S4 Chinese History Practice Paper: Qin-Han Unification, Emperor Wu's Centralisation, the Silk Road and the Western Regions, Wei-Jin Aristocracy and Sinicisation, Sui-Tang Golden Ages, the An Lushan Rebellion and the Two-Tax System

Level: S4 | Subject: Chinese History | 75 minutes | 100 marks | 24 questions | answer key

Part A - Qin-Han Unification (3 marks each)

Answer each question, giving the correct year, name of the institution and its content.

#	Question	Answer	Marks
1	In which year did Qin complete the conquest of the six states? What local administrative system did it adopt, and what officials headed the commandery and the county?	In 221 BC, after the fall of Qi, King Zheng of Qin unified China and took the title First Emperor. Feudal enfeoffment was abolished and the commandery-and-county (junxian) system imposed: the empire was divided into thirty-six commanderies, later over forty. Each commandery was headed by a governor (junshou) for civil affairs, a commandant (junwei) for troops and an inspecting censor; each county by a magistrate (xianling) and a county commandant. All were appointed and dismissed by the central government and could not inherit office, so local power was concentrated in the emperor.	3
2	What exactly did the First Emperor do under the slogans "one script for writing, one gauge for cart axles"? What form did the unified coinage take?	One script: the Qin small-seal script was made the standard and the variant graphs of the six states were abolished. One gauge: cart axle widths were standardised at six chi and imperial highways (chidao) built for transport and troop movement. Coinage: the knife and spade monies of the six states were replaced by the round coin with a square hole, the "half-tael" (banliang), with gold as the higher unit. Weights and measures were also standardised with official bronze standards inscribed with the imperial edict.	3
3	Give two main reasons for the rapid fall of the Qin, each supported by one specific piece of evidence.	First, crushing corvde labour and taxes: the Great Wall, Epang Palace, the Lishan mausoleum and the Lingnan roads mobilised labour by the million, while land and poll taxes were heavy, draining agriculture. Second, harsh law and misgovernment: Qin statutes were minute and brutal, with collective and clan punishment widely applied; after the First Emperor died, the Second Emperor was weak and Zhao Gao monopolised power, killing senior ministers. In 209 BC Chen Sheng and Wu Guang, facing execution for arriving late, rose in revolt; the old six states joined, and Qin fell in 207 BC.	3
4	What did the early-Han policy of "rest and recuperation" include, and what was the "commandery-and-kingdom" system in local administration?	The policy included: lightening taxes to one-fifteenth of the harvest (with a temporary full remission under Emperor Wen); simplifying law by repealing Qin severities and abolishing collective punishment and mutilating penalties; encouraging agriculture with imperial ploughing ceremonies and famine relief; and buying peace with the Xiongnu through marriage alliances. In local government, directly ruled commanderies and counties existed alongside kingdoms enfeoffed to imperial relatives and meritorious generals. The kingdoms were initially powerful; Emperor Jing's attempt to reduce them triggered the Rebellion of the Seven States, and after Emperor Wu's push-enfeoffment decree they survived in name only.	3

Part B - Emperor Wu: Centralisation and Expansion (3 marks each)

Answer on Emperor Wu's policies, naming the year, the proposer and the effect.

#	Question	Answer	Marks
5	In what year and on whose advice was the "push-enfeoffment" decree issued? What did it provide and what did it achieve?	Issued in 127 BC on the advice of Zhu Fu Yan. It provided that when a king died, his lands be divided not only among the heir but also among his other sons, each created a marquis under an imperial title. The effect was to carve the kingdoms into many small marquisates, steadily enlarging the commanderies under direct central control. No king retained more than a dozen cities, so none could challenge the throne; the measure also posed as an act of grace and so provoked no revolt.	3
6	What were the salt-and-iron monopoly, the equable transport system and the price-stabilisation system, and what were they for?	The state monopolised salt and iron, appointing salt and iron officials to control production and sale and banning private trade. Equable transport had officials collect tribute goods and move them to where prices were highest, avoiding waste on long hauls. Price stabilisation used an office in the capital to buy when prices were low and sell when high. Together they curbed great merchants, filled the treasury for the Xiongnu wars and the opening of the Western Regions, and steadied prices for ordinary people.	3
7	What was the background of Emperor Wu's elevation of Confucianism, who advised it, and what measures carried it out?	Background: early-Han laissez-faire had restored the economy but left powerful kingdoms, a Xiongnu threat and merchant aggrandisement; an activist government and a unified ideology were wanted. Dong Zhongshu, in his examination answers, urged the rejection of the hundred schools and the honouring of the Six Classics. Measures: an imperial academy with chairs for the Five Classics and students drawn from the provinces; recruitment by Confucian learning and the commendation of filial and incorruptible candidates; Confucian scholars appointed to high office; and the use of the classics in judging cases and fixing ritual. Confucianism thus became the state ideology, fused with the career ladder for the next two millennia.	3
8	When did Zhang Qian make his two missions to the Western Regions, where did he go, what befell him, and what did his missions mean for East-West communications?	In 138 BC Emperor Wu sent him to the Yuezhi to secure an alliance against the Xiongnu; he was detained by the Xiongnu for over a decade, then travelled through Dayuan and Kangju to the Yuezhi, who would not move east. He returned to Chang'an in 126 BC with only two of some hundred companions. In 119 BC he led three hundred men to the Wusun and sent deputies to Dayuan, Kangju and Daxia, returning in 115 BC. His missions gave the Han court detailed knowledge of the Western Regions and opened regular diplomatic traffic, laying the foundation of the Silk Road.	3

Part C - The Silk Road and the Western Regions (4 marks each)

Answer on the Hexi corridor, the Protectorate of the Western Regions and cultural exchange.

#	Question	Answer	Marks

9	Name the four Hexi commanderies set up under Emperor Wu and explain their military and economic functions.	The four were Wuwei, Zhangye, Jiuquan and Dunhuang. Militarily they controlled the Hexi corridor, severed the Xiongnu from the Qiang (cutting off the Xiongnu's "right arm") and shielded the Guanzhong heartland, with walls, beacon towers and garrison farms providing a base for operations further west. Economically they carried large-scale colonisation and irrigation, developing farming and pastoralism, while Dunhuang and Wuwei became hubs of envoys and East-West trade whose transit and customs revenue enriched the region.	4
10	In what year was the Protectorate of the Western Regions established, what were its powers, and what was its historical significance?	It was established in 60 BC under Emperor Xuan, with Zheng Ji as first protector seated at Wulei. He commanded the thirty-six states of the Western Regions, issued Han orders, confirmed and deposed local kings, arbitrated disputes, directed garrison farms and troops and safeguarded routes and tribute. Its significance is that the Western Regions formally entered the Han empire's administrative order, the trade routes were protected, the Xiongnu were contained, and a precedent was set for later dynasties' control of the region.	4
11	What goods did the Han-period Silk Road carry out and in, and what cultural exchange besides goods took place?	Outbound: silk, lacquerware, iron tools, bamboo and wooden goods, paper and gold, moving through the Western Regions to Central Asia, Persia and Rome. Inbound: fine horses from Dayuan, grapes, alfalfa, pomegranates, walnuts, flax, aromatics, glass and gems. Culturally, Buddhism entered China through Khotan and Kucha, with Prince Ying of Chu patronising it in the Eastern Han; Central Asian music, dance and instruments such as the pipa and konghou came in; Chinese iron casting, deep-well digging and sericulture travelled west.	4
12	What were Ban Chao's main achievements in the Western Regions, and to which episode does "how can you catch tiger cubs without entering the tiger's lair" refer?	In 73 AD he joined Dou Gu's campaign and was then sent as envoy to Shanshan, where a night attack on the Xiongnu mission forced Shanshan to submit; this is the episode behind the saying. With thirty-six men he then brought Khotan over and reduced Kashgar, and allied the states against the Xiongnu. In 91 he became Protector of the Western Regions at Kucha, and sent Gan Ying towards Da Qin (Rome), who turned back at the sea near Tiaozhi. The result was the restoration of the protectorate, the adherence of over fifty states, and the reopening of the Silk Road; Ban Chao served thirty-one years and returned to Luoyang in 102.	4

Part D - Wei-Jin and Northern-Southern Dynasties: Clans and Sinicisation (4 marks each)

Answer on the nine-rank system, aristocratic politics, Emperor Xiaowen's reforms and Buddhism.

#	Question	Answer	Marks
13	Who created the nine-rank system, in what year, how did grading work and how did it change?	It was created in 220 AD on the proposal of Chen Qun, president of the board of personnel under Wei. Each province and commandery appointed a "impartial judge" (zhongzheng) who graded local figures in nine ranks from upper-upper to lower-lower by family pedigree, conduct and ability, and reported to the board as the basis for appointment. At first ability and character mattered; from Western Jin pedigree dominated, producing the saying that "no poor family reaches the upper grades, no powerful clan the lower", so that the system became a tool of aristocratic monopoly until the Sui abolished it in favour of examinations.	4

14	What characterised aristocratic clan politics? Give examples of the political, economic and social advantages of great families.	Politically, sons of great houses rose smoothly to the highest offices, monopolising the "pure" posts while lesser families held only subordinate ones; in the Eastern Jin the Wang and Xie clans alternated in power, hence "Wang and Ma shared the empire". Economically, clans held vast estates with dependent tenants and retainers, self-sufficient manors and exemption from corvde. Socially, they guarded pedigree marriage, compiled genealogies to separate gentry from commoners, refused to sit or intermarry with commoners, and monopolised culture through family learning and qingtan discourse.	4
15	In what year did Emperor Xiaowen of Northern Wei move the capital to Luoyang, and what sinicising measures did he impose?	In 494, ostensibly on a "southern campaign", he moved the court to Luoyang to escape the pressure of the old Xianbei nobility at Pingcheng. His measures: the imperial Tuoba clan took the surname Yuan and other clans were renamed by rank; Chinese dress replaced Xianbei dress; the Xianbei language was banned in court, officials under thirty having to speak Chinese; luoyang became the registered native place with burial in Henan; intermarriage with great Chinese families was encouraged, the emperor himself taking Chinese consorts and marrying his brothers to gentry daughters; and the equal-field system, the three-elders organisation, Chinese-style offices, law codes and Confucian learning were adopted.	4
16	Why did Buddhism flourish in the Wei-Jin and Northern-Southern Dynasties? Give two concrete cultural results.	Reasons: prolonged war and dynastic collapse made life precarious and drove scholars beyond pure conversation to religion; Buddhist karma, rebirth and salvation answered a mood of suffering; non-Chinese rulers patronised the faith to legitimise rule, as Shi Le and Shi Hu honoured Fotudeng; translations accumulated, and monasteries offered exemption from service and shelter for dependants. Results include the cave temples of Dunhuang, Yungang and Longmen, blending Gandharan and Chinese styles; the translations of Kumarajiva at Chang'an and the scholastic systems of Dao'an and Sengzhao; and literary works such as the Record of the Monasteries of Luoyang.	4

Part E - Sui-Tang Golden Ages and Institutions (5 marks each)

Answer on the Sui unification, the Grand Canal, the Zhenguan era and the examination system, covering causes, content and effects.

#	Question	Answer	Marks
17	Why was Sui able to destroy Chen and reunify China in 589? Consider the economy, the army, politics and Chen itself.	Economically, northern agriculture recovered under the Northern Wei equal-field and three-elders systems, and the fubing militia fused soldier and farmer, giving Sui greater resources than the south. Militarily, Emperor Wen reorganised the army, neutralised the Turkish threat after 581, and in 589 sent Yang Guang, He Ruobi and Han Qinhu south across the Yangzi to Jiankang. Politically, he streamlined offices, abolished commanderies in favour of prefectures and counties, and introduced examination recruitment, raising central efficiency, while Northern Zhou had already unified the north. Chen's last ruler was dissolute, taxes were heavy and morale collapsed when the river line was crossed, ending nearly three centuries of division since the fall of Western Jin.	5

18	Which city centred the Sui Grand Canal, what sections made it up, which great rivers did it link, and what were its benefits and costs?	It centred on Luoyang and was begun in 605, the first year of the Daye era. Its sections were the Tongji Canal from Luoyang to the Huai, the Hangou from Huai'an to Jiangdu, the Yongji Canal north to Zhuojun, and the Jiangnan Canal from Jingkou to Yuhang, over two thousand kilometres in all, joining the Hai, Yellow, Huai, Yangzi and Qiantang rivers. It made grain transport from the south to the capital and frontiers fast and cheap, promoted regional exchange and the growth of canal cities. Its cost was conscription of a million labourers on punishing schedules with heavy mortality, a burden often cited among the causes of Sui collapse.	5
19	What produced the Zhenguan era of good government? Discuss the ruler-minister style, appointments, institutions and livelihood.	In style, Taizong took Sui's fall as a warning, welcomed remonstrance (Wei Zheng submitting over two hundred objections) and deliberated policy in council. In appointments he ignored faction and seniority, using Fang Xuanling, Du Ruhui, Li Jing and Wei Zheng, even former rivals' men, and widened recruitment through schools and examinations. Institutionally the three departments and six ministries separated drafting, review and execution, the Zhenguan code was mild, and the fubing militia, equal-field and zu-yong-diao tax systems operated. For livelihood, taxes and corvde were lightened, famine relief given, palace women freed and captives restored, so that order returned, grain was cheap, and neighbouring rulers hailed him as Heavenly Qaghan.	5
20	How did the examination system develop from its Sui origins through the Tang, and what were its positive and negative social effects?	The Sui abolished the nine-rank system and recruited by examination; under Emperor Yang the jinshi ("advanced scholar") degree was created with a policy essay. The Tang expanded it, adding the mingjing (classics), law and mathematics degrees, with jinshi prized for poetry and policy writing; Wu Zetian added palace examinations and a military degree, and under Xuanzong poetry became standard. Positively, it broke aristocratic monopoly, let poor families rise by learning, widened the recruiting base, spread education and letters, and gave objective criteria. Negatively, it privileged poetry and classical exegesis over practical skills, bred careerism and faction, and with few places left most candidates lifelong failures, hence the lament that men passed the classics at thirty but the jinshi at fifty.	5

Part F - From High Tang to Decline: Kaiyuan, An Lushan and the Two-Tax System (6 marks each)

Answer analytically, citing background, content, effects and dates.

#	Question	Answer	Marks
21	What were the main achievements of the Kaiyuan era (713-741), and what dangers were sown at the same time?	Achievements: in his early reign Xuanzong employed Yao Chong and Song Jing, tightened administration, cut redundant offices, clergy and expenditure, checked magnate land-grabbing, replaced the fubing militia with recruitment, built irrigation and garrison farms; registered households passed nine million, grain was cheap and the capitals flourished, as Du Fu's verse on brimming granaries records. Dangers: the equal-field system decayed as land concentration and tax evasion grew, eroding zu-yong-diao revenue; the ten frontier commands held some 490,000 troops while the central army weakened; the emperor grew lax, indulged his favourite consort and relied on Li Linfu and Yang Guozhong, silencing criticism; and recruited armies tied soldiers to commanders as private forces.	6
22	What caused the An Lushan rebellion (755-763) and what	Causes: military governors combined civil, military and fiscal power, An Lushan commanding nearly 200,000 men in three commands; the central army was weak, so the frontier outweighed the capital;	6

	were its far-reaching effects?	Xuanzong neglected government while Li Linfu blocked frontier generals from the chancellorship and promoted non-Chinese commanders; the feud between Yang Guozhong and An hastened revolt; and social strain and the decay of the equal-field system shrank militia recruitment. In 755 An rose in the name of punishing Yang, took Luoyang and Chang'an, the emperor fled to Sichuan, and order was restored with Uyghur help only in 763 after eight years. Effects: registered households fell from over nine million to about two million; the north was devastated and the economic centre shifted south; military governors became autonomous, the court lost Hebei; Tibet seized the Hexi and Longyou, cutting the Western Regions; eunuchs controlled the palace armies and politics; Tang passed from strength to decline.	
23	Who introduced the Two-Tax System, in what year, on what principles, and how did it change and fail to change the zu-yong-diao system?	It was introduced in 780, the first year of Jianzhong, on the advice of Chancellor Yang Yan. It provided that households, native or immigrant, be registered where they lived; that tax be graded by property and land rather than by adult male status, abolishing the poll-based zu-yong-diao; that collection occur twice, summer tax by the sixth month and autumn tax by the eleventh; that assessment be in cash, payable in silk; and that expenditure be estimated first and revenue raised to meet it. The change was from persons to property, weakening personal dependency, taxing immigrants and merchants and widening the base. Its limits: cash assessment while coin was scarce and goods cheap raised the real burden; property valuation was evaded by the powerful; surcharges and tribute continued; and land concentration and flight from the registers went on.	6
24	Tang survived the An Lushan rebellion by more than a century yet fell in 907. Analyse the main factors in its decline.	First, autonomous military commands: the three Hebei provinces passed office hereditarily, keeping taxes and troops, so central orders did not run; Xianzong briefly subdued Huaixi and Ziqing, but revolts resumed after Yuanhe. Second, eunuch power: controlling the Shence armies, they made and unmade emperors after Dezong, and at the Ganlu incident of 835 slaughtered the civil officials. Third, factional strife between the Niu and Li groups alternated for over forty years, corrupting policy. Fourth, fiscal and agrarian strain: concentration and tax evasion grew under the Two-Tax System, crushing the peasantry. Fifth, revolt: Wang Xianzhi and Huang Chao rose in 875, marched the length of the country and entered Chang'an in 880, wrecking the southern revenue base. Sixth, external pressure and loss of control: Tibet and Nanzhao raided, the Shatuo under Li Keyong entered the plain, and in 907 Zhu Wen deposed the last emperor and founded Later Liang.	6