

Between China's Classical Age and its Restoration

After the Han, China briefly devolved into 3 separate kingdoms, then into a mass of many regional kingdoms trying to assert their power over the others. Despite the lack of a unified government, Buddhism became very wide spread during this time and easily adapted itself to Confucian values and morality. Chinese language played an important part of this syncretism, as dharma was simply translated as the Dao, etc.

The Sui Dynasty

The Sui dynasty ended the 3 and a half century period of chaos by militarily dominating the others and rising to power. Much of this was accomplished by **Yangdi**, a ruthless leader who murdered his father to gain the throne. Often compared to the Qin, the Sui placed strict demands on their subjects and recovered China's centralized government. They also beat back the threatening nomads on China's northwest border, re-strengthened the Confucian education system and restored the examination system for promoting the scholar-gentry class into the government's bureaucracy.

The most important project by far was the construction of the Great Canal, which would have important effects for China's future. China's important rivers run east and west; it's most populated area is its northern plain, the center of most of its important dynasties. However, the Yangzi River valley in the south was becoming an important source of abundant agriculture. To connect this area with the populated area in the north an artificial waterway had to be constructed. The Sui accomplished this incredible feat, employing millions of peasants for a Grand Canal that eventually stretched over 1200 miles. The canal connected the northern and southern regions providing an economic basis for political and cultural unity. Not only were the food products of the south available to the north, but this area was open to more direct taxation.

The Sui dynasty over extended itself by attempting to retake lands in Korea originally conquered by Han Wudi during the Han dynasty. The terrible expenses of this campaign in economic and human terms caused deep resentment, especially when contrasted with the incredibly luxurious life and court of the emperor. In 618 Yangdi was assassinated by one of his own ministers bringing the short-lived Sui to an end.

The Tang

From the struggles and chaos after the assassination of Yangdi the Tang family emerged successful and established, along with the Song, one of the most successful eras in China's history.

The success of the Tang was founded on three policies:

- 1) a complex system of communication and transportation

The Tang instituted a network of roads, canals, inns, post offices, and used horses and human runners (nearly 10,000) to keep communication lines flowing.

- 2) the three-field system of agriculture

The equal-field system allotted land to families according to their need and the fertility of the land. It's purpose was to avoid the concentration of land into the hands of a small group of aristocrats, something that contributed to social unrest during the Han.

3) a bureaucracy based on merit

Confucianism was re-established as the basis of the bureaucracy. Like the Han, the Tang used the scholar-gentry class to offset the power of local aristocrats. The bureaucracy formed a much tighter system than under the Han, reaching from the emperor himself all the way down to an area the size of an American county.

Dealing with Turkish nomads on the northwest frontier. The Tang enlisted many of them into their armies, forced their sons to move to the capital to be educated. This not only guaranteed good behavior for the Turkish soldiers, but assimilated many of their sons into Chinese culture.

The relation with Buddhism

After the fall of the Han dynasty the popularity of Buddhism surged, especially the **Pure Land** or Mahayana version that offered salvation. In China Buddhism took another form in something called **Chan Buddhism** (Zen in Japan). It emphasized an appreciation of artistic, literary, and natural beauty and stressed the importance of meditation. Chan Buddhist did not seek the gradual process of enlightenment, but rather the instantaneous flashes of enlightenment that came through focused meditation. By the time of the Tang Dynasty, Buddhism had become a central feature of Chinese civilization and under the Tang even enjoyed the sponsorship of the government. The most important Tang ruler supporting Buddhism was **Empress Wu**, the only female leader of China. Wu attempted to make Buddhism into a state religion; she commissioned huge statues of the Buddha, had Buddhist pagodas built and paid for thousands of Buddhist monasteries. By the mid 9th century China had over 50,000 Buddhist monasteries.

The restoration of the civil service examination re-enforced the focus on Confucian education, and Confucian scholars were deeply troubled by the prominence of Buddhism and stressed its foreign nature. They convinced the government that Buddhist monasteries, which enjoyed tax free status, deprived the state of much needed funds. A backlash against Buddhism occurred after Empress Wu that forced many Buddhist monks and nuns into the workforce and confiscated thousands of Buddhist monasteries and converted them into farms.

The Song Dynasty

Chao K'uang-yin founded the Song dynasty. He was a general, made emperor by his soldiers in 960 A.D. Unlike the generals before him who had declared themselves emperors of dynasties that soon failed, Chao K'uang-yin lived a long life. This allowed him to establish a more solid foundation for his successors. Another reason that his dynasty lasted longer was that he did not try to fight the Khitans to the north; rather he conquered the southern half of China. The southern kingdoms, while economically and culturally advanced, did not have strong militaries and were relatively easy to defeat. In order to maintain peace with the Khitans, the Song were forced to pay them annual

tributes. These annual tributes were more cost effective than maintaining a military that could hold the Khitans back.

Great advances were made in the areas of technological invention, material production, political philosophy, government, and elite culture. The Song used gunpowder as a weapon in siege warfare, foreign trade expanded greatly, and the Chinese had the best ships in the world. Their ships contained as many as four decks, six masts, and a dozen sails. The ships were guided by a stern post rudder, while navigation was done through the use of charts and compasses. These ships could carry 500 men. European ships on the other hand used muscle power and an inefficient steering oar. Advances were also made in medicine, as the first autopsy was performed in about 1145 AD on the body of a Southern Chinese captive.

Education, and the examination system became central to the upper class. This rise in the popularity of education was due in part to advances made in printing and the greater availability of books. Examinations grew steadily in popularity throughout China, although only enough were allowed to pass them as was needed to fill the administrative positions. This resulted in the education itself, and the attempted examination, gaining more importance socially than it had in the past.

Neo-Confucianism was developed during this time, especially during the Southern Song dynasty. Zhu Xi was one of the people who helped develop Neo-Confucianism. While not the only person to write about Confucianism, he was the one who combined others works with his and best organized the beliefs. He selected, from the ancient writings on Confucianism, the *Four Books* and also synthesized the writings of previous philosophers who had been active earlier during the Northern Song era. An important part of Neo-Confucianism is the attempt to "repossess the Way." Pursuit of the Way through disciplined self cultivation formed a person's character. This was important because it encouraged the nobles to live up to the Confucian ideals by being less selfish.

While poetry and painting gained importance, some poets began using the vernacular in their writings. In the past it had been very unusual to use phrases from everyday life. Painting reached new heights during this time. There were two main schools of painters. The first created decorative, yet realistic, paintings that show a great attention to detail. The second tried to paint inner realities, as they viewed painting to be an intimate personal expression. Near the end of the Song dynasty, the famous blue and white porcelain was created. The most common porcelain was the type known as Celadon.

While being one of the most technologically and culturally advanced people in the world at the time, the Song were not militarily powerful. Part of the reason for this may be because Confucianism held military in very low regard. Confucianism did not recognize the military as being part of the four official classes of occupations; therefore, the military consisted of either the poor, uneducated peasants, mercenaries or allies. Diplomacy was the favored form of dealing with enemies. This prolonged period of paying tribute to enemies, rather than being militarily strong enough to defeat them, left the Song susceptible to attack from others. This weakness allowed for two non-Chinese

kingdoms to exist to the north of the Song. They were the Liao and the Western Xia. All three of these kingdoms favored diplomacy over military aggression. Thus by 1125 A.D., a group called the Jin were able to conquer the Liao and the Song, along with part of the territory of the Western Xia. A brother of the Song emperor fled south, and declared himself emperor. His dynasty is generally known as the Southern Song.

The Southern Song experienced a temporary return to peace, and culturally they too flourished. However, the power was mainly held by the nobles, and many emperors were forced, by the nobles, to abdicate. This period did not last long, as in 1210 A.D. the Mongols began to assault the Song, and in 1279, the [Yuan](#), or Mongol empire began.

Economic revolution in China

Agricultural advancements

Invasion of Vietnam introduced them to fast-ripening rice

New agricultural practices: iron plows, harnessed animals, irrigation, manure

Population growth (60 million during Han, 50-60 during Tang, 120 mill by end of Song)

Urbanization

Song China was the most urbanized land in the world. Large cities grew, its capital Chang'an probably had two million people, largest in the world behind Baghdad and Constantinople. Cities became centers of trading, markets, entertainments; goods from all over the world could be found in Chinese markets.

Porcelain production

Metallurgy

Gunpowder

Printing

Magnetic compass

Junks (and dhows) (the Chinese began to trade in the spice islands of southeast Asia)

Banking and paper money

Printing altered education: Civil service exam get more complicated.

Confucianism merges with Buddhism-Neo-Confucianism

Weak military, strong patriarchy (foot binding)

Song paid tribute to nomads on their frontiers.

bureaucracy had become extremely complex, expensive.

Large, but weak military (run by bureaucrats, not military personnel)

In 1115 people called the Jurchens invaded from the north, the Song retreated to the south. The Southern Song lasted 1127-1279, then the Mongols destroyed them.

Sinification of East Asia

