
   4. Strength of the state is in agriculture and the military - actively dissuades people from other careers
   5. While this philosophy is what actually unified China after the PWS, scholars have found little to praise in the Legalist doctrine. People hated them then and not much has changed.
6. Qin Dynasty (221-207 BCE)
   1. Shang Yang and Han Feizi used legalist doctrine in their home territory and their ideas spread to the surrounding areas
      1. They encouraged peasants to move to the Qin homeland by giving them land
      2. They also weakened the land holding elites by giving away their land
         1. More food, means more money, which is invested in the army
   2. The Qin king, Qin Shihuangdi, unifies the warring states and becomes the new Emperor
      1. He ignored the nobles and ruled through a centralized bureaucracy of merit
      2. Focused on large public works projects, like walls and roads - forced people to work on these things
      3. Destroyed forts or castles of nobles that might rebel against him.
      4. No open criticism or discussion
         1. Burned Zhou books - history, philosophy, poetry, but exempted books on medicine, agriculture or fortune telling because they had some utilitarian value.
      5. Centralized laws, coins and writing - all of these things were organized by the Qin Emperor
   3. It fell when Qin Shihuangdi died and the people rebelled against the harsh legalist tactics
7. Han Dynasty
   1. After the fall of the Qin Dynasty, a single determined commander named Liu Bang (from the Han Region) managed to reunite China in a year.
      1. Ultimately settled on a more friendly version of legalist policies to rule China
   2. The most important Han emperor was Han Wudi
      1. Succeeded in expanding Chinese territory and centralizing authority
         1. Conquered parts of modern Korea and Vietnam
      2. Used his own officials to govern territories, issued more taxes to make the big government work
      3. Government monopolies on essential goods, like iron production, salt and liquor
      4. Built roads and canals, like the Qin did
      5. Also standardized Confucian education in history, philosophy, literature and writing in order to train the huge number of government officials the Han government needed.
   3. Frequently attacked by the Xiongnu, a nomadic pastoral people to the north.
      1. Usually a symbiotic relationship - X traded for grains and agricultural goods, Han traded for meat and leather goods
      2. Under Maodun (210-174 BCE) the Xiongnu became a strong military force
      3. Han response to the growing threat was to settle the X lands, effectively destroying X society and adding that territory to the growing Han Empire
8. Han Society and Economy
   1. Similar patriarchal structure as the Zhou dynasty, Confucian concept of *xiao* cemented this structure
   2. They also became very adept at iron metallurgy
      1. This meant that even the poorest people could afford strong tools and utensils of high quality
   3. Silk became an important industry and desired as far away as Rome.
      1. Start of the silk road™
   4. Writing became more prevalent because of the invention of paper
      1. Prior to this, writing was done on bones, bamboo or silk
   5. Han China was an engine of invention and innovation
      1. Improved crossbow (innovation)
      2. Improved horse collar (innovation)
      3. Ship’s rudder (invention)
9. Fall of the Han Dynasty
   1. Military expeditions were costly which exhausted the imperial treasury
   2. Additionally, the gap between rich and poor continued to grow
      1. This gap became so large that a regent (a stand-in ruler for a small child) usurped the throne in 6 CE.
         1. Wang Mang was called the Socialist Emperor because of his extreme land redistribution policies
         2. These policies were poorly implemented and chaos ensued and Wang Mang was overthrown himself by angry landlords and desperate peasants in 23 CE
   3. The Han reasserted their rule, but did nothing to fix the disparity between rich and poor. (23-220 CE)
      1. The Yellow Turban Uprising was a direct result of this disparity in which poor desperate peasants fought the Han. It took a lot of military strength to put it down, which further weakened the state.
   4. The Han finally collapsed due to internal conflicts within the government.
      1. Bureaucrats vs. Eunuchs vs. Royal Family members
      2. They were too busy fighting among themselves that they could not stop rebellions throughout the country
   5. China again fell apart, this time into 4 large regional kingdoms.