

SEVENTH
EDITION

THE ESSENTIAL WORLD HISTORY

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SEVENTH EDITION

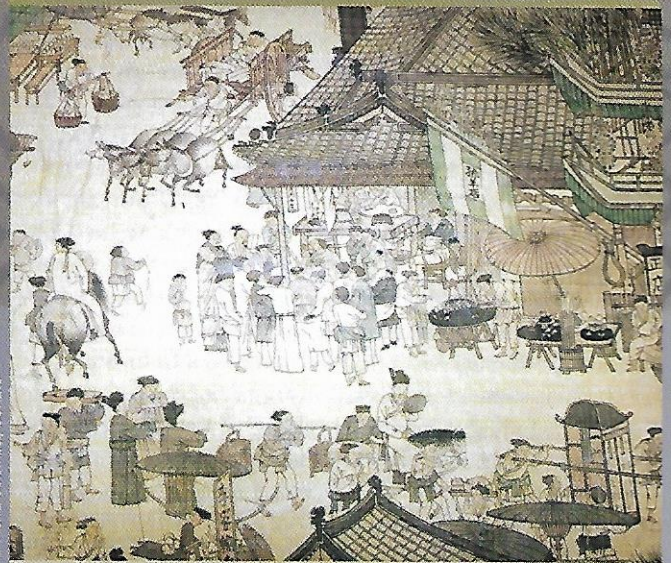
WILLIAM J. DUIKER
The Pennsylvania State University

JACKSON J. SPIELVOGEL
The Pennsylvania State University



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The Flowering of Traditional China



Detail of a Chinese scroll, Spring Festival on the River

CHAPTER OUTLINE AND FOCUS QUESTIONS

China After the Han

Q Why did China go through several centuries of internal division after the decline of the Han dynasty, and what impact did this have on Chinese society?

China Reunified: The Sui, the Tang, and the Song

Q What major changes in political structures and social and economic life occurred during the Sui, Tang, and Song dynasties?

Explosion in Central Asia: The Mongol Empire

Q Why were the Mongols able to amass an empire, and what were the main characteristics of their rule in China?

The Ming Dynasty

Q What were the chief initiatives taken by the early rulers of the Ming dynasty to enhance the role of China in the world? Why did the imperial court order the famous voyages of Zhenghe, and why were they discontinued?

In Search of the Way

Q What roles did Buddhism, Daoism, and Neo-Confucianism play in Chinese intellectual life in the period between the Sui dynasty and the Ming?

The Apogee of Chinese Culture

Q What were the main achievements in Chinese literature and art in the period between the Tang dynasty and the Ming, and what technological innovations and intellectual developments contributed to these achievements?

CRITICAL THINKING

Q The civilization of ancient China fell under the onslaught of nomadic invasions, as had some of its counterparts elsewhere in the world. But China, unlike other ancient empires, was later able to reconstitute itself on the same political and cultural foundations. How do you account for the difference?

ON HIS FIRST VISIT to the city, the traveler was mightily impressed. Its streets were so straight and wide that he could see through the city from one end to the other. Along the wide boulevards were beautiful palaces and inns in great profusion. The city was laid out in squares like a chessboard, and within each square were

spacious courts and gardens. Truly, said the visitor, this must be one of the largest and wealthiest cities on earth—a city “planned out to a degree of precision and beauty impossible to describe.”

The visitor was Marco Polo (MAR-koh POH-loh), and the city was Khanbaliq (kahn-bah-LEEK) (later known as Beijing), capital of the Yuan (YOO-enn or YWAHN) dynasty (1279–1368) and one of the great urban centers of the Chinese Empire. Marco Polo was an Italian merchant who had traveled to China in the late thirteenth century and then served as an official at the court of Khubilai Khan (KOO-blah KAHN). In later travels in China, Polo visited a number of other great cities, including the commercial hub of Kaifeng (KY-fuhng) (Ken-Zan-fu) on the Yellow River. It is a city, he remarked,

of great commerce, and eminent for its manufactures. Raw silk is produced in large quantities, and tissues of gold and every other kind of silk are woven there. At this place likewise they prepare every article necessary for the equipment of an army. All species of provisions are in abundance, and to be procured at a moderate price.¹

Polo's diary, published after his return to Italy almost twenty years later, astonished readers with tales of this magnificent but unknown civilization far to the east. In fact, many of his European contemporaries were skeptical and suspected that he was a charlatan seeking to win fame and fortune with a fictional account of his travels to fantastic lands.

Readers of Marco Polo's memoirs in other parts of the world, however, undoubtedly would have found his account of the wonders of the East more credible, for evidence of the greatness of the Chinese Empire—now under the domination of a fearsome Central Asian people called Mongols—was all around them. Indeed, after the decline of the Abbasids in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, China had clearly emerged as the richest and most powerful empire on the Eurasian supercontinent. 🍵

China After the Han

Q FOCUS QUESTION: Why did China go through several centuries of internal division after the decline of the Han dynasty, and what impact did this have on Chinese society?

After the collapse of the Han dynasty at the beginning of the third century C.E., China fell into an extended period of division and civil war. Taking advantage of the absence of organized government in China, nomadic forces

from the Gobi Desert penetrated south of the Great Wall and established their own rule over northern China. In the Yangtze valley and farther to the south, native Chinese rule was maintained, but the constant civil war and instability led later historians to refer to the period as the “era of the six dynasties.”

The collapse of the Han Empire had a marked effect on the Chinese psyche. The Confucian principles that emphasized hard work, subordination of the individual to community interests, and belief in the essentially rational order of the universe came under severe challenge, and many Chinese intellectuals began to reject the stuffy moralism and complacency of State Confucianism as they sought emotional satisfaction in hedonistic pursuits or philosophical Daoism.

Eccentric behavior and a preference for philosophical Daoism became a common response to a corrupt age. A group of writers known as the “seven sages of the bamboo forest” exemplified the period. Among the best known was the poet Liu Ling (lyoo LING), whose odd behavior is described in this oft-quoted passage:

Liu Ling was an inveterate drinker and indulged himself to the full. Sometimes he stripped off his clothes and sat in his room stark naked. Some men saw him and rebuked him. Liu Ling said, “Heaven and earth are my dwelling, and my house is my trousers. Why are you all coming into my trousers?”²

But neither popular beliefs in the supernatural nor philosophical Daoism could satisfy deeper emotional needs or provide solace in time of sorrow or the hope of a better life in the hereafter. Instead Buddhism filled that gap.

Buddhism was brought to China in the first or second century C.E., probably by missionaries and merchants traveling over the Silk Road. The concept of rebirth was probably unfamiliar to most Chinese, and the intellectual hairsplitting that often accompanied discussion of the Buddha's message in India was somewhat esoteric for Chinese tastes. Still, in the difficult years of the Han dynasty's decline, Buddhist ideas, especially those of the Mahayana school, began to find adherents among intellectuals and ordinary people alike. As Buddhism increased in popularity, it was frequently attacked by supporters of Confucianism and Daoism for its foreign origins. But such sniping did not halt the progress of Buddhism, and eventually the new faith was assimilated into Chinese culture, assisted by the efforts of such tireless advocates as the missionaries Fa Xian and Xuan Zang and the support of ruling elites in both northern and southern China (see “The Rise and Decline of Buddhism and Daoism” later in this chapter).

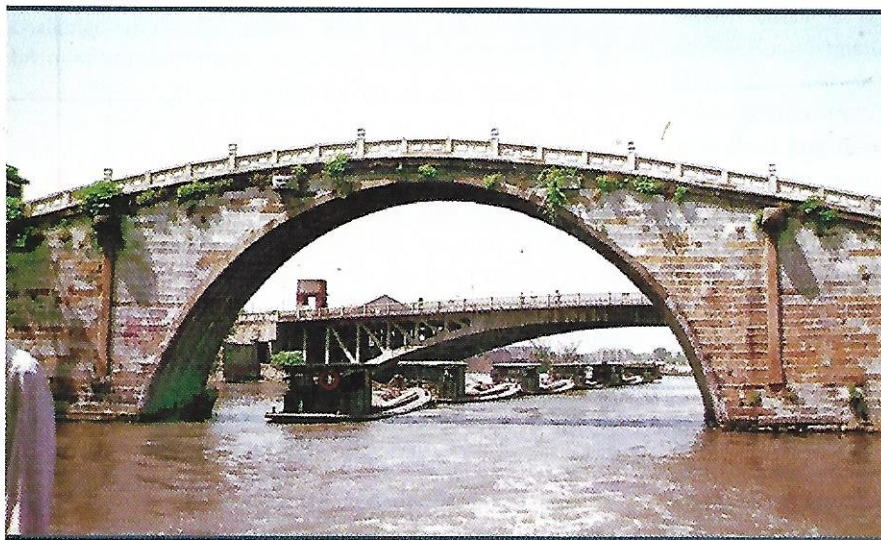
China Reunified: The Sui, the Tang, and the Song

Q FOCUS QUESTION: What major changes in political structures and social and economic life occurred during the Sui, Tang, and Song dynasties?

After nearly four centuries of internal division, China was unified once again in 581 C.E. when Yang Jian (yahng JEE-YEN) (Yang Chien), a member of a respected aristocratic family in northern China, founded a new dynasty, known as the Sui (SWAY) (581–618). Yang Jian, who is also known by his reign title of Sui Wendi (SWAY wen-DEE) (Sui Wen Ti), established his capital at the historic metropolis of Chang'an (CHENG-AHN) (Ch'ang-an) and began to extend his authority throughout the Chinese heartland.

The Sui Dynasty

Like his predecessors, the new emperor sought a unifying ideology to enhance the state's efficiency. But whereas Liu Bang, the founder of the Han dynasty, had adopted Confucianism as the official doctrine to hold the empire together, Yang Jian turned to Daoism and Buddhism. He founded monasteries for both doctrines and appointed Buddhist monks to key positions as political advisers.



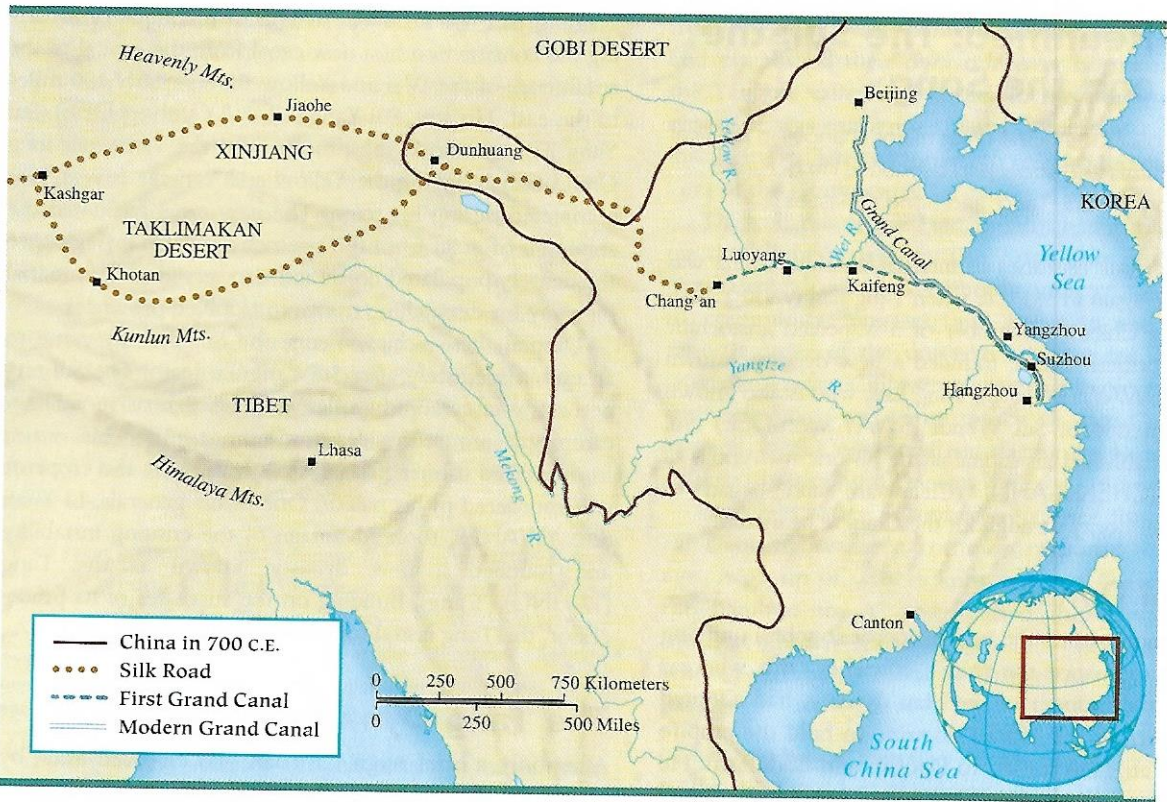
The Grand Canal. Built over centuries, the Grand Canal is one of the engineering wonders of the world and a crucial conduit for carrying goods between northern and southern China. During the Song dynasty, when the region south of the Yangtze River became the heartland of the empire, the canal was used to carry rice and other agricultural products to the food-starved northern provinces. Many of the towns and cities located along the canal became famous for their wealth and cultural achievements. Among the most renowned was Suzhou (soo-JOE), a center for silk manufacture, which is sometimes described as the “Venice of China” because of its many canals. Shown here is a classic example of a humpback bridge crossing an arm of the canal in downtown Suzhou. Chinese engineers discovered how to construct such bridges several hundred years before their counterparts in Europe mastered the technique.

Yang Jian was a builder as well as a conqueror, ordering the construction of a new canal from the capital to the confluence of the Wei and Yellow Rivers nearly 100 miles to the east. His son, Sui Yangdi (SWAY yahng-DEE) (Sui Yang Ti), continued the process, and the 1,400-mile-long Grand Canal, linking the Yellow and Yangtze Rivers, was completed during his reign. The new canal facilitated the shipment of grain from the rice-rich southern provinces to the densely populated north and also served as an imperial highway for dispatching troops to troubled provinces.

Despite these achievements, the Sui dynasty came to an end immediately after Sui Yangdi's death. The Sui emperor was a tyrannical ruler, and his expensive military campaigns aroused widespread unrest. After his return from a failed campaign against Korea in 618, the emperor was murdered in his palace. One of his generals, Li Yuan (lee YWAHN), took advantage of the ensuing instability and founded a new dynasty, known as the Tang (TAHNG) (T'ang). Building on the successes of its predecessor, the Tang lasted for three hundred years, until 907.

The Tang Dynasty

After only a brief reign, Li Yuan was elbowed aside by his son, who assumed the reign title Tang Taizong (tahng ty-ZOONG) (T'ang T'ai-tsung). Under his leadership, the Tang launched a program of internal renewal and external expansion that would make it one of the greatest Chinese dynasties (see Map 10.1). The northwest was pacified and given the name of Xinjiang (SHIN-jyahng), or “new region.” A long conflict with Tibet led for the first time to the extension of Chinese control over the vast and desolate plateau north of the Himalaya Mountains. The southern provinces below the Yangtze were fully assimilated into the Chinese Empire, and the imperial court established commercial and diplomatic relations with the states of Southeast Asia. With reason, China now claimed to be the foremost power in East Asia, and the emperor demanded fealty and tribute from all his fellow rulers beyond the frontier. Korea accepted tribute status and attempted to adopt the Chinese model, and the Japanese dispatched official missions



MAP 10.1 China Under the Tang. The era of the Tang dynasty was one of the greatest periods in the long history of China. Tang influence spread from the Chinese heartland into neighboring regions, including Central and Southeast Asia.

Q What was the main function of the Grand Canal during this period, and why was it built?

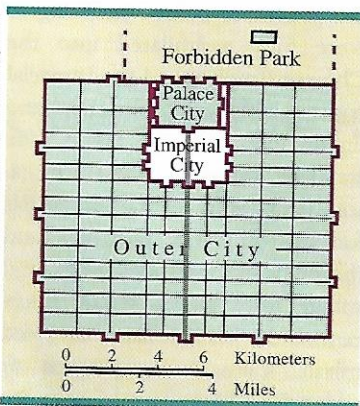
to China to learn more about its customs and institutions (see Chapter 11).

Finally, the Tang dynasty witnessed a flowering of culture, often regarded as the apogee of Chinese creativity in poetry and sculpture. One reason for this explosion of culture was the influence of Buddhism, which affected art, literature, and philosophy, as well as religion and politics. Monasteries

sprang up throughout China, and (as under the Sui) Buddhist monks served as advisers at the imperial court. The city of Chang'an once again became the seat of the empire. With a population estimated at nearly 2 million, it was possibly the greatest city in the world.

But the Tang, like the Han, sowed the seeds of their own destruction. Tang rulers could not prevent the rise of internal forces that would ultimately weaken the dynasty and bring it to an end. Two ubiquitous problems were court intrigues and official corruption. A prolonged drought may also have played a role in the dynasty's decline. In 755, rebellious forces briefly seized control of Chang'an itself. Although the revolt was eventually suppressed, the Tang never fully recovered. The loss of power by the central government led to increased influence by great landed families inside China and chronic instability along the northern and western frontiers, where local military commanders ruled virtually without central government interference. It was an eerie repetition of the final decades of the Han.

The end finally came in the early tenth century, when border troubles with northern nomadic peoples called the Khitan (KEE-tan) caused the Tang to follow the classic Chinese strategy of "using a barbarian to oppose a barbarian" by allying with the Uighurs (WEE-gurz), a Turkic-speaking people who had taken over many of the caravan routes along the Silk Road. But yet another nomadic people called the Kirghiz (keer-GEEZ) defeated



Chang'an Under the Sui and the Tang

the Uighurs and then turned on the Tang government in its moment of weakness and overthrew it.

The Song Dynasty

China slipped once again into chaos. This time, the period of foreign invasion and division was much shorter. In 960, a new dynasty, known as the Song (SOONG) (960–1279), rose to power. From the start, however, the Song (Sung) rulers encountered more problems in defending their territory than their predecessors. The founding emperor, Song Taizu (soong ty-DZOO) (Sung T'ai-tsu), was unable to reconquer the northwestern part of the country from the nomadic Khitan peoples and therefore established his capital farther to the east, at Kaifeng, where the Grand Canal intersected the Yellow River. Later, when pressures from the nomads in the north increased, the court was forced to move the capital even farther south, to Hangzhou (HAHNG-joe) (Hangchow), on the coast just south of the Yangtze River delta; the emperors who ruled from Hangzhou are known as the southern Song (1127–1279). Despite its political and military weaknesses, the dynasty nevertheless ruled during a period of economic expansion, prosperity, and cultural achievement and is therefore considered among the more successful Chinese dynasties. The empire's population, estimated at 40 million, was slightly higher than that of the continent of Europe.

Yet the Song were never able to surmount the external challenge from the north, and that failure eventually brought about the end of the dynasty. During its final decades, the Song rulers were forced to pay tribute to the Jurchen (roor-ZHEN) peoples from Manchuria (man-CHUR-ee-uh). In the early thirteenth century, the Song, ignoring precedent and the fate of the Tang, formed an alliance with the Mongols, a new and obscure nomadic people from the Gobi Desert. As under the Tang, the decision proved to be a disaster. Within a few years, the Mongols had become a much more serious threat to China than the Jurchen. After defeating the Jurchen, the Mongols turned their attention to the Song, advancing on Song territory from both the north and the west. By this time, the Song empire had been weakened by internal factionalism and a loss of tax revenues. After a series of battles and sieges marked by the use of catapults and gunpowder, the Song were defeated, and the conquerors announced the creation of a new Yuan (Mongol) dynasty. Ironically, the Mongols had first learned about gunpowder from the Chinese.

Political Structures: The Triumph of Confucianism

During the nearly seven hundred years from the Sui to the end of the Song, a mature political system based on principles originally established during the Qin and Han

CHRONOLOGY Medieval China

Arrival of Buddhism in China	c. first century C.E.
Fall of the Han dynasty	220 C.E.
Sui dynasty	581–618
Tang dynasty	618–907
Li Bo (Li Po) and Du Fu (Tu Fu)	700s
Song dynasty	960–1279
Wang Anshi	1021–1086
Southern Song dynasty	1127–1279
Mongol conquest of China	1279
Reign of Khubilai Khan	1260–1294
Fall of the Yuan dynasty	1368
Ming dynasty	1369–1644

dynasties gradually emerged in China. After the Tang dynasty's brief flirtation with Buddhism, State Confucianism became the ideological cement that held the system together (see the box on p. 254). The development of this system took several centuries, and it did not reach its height until the period of the Song dynasty.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY IN CHINA: THE CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION At the apex of the government hierarchy was the **Grand Council**, assisted by a secretariat and a chancellery; it included representatives from all three authorities—civil, military, and censorate. Under the Grand Council was the Department of State Affairs, composed of ministries responsible for justice, military affairs, personnel, public works, revenue, and rites (ritual).

The Tang dynasty adopted the practice of selecting some officials through periodic civil service examinations. The effectiveness of this merit system was limited, however, because it was dominated by the great aristocratic clans, who had mastered the technique of preparing candidates for the exams. According to one source, fully one-third of those who succeeded on the examinations during the Tang era came from the great families.

The Song were more successful at limiting aristocratic control over the bureaucracy, in part because the nobility had been weakened during the final years of the Tang dynasty and the interregnum that followed its collapse. Making the civil service examination system the primary route to an official career was a way of strengthening the power of the central administration. To reduce the power of the noble families, relatives of individuals serving in the imperial court were prohibited from taking the examinations. But if the objective was to make the bureaucracy more subservient to the court, the Song rulers may have been disappointed. The rising professionalism and influence of the bureaucracy, which numbered about

Action or Inaction: An Ideological Dispute in Medieval China

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

During the four hundred years between the fall of the Han dynasty in 220 C.E. and the rise of the Tang, Daoist critics lampooned the hypocrisy of the “Confucian gentleman”

and the Master’s emphasis on ritual and the maintenance of proper relations among individuals in society. In the first selection, a third-century Daoist launches an attack on the pompous and hypocritical Confucian gentleman who feigns high moral principles while secretly engaging in corrupt and licentious behavior.

By the eighth century, the tables had turned. In the second selection, Han Yu (hahn YOO) (768–824), a key figure in the emergence of Neo-Confucian thought as the official ideology of the state, responds to such remarks with a withering analysis of the dangers of “doing nothing”—a clear reference to the famous Daoist doctrine of “inaction.”

Biography of a Great Man

What the world calls a gentleman [*chun-tzu*] is someone who is solely concerned with moral law [*fa*], and cultivates exclusively the rules of propriety [*li*]. His hand holds the emblem of jade [authority]; his foot follows the straight line of the rule. He likes to think that his actions set a permanent example; he likes to think that his words are everlasting models. In his youth, he has a reputation in the villages of his locality; in his later years, he is well known in the neighboring districts. Upward, he aspires to the dignity of the Three Dukes; downward, he does not disdain the post of governor of the nine provinces.

Have you ever seen the lice that inhabit a pair of trousers? They jump into the depths of the seams, hiding themselves in the cotton wadding, and believe they have a pleasant place to live. Walking, they do not risk going beyond the edge of the seam; moving, they are careful not to emerge from the trouser leg; and they think they have kept to the rules of etiquette. But when the trousers are ironed, the flames invade the hills, the fire spreads, the villages are set on fire and the towns burned down; then the lice that inhabit the trousers cannot escape. What difference is there between the gentleman who

lives within a narrow world and the lice that inhabit trouser legs?

Han Yu, *Essentials of the Moral Way*

In ancient times men confronted many dangers. But sages arose who taught them the way to live and to grow together. They served as rulers and as teachers. They drove out reptiles and wild beasts and had the people settle the central lands. The people were cold, and they clothed them; hungry, and they fed them. Because the people dwelt in trees and fell to the ground, dwelt in caves and became ill, the sages built houses for them.

They fashioned crafts so the people could provide themselves with implements. They made trade to link together those who had and those who had not and medicine to save them from premature death. They taught the people to bury and make sacrifices [to the dead] to enlarge their sense of gratitude and love. They gave rites to set order and precedence, music to vent melancholy, government to direct idleness, and punishments to weed out intransigence. When the people cheated each other, the sages invented tallies and seals, weights and measures to make them honest. When they attacked each other, they fashioned walls and towns, armor and weapons for them to defend themselves. So when dangers came, they prepared the people; and when calamity arose, they defended the people. But now the Daoists maintain:

*Till the sages are dead,
theft will not end . . .
so break the measures, smash the scales,
and the people will not contend.*

These are thoughtless remarks indeed, for humankind would have died out long ago if there had been no sages in antiquity. Men have neither feathers nor fur, neither scales nor shells to ward off heat and cold, neither talons nor fangs to fight for food. . . .

But now the Daoists advocate “doing nothing” as in high antiquity. Such is akin to criticizing a man who wears furs in winter by asserting that it is easier to make

(Continued)

linen, or akin to criticizing a man who eats when he is hungry by asserting that it is easier to take a drink. . . .

This being so, what can be done? Block them or nothing will flow; stop them or nothing will move. Make humans of these people, burn their books, make homes of their dwellings, make clear the way of the former kings to guide them, and “the widowers, the widows,

the orphans, the childless, and the diseased all shall have care.” This can be done.



How might the author of the first selection have responded to Han Yu's arguments? Which author appears to make the better case for his chosen ideological preference?

Sources: Biography of a Great Man. From *Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy*, by Etienne Balasz. Copyright © 1964 by Yale University Press. Used with permission. Han Yu, *Essentials of the Moral Way*. Excerpt from *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, by William Theodore de Bary. Copyright © 1960 by Columbia University Press. Reprinted with the permission of the publisher.

20,000 in total, with 10,000 in the imperial capital, sometimes enabled it to resist the whims of individual emperors.

Under the Song, the examination system attained the form that it would retain in later centuries. Three levels of examinations were administered. The first was a qualifying examination given annually at the provincial capital. Candidates who succeeded at this stage normally could only obtain positions at the local level. Candidates who wished to go on could take a second examination given at the capital every three years. Successful candidates could apply for an official position. Those who passed the final examination, which was given in the imperial palace once every three years, were eligible for high positions in the central bureaucracy or for appointments as district magistrates.

The examinations were based entirely on the Confucian classics. Candidates were expected to memorize passages and to be able to explain the moral lessons they contained. The system guaranteed that successful candidates—and therefore officials—would have received a full dose of Confucian political and social ethics. Many students complained about the rigors of memorization and the irrelevance of the process. Others brought crib notes into the examination hall (one enterprising candidate concealed an entire Confucian text in the lining of his cloak).

The Song authorities ignored such criticisms, but they did open the exams to almost all males except criminals and set up training academies at the provincial and district level. Without such academies, only individuals with access to family-run schools could have passed the examinations. In time, the majority of candidates came from the landed gentry, nonaristocratic landowners who controlled much of the wealth in the countryside. Because the gentry prized education and became the primary upholders of the Confucian tradition, they were often called the **scholar-gentry**.

Nevertheless, the system still did not truly provide equal opportunity to all. Not only were only males eligible, but the Song never attempted to establish a system of universal elementary education. In practice, only those who had been given a basic education in the classics at

home were able to enter the state-run academies and compete for a position in the bureaucracy. Hence, the poor had little chance.

Nor could the system guarantee an honest, efficient bureaucracy. Official arrogance, bureaucratic infighting, and corruption were as prevalent in medieval China as in bureaucracies the world over. Nepotism was a particular problem, since many Chinese, following Confucius, held that filial duty transcended loyalty to the community.

Despite such weaknesses, the civil service examination system was an impressive achievement for its day and probably provided a more efficient government and more opportunity for upward mobility than existed in any other civilization of the time. Most Western governments, for example, did not begin to recruit officials on the basis of merit until the nineteenth century. Furthermore, by regulating the content of the examinations, the system helped provide China with a cultural uniformity lacking in empires elsewhere in Asia.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT The Song dynasty maintained the local government institutions that it had inherited from its predecessors. At the base of the government pyramid was the district (or county), governed by a magistrate who was responsible for maintaining law and order and collecting taxes within his district, which could exceed 100,000 people. Below the district was the basic unit of Chinese government, the village. Villages were allowed to administer themselves, normally through a council of elders. The council, usually made up of the heads of influential families in the village, maintained the local irrigation and transportation network, adjudicated disputes, organized a militia, and assisted in collecting taxes (usually paid in grain).

The Economy

During the long period between the Sui and the Song, the Chinese economy, like the government, grew considerably in size and complexity. China was still an

agricultural society, but major changes were taking place. The urban sector was becoming increasingly important, new social classes were beginning to appear, and the economic focus of the empire was beginning to shift from the Yellow River valley in the north to the Yangtze River valley in the center—a process that was encouraged both by the expansion of cultivation in the Yangtze delta and by the control exerted over the north by nomadic peoples during the Song.

LAND REFORM The economic revival began shortly after the rise of the Tang. During the long period of internal division, land had become concentrated in the hands of aristocratic families, with most peasants reduced to serfdom or slavery. The early Tang tried to reduce the power of the landed nobility and maximize tax revenues by adopting the ancient “well-field” system, in which land was allocated to farmers for life in return for an annual tax payment and three weeks of conscript labor.

At first, the new system led to increased rural prosperity and government revenue, but eventually, the rich and politically influential, including some of the largest Buddhist monasteries, learned to manipulate the system and accumulated huge tracts of land. The growing population also put steady pressure on the system. Finally, the government abandoned the effort to equalize landholdings and returned the land to private hands while attempting to prevent inequalities through the tax system. The failure to resolve the land problem contributed to the fall of the Tang dynasty in the early tenth century, although the reversion of farmlands to private hands did result in more efficient production in some instances as well as increased long-distance trade in food products.

The Song tried to resolve the land problem by returning to the successful programs of the early Tang and reducing the power of the landed aristocrats. During the late eleventh century, the reformist official Wang Anshi (WAHNG ahn-SHEE) (Wang An-shih) (1021–1086) attempted to limit the size of landholdings through progressive land taxes and provided cheap credit to poor farmers to help them avoid bankruptcy. His reforms met with some success, but other developments probably contributed more to the general agricultural prosperity under the Song. These included the opening of new lands in the Yangtze River valley, technological improvements such as the chain pump (a circular chain of square pallets on a treadmill that enabled farmers to lift water to a higher level), and the introduction of a quick-growing rice from Southeast Asia, which allowed two crops to be produced each year. It was during the Song dynasty that rice became the main food crop for the Chinese people.

AN INCREASE IN MANUFACTURING Major changes also took place in the urban economy, which witnessed a

significant increase in trade and manufacturing, helped by several technological developments (see the comparative essay “The Spread of Technology” on p. 257). During the Tang, the Chinese mastered the art of manufacturing steel by mixing cast iron and wrought iron. Blast furnaces were heated to a high temperature by burning coal. The resulting product was used for swords, sickles, and even suits of armor. By the eleventh century, more than 35,000 tons of steel were being produced annually. The introduction of cotton offered new opportunities in textile manufacturing. Gunpowder was invented by the Chinese during the late Tang dynasty and was used primarily for explosives and a primitive form of flamethrower; it reached the West via the Arabs in the twelfth century.

THE EXPANSION OF COMMERCE The nature of trade was also changing. In the past, most long-distance trade had been undertaken by state monopoly, but by the time of the Song, private commerce was being actively encouraged. Guilds began to appear, along with a new money economy. Paper currency began to be used in the eighth and ninth centuries and led to the development of banking as merchants found that strings of copper coins were too cumbersome for their increasingly complex operations. Credit (at first called “flying money”) also made its appearance during the Tang. The invention of the abacus, an early form of calculator, simplified the calculations needed for commercial transactions.

THE SILK ROAD Long-distance trade, both overland and by sea, expanded under the Tang and the Song. Trade with countries and peoples to the west had been carried on for centuries (see Chapter 3), but it had declined dramatically between the fourth and sixth centuries C.E. as a result of the collapse of the Han and Roman Empires. It began to revive with the rise of the Tang and the simultaneous unification of much of the Middle East under the Arabs. During the Tang era, the route that we call the Silk Road reached its zenith. Along the Silk Road to China came raw hides, furs, and horses. Much of the trade was carried by the Turkic-speaking Uighurs or Iranian-speaking Sogdians (SAHG-dee-unz) from Central Asia. During the Tang, Uighur caravans of two-humped Bactrian camels carried goods between China and the countries of South Asia and the Middle East.

In actuality, the Silk Road was composed of a number of separate routes. The first to be used, probably because of the jade found in the mountains south of Khotan (koh-TAHN), ran along the southern rim of the Taklimakan (tah-kluh-muh-KAHN) Desert and thence through the Pamir (pah-MEER) Mountains into Bactria. The first Buddhist missionaries traveled this route from India to

The Spread of Technology



From the invention of stone tools and the discovery of fire to the introduction of agriculture and writing systems, mastery of technology has been a driving force in human history. But why do some societies appear to be much more advanced in their use of technology than others? People living on the island of New Guinea, for example, began cultivating local crops like taro and bananas as early as ten thousand years ago but never took the next steps toward creating a complex society until the arrival of Europeans many millennia later. Advanced societies began to emerge in the Western Hemisphere during the ancient era, but none discovered the use of the wheel or the smelting of metals for toolmaking. Writing also remained in its infancy there.

Technological advances appear to take place for two reasons: need and opportunity. Farming peoples throughout the world needed to control the flow of water, so in areas where water was scarce or unevenly distributed, they developed irrigation techniques to make resources available throughout the region. Sometimes, however, opportunity strikes by accident (as in the legendary story of the Chinese princess who dropped a silkworm cocoon into her cup of hot tea, thereby initiating a series of discoveries that resulted in the manufacture of silk) or when new technology is introduced from a neighboring region (as when the discovery of tin in Anatolia launched the Bronze Age throughout the Middle East).

The most important factor enabling societies to keep abreast of the latest advances in technology, it would

appear, is participation in the global trade and communications network. In this respect, the Abbasid Empire enjoyed a major advantage because the relative ease of communications between the Mediterranean region and the Indus River valley gave the empire rapid access to all the resources and technological advances in that part of the world. China was more isolated from such developments because of distance and barriers such as the Himalaya Mountains. But with its size and high level of cultural achievement, China was almost a continent in itself and was able to communicate with countries to the west via the Silk Road.

Societies that were not linked to this vast network were at an enormous disadvantage in keeping up with new developments in technology. The peoples of New Guinea, at the far end of the Indonesian archipelago, had little or no contact with the outside world. In the Western Hemisphere, a trade network did begin to take shape between societies in the Andes and their counterparts in Mesoamerica. But because of difficulties in

communication (see Chapter 6), contacts were intermittent. Not until the arrival of the conquistadors did technological developments taking place in distant Eurasia reach the Americas.



In what ways did China contribute to the spread of technology and ideas throughout the world during the period from the Sui dynasty to the rise of the Ming? How did China benefit from the process?



A copper astrolabe from the Middle East, circa the ninth century C.E.

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China. Eventually, however, this area began to dry up, and traders were forced to seek other routes. The route to the north of the Tian Shan (TEE-en SHAHN) (Heavenly Mountains) offered pastures where animals could graze, but the area was frequently infested by bandits, so most caravans followed the southern route, which passed along the northern fringes of the Taklimakan Desert to Kashgar (KASH-gahr) and down into northwestern

India. Travelers avoided the direct route through the desert (in the Uighur language, the name means “go in and you won’t come out”) and trudged from oasis to oasis along the southern slopes of the Tian Shan.

The eastern terminus of the Silk Road was the city of Chang’an, perhaps the wealthiest city in the world during the Tang era. Its days as China’s foremost metropolis were numbered, however. Chronic droughts throughout



Tang Camel. During the Tang dynasty, trade between China, India, and the Middle East along the famous Silk Road increased rapidly and introduced new Central Asian motifs to Chinese culture. As seen in this sturdy example, the Bactrian two-humped camel played a major role in carrying goods along the trade route, since its ability to withstand long periods without water enabled it to survive the grueling trek across the Central Asian deserts. Numerous ceramic studies of horses and camels, along with officials, court ladies, and servants, painted in brilliant gold, green, and blue lead glazes, were created as tomb figures and therefore are preserved for us today.

the region made it more and more difficult to supply the city with food, and the growing power of nomadic peoples in the hinterlands made the city increasingly vulnerable to attack. During the later Tang, the imperial court was periodically shifted to the old capital of Luoyang (LWOH-yahng). The Song dynasty, a product of the steady drift of the national center of gravity toward the south, was forced to abandon Chang'an altogether.

THE MARITIME ROUTE The Silk Road was so hazardous that shipping goods by sea became increasingly popular. China had long been engaged in sea trade with other countries in the region, but most of the commerce was originally in the hands of Korean, Japanese, Southeast Asian, or Middle Eastern merchants. Under the Song, however, Chinese maritime trade was stimulated by the invention of the compass and technical

improvements in shipbuilding such as the sternpost rudder. If Marco Polo's observations can be believed, by the thirteenth century, Chinese junks (a type of seagoing ship with square sails and a flat bottom) had multiple sails and were up to 2,000 tons in size, much larger than contemporary ships in the West. The Chinese governor of Canton (KAN-tahn) in the early twelfth century remarked:

According to the government regulations concerning sea-going ships, the larger ones can carry several hundred men, and the smaller ones may have more than a hundred men on board. . . . The ship's pilots are acquainted with the configuration of the coasts; at night they steer by the stars, and in the daytime by the Sun. In dark weather they look at the south-pointing needle. They also use a line a hundred feet long with a hook at the end, which they let down to take samples of mud from the sea-bottom; by its appearance and smell they can determine their whereabouts.³

A wide variety of goods passed through Chinese ports. The Chinese exported tea, silk, and porcelain to the countries beyond the South China Sea, receiving exotic woods, precious stones, cotton from India, and various tropical goods in exchange. The major southern port was Canton, home to an estimated 100,000 merchants. Chinese aristocrats, their appetite for material consumption stimulated by the affluence of much of the Tang and Song periods, were fascinated by the exotic goods shipped from the tropical lands of the South Seas and the flora and fauna of the desert that arrived via the Silk Road.

Some of this trade was a product of the tribute system. The Chinese viewed the outside world as they viewed their own society—in a hierarchical manner. Rulers of smaller countries along the periphery were viewed as “younger brothers” of the Chinese emperor and owed fealty to him. Foreign rulers who accepted the relationship were required to pay tribute and to promise not to harbor enemies of the Chinese Empire. In return, they obtained legitimacy and access to the vast Chinese market.

Society in Traditional China

These political and economic changes affected Chinese society during the Tang and Song eras. For one thing, it became much more complex. Whereas previously China had been almost exclusively rural, with a small urban class of merchants and artisans almost entirely dependent on the state, the cities had now grown into an important, if statistically still insignificant, part of the population. Cities were no longer primarily administrative centers but now included a much broader mix of officials, merchants, artisans, touts, and entertainers. Unlike European cities, however, Chinese cities did not possess special privileges that protected their residents from the rapacity of the central government.



Court Ladies Preparing Silk. Since antiquity, human beings have fashioned textiles out of hemp, flax, wool, cotton, and silk. The Shang dynasty produced both hemp and silk cloth, whereas wool was prominent in the Middle East and Greece. Linen, woven in Egypt, was used by the Roman Empire to clothe its army. Fine Indian cotton was introduced to China along the Silk Road, just as Chinese satin was carried by Mongol warriors to Europe, where it was used for making banners. Sometimes the Chinese government demanded bolts of cloth as well as grain as a tax from peasants. Although most silk was produced by peasants as an agricultural by-product, it was also woven by the elegant court ladies of the Song dynasty, as seen here, and its use as a fabric was restricted to the elite classes until the nineteenth century.

In the countryside, equally significant changes were taking place, as the relatively rigid demarcation between the landed aristocracy and the mass of the rural population gave way to a more complex mixture of landed gentry, free farmers, sharecroppers, and landless laborers. There was also a class of “base people,” consisting of actors, butchers, and prostitutes, who possessed only limited legal rights and were not permitted to take the civil service examination.

THE RISE OF THE GENTRY Under the early Tang, powerful noble families not only possessed a significant part of the national wealth, but also dominated high positions in the imperial government, just as they had at the end of the Han dynasty four hundred years earlier. The soaring ambitions and arrogance of China’s great families are evident in the following wish list set in poetry by a young bridegroom of the Tang dynasty:

*Chinese slaves to take charge of treasury and barn,
Foreign slaves to take care of my cattle and sheep.
Strong-legged slaves to run by saddle and stirrup
when I ride,
Powerful slaves to till the fields with might
and main,
Handsome slaves to play the harp and hand
the wine;
Slim-waisted slaves to sing me songs, and dance;
Dwarfs to hold the candle by my dining-couch.⁴*

Some Tang rulers, notably Empress Wu Zhao (WU ZHOU) in the late seventh century, sought to limit the power of the great families by recruiting officials through

the civil service examinations, but in the end it was the expansion of regional power—often under non-Chinese military governors—after the revolt in 755 that sounded the death knell to the aristocratic system.

Perhaps the most significant development during the Song dynasty was the rise of the landed gentry as the most influential force in Chinese society. The gentry controlled much of the wealth in the rural areas and produced the majority of the candidates for the bureaucracy. By virtue of their possession of land and specialized knowledge of the Confucian classics, the gentry had replaced the aristocracy as the political and economic elite of Chinese society. Unlike the aristocracy, however, the gentry did not form an exclusive class. Upward and downward mobility between the scholar-gentry and the remainder of the population was not uncommon and may have been a key factor in the stability of the system. A position in the bureaucracy opened the doors to wealth and prestige for the individual and his family but was no guarantee of success, and the fortunes of individual families might experience a rapid rise and fall.

For affluent Chinese in this era, life offered many more pleasures than had been available to their ancestors. There were new forms of entertainment, such as playing cards and chess (brought from India, although an early form had been invented in China during the Zhou dynasty); new forms of transportation, such as the paddle-wheel boat and horseback riding (made possible by the introduction of the stirrup); and better means of communication (block printing was first invented in the eighth century C.E.). Tea, which had been introduced

from the Burmese frontier by monks as early as the Han dynasty, began to emerge as a national drink, and brandy and other distilled spirits made their appearance in the seventh century.

VILLAGE AND FAMILY The vast majority of the Chinese people still lived in rural villages. Their lives were bounded by their village. Although many communities were connected to the outside world by roads or rivers, most Chinese rarely left their native village except for an occasional visit to a nearby market town.

An even more basic unit than the village for most Chinese, of course, was the family. The ideal was the joint family with at least three generations under one roof. Because of the heavy labor requirements of rice farming, the tradition of the joint family was especially prevalent in the south. When a son married, he was expected to bring his new wife back to live in his parents' home.

Chinese village architecture reflected these traditions. Most family dwellings were simple, consisting of one or two rooms. They were usually constructed of dried mud, stone, or brick, depending on available materials and the family's prosperity. Roofs were of thatch or tile, and the floors were usually of packed dirt. Large houses were often built in a square around an inner courtyard.

Within the family unit, the eldest male theoretically ruled as an autocrat. He was responsible for presiding over ancestral rites at an altar, usually in the main room of the house. He had traditional legal rights over his wife, and if she did not provide him with a male heir, he was permitted to take a second wife. The wife, however, had no recourse to divorce. As the old saying went, "Marry a chicken, follow the chicken; marry a dog, follow the dog." Wealthy Chinese might keep concubines, who lived in a separate room in the house and sometimes competed with the legal wife for precedence.

In accordance with Confucian tradition, children were expected, above all, to obey their parents, who not only determined their children's careers but also selected their marriage partners. Filial piety was viewed as an absolute moral good, above virtually all other moral obligations.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN The tradition of male superiority continued from ancient times into the medieval era, especially under the southern Song when it was reinforced by Neo-Confucianism (see the box on p. 261). Female children were considered less desirable than males because they could not undertake heavy work in the fields or carry on the family traditions. Poor families often sold their daughters to wealthy villagers to serve as concubines, and in times of famine, female infanticide was not uncommon to ensure that there would be food for the remainder of the family.

During the Song era, two new practices emerged that changed the equation for women seeking to obtain a successful marriage contract. First, a new form of dowry appeared. Whereas previously the prospective husband offered the bride's family a bride price, now the reverse became the norm, with the bride's parents paying the groom's family a dowry. With the prosperity that characterized much of the Song era, affluent parents sought to buy a satisfactory husband for their daughter, preferably one with a higher social standing and good prospects for an official career.

A second source of marital bait during the Song period was the promise of a bride with tiny bound feet. The process of **foot binding**, carried out on girls aged five to thirteen, was excruciatingly painful, as it bent and compressed the foot to half its normal size by imprisoning it in restrictive bandages. But the procedure was often performed by ambitious mothers intent on assuring their daughters of the best possible prospects for marriage. Bound feet represented submissiveness and self-discipline, two attributes of the ideal Confucian wife.

Throughout northern China, foot binding became common for women of all social classes. It was less common in southern China, where the cultivation of wet rice could not be carried out with bandaged feet; there it tended to be limited to the scholar-gentry. Still, most Chinese women with bound feet contributed to the labor force to supplement the family income. Although foot binding was eventually prohibited, the practice lasted into the twentieth century, particularly in rural villages.

As in most traditional societies, there were exceptions to the low status of women in Chinese society. Women had substantial property rights and retained control over their dowries even after divorce or the death of the husband. Wives were frequently an influential force within the home, often handling the accounts and taking primary responsibility for raising the children. Some were active in politics. The outstanding example was Wu Zhao (c. 625–c. 706), popularly known as Empress Wu. Selected by Emperor Tang Taizong as a concubine, after his death she rose to a position of supreme power at court. At first, she was content to rule through her sons, but in 690, she declared herself empress of China. For her presumption, she has been vilified by later Chinese historians, but she was actually a quite capable ruler. She was responsible for giving meaning to the civil service examination system and was the first to select graduates of the examinations for the highest positions in government. During her last years, she reportedly fell under the influence of courtiers and was deposed in 705, when she was probably around eighty.

Admiral Zhenghe at court. This aroused resentment among conservatives within the bureaucracy, some of whom viewed commercial activities with a characteristic measure of Confucian disdain.

Shortly after Yongle's death, the voyages were discontinued, never to be revived. The decision had long-term consequences and in the eyes of many modern historians marks a turning inward of the Chinese state, away from commerce and toward a more traditional emphasis on agriculture, away from the exotic lands to the south and toward the heartland of the country in the Yellow River valley. The imperial capital was moved from Nanjing (nahn-JING), in central China, back to Beijing.

WHY WERE ZHENGHE'S VOYAGES ABANDONED?

Why the Ming government discontinued Zhenghe's explorations has long been a quandary. Was it simply a consequence of court intrigues or the replacement of one emperor by another, or were deeper issues involved? Some scholars speculate that the real purpose of the voyages was "power projection" and that when local rulers throughout the South Seas had been sufficiently intimidated to accept a tributary relationship with their "elder brother" in China, such expensive voyages were no longer necessary.

One recent theory that has spurred scholarly debate contends that the fleets actually circled the earth and discovered the existence of the Western Hemisphere. Although that theory has won few scholarly adherents, the voyages, and their abrupt discontinuance, remain one of the most fascinating enigmas in the history of China.

In Search of the Way

Q FOCUS QUESTION: What roles did Buddhism, Daoism, and Neo-Confucianism play in Chinese intellectual life in the period between the Sui dynasty and the Ming?

By the time of the Sui dynasty, Buddhism and Daoism had emerged as major rivals of Confucianism as the ruling ideology of the state. But during the last half of the Tang dynasty, Confucianism revived and once again became dominant at court, a position it would retain to the end of the dynastic period in the early twentieth century. Buddhist and Daoist beliefs, however, remained popular at the local level.

The Rise and Decline of Buddhism and Daoism

As noted earlier, Buddhism arrived in China with merchants from India and found its first adherents among the merchant community and intellectuals. During the chaotic centuries following the collapse of the Han dynasty, Buddhism and

Daoism appealed to those who were searching for more emotional and spiritual satisfaction than Confucianism could provide. Both faiths reached beyond the common people and found support among the ruling classes as well.

THE SINIFICATION OF BUDDHISM As Buddhism attracted more followers, it began to take on Chinese characteristics and divided into a number of separate sects. Some, like the **Chan** (Zen in Japanese) sect, called for mind training and a strict regimen as a means of seeking enlightenment (see the box on p. 269). Others, like the **Pure Land** sect, stressed the role of devotion, an approach that was more appealing to ordinary Chinese, who lacked the time and inclination for strict monastic discipline. Still others were mystical sects, like **Tantrism** (TUHN-tri-zum), which emphasized the importance of magical symbols and ritual. Some Buddhist groups, like their Daoist counterparts, had political objectives. The **White Lotus** sect, founded in 1133, often adopted the form of a rebel movement, seeking political reform or the overthrow of a dynasty and forecasting a new era when a "savior Buddha" would come to earth to herald the advent of a new age. Most believers, however, assimilated Buddhism into their daily lives, where it joined Confucian ideology and spirit worship as an element in the highly eclectic and tolerant Chinese worldview.

The burgeoning popularity of Buddhism continued into the early years of the Tang dynasty. Early Tang rulers lent their support to the Buddhist monasteries that had been established throughout the country. But ultimately, Buddhism and Daoism lost favor at court. Daoists and Confucianists made a point of criticizing the foreign origins of Buddhist doctrines, which one prominent Confucian scholar characterized as nothing but "silly relics." But another reason for this change of heart may have been financial. The great Buddhist monasteries had accumulated thousands of acres of land and serfs that were exempt from paying taxes. As the state attempted to eliminate the great landholdings of the aristocracy, the large monasteries also attracted its attention. During the later Tang, countless temples and monasteries were destroyed, and more than 100,000 monks were compelled to leave the monasteries and return to secular life.

BUDDHISM UNDER THREAT Yet there were probably deeper political and ideological reasons for the growing antagonism between Buddhism and the state. By preaching the illusory nature of the material world, Buddhism was denying the essence of Confucian teachings—the necessity for filial piety and hard work. By encouraging young Chinese to abandon their fields and seek wisdom in the monasteries, Buddhism was undermining the foundation stones of Chinese society—the family unit and the work ethic. Ultimately, Buddhism was incompatible with the activist element in Chinese society. In the

The Way of the Great Buddha

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

According to Buddhists, it is impossible to describe the state of Nirvana, which is sometimes depicted as an extinction of self. Yet Buddhist scholars found it difficult to avoid trying to interpret the term for their followers. The following passage by the Chinese monk Shen-Hui (shun-HWEE), one of the leading exponents of Chan Buddhism, dates from the eighth century and attempts to describe the means by which an individual may hope to seek enlightenment. There are clear similarities with philosophical Daoism.

Shen-Hui, *Elucidating the Doctrine*

“Absence of thought” is the doctrine.

“Absence of action” is the foundation.

True Emptiness is the substance.

And all wonderful things and beings are the function.

True Thusness is without thought; it cannot be known through conception and thought.

The True State is noncreated—can it be seen in matter and mind?

There is no thought except that of True Thusness.

There is no creation except that of the True State.

Abiding without abiding, forever abiding in Nirvana.

Acting without acting, immediately crossing to the Other Shore.

Thusness does not move, but its motion and functions are inexhaustible.

In every instant of thought, there is no seeking; the seeking itself is no thought.

Perfect wisdom is not achieved, and yet the Five Eyes all become pure and the Three Bodies are understood.

Great Enlightenment has no knowledge, and yet the Six Supernatural Powers of the Buddha are utilized and the Four Wisdoms of the Buddha are made great.

Thus, we know that calmness is at the same time no calmness, wisdom at the same time no wisdom, and action at the same time no action.

The nature is equivalent to the void and the substance is identical with the Realm of Law.

In this way, the Six Perfections are completed.

None of the ways to arrive at Nirvana is wanting.

Thus, we know that the ego and the dharmas are empty in reality and being and nonbeing are both obliterated.

The mind is originally without activity; the Way is always without thought.

No thought, no reflection, no seeking, no attainment;

No this, no that, no coming, no going.



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Buddhist Sculpture at Longmen. In the seventh century, the Tang emperor Gaozong (gow-ZOONG) commissioned this massive cliffside carving as part of a large complex of cave art devoted to the Buddha at Longmen (LAHNG-mun) in central China. Bold and grandiose in its construction, this towering statue of the Buddha, surrounded by temple guardians and bodhisattvas, reflects the glory of the Tang dynasty.

With such reality one understands the True Insight [into previous and future mortal conditions and present mortal suffering].

With such a mind one penetrates the Eight Emancipations [through the eight stages of mental concentration].

By merits one accomplishes the Ten Powers of the Buddha.

Q What similarities with philosophical Daoism are expressed in this passage? Compare and contrast the views expressed here with the Neo-Confucian worldview.

competition with Confucianism for support by the state, Buddhism, like Daoism, was almost certain to lose.

Neo-Confucianism: The Investigation of Things

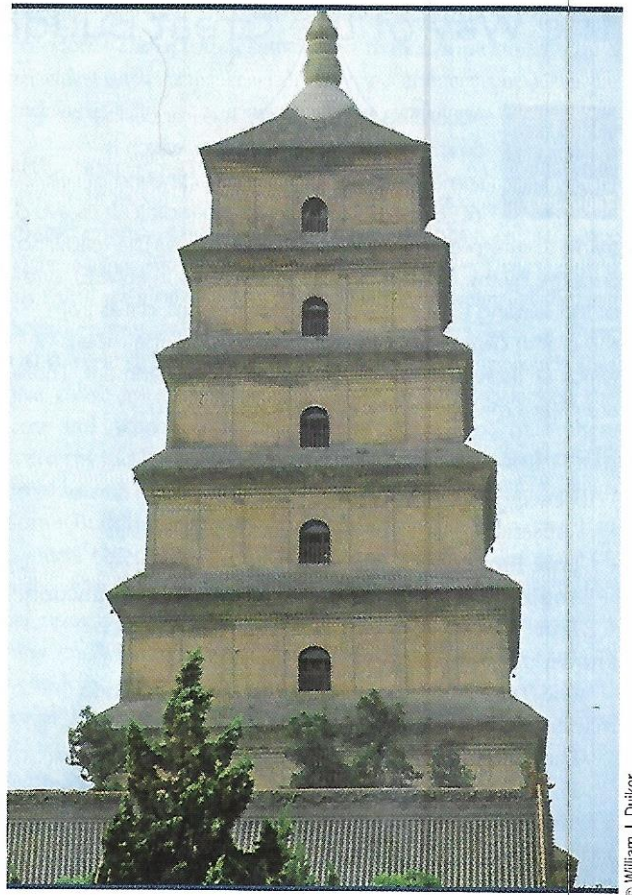
Into the vacuum left by the decline of Buddhism and Daoism stepped a revived Confucianism. Challenged by Buddhist and Daoist ideas about the nature of the universe, Confucian thinkers began to flesh out the spare metaphysical structure of classical Confucian doctrine with a set of sophisticated theories about the nature of the cosmos and humans' place in it.

The fundamental purpose of **Neo-Confucianism**, as the new doctrine was called, was to unite the metaphysical speculations of Buddhism and Daoism with the pragmatic Confucian approach to society. In response to Buddhism and Daoism, Neo-Confucianism maintained that the world is real, not illusory, and that fulfillment comes from participation, not withdrawal.

The primary contributor to this intellectual effort was the philosopher Zhu Xi (JOO SHEE) (Chu Hsi). Raised during the southern Song era, Zhu Xi accepted the division of the world into a material world and a transcendent world, called the **Supreme Ultimate**, or *Tai Ji* (TY JEE), which was roughly equivalent to the *Dao*, or Way, in classical Confucian philosophy. To Zhu Xi, this Supreme Ultimate was a set of abstract principles governed by the law of *yin* and *yang* and the five elements.

Human beings served as a link between the two halves of this universe. Although human beings live in the material world, each individual has an identity that is linked with the Supreme Ultimate, and the goal of individual action is to transcend the material world in a Buddhist sense to achieve an essential identity with the Supreme Ultimate. According to Zhu Xi and his followers, this transcendence occurs through self-cultivation, which is achieved by the "investigation of things."

THE SCHOOL OF MIND During the remainder of the Song dynasty and into the early years of the Ming, Zhu Xi's ideas became the core of Confucian ideology and a favorite source of questions for the civil service examinations. But during the mid-Ming era, his ideas came under attack from a Confucian scholar named Wang Yangming (WAHNG yahng-MING). Wang and his supporters disagreed with Zhu Xi's focus on learning through an investigation of the outside world and asserted that the correct way to transcend the material world was through an understanding of self. According to this so-called **School of Mind**, the mind and the universe were a single unit. Knowledge was thus intuitive rather than empirical and was obtained through internal self-searching rather than



The Big Goose Pagoda. When the Buddhist pilgrim Xuan Zang returned to China from India in the mid-seventh century C.E., he settled in the capital of Chang'an, where, under orders from the Tang emperor, he began to translate Buddhist texts in his possession from Sanskrit into Chinese. The Big Goose Pagoda, shown here, was erected shortly afterward to house them. Originally known as the Pagoda of the Classics, the structure consists of seven stories and is more than 240 feet high.

through an investigation of the outside world. The debate is reminiscent of a similar disagreement between followers of the ancient Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle. Plato had argued that all knowledge comes from within, while Aristotle argued that knowledge resulted from an examination of the external world. Wang Yangming's ideas attracted many followers during the Ming dynasty, and the school briefly rivaled that of Zhu Xi in popularity. Nevertheless, it never won official acceptance, probably because it was too much like Buddhism in denying the importance of a life of participation and social action.

For the average Chinese, of course, an instinctive faith in the existence of household deities or nature spirits continued to take precedence over the intellectual ruminations of Buddhist monks or Confucian scholars. But a prevailing belief in the concept of *karma* and possible rebirth in a next life was one important legacy of the Buddhist

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connection, while a new manifestation of the Confucian concept of hierarchy was the village god—often believed to live in a prominent tree in the vicinity—who protected the community from wandering evil spirits.

The Apogee of Chinese Culture

Q FOCUS QUESTION: What were the main achievements in Chinese literature and art in the period between the Tang dynasty and the Ming, and what technological innovations and intellectual developments contributed to these achievements?

The period between the Tang and the Ming dynasties was in many ways the great age of Chinese literature and art. Enriched by Buddhist and Daoist images and themes, Chinese poetry and painting reached the pinnacle of their creativity. Porcelain emerged as the highest form of Chinese ceramics, and sculpture flourished under the influence of styles imported from India and Central Asia.

Literature

The development of Chinese literature was stimulated by two technological innovations: the invention of paper during the Han dynasty and the invention of woodblock printing during the Tang. At first, paper was used for clothing, wrapping material, toilet tissue, and even armor, but by the first century B.C.E., it was being used for writing as well.

In the seventh century C.E., the Chinese developed the technique of carving an entire page of text into a wooden block, inking it, and then pressing it onto a sheet of paper. Ordinarily, a text was printed on a long sheet of paper like a scroll. Then the paper was folded and stitched together to form a book. The earliest printed book known today is a Buddhist text published in 868 C.E.; it is more than 16 feet long. Although the Chinese eventually developed movable type as well, block printing continued to be used until relatively modern times because of the large number of Chinese characters needed to produce a lengthy text. Even with printing, books remained too expensive for most Chinese, but they did help popularize all forms of literary writing among the educated elite.

POETRY Although historical writing and essays continued to be popular, it was in poetry that Chinese from the Tang to the Ming dynasties most effectively expressed their literary talents. Chinese poems celebrated the beauty of nature, the changes of the seasons, and the joys of friendship; others expressed sadness at the brevity of life, old age, and parting. Love poems existed but were neither as intense as Western verse nor as sensual as Indian poetry.

The nature of the Chinese language imposed certain characteristics on Chinese poetry, the first being compactness. The most popular forms were four-line and eight-line poems, with five or seven words in each line. Because Chinese grammar does not rely on case or gender and makes no distinction between verb tenses, five-character Chinese poems were not only brief but often cryptic and ambiguous.

Two eighth-century Tang poets, Li Bo (LEE BOH) (Li Po, sometimes known as Li Bai or Li Taibo) and Du Fu (DOO FOO) (Tu Fu), symbolized the genius of the era. Li Bo was a free spirit whose writing often shifted easily between moods of revelry and melancholy. One of his best-known poems is *Drinking Alone in Moonlight*:

*Among the flowers, with a jug of wine,
I drink all alone—no one to share.
Raising my cup, I welcome the moon.
And my shadow joins us, making a threesome.
Alas! the moon won't take part in the drinking,
And my shadow just does whatever I do.
But I'm friends for a while with the moon and
my shadow.⁷*

Whereas Li Bo was a carefree Daoist, Du Fu was a sober Confucian whose poems often dealt with historical or ethical issues. Many of his works reflect a concern with social injustice and the plight of the unfortunate rarely found in the writings of his contemporaries.

Neither the poetry nor the prose of the great writers of the Tang and Song dynasties was written for or ever reached the majority of the Chinese population. Chinese peasants and artisans acquired their knowledge of Chinese history, Confucian moralisms, and even Buddhist scripture from a rich oral tradition passed down by storytellers, wandering minstrels, and itinerant monks. One exception is the popular poem *Song of Lasting Pain* by the Tang poet Bo Ju-yi (BOH joo-YEE) (772–846) (see the box on p. 272).

THE CHINESE NOVEL During the Yuan dynasty, new forms of literary creativity, including popular theater and the novel, began to appear. One of the most famous novels was *Tale of the Marshes*, an often violent tale of bandit heroes who at the end of the northern Song banded together to oppose government taxes and official oppression. They stole from those in power to share with the poor. *Tale of the Marshes* is the first prose fiction that describes the daily ordeal of ordinary Chinese people in their own language.

Art

Although painting flourished in China under the Han and reached a level of artistic excellence under the Tang, little remains from those periods. The painting of the Song and the Yuan, however, is considered the apogee of painting in traditional China.

Beautiful Women: The Scapegoats of Legends



One of the most famous episodes in Chinese history occurred during the Tang dynasty when the emperor Xuanzong (shyahn-ZOONG) became infatuated with a beautiful concubine Yang Guifei (yahng gway-FAY). She was put to death after one of her protégés launched a rebellion in 755. Although for centuries Chinese historians have blamed Yang Guifei for distracting the emperor from his imperial duties, the Chinese people have always been fascinated by her passion, her beauty, and her dramatic downfall.

One who sought to capture her story was the Tang poet Bo Ju-yi, whose famous work *Song of Lasting Pain* has captivated Chinese readers for more than 1,300 years. After describing her brutal murder and Xuanzong's inconsolable grief, the poem ends with the emperor and his lover united in everlasting sorrow.

Bo Ju-yi, *Song of Lasting Pain*

*Han's sovereign prized the beauty of flesh,
he longed for such as ruins domains;
for many years he ruled the Earth
and sought for one in vain.*

*A daughter there was of the house of Yang,
just grown to maturity,
raised deep in the women's quarters
where no man knew of her.*

*When Heaven begets beauteous things,
it is loath to let them be wasted,
so one morning this maiden was chosen
to be by the ruler's side.*

*When she turned around with smiling glance,
she exuded every charm;
in the harem all who wore powder and paint
of beauty then seemed barren.*

*In springtime's chill he let her bathe
in Hua-ting Palace's pools
whose warm springs' glistening waters
washed flecks of dried lotions away.*

*Those in attendance helped her rise,
in helplessness so charming—
this was the moment when first she enjoyed
the flood of royal favor.*

*She waited his pleasure at banquets,
with never a moment's peace,
their springs were spent in outings of spring,
he was sole lord of her nights.
In the harems there were beauties,
three thousand there were in all,
but the love that was due to three thousand
was spent on one body alone.*

*Tresses like cloud, face like flower,
gold pins that swayed to her steps;
it was warm in the lotus-embroidered tents
where they passed the nights of spring.
And the nights of spring seemed all too short,
the sun would too soon rise,
from this point on our lord and king
avoided daybreak court.*

.....
*If in Heaven, may we become
those birds that fly on shared wing;
or on Earth, then may we become
branches that twine together.
Heaven lasts, the Earth endures
yet a time will come when they're gone,
yet this pain of ours will continue
and never finally end.*

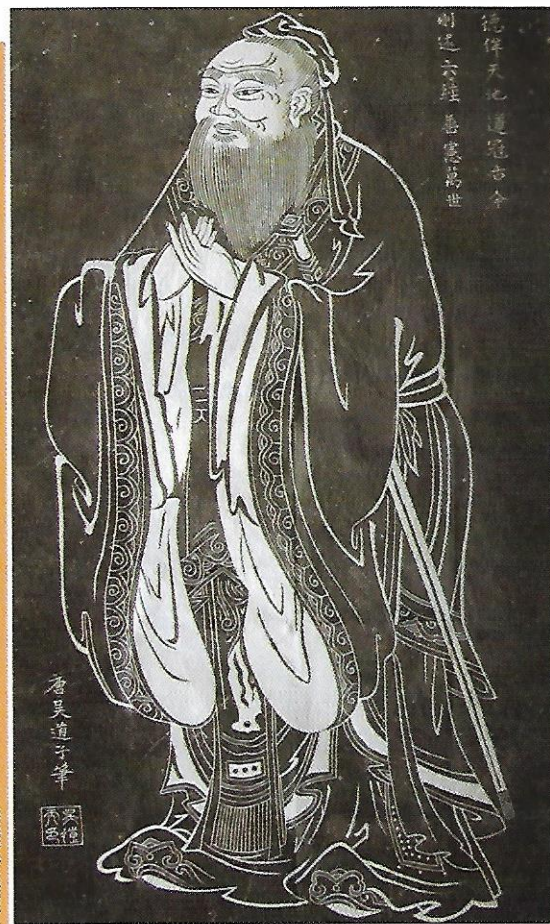
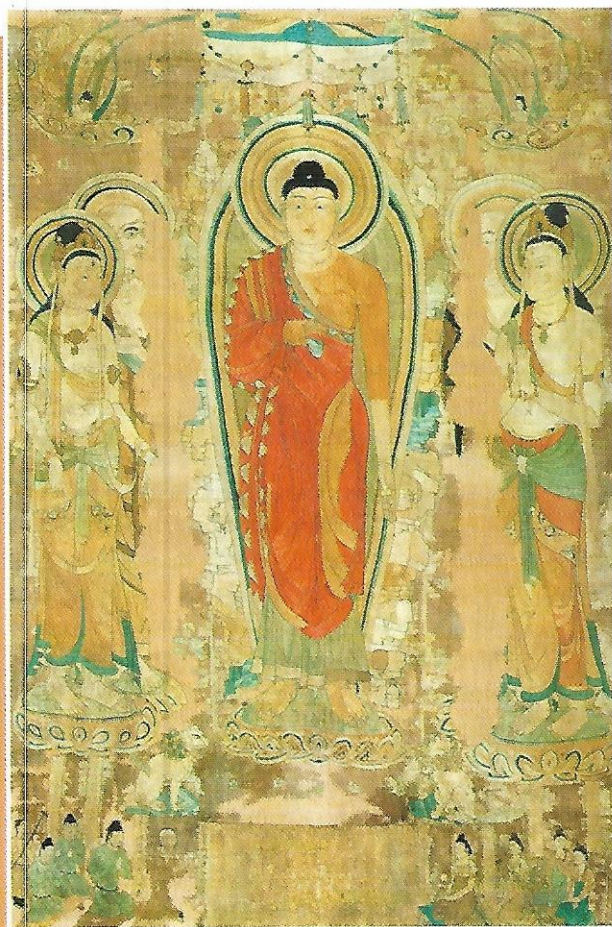


Like Yang Guifei, a number of other beautiful women in history and legend, including Helen of Troy, Cleopatra, and Rama's wife Sita, have been blamed for the downfall of states and other misfortunes. Why is this is such a familiar theme in many cultures around the world? Can you think of other examples?

Source: Appears in *An Anthology of Chinese Literature*, (trans. S. Owen, (New York, 1996), pp. 442-447

Like literature, Chinese painting found inspiration in Buddhist and Daoist sources. Some of the best surviving examples of the Tang period are the Buddhist wall paintings in the caves at Dunhuang (doon-HWAHNG), in

Central Asia. Like the few surviving Tang scroll paintings, these wall paintings display a love of color and refinement that are reminiscent of styles in India and Persia (see the comparative illustration on p. 273).



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COMPARATIVE ILLUSTRATION

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

The Two Worlds of Tang China. In Tang dynasty China, the arts often reflected influences from a wide variety of cultures. On the left is an eighth-century wall painting from a cliffside cave at Dunhuang, a major rest stop on the Silk Road. The portrait of the Buddha clearly reflects Indian influence. The illustration on the right is a stone rubbing of Confucius based on a painting by the Tang dynasty artist Wu Daozi (woo DOW-ZEE) (c. 685–758). Although the original painting is not extant, this block print of a stone copy of Wu Daozi's work, showing Confucius in his flowing robe, reflects the indigenous style for which the painter was famous. It became the iconic portrait of the Master for millions of later Chinese. The Chinese government recently commissioned a copy based on Wu's original painting to serve as the standard portrait of Confucius for people around the world.

Q How do the two portraits shown here differ in the way their creators seek to present the character and the underlying philosophy of the Buddha and Confucius?

Daoism ultimately had a greater influence than Buddhism on Chinese painting. From early times, Chinese artists retreated to the mountains to write and paint and find the *Dao*, or Way, in nature. In the fifth century, one Chinese painter, who was too old to travel, began to paint mountain scenes from memory and announced that depicting nature could function as a substitute for contemplating it. Painting, he said, could be the means of realizing the *Dao*. This explains in part the emphasis on nature in traditional Chinese painting. The word *landscape* in Chinese means “mountain-water,” and the Daoist search for balance between earth and water, hard and soft, *yang* and *yin*, is at play in the tradition of Chinese painting.

To represent nature, Chinese artists attempted to reveal the quintessential forms of the landscape. Rather than depicting a specific mountain, they tried to portray the idea of “mountain.” Empty spaces were left in the paintings because in the Daoist vision, one cannot know the whole truth. Daoist influence was also evident in the tendency to portray human beings as insignificant in the midst of nature. In contrast to Western art with its focus on the human body and personality, Chinese art presented people as tiny figures fishing in a small boat, meditating on a cliff, or wandering up a hillside trail, coexisting with but not dominating nature.

The Chinese displayed their paintings on long scrolls of silk or paper that were attached to a wooden cylindrical bar at the



Emperor Ming-huang Traveling to Shu. Although the Tang dynasty was a prolific period in the development of Chinese painting, few examples have survived. Fortunately, the practice of copying the works of previous masters was a common tradition in China. Here we see an eleventh-century copy of an eighth-century painting depicting the precipitous journey of Emperor Ming-huang after a revolt forced him to flee from the capital into the mountains of southwest China. Rather than portraying the bitterness of the emperor's precarious escape, however, the artist reflected the confidence and brilliance of the Tang dynasty through cheerful color and an idyllic landscape.

bottom. Varying in length from 3 to 20 feet, the paintings were unfolded slowly so that the eye could enjoy each segment, beginning at the bottom with water or a village and moving upward into the hills to the mountain peaks and the sky.

By the tenth century, Chinese painters began to eliminate color from their paintings, preferring to capture the distilled essence of a landscape in washes of black ink on white silk. Borrowing from calligraphy, now a sophisticated and revered art, they emphasized the brush stroke and created black-and-white landscapes characterized by a gravity of mood and dominated by overpowering mountains.

Second only to painting in creativity was the field of ceramics, notably, the manufacture of porcelain. Made of fine clay baked at unusually high temperatures in a kiln, porcelain was first produced during the period after the fall of the Han and became popular during the Tang era. During the Song, porcelain came into its own. The translucence of Chinese porcelain represented the final product of a technique that did not reach Europe until the eighteenth century.

CHAPTER SUMMARY



Traditionally Chinese historians believed that Chinese history tended to be cyclical driven by the dynamic interplay of the forces of good and evil, *yang* and *yin*, growth and decay. Beyond the forces of conflict and change lay the essential continuity of Chinese history, based on timeless principles established by Confucius and other thinkers during the Zhou dynasty in antiquity.

This view of the dynamic forces of Chinese history was long accepted as valid by historians in the West and led many to assert that Chinese history was unique and could not be placed in a European or universal framework. Whereas Western history was linear, leading steadily away from the past, China's always returned to its moorings and was rooted in the values and institutions of antiquity.

In recent years, however, this traditional view of a changeless China has come under increasing challenge from historians who see patterns of change that made the China of the late fifteenth century a very different place