Achievements during the Han Dynasty

During Han times, pulleys and wheelbarrows were used to move goods. To pulverize ores and grains, they employed the water-powered trip-hammer and air was pumped into furnaces thanks to the aid of bellows.

Cai Lun around 105 CE came up with an innovation that would be invaluable for learning. A screen was dipped into a vat of watery oatmeal-like pulp made of rice straw and inner tree bark. When the screen was raised, it had a layer of dripping slush on top, which was later pressed and dried. The end result was a sheet of paper. However, during Han times, paper was used largely to wrap fish rather than for written documents. Just a few written paper sheets survived to our days from Han times, mostly found in tombs. Tens of thousands of written documents have come down to our day, most of them on wooden tablets and slips of bamboo. Examples include mathematical problems, historical records, poetry, government records, a massive dictionary, and the oldest surviving large-scale census of all history, which reports 57,671,400 people in 2 CE. All these documents have been critical in our fairly good historical knowledge of the Han dynasty.

The “Records of the Grand Historian,” was written during the Han Dynasty by Sima Qian, who is referred to as the father of Chinese writing about history. This work is a vast general history of China which covers a period of over 2,000 years, from the mythical times of the Yellow Emperor (the founder of the first Chinese dynasty, the Xia) to his own time during the reign of Emperor Wu (also known as Wu Di) who reigned between 141 and 87 BCE.
The opening of the Silk Road was probably the major economic achievement of the Han Dynasty. Emperor Wu took the great step of setting out on diplomatic missions to various rulers in Central Asia. This led to the exploration of trade routes that linked Xi’an to the Mediterranean Sea and opened up new roads for merchants. This increased the trade and economic prosperity of the empire and also led to a constant cultural exchange between several cultures.

It was also during Wu Di's time that China incorporated the whole of modern China proper, northern Vietnam, Inner Mongolia, southern Manchuria, and most of Korea.