

Sui and Tang Dynasties

The Han dynasty ruled China from 206 BC to AD 220—more than 400 years. After the dynasty collapsed, military leaders split China into rival kingdoms. These events began a period of disorder and warfare that historians call the Period of Disunion.

The Period of Disunion

- Nomads invaded northern China, formed own kingdoms
- Many northern Chinese fled south to region of Yangzi River
- A number of southern dynasties rose, fell

Civilization Thrived

- Despite these events, Chinese civilization thrived, developed
- Nomadic invaders in north adopted aspects of Chinese civilization
- Northern Chinese immigrants' culture blended with local cultures in south; arts, philosophy flowered

The Period of Disunion lasted more than 350 years, ending when a northern ruler named Wendi reunified China, founding the Sui dynasty.

The Sui Dynasty

Centralized Government

- Wendi worked to build centralized government
- Restored order, created new legal code, reformed bureaucracy
- Created policies to provide adult males with land, ensure availability of grain

Grand Canal

- Greatest accomplishment of Sui dynasty, completed during reign of Yangdi, Wendi's son
- 1,000 mile waterway linked northern, southern China
- Yangdi forced millions of peasants to work on canal; led to discontent, rebellion
- 618, Yangdi assassinated, Sui dynasty ended

The Tang Dynasty

Period of Brilliance

- Tang dynasty ruled 618 to 907; Chinese influence spread
- China experienced period of brilliance, prosperity, cultural achievement
- Government, other institutions served as models across East Asia

Built on Sui Foundations

- Established capital at Chang'an, Sui capital
- Second capital located at Luoyang
- Government control remained centralized, based on bureaucracy of officials

Civil Service

- To obtain talented officials, Tang expanded civil service examination system
- People had to pass written exams to work for government
- Created flexible law code; model for law codes in Korea, Japan

Foreign Affairs

- Tang expanded China, Chinese influence
- Regained western lands in Central Asia, gained influence over Korea
- Contact with Japan increased; Japanese scholars came to China to study
- Expansion, increased contact with others grew foreign trade

Expansion

- Much of expansion occurred during reign of Taizong, 626 to 649
- Taizong relied on talented ministers to help govern
- In addition to military conquests, Taizong had schools built to prepare students for civil service exams
- After his death, one of his sons became emperor

The Age of Buddhism

From India

- Buddhism first came to China from India during Han times
- During Period of Disunion many Chinese turned to Buddhism
- Taught people could escape suffering, appealed to people in turmoil

State Religion

- Under Tang rule, Buddhism became state religion
- Buddhist temples appeared across land, missionaries spread Buddhism
- 400 to 845 in China, Age of Buddhism; ended when lost official favor

Tang Decline

- 750s, decline began, government weak, nomadic invasions, rebellions
- Military defeats lost Tang lands in Central Asia and the north
- 907, emperor killed, Tang dynasty ended

The Song Dynasty

After Tang Dynasty

- China split apart after Tang dynasty
- Did not reunify until 960 with Song dynasty
- Song ruled for about 300 years, created achievement, prosperity
- Under Song, Chinese civilization became most advanced in world

Government and Civil Service

- Song established capital at Kaifeng, restored centralized government control
- Enlarged government bureaucracy, reformed civil service examination system
- Neo-Confucianism gained favor, emphasizing Confucian ethics, spiritual matters

Civil Service Exams

- Extremely difficult to pass; those who did became **scholar-officials**
- Scholar-officials received good salary, were respected
- Civil service exams became more open to ordinary people
- Exams became pathway to gaining wealth, status

Southern Song

- Song rulers never regained northern, western lands lost by Tang
- Tried to buy peace with threatening nomads by sending lavish gifts
- 1120s, nomadic people, Jurchen, conquered northern China, founded Jin empire
- Song continued in south as Southern Song dynasty 150 more years

Cultural Achievements

The Tang and Song dynasties were periods of great cultural achievement. Art and literature flourished, and many inventions and advances occurred in science and technology.

Literature and Art

- Tang period produced some of China's greatest poets
- Du Fu, Li Bo, two most famous
- Poems of Confucian ideals, joys of life

Painting

- Reached new heights
- Wu Daozi, murals celebrating Buddhism, nature
- Landscapes of great beauty
- Some used only black ink

Artisans

- Exquisite objects made from clay
- Tang: pottery figurines, often to go in tombs
- Song: excelled at making **porcelain**
- Admired, sought after worldwide

Inventions and Innovations

Architecture

- Indian Buddhist temples influenced design of Chinese **pagoda**
- Featured roofs at each floor curving upwards at corners

Inventions

- During Tang, Song periods, China became a world leader in technology, science
- Gunpowder major invention, used in fireworks, weapons

Magnetic Compass

- Major Tang technical advance
- Uses Earth's magnetic field to show direction
- Revolutionized sea travel, contributed to world exploration

Printing

- Paper, ink invented earlier
- Tang period, developed **woodblock printing**
- Text carved into wood, coated with ink, pressed on paper

Moveable Type

- Song dynasty invented another type of printing, **moveable type**
- Uses blocks on which letters, characters carved
- Blocks rearranged, reused to print many things
- Faster than woodblock, spread to Europe, revolutionized printing

Paper Money

- Another Song invention
- Had used bulky metal disks placed on strings
- As economy grew, lighter, more useful form of currency developed
- Paper money light, easy to use, quickly spread in use in China

Prosperity and Society

In addition to cultural achievements, the Tang and Song periods were a time of growth and prosperity.

Agriculture

- Chinese agriculture became more productive
 - New irrigation techniques
 - New variety of rice
 - Production of cotton, tea increased
- Increased food production contributed to population growth
- Tang population 60 million, Song population 100 million

Trade

- Improvements in roads, canals increased trade within China
- Foreign trade expanded, mostly over land routes like Silk Roads
- Late Tang: advances in sailing, shipbuilding helped sea trade
- Song: merchants became important in society; money, banking began to develop

City Life

- As farming, trade grew so did China's cities
- China had largest cities in world at the time
- Tang capital, Chang'an, population more than 1 million, many cultures
- Song dynasty, several cities had million or more; sea trade caused port cities to boom
- Despite urban growth, most Chinese still lived, farmed in countryside

Society

- Power of aristocratic families declined during period
- New class developed, **gentry**
- Included scholar-officials, leading landowners
- Most still peasants, farmers
- Paid most of taxes, little schooling

Women

- Status of women declined, most visibly in upper classes
- Desire for small, dainty feet led to custom of footbinding
- Painful process to keep feet from growing, deformed feet over time
- Symbol of husband's authority