

CHAPTER
7

Summary

CHAPTERS IN BRIEF

India and China Establish Empires, 300 B.C.–A.D. 550

CHAPTER OVERVIEW Skillful generals and rulers establish empires in northern India. They join together many different peoples and bring peace and prosperity to the land. During this time, the religions of India undergo changes in order to be more appealing to the common people. In China a great empire sets the patterns of Chinese government and culture that would be followed centuries later.

1 India's First Empires

KEY IDEA *The Mauryas and the Guptas made empires in India. Neither family, though, united India for very long.*

In 321 B.C., Chandragupta Maurya used his army to defeat the king of eastern India. He took the throne and started a dynasty named after him.

Chandragupta, not stopping with eastern India, moved west. In 305 B.C., he began to challenge Seleucus, one of Alexander the Great's generals. The two armies clashed for several years, and eventually Chandragupta won. For the first time, northern India, from west to east, was joined under the rule of one person.

Chandragupta was a harsh ruler. He charged a heavy tax on all the farmers who raised food—one-half of the crop they grew each year. He used the wealth he gained to build a huge army. He created a government that he controlled by carefully choosing officials and keeping a watchful eye on them. He split his empire into four provinces, each ruled by a prince. These areas, in turn, were divided into smaller pieces that were run by members of the government.

We know a great deal about life in Chandragupta's court because Seleucus sent a Greek there as an ambassador. He described the richness of the palace and the beauty of the capital city.

Chandragupta's grandson Asoka took the throne in 269 B.C. and brought the Mauryan Empire to its greatest height. At first he was a warlike king and fought many fierce battles with an enemy to the south. Then he decided to accept the teachings of the Buddha.

Asoka promised to rule in a fair and just way. He issued laws that urged his subjects to avoid violence. He made great roads so that people could travel easily—and then placed wells and rest stops all along these roads for travelers to refresh themselves. Soon after Asoka died, however, his empire collapsed.

For the next 500 years, India was a land of troubles. In the center of India, a new kingdom arose to dominate the scene. In the northwest, many Greeks, Persians, and Central Asians entered the land, fleeing the invasions of others. They added new ideas and languages to India's rich mix of culture. In the south, three different kingdoms fought each other off and on.

Around A.D. 320, a new power arose in the north. It was Chandra Gupta (not related to the first emperor), and he came to power by marrying the daughter of an important royal family. With this alliance, he took the title of king and began to conquer other areas.

His son, Samudra Gupta, followed the same policy and for 40 years fought to win new lands for the Gupta Empire. His son, Chandra Gupta II, brought the empire to its largest size. He managed to take parts of western India, including important ports on the Indian Ocean. With these, the Guptas were able to engage in the rich trade that connected India, Southwest Asia, and the world of the Mediterranean Sea. The Gupta Empire, like the Mauryan Empire before it, now stretched all across northern India.

Farmers worked their land, following the cycle of the seasons. Each family was led by the father, and all members of the family worked on the farm. Part of each crop had to be paid to the king each year. Farmers also had to set aside part of each month to work on community resources such as wells or dams. Craft workers and those who worked in trade lived in special sections of each village, town, or city.

The Gupta kings were patrons of the arts, and artists flourished during their rule. The people were happy, too, according to a Chinese traveler who spent many years in India. However, this period of calm ended soon after the death of Chandra Gupta II. Another wave of invaders, related to the Huns sacking Rome at this time,

moved into India. Soon the great Gupta Empire had broken up into several smaller kingdoms.

2 Trade Spreads Indian Religions and Culture

KEY IDEA *Indian religions, culture, and science developed and changed. Through trade, they reached other lands.*

Over time, the religions of Hinduism and Buddhism became more and more distant from the common people. The special class of priests controlled Hinduism. Followers of the Buddha found it difficult to find the promised goal of release from this world. As new peoples moved into India, they brought new ideas. These ideas had an impact on these religions.

The Buddha had taught that a tough course of spiritual life was the way to escape from the suffering of the world. Self-denial was difficult for many people to follow, however. Many people came to worship the Buddha himself as a god, even though he had forbidden it. Then they came to believe that other people could become Buddhas themselves through good works and sacrifice.

These ideas created a new kind of Buddhism, and the religion broke into two ways of belief. Some took the new doctrine, and others held on to the stricter beliefs. However, with this new approach, Buddhism became a popular religion. All believers had the chance to be saved. This change caused an increase in art. Buddhists with money built temples and shrines and then paid artists to decorate them with sculptures and paintings.

Hinduism changed too. By the time of the Mauryan Empire, only priests were involved in many rituals of the faith. For centuries, Hinduism had been a religion of many gods. Now other religions based on only one god were becoming more important. Many Hindus began to emphasize three gods in particular. By devoting themselves to these gods, people began to feel the religion more directly in their lives.

Indian art enjoyed a period of great vigor during these centuries. Poets and playwrights wrote beautiful works of literature, while other artists laid the foundations for the classical form of dance in India.

The scientists of India had many achievements. They proved that the earth was indeed round many hundred years before Europeans realized it. They made great advances in mathematics, too. They invented the idea of zero and of decimal numbers.

The doctors of India became highly skilled. They knew more than 1,000 diseases and used hundreds of medicines from plants to help their patients.

India was also a center of trade. It traded cotton cloth and animals to China for silk. Traders brought spices from Southeast Asia to India along caravan routes called the Silk Roads. Then they sold them to Rome and to other western peoples. This trade was so busy that large numbers of Roman coins have been found in India. The Indians also traded their own cotton cloth in Africa for ivory and gold. They sent rice and wheat to Arabia for dates and horses. They carried out this trade by land and sea.

Along with goods, Indians spread their culture. The art and architecture of many lands in Southeast Asia shows the influence of Indian art. Some adopted Hinduism, and many began to follow Buddhism.

3 Han Emperors in China

KEY IDEA *The Han Dynasty made China larger. It also started a system of government that lasted for centuries.*

An empire also arose in China, one that would have long-lasting effects on Asia. The Chinese had been united briefly under the Qin Empire, but it fell apart in a period of civil war. Two leaders worked together to win control of China. Then one of them, Liu Bang, turned on the other and defeated him in battle. In 202 B.C., he named himself the first emperor of the Han Dynasty. The Han would rule parts of China for the next 400 years and set many patterns for Chinese culture for centuries to come.

Liu Bang made his government strong so that no one else could rival him for power. Local officials led the government throughout the land. They reported to the emperor in the capital. The rule of the previous emperor had been very harsh. Liu Bang took a different approach. He lowered taxes and had lighter penalties for crimes. Life became easier for the Chinese people.

After the death of Liu Bang, one of his wives, the Empress Lü took over. In this time, as in other parts of Han rule, court politics was a major part of life around the ruler. Each group tried to find a way of making sure that it could get and hold power. This game of political chess would take the ruler's attention from the people he was supposed to rule.

From 141 to 87 B.C., the emperor Wudi ruled Han China. He made the area of his empire much larger, pushing it almost to the size of modern

China. He began by defeating some nomads who lived in the north and bothered the people with constant attacks. He moved troops and settlers to the west. He sent soldiers to the north into modern Korea and to the south to modern Vietnam.

Wudi also changed the government in important ways. To run his government, he had a large number of officials who reached down to the smallest village. To find people to fill these posts, he introduced a new system. Those who wanted to work for the government had to earn the right by passing an exam. The exam tested them on their knowledge of the writings of Confucius, the Chinese philosopher who had lived 400 years earlier. He also built schools around the country that taught this knowledge. This system continued to work into the 20th century.

To support this large government, Wudi collected taxes. Farmers paid part of the crops they gathered each year. Merchants paid taxes on the goods they traded. Peasants also gave one month's worth of labor each year to the government to work on large public building projects such as dams and roads.

Under Han rule, the Chinese had many new inventions. One of the most important was paper. Before that invention, books were printed on silk. Because paper was much cheaper, using it meant that there were more books—and more learning in the country. The Chinese also improved farming by inventing a new two-bladed plow.

This change was important because the number of Chinese people had grown greatly. The Han emperors told their people that farming was the most important work to do—because they needed to grow much more food to feed so many people.

At the same time, several industries became important. The government took control of mining salt and making iron, coins, and alcohol. For a while the government went to work making silk. This expensive cloth was in great demand in India, Rome, and other lands. Only the Chinese knew how to make silk from the cocoons of the silkworm, and they kept their secret closely guarded. They wanted to be sure to control the trade.

China now included many different peoples, and the Han rulers tried to make sure that they learned Chinese ways. They urged their people to marry with people from these other groups. New books told the story of the history of China.

One group that did not do well in Han China was women. According to the teachings of Confucius, women were supposed to meet the needs of their husband and children and not become involved in other areas of life. Although some women in the emperor's family might wield power, this was rare.

The empire began to have problems as the rich people who owned large amounts of land grew more and more rich. The poor, at the same time, were being forced to pay heavy taxes. For about 40 years, China suffered in two ways. The members of the court were caught up in plots to try to gain power. Meanwhile, the peasants rebelled against their high taxes and poor lives. A government official named Wang Mang took the throne and tried to help the poor by taking land from the large landholders. In the middle of these changes, though, a terrible flood struck China and destroyed millions of homes. The peasants rebelled again, and Wang Mang was killed. At that time, a member of the old imperial Han family was put back on the throne. A new Han rule—called the Later Han Dynasty—was created.

For the next few decades, China enjoyed peace and wealth. Later, though, the same problems arose again—the gap between rich and poor was too great. By A.D. 220, the Han Dynasty had fallen for good.

Review

1. **Comparing and Contrasting** Compare and contrast the rule of Chandragupta Maurya and Asoka.
2. **Drawing Conclusions** How did Buddhism and Hinduism become more popular religions in this period?
3. **Summarizing** Describe two advances in the sciences in India of the Guptas.
4. **Forming and Supporting Opinions** Which Han emperor do you think was most important? Why?
5. **Analyzing Causes and Recognizing Effects** What basic problem was there in Han China, which led to its fall?