Document Based Questions: Ancient Chinese Dynasties

Directions: Use the documents to answer the questions which follow.

**Document 1:** Shi Huangdi, first emperor of the Qin dynasty, used warfare to weaken six of the seven warring states. His efforts to unify China led to the consolidation of his power.

... The Qin (under Shi Huangdi) made many changes that were meant to unify China and aid in administrative task. First, the Qin implemented a Legalist form of government, which was how the former Qin territory had been governed. The area was divided up in 36 commanderies which were then subdivided into counties. These commanderies had a civil governor, a military commander, and an imperial inspector. The leaders of the commanderies had to report to the Emperor in writing. The Legalist form of government involved rewards and punishments to keep order. Also, the state had absolute control over the people, and the former nobility lost all of their power. The nobility were transplanted from their homes to the capital. Groups were formed of units of five to ten families, which then had a group responsibility for the wrongdoings of any individual within the group...

-“Qin Dynasty” EMuseum, Minnesota, State University at Mankato

1. **Based on the EMuseum document, what were two ways the Qin under Shi Huangdi attempted to control China?**
2. **What do you think Shi Huangdi chose Legalism as the philosophy to rule the newly united China?**
3. **Why do you think Shi Huangdi used “group punishment?”**

**Document 2:** Shi Huangdi

... His (Shi Huangdi’s) most significant reforms were to standardize Chinese script (writing), weights and measures, and even the length of cart axels so that every cart could run smoothly in ruts. An extensive new network of roads and canals improved trade and the movement of troops between provinces....

- “The Emperor with an ego big enough for all time” Timesonline

4. **Based on this document, how did Shi Huangdi improve China under the Qin Dynasty?**

**Document 3:** Confucianism

Constant principles underlie Heaven’s behavior. Heaven does not prevail because you are the sage (Holy man) Yao or disappear because you are the tyrant Jie. Blessings result when you respond to Heaven by creating order; misfortune results when you respond to it with disorder. When you concentrate on agriculture and industry you are frugal in expenditures. Heaven cannot impoverish (make poor) your state. When you store provisions and act quickly in emergencies, Heaven cannot inflict illness on your people. When you are single-minded in your cultivation of the Way, Heaven cannot send disasters. Thus, even if they come, droughts and floods will not bring starvation, extremes of temperature will not bring illness, uncanny phenomena will not prove unlucky.

On the other hand, if you ignore agriculture and industry and spend extravagantly, then Heave cannot make your country rich. If you are negligent concerning provisions and slow to respond to crises, Heaven cannot keep your country while. If you renounce the Way and act recklessly, Heaven cannot make you lucky. In such a case, starvation will result even without flood or drought; illness will occur even without severe weather; misfortune will occur without any uncanny phenomena...

- Xunzi, a Confucianist

5. **What does a ruler have to do to gain favor in Heaven? What are the consequences of his failure?**
Document 4: Han Dynasty

During the Han dynasty, China experienced a period of peace, stability, and prosperity. Han emperors established a strong military, which allowed them to conquer new territories, expanding the reach of the empire as far as modern-day Korea and North Vietnam. In addition, they extended their power through diplomatic alliances with neighboring peoples. These alliances were often forged through strategic marriages or the exchange of lavish presents. Under the Han, the Chinese also engaged in international trade. Trading such goods as silk, spices, and jade, the Chinese acquired new products and ideas - including Buddhism - from ancient cultures such as India, Central Asia, and Rome. Much of the trade occurred locally in small trade centers throughout Asia that became known collectively as the Silk Road.

6. According to the above document, how did the Han dynasty extend their relations with other countries/regions?

Document 5: Role of Women

“With printing and the expansion of the educated class, more women [in Song China] were taught to read and write... In the Song Period women’s legal claims to property were improved... These changes can all be classed as favorable... But there were concurrent [simultaneous] changes in Song times that were generally classed as detrimental [harmful] to women... In Song times, standards of beauty shifted to favor the delicate and restrained woman. Notions of female modesty became more rigid... By the [1100s], doctors who called on women in elite households could neither view the woman nor question her; all they could do was take the pulse of a [woman’s] hand through the bed of curtains”
–Patricia Buckley Ebrey

7. What happened to the status of women in the Song Dynasty? How was this shown?

8. What do you think were long-term consequences of the practice of foot-binding?

Document 6: Mongol Tactics

“The greatest happiness is to scatter your enemy, to drive him before you, to see his cities reduced to ashes, to see those who love him shrouded in tears, and to gather into your bosom his wives and daughters.” –Genghis Khan

“The [Mongols] began to storm the city of Riazan, some with firebrands, some with battering rams, and others with countless scaling ladders for ascending the walls of the city. And the [Mongols] cut down many people, including women and children... And they burned down this holy city with all its beauty and wealth... And not one man remained alive in the city... There used to be the city of Riazan, ...but its wealth disappeared and its glory cases, and there is nothing to be seen in the city excepting smoke, ashes, and barren earth.” –Tale of the Destruction of Riazan

The mobility of individual soldiers made it possible to send Mongol cavalry on successful scouting missions, gathering intelligence about routes and searching for terrain suited to the preferred combat tactics of the Mongols... To avoid the deadly hail of missiles, enemies would frequently spread out, or seek cover, breaking up their formations and making them more vulnerable to the lancers' charges. Likewise, when they packed themselves together, into dense square or phalanx style formations, they would become more vulnerable to the arrows.

9. What tactics allowed the Mongols to conquer such a large empire?

10. Were the positive effects of the Pax Mongolia worth the methods used to create it? Why or why not?
Document 7: Chinese Exploration

“The Imperial Ming Dynasty unifying seas and continents, surpassing the three
dynasties even goes beyond the Han and Tang dynasties... The Emperor, approving of
their loyalty and sincerity, has ordered us, Zheng He, and others at the head of several
tens of thousands of officers and flag-troops to ascend more than one hundred large
ships to go and confer presents on them in order to make manifest the transforming
power of the (imperial) virtue and to treat distant people with kindness.”

–inscription on a Chinese temple

11. Why did the Chinese send out such a huge fleet of ships?
12. Why would a new Chinese emperor later recall Zheng He’s fleet and ban all exploration (look at the next question)?

Document 8: Chinese Isolation

“Swaying the wide world, I have but one aim in view, to maintain a perfect
governance and to fulfill the duties of the State: strange and costly objects do not
interest me... Our dynasty’s majestic virtue has penetrated unto every country
under Heaven, and Kings of all nations have offered their costly tribute by land
and sea. As your Ambassador can see for himself, we possess all things. I set no
value on objects strange or ingenious [clever], and have no use for your country’s
manufactures [products].”

-Qing emperor Qianlong in a letter to King George III of England

13. How did Chinese Emperors ruling from the Forbidden City during the Ming Dynasty affect the way they ruled?
14. Why did the Chinese emperor reject the more sophisticated goods of the West? What impact did this mindset
have?