Rome: the Transformation from a Republic to an Empire
By Benjamin Wang

The once-mighty Roman Republic officially came to an abrupt end in 27 BCE. With civil wars raging on and the assassination of Julius Caesar as another threat to the already vulnerable Republic, Octavian created the Roman Empire by persuading the Senate to grant him the power of a dictator by naming him the "First Citizen" of Rome. Octavian's rule as Emperor stabilized the Roman world by ending decades of war and enacting reforms that restored the Roman people's social, political and economic order. He enacted social reforms by passing laws regarding marriage and adultery and restoring religious tradition by rebuilding temples and reinstituting festivals. His political reforms included creating a large and loyal army and working with the Senate to increase his power. In addition, Octavian created a very efficient and successful taxing system in terms of economic reforms.

Background

Decades of war and instability preceded the fall of the Roman Republic. A significant turning point near the end of the Roman Republic was the assassination of Julius Caesar. Julius Caesar stood out at the time not only because he was appointed a dictator who had led Rome win critical battles but also because of his popularity with the citizens of Rome to reduce their economic burdens. He was a well-liked populist leader but had a much more complicated relationship with the Senate.

After defeating Pompey in the civil war in 49 BCE and claiming dictatorship, Caesar made a move that the Senate was outraged with; he became the first dictator for life. Traditionally, dictators had usually only ruled the country in one-year terms. However, because his popularity as a dictator endangered the future of the Republic, Caesar was assassinated by his right-hand man Marcus Junius Brutus and a group of conspirators. Later, Brutus committed suicide after the defeat in the second war of Philippi, when he knew Octavian was going to capture him.

Octavian, Caesar's nephew, inherited Caesar's fame, control of the military and properties. At first, Octavian's parents did not allow the 17-year old to take the risk of being a new leader, given the political instability after Caesar's assassination. Still, Octavian eventually chose to leave his family and inherit the power. Octavian and his army raced to capture the conspirators in the plot of Caesar's assassination. Brutus and

his few men were the last to survive. They trotted east but found out they had no chance with Octavian's army.

With Brutus committed suicide, Octavian made peace with his biggest rival, Mark Antony. He also created the Second Triumvirate with Mark Antony and Marcus Aemilus Lepidus. Mark Antony controlled the eastern parts of Rome, Octavian controlled the western parts of Rome, and Marcus Lepidus controlled Africa. The triumvirate eventually fell apart, and Octavian declared war on Cleopatra, the Queen of Egypt and Antony's ally and romantic interest. In 32 BC, Octavian defeated Cleopatra, and she and Marc Antony committed suicide. At this point, Octavian became the only ruler of Rome, ending the epoch of the Roman Republic.

The First Roman Emperor and the Beginning of Peacetimes

Octavian had to find a way to persuade the Senate to give him the power of a dictator without calling himself one. If he just named himself dictator as Caesar did in the past, he might also be assassinated. The mission was not difficult, as the Senate realized that Octavian was very influential in the region and had accumulated enormous financial power to support himself. In addition, there had been civil wars raging for decades in Rome, and the Senate realized that only Octavian might save them from continuing instability. According to historian Werner Eck, Augustus's power came from three primary sources: the powers the Senate and the people of Rome gave him through his offices, his inherited fortunes, and the fact that he established many relationships with essential people across the Republic. It was evident that Octavian held the most power and had the most support from the people. The Senate, therefore, reluctantly gave power to Octavian since they knew that if they didn't give power to him, the civil wars would likely continue.

In 27 BCE, the Senate named Octavian *princeps,* meaning "First Citizen," which in reality meant dictator. It was also when he obtained the title Augustus. After Augustus resigned his Consulship, the Senate gave him "enhanced proconsular security," allowing him to give commands to other governors. The Senate also rewarded Augustus "tribunician powers," which meant that he could gain back most of the power he had lost while resigning his position as Consul**.** With more power, Augustus would quickly become the first ruler of a new age for the Romans**,** the Roman Empire.

Augustus's Reforms of the Roman Empire

Augustus's rule is known as the start of the "Pax Romana," or the Roman Peace. Commonly thought to have been a good leader overall, Augustus was a micromanager, utilizing every one of the powers granted. Fortunately, he used these powers wisely, and he enacted many of the reforms in the Roman Empire that helped restore control and order in Rome.

First, Augustus introduced social reforms amongst the Roman populace. During the last few decades of the Republic, Roman citizens realized that their traditional virtues and public morals were slowly decaying. Hence, Augustus started with rebuilding the social structure of Rome and wanted a restoration of the old faith and values of Rome. Augustus created two Julian laws: one made women's adultery a criminal act, and the other penalized unmarried men and childless lovers to increase the birthrate. Augustus also recognized a need for the reawakening of the importance of religion. He held many old, popular festivals and rebuilt or repaired 82 temples in his first year as emperor. In fact, in 12BC Augustus made himself the Pontifex Maximus, or chief priest, and, throughout his reign, built many statues of himself so that more could know about him. After his death began the idea among the Romans that the Emperor is a god or very close to the gods.

Furthermore, he found ways for his army, made of twenty-three legions, to be loyal to him. Augustus gave money and land to every soldier under his rule, mading them a very effective army. For example, the army quickly quelled revolts such as those of the Gauls in the north. Augustus even created his bodyguard, the Praetorian Guard, to defend himself from his Ides of March.

In addition, he made many regulations that were beneficial for the Roman Empire. For example, Augustus' expansion of the Roman Empire required many resources, especially since he paid his soldiers very well. Augustus solved this problem by creating a "framework for assessment." This framework was a method for extracting resources from taxes. It worked exceptionally well because Augustus centralized the treasury in Rome in order to minimize the money being ill-spent by corrupt and irresponsible governors. Although there might have been protests against Augustus being a micromanager, many still believe that the "framework for assessment" was successful.

Thus, Augustus made many changes to the political system of the Roman Empire. Without surprise, his successors "all continued to follow the Augustan precedent in building their way into power, in flaunting their generosity to the people and in

displaying their military prowess." Roman imperial politics built on such foundations to eradicate the root of Roman Republic's social instability, the mounting disparity of wealth between the plebians and patricians. With now a ultimate dictator, the Emperor, in place, a new ruling mechanism germinated, gradually eliminating the old SPQR system, without a seemingly radical change of its form.

Augustus's rule as Emperor of Rome was very successful, but the empire system meant that transition from one ruler to the next was risky. There was no democratic process for picking leaders the people supported, and only power struggles that sometimes produced good emperors and sometimes did not. Furthermore, the belief in the Emperor's being a god worsened the political paradox of how the ruler's power was to be bounded. Finally, the defining force in the Republic, the Senate, gradually lost its balancing role as elite representatives in the new era. All these conflicts of imperial power led to an inevitable dilemma of all the once-almighty empires.

Conclusion
The Pax Romana lasted over 200 years, finally ending in 180 CE with the death of Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Although the Pax Romana was not perfect, it was a period of peace and prosperity. The Roman Empire had systems that the people celebrated. With checks and balances, the political system of the Empire had elections for citizens to vote. Although only one ultimate power controlled the Roman Empire, which was the Emperor, the system was still what most people liked and wanted. Sadly, the capabilities of the Emperors dropped, and most of the Roman Emperors after the period of the Pax Romana did not work on keeping the Roman Empire intact, which led to the fall of the 400-year old Western Roman Empire.

<div align="center">**Citations：**</div>
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