From River to Empire

Trace how ideas, inventions, and trade shaped ancient China.

SS24.7.13 "Explain the emergence and consolidation of China from the Xia Dynasty along the Huang He River Valley through the fall of the Han Dynasty. 13a Compare and contrast the philosophies of Confucianism, Daoism..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Circle the three philosophies named in the passage, then underline one cause-and-effect connection in each paragraph to trace how China changed.

Building and Holding an Empire

1. Traditional accounts place the Xia near the Huang He (Yellow River), where farming communities depended on river water. Historians still debate whether the Xia was a single, identifiable dynasty. The Shang left written records, and the Zhou later claimed rulers held power only while they governed well, an idea called the Mandate of Heaven. As Zhou authority weakened, rival states fought in the Warring States period. Confucianism urged rulers to lead through virtue and learning; Daoism favored harmony with nature and less interference; Legalism called for strict laws and punishments.

2. In 221 BCE, Qin ruler Shi Huangdi defeated the rival states and united much of China. He standardized writing, coins, and measurements to strengthen control. Qin officials drew on Legalism, but forced labor and harsh punishments helped spark revolts after his death. After the Qin fell in 206 BCE, the Han dynasty rose to power. The Han kept a central government while favoring Confucian learning for officials. During the Han, improved papermaking made records easier to produce, and an early seismograph showed the direction of a distant earthquake. These tools helped officials manage a large empire.

3. Han leaders supported trade routes later called the Silk Road. Merchants carried silk west through Central Asia, while horses, glassware, and new ideas moved along connected routes between Asia and Europe. Trade also reached parts of Africa through wider networks. This exchange brought wealth and new beliefs, including Buddhism, into China. Yet land inequality and rebellions weakened Han rule, and the dynasty ended in 220 CE. Centuries later, Chinese inventors developed gunpowder and the magnetic compass. These were not Han inventions, but both later changed warfare and navigation far beyond China.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism differ in what they wanted rulers to do?

2. How did Qin rulers unite and control China, and what helped bring an end to their rule?

3. How did two Han-era inventions help officials? How did two later Chinese inventions change life beyond China?

4. How did Silk Road connections affect both trade and culture across more than one continent?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you advise a new Han ruler after the Qin falls. In five or six sentences, propose two policies drawn from different philosophies and one way to use a Han invention or Silk Road trade, then explain how your choices might help the dynasty last.

ANSWER KEY

From River to Empire

GRADE 7 · SS24.7.13

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Circle the three philosophies named in the passage, then underline one cause-and-effect connection in each paragraph to trace how China changed. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism differ in what they wanted rulers to do?	**Confucianism favored virtue and learning, Daoism favored less interference and harmony with nature, and Legalism favored strict laws and punishments.**
2	How did Qin rulers unite and control China, and what helped bring an end to their rule?	**Shi Huangdi defeated rival states and standardized writing, coins, and measurements. Forced labor and harsh punishments helped spark revolts after his death.**
3	How did two Han-era inventions help officials? How did two later Chinese inventions change life beyond China?	**Improved papermaking made records easier to produce, and an early seismograph showed the direction of a distant earthquake. Later, gunpowder changed warfare and the magnetic compass changed navigation.**
4	How did Silk Road connections affect both trade and culture across more than one continent?	**Connected routes carried goods between Asia and Europe, with trade reaching parts of Africa through wider networks. The exchange brought wealth and carried ideas such as Buddhism into China.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would ask the ruler to appoint officials who study Confucian teachings so they treat people fairly. I would also borrow Daoism by avoiding unnecessary orders that disrupt farmers' lives. Officials could use paper to keep clear records of grain and taxes. Fair treatment and careful records might reduce anger about demands on workers. If fewer people rebel, the dynasty might last longer.

Accept other reasonable policy choices tied accurately to two distinct philosophies. For the open task, look for a plausible use of a Han-era invention or Silk Road trade and an explanation of how the choices could support stability.