

NATIONALGEOGRAPHIC.COM/MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY 2004

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

**A Chinese Empire
to Rival Rome 2**

**South Pacific
Coral Hideaway 48**

**Lost Outpost
of the Inca 66**

**World's Fastest
Monkeys 82**

**The Case of the
Missing Carbon 88**

**ZipUSA: Greenwich
Dream Time 118**

Great Whites OF THE NORTH ³⁰



Another hallmark of the Han: durability. Among the longest of China's major dynasties, it survived, with minor interruption, for more than four centuries. From its founding in 206 B.C. the Han state was as powerful and prestigious in East Asia as the Roman Empire, its approximate contemporary, was in the West. Like Rome, it expanded into "barbarian" territory on its flanks, particularly to the northwest, where its armies cleared the way for trade along the Silk Road. And, like Rome, the dynasty spawned its share of weak rulers and sloughed into turmoil before collapsing, in A.D. 220.

Still, it bequeathed a template of ideal rule—

a united China and a self-perpetuating government—that became the goal of all subsequent dynasties, just as it is for the dynasty (officially communist, but with capitalism busting out all over) that holds power in China today. In the Han legacy, too, are spiritual and ethical dynamics that guide millions of Asians. One is Confucianism, based on the moral values of Confucius, which became official ideology of the Han court (not that the Han rulers were always moral). Even the name Han, which the first emperor adopted from a river, endures. It's what ethnic Chinese call themselves: *Han ren*, Han people.



In many fields Han workers were far ahead of their Roman counterparts. They employed the wheelbarrow and the pulley to move goods, the water-powered trip-hammer to pulverize grain and ores, and the bellows to pump air into furnaces. When an emperor went out in his carriage, he rode in the shade of a regal parasol that—unique in its time—could be collapsed, thanks to sliding metal ribs. And the Han were the first to make a commodity that revolutionized learning, which they called *zhi*. We call it paper.

A eunuch, Cai Lun, told Emperor He about making *zhi* in A.D. 105. Perhaps Cai Lun used

HANDS CLASPED in greeting, Zhang Qian, emissary of Wu Di (“martial emperor”), returns on horseback to the Western Han capital of Changan, part of today’s city of Xian. In the late second century B.C., Emperor Wu sent Zhang Qian on epic journeys westward along the Silk Road to forge diplomatic and military ties and to bolster Han power in Central Asia. Envoys of the Wusun, a nomadic people northeast of the Fergana Valley, follow Zhang Qian to offer their prized horses to the emperor, who was enchanted by them. The animals’ speed, strength, and size earned them the name “heavenly horses.”

ART BY HONGNIAN ZHANG

HAN DYNASTY 9