

# Wudi

c. 156-87 BC



**HOW HE AFFECTED THE REGION** Wudi was a Chinese emperor who was responsible for the expansion of the control of the Han dynasty. He also made Confucianism the state religion of China.



*As you read the biography below, think about how Wudi's aggressiveness helped him extend China's borders.*

Wudi began his reign as emperor of the Han dynasty around 141 BC. It was unusual for someone like Wudi, who was not the oldest son of the king, to become emperor. However, Wudi's destiny had been decided for him at the age of seven, when relatives secured his position as heir to the throne. He was only sixteen when he was made emperor.

In the early years of his reign, Wudi ruled mostly under the influence of his relatives and political officials. The foreign policy of China at the time was mostly to defend the country when attacked. Around 130 BC, Wudi decided that China should be more aggressive in its approach to foreign nations. He launched an attack on the people on China's northern border who were threatening the empire. From then on, Wudi focused on expanding the empire.

During his reign, several areas of Asia came under Wudi's control. Wudi's massive army conquered Southern China and most of Vietnam and Korea. More battles provided him with control of Furgana, now known as Uzbekistan, and many small states in between.



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## VOCABULARY

**Confucianism** the teachings of Chinese philosopher Confucius

All of these wars had cost the Chinese a large amount of money. Wudi added new taxes and saw that the government controlled the trade of all salt, wine, and iron in order to raise money. The financial despair resulting from the wars made Wudi unpopular with the public.

Despite his aggressiveness, Wudi was interested in **Confucianism**, and he made it the state religion of China. In order to work for the government, a person had to pass a test based on the teachings of Confucius. Wudi even founded a university to teach Confucian ideas. Although Wudi himself did not follow the Confucian ideas of a ruler as a benevolent father figure, he did appreciate Confucius's writings and the Confucian use of ritual in religion.

Near the end of his life, Wudi suffered the dislike of the public as well as personal tragedy. His 15-year-old son, who was to become heir, was accused of witchcraft. The son led an uprising in which many people were killed and then committed suicide. Before his death, Wudi appointed his eight-year-old son as heir.

### WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

- 1. Draw Conclusions** Why do you think the people of China were upset with Wudi, even though they lived in a more powerful country after his military conquests?

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- 2. Make Judgments** Would you rather have lived in ancient China or ancient Greece? Provide reasons or examples to support your point of view.

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### ACTIVITY

Imagine that you are able to interview Wudi for a newspaper. Write several questions and then answer them how you think Wudi would have responded.