The Han Dynasty of China:
A Chinese Golden Age

(206 BCE-220 CE)
Historical Setting of the Han

• Followed the Qin dynasty
  – 221-206 BCE
  – Qin ended in rebellion and civil war due to weak ruler and unrest (206-202 BCE)
• Han dynasty was China’s second imperial dynasty
  – 206 (or 202) BCE-220 CE
  • Over 400 years
• Followed by the Three Kingdoms
  – 220-265 CE
Liu Bang – Emperor Gaozu of Han

• Civil war
  – Two strong leaders
    • Xiang Yu (aristocratic general)
    • Liu Bang (peasant-class general under Xiang Yu)

• 202 BCE
  – Liu Bang beat Xiang Yu for good
    • Ultimately had a stronger and more devoted army
    • Liu Bang declared start of Han dynasty

Liu Bang reigned 202 BCE-195 BCE.
Two Periods of the Han Dynasty

• **Former Han**
  – Also called the **Western Han**
  – 206 BCE-9 CE

• **Interrupted by the Xin dynasty**
  – Under Wang Mang
  – 9-23 CE

• **Later Han**
  – Also called the **Eastern Han**
  – 25-220 CE
Government under the Han

- Centralized government
  - Capital cities
    - Chang’an
      - 206 BCE-9 CE (all of the Former or Western Han) and 190-195 CE (Later or Eastern Han)
    - Luoyang
      - 25-190 CE and 196 CE (most of the Later or Eastern Han)
    - Xuchang
      - 196-220 CE (very end of the Later or Eastern Han)
- Lowered taxes
- Less harsh punishments
Empress Lu

• One of Liu Bang’s widows
• Retained power by naming various children as emperor in turn
• Example of power gained through the manipulation of court politics
  – Families vied for power
  – Alliances among powerful and influential people
Wudi – The Martial Emperor

- **Han Wudi** lived 141-87 BCE
- Used warfare to expand the Chinese empire
  - **Northern steppes**
    - **Xiongnu** – steppe nomads from the north and west
    - Commonly raided Chinese villages
    - Traditionally kept at bay through bribery/tribute
    - Wudi made allies of the Xiongnu’s enemies and sent in 100,000 soldiers
    - Pushed the Xiongnu back
    - Settled soldiers on former Xiongnu lands
    - But the nomads of the steppes provided ongoing conflict
  - Modern-day **Korea, Manchuria, Vietnam**, etc.
    - Conquered and colonized
- Borders under Wudi nearly what they are today
Bureaucracy under the Han

- Taxes supported the government and military
- Merchants
  - Paid taxes
- Peasants
  - Gave the government a portion of their annual crops
  - Each year gave a month of labor (for public works projects) or of military service
Civil Service under the Han

- Over 130,000 employees
- 18 ranks of employees
- Civil service exams
  - Confucian principles described the qualities that emperors wanted in civil servants
  - Wudi set up a Confucian educational system
    - His greatest contribution to later dynasties
  - Formal examinations in Confucianism, history, law, and literature for civil service positions
  - Theoretically a merit-based system
    - But poor could not afford to educate their children
  - In effect until the downfall of China’s last dynasty in 1912