Confucianism and Buddhism

While Confucianism was founded long before the Han, it was this dynasty who would revive the philosophy. Many Confucian scholars were put into positions as government advisors which helped advance their ideas. The values of Confucius based on respect and loyalty to the superiors were seen in the way the Han governed their inferiors. The Han people were granted more freedoms making them less likely to rebel as they had under previous rulers. Knowledge of Confucianism was necessary to pass civil service exams, highlighting the deep connection of the belief system with daily life. Civil service exams made it possible for qualified individuals to take part in key government positions something not seen in other civilizations. By mainstreaming Confucianism, the Han were able to improve relations with their subjects and made sure these ideals would not be forgotten. Buddhism had been introduced to China from travelers along the silk road who journeyed to India. While Buddhism had been wavering in support from the Indian government it’s new audience in China greatly supported the religion. China had a large peasant population that was drawn to the ideals of Buddhism. The spread of Buddhism was another example of cultural diffusion as a result of the Silk Road and Han dynasty.

1. What were the benefits of Confucian values on the Han government?
2. Why are belief systems like Confucianism considered achievements of classical civilizations?
Compass

The compass like many other great Chinese inventions had existed for a period of time before the Han, although it was the advancements under the Han that made them much more common. The compass was especially useful during the exploratory period of the Chinese as it increased the ability for merchants to navigate at sea or at night. The compass was created by using a metal spoon and magnets that would always point south. By knowing where south was at all times trade and travel greatly enhanced and the resource could then be brought to other civilizations benefiting their ability to trade and travel as well. A steel needle would eventually replace the spoon which made the compass easier to carry and use showing how the Han made constant advancements to their inventions and were not content with the first achievements.

Question 1. How did the compass give the Chinese advantages in trade over other civilizations?
Question 2. How has the compass evolved over time (early China to Han- Han to Modern Day)? What does this make the compass an example of?
Paper

Paper was first invented in China in 105 CE, despite not being seen in Europe until centuries later. While early writing methods had involved writing on stone or rags the Chinese paper methods were much more effective. This was possible as the Han used pressed plant fibers which were then dried into sheets. With light paper sheets painting and calligraphy (decorative handwriting) were more common throughout China. The use of paper was also beneficial for expanding education throughout the Han empire as more and more people could read books that were less expensive. Paper helped make the government more efficient with recordkeeping and spread literacy to the extents of the empire.

Question 1. What were the immediate benefits of paper on the Han dynasty?

Question 2. How does the invention of paper prove that the Han were a classical civilization?
Seismograph

A seismograph is used to measure the effects of earthquakes the Han dynasty were able to establish one of the first seismographs. Zhang Heng, an ancient astronomer and mathematician from the Han dynasty was the inventor of this device. With the seismograph he was able to determine where earthquakes were occurring which helped the government know where aid was needed. The device worked by having dragon faces point in different directions with golden spheres in their mouth. The vibrations of an earthquake would cause the sphere to drop based on the direction of the earthquake. This technology was especially beneficial for providing aid throughout the country and showing the scientific achievements of the Han.

1. How did the Han seismograph benefit villagers from outside the capital?

2. How do inventions like a seismograph prove the Han are a classical civilization?
Farming Technology

One of the greatest impacts of the Han dynasty was their contributions with farming technology. The wheelbarrow was created in 231 CE by an inventor named Zhuge Liang. Wheelbarrows have been used to carry all kinds of materials like crops and supplies as well as bodies on the battlefield. The invention of the wheelbarrow, while simplistic had great effects with moving heavy objects from one area to another. The Chinese plow used two iron blades that proved to be much more effective than earlier technology. These plows pulled by oxen made farming easier increasing the speed in which crops were placed in the ground and taken out again. With a horse harness the Chinese were able to greatly increase the impacts of these animals as well. The harness allowed for horses to carry heavy loads throughout China at greater speeds continuing their excellence with using animals for farming and increasing the loads of resources that could be brought from one area to another.

1. What was the immediate effects of the wheelbarrow? Plow?
2. How are these farming technologies useful for the growth of the Han dynasty