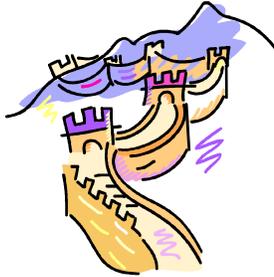


Imperial China



Imperial China (221 BC onward) saw a conflict between the Emperor at the capital, and the aristocrats throughout the Chinese countryside. When one of these forces was strong, the other tended to be weak. The peasants would stay loyal to the emperor as long as conditions were good (bountiful crops & low taxes).

Emperor

- Brought new lands into cultivation, sending out huge numbers of peasant colonists
- Title to lands (new and old) given to peasants
- Acquired huge estates: from 100 BC to 100 AD, the annual imperial income was 8 billion coins; the rest of China's was 10 billion
- Used huge numbers of peasants, soldiers, and criminals on public works projects
- Received tax revenues (instead of aristocrats)
- Sent aristocrats to capital or new cities

Peasants

- Would get loans and farming tools from imperial government
- Worked on irrigation projects
- Tendency was to get private ownership of land (as opposed to simply paying taxes to an aristocratic landlord), and to pay taxes directly to the emperor instead
- Tended to support the emperor, except if taxes were too high

Hostile tribes along the northern borders were often a problem for China.

- This is one reason why the emperors tried so hard to bring new lands into cultivation—it set up colonies and support for the Chinese army, which would keep the nomad tribes at bay.
- When large armies were not sent out to these frontier districts, many gifts were given to these border tribes: gifts of silk to them grew from 7 tons in 50 BC, to 30 tons in 1 BC. At this time, the Chinese economy produced an average of 18 billion coins a year in value; some 3 to 4 billion coins worth of goods were handed over to the nomads along the north, and the desert tribes in the northwest.