

### The Warring States Era. The Ch'in and Han Empires

By 500 B.C., a flourishing culture of bronze craftsmanship was challenged by the introduction of iron, and local kingdoms steadily increased their power and battled for supremacy. This era, known as "The Warring States", saw considerable economic expansion and interesting developments in political and philosophical thought.

At the end of the Third Century B.C. the short-lived but powerful state of Ch'in (221-210) united all the then known Chinese world. The borders of China were pushed far to the west, and southwards to Canton, a network of roads was established, the fortifications separating the states were destroyed, and the Great Wall was begun along the northern frontier to protect the new empire from nomadic invasions.

The Han Empire, which succeeded the Ch'in, maintained its state for four centuries. Under the Hans (2nd century B.C. - 2nd century A.D.) China was powerful and prosperous and the Ch'in policy of expansion continued. The empire was characterized by the splendour of its court, the development of the arts and humanities, and substantial progress in agriculture. Later generations were to look on the Han era as a golden age in Chinese history.

The fall in 220 A.D. of the Empire of Han, weakened by court intrigues and peasant uprisings, saw the beginning of a new period of division, with a succession of ephemeral Chinese dynasties in the south, and nomad invaders dominating the north. Feudalism reappeared, and it was at this time that Buddhism was introduced into China.