Life in China after the Han Dynasty

By about 100 C.E., the Han Dynasty began to decline due to a multitude of factors. In 190 C.E., Dong Zhou, a warlord, seized control of the imperial capital. Once in control, Zhou killed all of the eunuchs (court officials) and burned it to the ground. The Han Dynasty lost the mandate of heaven. China entered into a period of political disunity in which the Northern Zhou, Northern Qi, and Chen monarchs controlled their territories.

Task: Each of you have been given a card labeled with one aspect of the Han Dynasty’s decline. It is your job to rank each event and decide which one had the greatest impact on the decline. You may use the space below to write down your ranking. When you are done with your ranking, answer the questions below.

1. ________________________________
2. ________________________________
3. ________________________________
4. ________________________________
5. ________________________________
6. ________________________________

Chinese Religion

Confucianism and Daoism were practiced throughout the Han Dynasty. As the empire declined and initially collapsed, many Chinese turned to religion as a source of hope. Using your knowledge of geography and religion, what religion would be most appealing to the Chinese during these historical circumstances?
Spread of Buddhism

Directions: Scan the QR codes and find the corresponding station with the questions.

Spread of Buddhism
1. Which continents are pictured in the map?

2. According to the map, where did Buddhism spread to?

3. Name two geographic features that helped to spread Buddhism.

Spread of Buddhism to Southeast Asia
4. How did Buddhism spread under Ashoka the Great?

5. Describe the role of political leaders in the spread of Buddhism?

Buddhism Enters China
6. How was Buddhism spread to China?

7. Why was Buddhism able to gain a strong following in China?

8. How did Buddhism reach Korea?
Branches of Buddhism

After the death of the Buddha, different opinions arose concerning the correct teachings and practices of Buddhism. Eventually three main Buddhist traditions formed: Theravada, Mahayana, and Tibetan. Bodhisattvas are individuals who believe they can attain nirvana through meditation while choosing to remain in the world as saints to help others by prayer and example. The most common example today of a bodhisattva is the Dalai Lama. After the death of the Buddha, bodhisattvas helped to spread and transform Buddhism throughout Asia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theravada</th>
<th>Mahayana</th>
<th>Tibetan/Vajrayana</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Origins:</strong> Believed to be the original form of Buddhism.</td>
<td><strong>Origins:</strong> Emerged in East Asia around 200 B.C.E.</td>
<td><strong>Origins:</strong> In 750 C.E., Buddhism mixed with local religion in Tibet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Locations:</strong> Practiced in Southeast Asian countries like Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.</td>
<td><strong>Locations:</strong> China, Korea, and Japan</td>
<td><strong>Locations:</strong> Tibet, Nepal, and Bhutan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus:</strong> Emphasizes monastic life with results in a religious hierarchy. It is believed that only monks and nuns can achieve enlightenment.</td>
<td><strong>Focus:</strong> Adapted Buddhism’s teachings to the majority of people. It emphasizes compassion for all living things, believes enlightenment can be achieved without monasticism (becoming a monk/nun), and celebrates the Buddha as divine.</td>
<td><strong>Focus:</strong> Shares many of Mahayana Buddhism’s teachings. Believes nirvana can be achieved in a single lifetime through special techniques. The Dalai Lama is the head monk of Tibetan Buddhism.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Zhi Dun, Chinese scholar, author, and confidant of Chinese aristocrats and high officials during the period when northern China was invaded by Central Asian steppe nomads, circa 350 C.E.

“Whosoever in China, in this era of sensual pleasures, serves the Buddha and correctly observes the commandments, who recites the Buddhist Scriptures, and who furthermore makes a vow to be reborn without ever abandoning his sincere intention, will at the end of his life, when his soul passes away, be miraculously transported thither. He will behold the Buddha and be enlightened in his spirit, and then he will enter Nirvana.”

Complete the document analysis below based on the document above.

How did Buddhism Spread to China?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confucian intellectual activity became less creative.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government became corrupt with local landlords ruling as they pleased.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peasants were heavily taxed, lost their farms, and had to sell their children into service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social uprising led by extreme Daoists known as Yellow Turbans who threatened the imperial capital.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nomadic invasions from Central Asian tribes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, and grasshopper plagues took place.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Spread of Buddhism
Spread of Buddhism to Southeast Asia

During the time of Ashoka’s reign of the Mauryan Empire in India, trade routes were opened through southern India. Some of the merchants using these roads were Buddhists who took their religion with them. Buddhist monks, some of which were sent by Ashoka, also used these roads for missionary activity. Buddhism entered Sri Lanka during this time. A Buddhist chronicle known as the Mahavamsa claims that the ruler of Sri Lanka, Devanampiya Tissa, was converted to Buddhism by Mahinda, Ashoka’s son, who was a Buddhist missionary. After reaching Sri Lanka, Buddhism crossed the sea into Myanmar (Burma). After Myanmar, Buddhism travelled into Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, and Laos, around 200 CE. The presence of Buddhism in Indonesia and the Malay peninsula is supported by archaeological records from about the 5th century CE.

While Buddhism was flourishing all over the rest of Asia, its importance in India gradually diminished. Two important factors contributed to this process: a number of Muslim invasions, and the advancement of Hinduism, which incorporated the Buddha as part of the pantheon of endless gods; he came to be regarded as one of the many manifestations of the god Vishnu. In the end, the Buddha was swallowed up by the realm of Hindu gods, his importance diminished, and in the very land where it was born, Buddhism dwindled to be practiced by very few.
Buddhism Enters China

Buddhism entered China during the Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE): The first Buddhist missionaries accompanied merchant caravans that travelled using the Silk Road, probably during the 1st century BCE. The majority of these missionaries belonged to the Mahayana school.

The initial stage of Buddhism in China was not very promising. Chinese culture had a long-established intellectual and religious tradition and a strong sense of cultural superiority that did not help the reception of Buddhist ideas. Many of the Buddhist ways were considered alien by the Chinese and even contrary to the Confucian ideals that dominated the ruling aristocracy. The monastic order received a serious set of critiques: It was considered unproductive and therefore was seen as placing an unnecessary economic burden on the population, and the independence from secular authority emphasized by the monks was seen as an attempt to undermine the traditional authority of the emperor.

Despite its difficult beginning, Buddhism managed to build a solid presence in China towards the fall of the Han dynasty on 220 CE, and its growth accelerated during the time of disunion and political chaos that dominated China during the Six Dynasties period (220-589 CE). The collapse of the imperial order made many Chinese skeptical about the Confucian ideologies and more open to foreign ideas. Also, the universal spirit of Buddhist teachings made it attractive to many non-Chinese ruler in the north who were looking to legitimate political power. Eventually, Buddhism in China grew strong, deeply influencing virtually every aspect of its culture.

From China, Buddhism entered Korea in 372 CE, during the reign of King Sosurim, the ruler of the Kingdom of Koguryo, or so it is stated in official records. There is archaeological evidence that suggests that Buddhism was known in Korea from an earlier time.