

“A Golden Age” → China during the Tang and Song: dynasties enjoyed political stability, economic growth, and intellectual and artistic achievement.

China: The more things change, the more they stay the same → Chinese culture retained many of its characteristics from Ancient through the Tang & Song era:

- Confucianism (& Buddhism) as an influence
- Advancements in technology and ideas
- Emperor and the Bureaucracy
- Written and spoken languages
- Social Classes and gender roles
- Unity

CHARACTERISTICS OF CHINA DURING THE SUI, TANG, and SONG DYNASTIES

Politics & Government:

- The frontiers were stabilized & attempts at expansion were partially successful.
- Centralized government returned along with a bureaucracy of trained civil servants.

Economy

- Agricultural production improved & crop specialization intensified → Champa Rice
- The use of a credit system and paper money improved commerce & trade.
- Imports included: luxury goods
- Exports included: manufactured goods
- Indian Ocean trade increased as Islamic and Jewish influence increased.
- Chinese trade ships, called junks, dominated eastern ocean trade.
- Silk Road trade increased

Religion & Philosophy

- Both Buddhism and Confucianism received patronage from the government.
- Buddhism eventually seen as threat to values / production → destroyed

Cultural Interaction

- In the later Tang and Song periods, involvement with and influence of “foreigners” was limited. Perhaps this was a reaction to the continual pressure placed on the empires by neighboring groups.

Social Classes

- Landowners (landed gentry) were still at the top of the social ladder.
- Scholar-gentry
- Merchants and artisans could acquire a great deal of wealth from industry and trade.
- Soldiers, peasants, and slaves at the bottom of the social classes.

Gender Roles

- Women’s status slowly declined (despite attempts at reform by several empresses).
- The Song Period saw women at a very low social status: Seclusion, lack of property rights, foot-binding, and exclusion from education are all examples.

Technology

- First chain driven mechanism - the clock
- Gunpowder
- Block printing techniques were invented and then advanced.
- Boat building and navigational technology was more advanced than the rest of the world.

Advancements included:

- Tang and Song China had the largest cities in the world at that time.
- Song Chinese were the first to use fractions in computations and equations.
- Solar year was accurately measured
- Doctors in Song China compiled and printed texts on the internal organs and blood vessels.

In terms of advancements, innovations, and knowledge, China benefited from centuries of Chinese scholarship and technology + Influences from other parts of the world (especially during the Tang period) also had a considerable effect.