**STRATEGIES OF IMPERIAL GOVERNMENT**

**BACKGROUND**

Empires and states developed new techniques of imperial administration based, in part, on the success of earlier political forms. In order to organize their subjects, in many regions the rulers created administrative institutions, including centralized governments as well as elaborate **legal systems** and **bureaucracies.**

**CHINESE IMPERIAL BUREACRACY**

After the fall of the Zhou Dynasty (1046 BC–256 BC) China fell into a period of chaos known as the Period of the Warring States. Although a time of conflict and strife, this period was one of the most fruitful in terms of intellectual output. In the quest to understand how China could have fallen into a period of instability, great thinkers pondered questions such as "What is the best form of governance?" and, related to that question, "What is the nature of man?" The differing answers to these questions formed the basis of Confucianism, Legalism, and Daoism.

The Period of Warring States ended when the warrior Qin Shi Huang centralized power and destroyed regional opposition. Although it lasted only 14 years, the Qin Dynasty set in place many important aspects of Chinese civilization.



***IMAGE 1:*** *The Qin Dynasty and its administrative regions. Each region was subdivided and placed into the bureaucratic chain that enabled the emperor to have his hand in every area of the empire.*

One of the most important things the Qin did was create a bureaucracy. Bureaucrats are employees of the state whose position in society, unlike nobles or aristocrats, does not rest on an independent source of wealth. Members of the bureaucracy only had positions and power as granted by the emperor. Generally speaking, the bureaucrat's high status and wealth is based on his obedience to his superior. Land owning aristocrats, on the other hand, have large estates and personal fortunes to fall back on; they have a vested interest in influencing the government in their personal favor. Aristocrats also tend to make decisions based on what is best for their location, thus becoming a decentralizing force. By assigning bureaucrats to regions, the Qin bypassed the powerful aristocracy and governed through those whose position depended on loyal obedience to the state. Additionally, the practice of Legalism reinforced the bonds of obligation between bureaucrat and superior. In this manner, the bureaucracy became a tool of centralization for China and placed the entire empire under the leadership of the Qin emperor.

***IMAGE 2:****A bureaucracy is a hierarchical chain of authority that allows a central leader to project power across a large area divided into many administrative regions.*

In order to bring unity to China, the Qin also built roads and bridges, constructed defensive walls, standardized units of weight and measurement, created a standard currency, and made one common form of Chinese writing. The harsh Legalism of the Qin allowed it to do much during its short reign of 14 years, but this same strict political philosophy also generated much resentment among the common people. As soon as the emperor died, the people revolted and slaughtered many of the remaining Qin officials.

Unlike previous eras, Chinese civilization did not regress into chaos for long. The Han dynasty came to power and ruled China for about 400 years, roughly 200 B.C.E. to 200 C.E. The ability of the Han to maintain a strong central government over such a vast area was greatly facilitated by the Qin reforms under Legalism.

Under the leadership of emperor Han Wudi, the Han Dynasty is responsible for some very important innovations that would have a lasting effect on China: the official adoption of Confucianism and the rise of the civil service examinations.

The Han adopted Confucianism because it was the most organized educational network from which they could draw people for the bureaucracy. To make certain new recruits were educated well, they began testing them through a rigorous system of civil service examinations; to be in the Han bureaucracy, one had to demonstrate a mastery of Confucian ideas on these tests. One effect of this was that the Han bureaucracy was filled with people profoundly influenced by Confucian thought. They were taught to model good behavior for those under them and to respect and submit to those in authority over them. Thus Confucianism not only became deeply embedded in Chinese culture, it also came to re-enforce the political bureaucracy by advocating obedience and benevolent rule. A synthesis was forged between China's political structure and a belief system.

**THE ROMAN EMPIRE AND LEGAL SYSTEM**

At its peak, the Roman Empire included areas as diverse as Egypt, Spain, Britain, Palestine, and the Caucasus Mountain region. As its territory expanded it grew from a monarchy, to a Republic, and finally became an Empire. Although its political innovations were impressive, Rome's greatest legacy was its system of law through which they forged a way to incorporate diverse cultures into a single political state without stripping localities of their individual identities.

The first laws implemented in Rome were the Twelve Tables. These laws were produced early in Roman history (449 BCE) in order to relieve tensions between the upper classes (the patricians) and the common classes (the plebeians) of citizens. The plebeians used their position as Rome's labor force as leverage to get the patricians to create these laws. The Twelve Tables, which guaranteed procedural equality and consistency in courts of law, was the first major concession won by the plebeians on their road to political equality and republican government.

Roman laws became more complex as the empire grew. The genius of Rome's response to the increased diversity of an expanding empire was the division of law into two types, jus gentium and jus civile. Jus gentium, or law of all nations, refers to universal principles that are true of all people. These are fundamental to being human and all societies have some version of them. They embody principles such as: harm done to another person without cause is wrong, and false dealing or fraud is wrong. The Romans thought these basic precepts were universal to all people; without them different cultures could not even engage in trade. Because they are universal, a foreigner in Rome could be charged for breaking one of these principles even if that person did not see them written down. Ignorance can never be an excuse for violating jus gentium. By the second century C.E. the jus gentium was called Natural Law.

After recognizing the general principles (jus gentium) that make society possible, the Romans realized that these general principles do not look the same within different societies; specific cultural norms and practices vary widely across civilizations. Thus the Romans came up with the idea of jus civile, or civil law. This codified system of law is what the jus gentium looks like inside a specific culture. They differ from place to place, but always manifest the general principles common to all people. For example, in all cultures it is wrong to cheat in trade. But in one civilization it may be more disruptive to cheat someone from one's own clan or tribe, so the punishment would be more severe in that case. In another civilization it might be worse to cheat someone from an higher social class than someone from one's own class. In both cultures cheating is wrong, but the written law concerning this principle looks different in both places. In short, general principles of right and wrong (jus gentium) are customized to fit the specific circumstances of local conditions; at the local level they become civil law (jus civile).

This system of law had coherence because it was based on principles thought to be universal to all men, and it had flexibility in that it allowed for local variances. Thus rendered, this system of law allowed Rome to administrate its massive empire with all its diverse cultures and local customs.