

The Decline of the Han

During the late Classical Period (200CE- 600CE) all the greatest civilizations that the world had known collapsed. This included the fall of the Han China, the Gupta Empire in India, and the Western part of the Roman Empire in the Mediterranean.

Directions: Each group will read the following documents and list on the graphic organizer the problems/weaknesses and any similarities they share with the Roman Empire.

Document #1

“The Han Dynasty had thrived in the East under Liu Bang. He was popular among peasants, he lowered taxes, and his humble origins made him well liked. After his death in 195 BCE, he had left a stable and prospering kingdom in the hands of his family. The dynasty produced capable rulers like Wendi, Jingdi, and Wudi. Their reigns were marked by peace, prosperity, expansion of China’s lands, art and trade. Confucianism became the official state philosophy. After Wudi’s death China experienced a succession of mediocre and incompetent rulers.”

F. Smitha: The Rise and Fall of Han China

Document #2

“Wudi ruled China from 140-87 BCE. He was the most famous ruler of the Han Dynasty. He was most remembered for bringing peace to the majority of the Asian continent. The Martial Emperor was establishing a Pax Sinica also known as the “Chinese Peace” in the East. Under Wudi, China conquered many lands, expanding their power and influence. It controlled northern Vietnam and the Korean Peninsula. His conquests however put an enormous burden on the economy. As costs increased, taxes increased, and the peasant’s burden led to revolt.”

P. Johnson: The Han Dynasty

Document #3

“Wudi found himself in a financial crisis. He debased the coinage thus creating inflation. Towards the end of Wudi’s reign, violence erupted between the empress and Wudi’s concubine over the heir to the throne. Eventually, a compromise ruler was chosen. However, the decline of the Han had already begun. Later emperors were incompetent, inconsistent and their reigns were marked by corruption and immorality.”

F. Smitha: The Rise and Fall of Han China

Document #4

“Wang Mang was appointed a regent of a child emperor Ruzi. The outsider seized power in 9 CE and attempted to implement sweeping reforms to repair the crumbling Han. He inherited many problems. For one, rich officials and merchants were able to acquire the land of small peasant-owners, who became tenants paying very high rents. The conflict of landownership and tenancy became a major problem in Chinese history. More and more peasants fell behind on their rents and were forced to sell themselves or their children into debt slavery. The emperor’s solution was to take the land of some wealthy landlords and raise taxes. This solution caused more problems. It discouraged trade, and increased tensions between rich and poor. It caused chaos in the government.”

Nosotros: The Decline of the Han Dynasty and the Roman Empire

Document #5

“Wang Mang faced more problems. Natural disasters such as a poor harvest had caused massive food shortages. At length, excessive taxation, unjust laws, incessant border warfare, severe famines, and the corruption of officials—all combined to arouse the people; and standard revolts were unfurled in more than one place in the empire. Had Wang Mang taken wise measures, he might have been able to save himself; but he was superstitious and believed that the rebellions would die a natural death. He was dragged out of a tower in his palace, where he had been hiding. Wang Mang was beheaded in 22 CE; but peace did not come to the nation.”

F. Smitha: The Rise and Fall of Han China

Document #6

“The successors of Wang Mang still suffered from internal strife. A Han prince tried to revive the Dynasty. It never reached the height of its first years. Gradually, court officials and warlords gained more and more power. The Daoist philosophy had become popular in China and amongst the peasants. It had preached equal rights causing peasants to want to regain their land. Court officials were now fighting with the Daoists. During this time nomads in the North destroyed the Chinese settlements as civil war rocked the Han. In the end, the emperors lost most of their power and China split into various warring factions that were eventually transformed into three new kingdoms. The Han’s glorious reign formally came to an end in 220 CE. For the next 400 years China was divided into several kingdoms.”

Nosotro: The Decline of the Han Dynasty and the Roman Empire

	Use each document to provide evidence about the decline of the Han.
Document 1	
Document 2	
Document 3	
Document 4	
Document 5	
Document 6	

TWO VIEWS OF THE CIVIL SERVICE EXAM IN HAN CHINA

Document 1:

At first glance it would seem that a topic such as the Chinese civil service examination would be something very distant and unimportant to us today. The proof is in the fact that at the end of the twelfth century the Chinese bureaucracy ruled over 120 million people. This helps us to understand the complexity because at this time period the exams were the main way of entrance into the bureaucracy. This meant that there was a lot riding on the exams being run in such a manner that truly brought the most talented individuals into the bureaucracy. The main point of this is that the Chinese were dealing with issues of how a bureaucracy should rule over such a large and diverse population long before the emergence of the European powers much less the United States. They were also determining how to examine people fairly and what should the exam candidates be tested on; which are similar to questions we face today in terms of college entrance exams for instance. It is areas such as these that looking back to the Chinese civil service exams can help us determine our own approach to examinations and the civil service.

The civil service examination has its roots in the Han dynasty (202 B.C.-220 A.D.); who in 124 B.C. established an imperial academy in the capital where the students studied the Confucian classics. The most successful students could be tapped for a position within the Han bureaucracy but first they had to pass a written examination over the Confucian classics. With the creation of these examinations over the classics we see in this period an institutionalization of Confucianism. For one to make it into the imperial bureaucracy and to move up or maintain their position in society one had to have a Confucian education. The result was that by about 150 A.D. there were an estimated 30,000 students studying the Confucian classics at the imperial academy.

The Han should be praised for their desire to select people based on merit and not family background. Many countries today have used ideas and examples from the ancient Chinese examination system to develop their own systems for awarding government jobs. The creation of civil service examinations had encouraged and created more educational opportunity for everyone, including the poor. It inspired the Chinese to pursue a wider variety of careers as scholars, artists, poets, historical writing. Author: *Geoffrey A. Barta*,

Document 2:

The exam system contained the seeds of corruption, and corruption did occur, in spite of elaborate preventive measures. In one scheme in the mid-19th century, code words allowed examiners to identify favored candidates, whose poor papers could be then replaced with promising ones. The offending examiners were caught and beheaded, and the cheating candidates lost all the qualifications previously gained. Some candidates armed themselves with miniature copies of the Confucian classics. One candidate even wore an undershirt covered with some 500,000 Hanzi the Confucian Five Classics and Four Books with commentaries (fig. 10-1b).

Preparation for the exams began young. Boys age 3 began learning characters at home, and began the study of the classics at school at age 8. By age 15, boys learned and memorized the Confucian classics, in preparation for the exams. They also practiced writing poems and eight-legged essays, and calligraphy. From ancient times, many poems were composed on the theme, "If you study while young, you will get ahead." Here is one written by a Song emperor (Miyazaki 1963: 17).

To enrich your family, no need to buy good land: /Books hold a thousand measures of grain. /For an easy life, no need to build a mansion: /In books are found houses of gold.... /A boy who wants to become a somebody /Devotes himself to the classics, faces the window, and reads.

The exams were in theory open to people from all socio-economic backgrounds except the "degraded classes," and some candidates were indeed from families with no record of civil-service status. But only a

small minority, sons of elite families, could afford the time and money to study for the exams. And some men were allowed to inherit or purchase official posts, bypassing the exams.

However, in later dynasties, they realized that the strong focus on Confucius did not allow them to learn about things that were important when trading and working with other societies. To connect China with more modern industrial, scientifically advanced societies, they felt they needed more education in subjects such as modern science and use of technology. The Traditional Chinese Examination System had failed to move China toward that goal and its use was ended in 1905. Author: ***F. Smith***

Document 1:	Document 2:
Author:	
Three Main Points of the Argument:	
Lines from document that express an opinion:	

1. Which author had a much more positive view of the exams? Why?
2. Which author was much more negative? Why?
3. In your opinion, were the civil service exams a good system in China?
4. Do you see a connection between the exams of China and testing in the United States, explain...