

Rise and Fall of Great Empires

The Big Idea

- The Han and Roman empires:
- grew through military expansion.
 - were supported by strong government and thriving trade.
 - fell as a result of internal weakness and invading forces.

Section Overview

The rise and fall of the Han dynasty and the Roman empire followed remarkably similar courses. Both empires gained power through conquest, strong central government, and profitable trade. Both eventually fell because of weak leadership, internal dissent, and aggressive invaders.

Key Themes and Concepts

As you review this section, take special note of the following key themes and concepts:

- Political Systems** What factors contributed to the rise of both the Han dynasty and the Roman empire?
- Economic Systems** What was the importance of trade to the Han and Roman empires?
- Change** What factors contributed to the decline of both the Han and Roman empires?

Key People and Terms

As you review this section, be sure you understand the significance of these key people and terms:

Wudi	Silk Road	Pax Romana
monopoly	Augustus	

Factors Leading to Growth

Both the Han and the Roman empires reached their height between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200. Both empires began by throwing off oppressive rulers: the Qin in China and the Etruscans in Rome. Although many elements contributed to the growth of these two empires, the most important factors that sustained them were strong government and profitable trade.

The Han Empire

Military Power The most famous of the Han emperors, Wudi, conducted many military campaigns to secure and expand China's borders. Many of the battles he fought were attempts to drive nomadic peoples beyond the Great Wall.

Government Wudi worked to strengthen the Chinese government. He removed many harsh laws. Also, the civil service system helped him to choose wise officials. He set up an imperial university to train scholars in Confucian teachings.

Economy and Trade Initially, Wudi improved the economy internally by adding canals and roads to ease the movement of goods. He also had storage areas for grain set up throughout his empire. When grain was plentiful, the government would buy and store it. Then, when it became scarce, the government could sell it.

Another source of government revenue was income from the sale of iron and salt. Wudi created a government monopoly on these items. A monopoly is the complete

control of a product or business by one person or group—in this case, the Han government. Sales of iron and salt allowed the government to have a source of income besides taxes. Wudi and later emperors also developed the Silk Road, a caravan route stretching from the Chinese capital to the Mediterranean Sea.

The Roman Empire

Military Power The Romans were able to conquer partly because they had a strong, well-disciplined army. However, they also treated conquered peoples well, allowing them to keep their own governments and customs. In return, conquered lands were required to supply soldiers for the Roman army and pay taxes to Rome.

Government Emperor Augustus, who ruled the Roman empire from 31 B.C. to A.D. 14, stabilized the government. He, like the Han emperors, created a civil service system that ensured a supply of well-trained and well-educated government officials.

Both good and bad emperors followed Augustus. However, the 200-year period called the **Pax Romana**, or Roman peace, began with his reign. During this time, Roman rule brought order and prosperity to the empire. Roman legions maintained the road system and guarded the borders.

Economy and Trade Roman expansion allowed the empire to take over prosperous trade routes throughout the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean served as a natural highway for trade. In addition, the Romans built miles of fine roads that promoted trade and brought wealth into the empire. Grain from the Nile Valley, ivory and gold from Africa, spices and gems from India, and silk that came from China via the Silk Road flowed into the empire. Under Augustus the tax system was reformed, and new coins were issued to make trade easier.

The Roman Empire, 44 B.C.



Geographic Setting

The Han and Roman empires arose on opposite sides of the Eurasian landmass. Both, however, expanded their borders over time.

Extent of the Han Empire

The Han empire was first located where the Qin had ruled: in eastern China. However, the empire expanded during Han times as Wudi secured and expanded China's borders. To the north, the Han moved into Manchuria and Korea. To the south, the empire moved into northern Vietnam. To the west, the Han gained territory in Tibet and central Asia.

Vocabulary Builder

caravan—(ka ruh van) n. a group of people with animals or vehicles who travel together for safety, especially through a desert

Key Themes and Concepts

Economic Systems Trade was encouraged in both the Han and Roman empires by extensive road systems.

The Roman Empire The Romans gained control of lands around the Mediterranean Sea through conquest and diplomacy.

Preparing for the Regents

- Name three lands that were part of the Roman empire in 44 B.C.

Great Britain.

Causes of Decline

Both the Han and Roman empires grew weak as a result of internal problems and external pressures.

The Han Empire

Expansion helped to strengthen the Han empire but also led to its decline.

- **Political Causes** Rulers that followed Wudi were unable to control powerful warlords in outlying areas.
- **Economic Causes** Some rulers did not maintain the systems of canals and roads, which were vital routes of commerce. As a result, the economy suffered. High taxes oppressed the peasants and thus led to a revolt.
- **Military Causes** In A.D. 220, warlords overthrew the last Han emperor, and the empire was split into several kingdoms. Invaders overran the Great Wall and set up their own kingdoms.

The Roman Empire

Some of the same factors that led to the Han decline also led to the Roman decline. Over-expansion of the empire, high taxes, and foreign invasions all weakened the empire.

Roman emperor Diocletian divided the empire into two parts in a failed attempt to restore order. Although the decline of the Roman empire was a long, slow process, the year A.D. 476, when Germanic leader Odoacer ousted the emperor in Rome, is the date generally considered to mark its fall. The Eastern Roman empire survived, however, and became known as the Byzantine empire.

The Fall of the Roman Empire

Military causes	Economic causes	Political causes	Social causes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visigoths and other Germanic peoples invaded the empire.• Roman army lacked training and discipline.• Romans were forced to hire foreign soldiers to defend borders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Heavy taxes were necessary to support the government.• Farmers left land.• Middle class disappeared.• Romans used too much slave labor.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Government became too strict.• People stopped supporting government.• Many officials were corrupt.• Divided empire became weak.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Population declined because of disease and war.• People became selfish and lazy.

Preparing for the Regents

- Write an essay that compares and contrasts the rise and fall of the Han and Roman empires.

Summary

At opposite ends of the Eurasian landmass, two great empires thrived between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200. The Han empire in China and the Roman empire in the lands around the Mediterranean Sea shared many characteristics. Both grew through conquest and were supported for centuries by strong central governments. Far-flung trade thrived in both empires and led to prosperity. Eventually, however, internal weakness and external invasions brought about the decline of these two great empires.