Patterns in Chinese History

1. Ethnocentrism
* Chinese believed their culture superior to others
* China as “Middle Kingdom”
1. Xenophobia
* Fear and distrust of foreigners
1. Creativity and innovation
* Inventions
* Art and literature
1. Importance of family
* Oldest male in charge, respect
1. Low status of women
* Social and economic
1. Natural hazards
* Floods and droughts sometimes led to mass starvation
1. Authoritarian, strong, central bureaucratic governments
2. Dynastic cycle
* Mandate of Heaven
* Revolts against strong, often abusive, central government
1. Cultural conservatism
* Very little change in culture for 3,500 years
1. Education important
2. Hard lives of peasants

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Ancient China Problem Solving

Han China and Wu Di

The year is 120 BCE and you are the Emperor Wu Di. You have ruled China for twenty years. The previous Han emperors have created a relatively stable, peaceful, and prosperous (wealthy) empire.

As emperor, you have many decisions to make. What actions would you take for each of the following problems? Give specific REASONS for your actions, using past history and patterns in Chinese history (see sheet “Patterns in Chinese History”) to justify them. At the end of the activity, you will record how Emperor Wu Di actually acted.

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| 1. Aggressive Nomads to the Northwest

The Xiognu (Huns) have raided to northwest region of your empire for many years. They are wild, aggressive, nomadic, and warlike people. They fight lightly armed on horseback. They wear animal skins and are even more crude and barbaric than other foreigners. **How will you deal with them**? Factors to consider:* You have sent diplomats with gifts of silk and art objects to negotiate peace. The Xiongnu reject your gifts.
* Your army includes a cavalry of over 1,000,000, supported by many more infantry. It is much larger than the Xiongnu army, but they are more familiar with the territory.
* They grew up as horsemen and are much better riders. Most of your Han Chinese soldiers grew up as peasants. Only wealthy landowners could afford horses.
* In 201 BCE they defeated a large Chinese army.
* Any war would be very expensive in lives and wealth lost.
* Some advisors want you to extend the Great Wall 300 miles to make the west of the northwest corner of the wall. This would also be expensive.
 |
| Your Solution: | Patterns in China that influenced your Solution:  | Emperor Wu Di’s Solution: |

Ex. Patterns if **Emperor Shi Huangdi:**

*Mandate of Heaven--I need to eliminate the threats immediately since attacks will have people questioning whether I have the mandate or not.*

*Peasants- Since they are held in such low regard the will be forced to build the wall. No one will care.*

Ex. solution if you were **Emperor Shi Huangdi:**

*As Shi Huangdi I believe in harsh punishments so I will not want to spare the lives of any of the nomads.*

 *I will force people to be in the army and then have them fight against the Xiongnu.*

*I will force people to build a large wall to protect China.*

*I need to eliminate the threats immediately.*

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| 1. Foreign Trade

You sent a gentleman from your court, Zhang Qian, with one hundred men west through Xiongnu territory. He hoped to avoid Xiongnu, yet was caught and imprisoned for ten years. Zhang escaped and made his way to the Yuezhi. They rejected his request to join China in a war against the Xiongnu. After a year, he again escaped and returned to report to you.Although disappointed with his failure to gain a military ally, you were fascinated by his stories of wealth to the west; of different foods and spices, strong, and beautiful horses, elephants, wine, and wool. **Will you provide the necessary funds to establish a trade route?** Factors to consider:* Zhang and some of your advisors recommend establishing trade with the lands to the west.
* The horses from Central Asia are stronger and faster than the horses your cavalry now uses against the Xiongnu.
* You love your gardens at the palace with their exotic plants, trees, peacocks, monkeys, and pheasants.
* Other advisors argue against unnecessary contact with foreigners.
* Others point out the cost in protecting such a long trade route to the Arab world of the Middle East/Southwest Asia.
* China is very wealthy and has all the natural resources it needs. Maintaining a large army for protection from the Xiongnu is expensive, though.
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| Your Solution: | Patterns in China that influenced your Solution: | Emperor Wu Di’s Solution: |

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| 1. Increasing Government Income (Money/Revenue)

Your government needs to raise more money than it has in the past in order to protect your borders, maintain the Great Wall, canals and roads, to keep your very high standard of living and luxuries, to possibly expand your territory, and protect trade routes. **How will you raise the necessary money?** Factors to consider:* The peasants are already taxed by the central government and by regional nobles to the point of near starvation.
* Some taxes are skimmed off (stolen) by corrupt tax collectors.
* Increasing taxes of the nobles could lead to the type of civil wars that plagued and ruled the Zhou Dynasty.
* Private merchants own prosperous salt and iron industries.
* Trade to the west might make many merchants wealthy.
* Many nobles would like high-ranking positions on the army as officers.
* Most crimes are punished by loss of body parts or time in jail.
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| Your Solution: | Patterns in China that influenced your Solution: | Emperor Wu Di’s Solution: |

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| 1. Government Organization and Bureaucrats (officials)

You want the smartest young men in your empire, the best and the brightest, to serve in your government. **How would you identify and train them?** Factors to consider:* Peasants make up about 90% of the population.
* Many of the wealthy landowners are greedy, corrupt, and hedonistic (pleasure loving).
* Most are not loyal to you. They think of their families and wealth first.
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| Your Solution: | Patterns in China that influenced your Solution: | Emperor Wu Di’s Solution: |