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Two Great Dynasties in China

Do Everything that is Highlighted

TERMS & NAMES

- Tang Taizong
- Wu Zhao
- movable type
- gentry

MAIN IDEA

During the Tang and Song dynasties, China experienced an era of prosperity and technological innovation.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Chinese inventions from this period, such as printing, gunpowder, and the compass, changed history.

SETTING THE STAGE After the Han Dynasty collapsed in A.D. 220, nomadic peoples from the northern steppe and Tibet conquered much of northern China. For 350 years, no emperor was strong enough to hold China together. More than 30 local dynasties rose and fell. By 589, an emperor named Sui Wendi had united northern and southern China once again. He restored a strong central government. Under the next two dynasties, the Tang and the Song, China experienced a golden age. It became the richest, most powerful, and most advanced country in the world.

The Tang Dynasty Expands China

Sui Wendi declared himself the first emperor of the Sui (sway) Dynasty. The dynasty lasted through only two emperors from 589 to 618. The Sui emperors' greatest accomplishment was the completion of the Grand Canal. This waterway connected the Huang He (Yellow River) and the Yangtze River. The canal provided a vital route for trade between the northern cities and the southern rice-producing region of the Yangtze delta.

To dig the 1,000-mile waterway, tens of thousands of peasant men and women toiled five years. Perhaps as many as half of the workers died on the job. Thousands more toiled and died to rebuild the Great Wall. The endless labor on state projects turned the people against the Sui Dynasty. Overworked and overtaxed, they finally revolted. In 618, a member of the imperial court strangled the second Sui emperor.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

A. Synthesizing

What Sui accomplishments helped the Tang Dynasty become powerful?

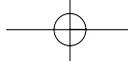
Tang Rulers Create a Powerful Empire While short-lived, the Sui Dynasty built a strong foundation for the great achievements of the next dynasty, the Tang (tahng). The Tang Dynasty ruled for nearly 300 years (618–907). The Tang emperor who began these achievements was **Tang Taizong**, whose brilliant reign lasted from 627 to 649.

Under the Tang rulers, the empire expanded. Taizong's armies reconquered the northern and western lands that China had lost since the decline of the Han Dynasty. By 668, China had extended its influence over Korea as well. The ruler during the campaign in Korea was the empress **Wu Zhao** (woo jow). From about 660 on, she held the real power while weak emperors sat on the throne. Finally, in 690, Empress Wu assumed the title of emperor for herself—the only woman ever to do so in China.

Tang rulers further strengthened the central government of China. They expanded the network of roads and canals begun by the Sui. This helped to pull the empire together. However, Tang Taizong also remembered the Sui emperors' mistake of overtaxing peasants. Therefore, he lowered taxes and took some lands from the wealthy to give to peasants. He and his successors also promoted foreign trade and improvements in agriculture. Tang China prospered.

Horses symbolized the power of the Tang Dynasty. Tang artists were famous for their glazed pottery horses such as this one, which was created in the early 700s.





HISTORYMAKERS



Tang Taizong
600–649

The man who restored the Middle Kingdom to its glory was a distinguished general named Li Shimin. He seized the imperial throne in 626 after killing off his brothers as rivals and forcing his father, the first Tang emperor, to step aside. As emperor, Li Shimin took the title Taizong, meaning “Great Ancestor.”

Taizong’s military campaigns extended China’s borders north to Manchuria, south to Vietnam, and west to the Aral Sea. China’s power and influence reached much farther. At home, aided by his gifted advisers, Taizong reformed the government organization and law code. These became models for all of East Asia.



Wu Zhao
625–705

At the age of 13, the beautiful Wu Zhao arrived at the court of Tang Taizong to become one of the emperor’s secondary wives. After Taizong’s death, she became a favored wife of his son and successor. Wu Zhao soon rose above rival wives and became the emperor’s chief wife, or empress.

For many years, Empress Wu virtually ruled China on behalf of the sickly emperor. After his death, two of their sons briefly held the throne. Frustrated by their lack of ability, she took the throne herself at the age of 65. She was 80 when she finally lost power.

A strong leader, Wu Zhao continued the work begun by Taizong to build and expand China.

Scholar-Officials To manage their large empire, the Tang rulers needed to restore China’s vast bureaucracy. The civil service examination system begun by the Han Dynasty had fallen into disorder. The Tang rulers revived and expanded the system to recruit good officials. They opened schools around the country to train young scholars in Confucianism, poetry, and other subjects covered in the exams. The few who passed the tough exams became part of an elite group of scholar-officials.

In theory, the exams were open to all men, even commoners. However, only the wealthy could afford the necessary years of education. Also, men with political connections could obtain high positions without taking the exams.

Despite these flaws, the system created a remarkably intelligent and capable governing class in China. Before the Tang Dynasty, a few noble families dominated the country. As the examination system grew in importance, talent and education became more important than noble birth in winning power. As a result, many moderately wealthy families shared in China’s government.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

B. Recognizing

Effects What resulted from the revival of the civil service system?

The Tang Lose Power By the mid-700s, the Tang Dynasty was weakening. To pay for military expansion, Tang rulers reimposed crushing taxes. These brought hardship to the people but still failed to meet the rising costs of government. In times of famine, peasants fled their villages and roved the countryside in bandit gangs.

Moreover, the Tang could not control the vast empire they had built. In 751, Arab armies soundly defeated the Chinese on China’s western frontier at the Battle of Talas. (See the map on pages 284–285.) Central Asia passed out of Chinese control and into foreign hands. After this time, border attacks and internal rebellions steadily chipped away at the power of the imperial government. Finally, in 907, Chinese rebels sacked and burned the Tang capital at Chang’an and murdered the last Tang emperor, a child.

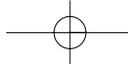
The Song Dynasty Restores China

After the end of the Tang Dynasty, rival warlords divided China into separate kingdoms. In 960, an able general reunited China and proclaimed himself Song Taizu, the first Song (sung) emperor. The Song Dynasty, like the Tang, lasted about three centuries (960–1279). Although the Song ruled a smaller empire than either the Han or the Tang, China remained stable, powerful, and prosperous.

Song armies never regained the western lands lost after 751. Nor did they regain northern lands that had been lost to nomadic tribes during the Tang decline. For a time, Song emperors tried to buy peace with their northern enemies. They paid hefty annual

Background

Recall the Mandate of Heaven (page 50), a concept the Chinese held to explain the decline and fall of dynasties.



tributes of silver, silk, and tea. This policy, however, ultimately failed to stop their threat. In the early 1100s, a Manchurian people called the Jurchen conquered northern China and established the Jin empire. The Jurchen forced the Song to retreat south across the Huang He. After 1126, the Song emperors ruled only southern China.

The Song ruling family fled south. They established a grand new capital at Hangzhou, a coastal city south of the Yangtze. Despite its military troubles, the dynasty of the Southern Song (1127–1279) saw rapid economic growth. The south had become the economic heartland of China. Merchants in southern cities grew rich from trade with Chinese in the north, nomads of Central Asia, and people of western Asia and Europe.

An Era of Prosperity and Innovation

The period of the Tang and Song dynasties was one of intense growth. China grew in population, trade, wealth, new ideas, and artistic achievements. In the span of three or four centuries, China's population nearly doubled, soaring to 100 million. By the Song era, China had at least ten cities with a population of 1 million each. China was the most populous country in the world. It was also the most advanced.

Science and Technology Artisans and scholars made important technological advances during the Tang and Song eras. Among the most important inventions were movable type and gunpowder. With **movable type**, a printer could arrange blocks of individual characters in a frame to make up a page for printing. Previously, printers had carved the words of a whole page into one large block. The development of gunpowder led to the creation of explosive weapons such as bombs, grenades, small rockets, and cannons. Other important inventions of this period include porcelain, the mechanical clock, paper money, and the use of the magnetic compass for sailing.

Inventions of Tang and Song China

	Date	Description	Impact
Porcelain	Late 700s	Bone-hard, white ceramic made of a special clay and a mineral found only in China	Became a valuable export—so associated with Chinese culture that it is now called “china”; technology remained a Chinese secret for centuries
Mechanical clock	700s	Clock in which machinery (driven by running water) regulated the movements	Early Chinese clocks short-lived; idea for mechanical clock carried by traders to medieval Europe
Printing	Block printing: 700s Movable type: 1040	Block printing: one block on which a whole page is cut; movable type: individual characters arranged in frames, used over and over	Printing technology spread to Korea and Japan; movable type also developed later in Europe
Gunpowder	800s	Explosive powder made from mixture of saltpeter, sulfur, and charcoal	First used for fireworks, then weapons; technology spread west within 300 years
Paper money	1020s	Paper currency issued by Song government to replace cumbersome strings of metal cash used by merchants	Contributed to development of large-scale commercial economy in China
Magnetic compass (for navigation)	1100s	Floating magnetized needle that always points north-south; device had existed in China for centuries before it was adapted by sailors for use at sea	Helped China become a sea power; technology quickly spread west

SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Charts

1. Which inventions eventually affected warfare and exploration?
2. Which of these inventions do you think had the greatest impact on history? Why?



The 1000s to the 1200s was a rich period for Chinese mathematics. The Chinese developed algebra and began to use the zero. Many mathematical ideas, such as using negative numbers, spread from China southward and westward.

Agriculture The rapid growth of China resulted from advances in farming. Farmers especially improved the cultivation of rice. In about the year 1000, China imported from Vietnam a new variety of fast-ripening rice. This allowed the farmers to harvest two rice crops each year rather than one. To make sure that farmers knew about the improved variety, Chinese officials distributed seedlings throughout the country. The agricultural improvements enabled China's farmers to produce more food. This was necessary to feed the rapidly expanding population in the cities.

Trade and Foreign Contacts Under the Tang and Song emperors, foreign trade flourished. Tang imperial armies guarded the great Silk Roads, which linked China to the West. Eventually, however, China lost control over these routes during the long Tang decline. After this time, Chinese merchants relied increasingly on ocean trade. Chinese advances in sailing technology, including use of the magnetic compass, made it possible for sea trade to expand. During the Song period, China developed into the greatest sea power in the world.

Up and down China's long coastline, the largest port cities in the world bustled with international trade. Merchant ships carried trade goods to Korea and Japan. They sailed across the Indian Ocean to India, the Persian Gulf, and even the coast of Africa. Chinese merchants established trading colonies around Southeast Asia. Many foreign traders, mostly Arabs, resided in Chinese cities. Through trade and travel, Chinese culture spread throughout East Asia. One major cultural export was Buddhism. This religion spread from China to Japan, Korea, and Vietnam.

The exchange of goods and ideas was two-way. During Tang times, tea first arrived in China from Southeast Asia. The Chinese became avid tea drinkers and tea producers. Foreign religions, including Islam and some Eastern sects of Christianity, also spread to China and won followers.

A Golden Age of Art The prosperity of the Tang and Song dynasties nourished an age of artistic brilliance. The spread of wealth, education, and urban culture stimulated a high level of artistic creativity. Scholar-officials, for example, were expected to write poetry and to own at least one fine painting.

The Tang period produced great poetry. Two of its most celebrated poets were Li Bo, who wrote about life's pleasures, and Du Fu, who praised orderliness and Confucian virtues. Du Fu also wrote critically about war and the hardships of soldiers. Once he himself was captured by rebels and taken to Chang'an, the capital city. He had sent his family to the village of Fuzhou for safety. Here he describes their separation.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

The same moon is above Fuzhou tonight;
From the open window she will
be watching it alone,
The poor children are too little
To be able to remember Chang'an.
Her perfumed hair will be dampened
by the dew,
The air may be too chilly
on her delicate arms.
When can we both lean
by the wind-blown curtains
And see the tears dry
on each other's face?

DU FU, "Moonlight Night"

Chinese painting reached new heights of beauty during the Song Dynasty. Painting of this era shows Daoist influence. Artists emphasized the beauty of natural landscapes and objects such as a single branch or flower. The artists did not use bright colors. Black ink was their favorite paint. Said one Song artist, "Black is ten colors."

Song artist Ju Ran painted this masterpiece, *Buddhist Monastery in Stream and Mountain Landscape*, in the late tenth century.



THINK THROUGH HISTORY

C. Recognizing Effects How might the spread of mathematical ideas from China affect other countries?



Changes in Chinese Society

China's prosperity produced many social changes during the Tang and Song periods. Chinese society became increasingly mobile. People moved to the cities in increasing numbers. The Chinese also experienced greater social mobility than ever before. The growing cities offered many opportunities for managers, professionals, and skilled workers. However, the most important avenue for social advancement was the civil service system.

Levels of Society During Tang and Song times the power of the old aristocratic families faded. A new, much larger upper class emerged, made up of scholar-officials and their families. Such a class of powerful, well-to-do people is called the **gentry**. The gentry attained their status through education and civil service positions, rather than through land ownership. However, many scholar-officials also became wealthy enough to own land.

Below the gentry was an urban middle class. It included merchants, shopkeepers, skilled artisans, minor officials, and others. At the bottom of urban society were laborers, soldiers, and servants. In the countryside lived the largest class by far, the peasants. They toiled for wealthy landowners as they had for centuries.

The Status of Women Women had always been subservient to men in Chinese society. Their status further declined during the Tang and Song periods. This was especially true among the upper classes in cities. There a woman's work was deemed less important to the family's prosperity and status. Changing attitudes affected peasant families less, however. Peasant women worked in the fields and helped produce their family's food and income.

One sign of the changing status of women was the custom of binding the feet of upper-class girls. The practice of foot binding began during this period and continued into the 20th century. When a girl was very young, her feet were bound tightly with cloth, which eventually broke the arch and curled all but the big toe under. This produced what was admiringly called a "lily-foot." Women with bound feet were crippled for life. To others in society, such a woman reflected the wealth and prestige of her husband, who could afford such a beautiful but impractical wife.

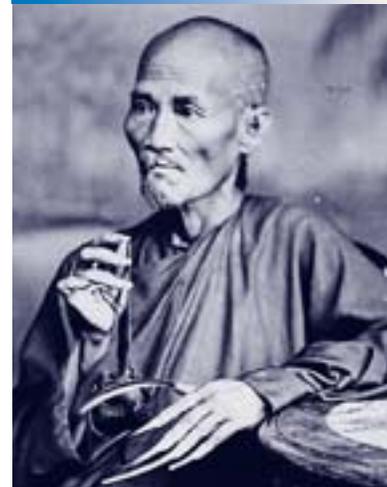
The social, economic, and technological transformations of the Tang and Song period permanently shaped Chinese civilization. They endured even as the Middle Kingdom fell to a group of nomadic outsiders, the Mongols, whom you will learn about in Section 2.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

D. Making

Inferences How did the practice of foot binding reflect the changing status of Chinese women?

Daily Life



A Scholar's Fingernails

Many scholar-officials eventually adopted the fashion of growing their fingernails long. A two-inch fingernail showed clearly that the owner did no manual labor. However, long nails did not prevent the scholar from following the pursuits of the gentry, such as writing poetry, painting, or practicing calligraphy. The photograph above is of a Chinese doctor in the late 19th century.

Section 1 Assessment

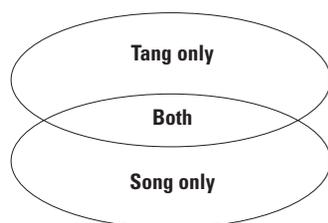
1. TERMS & NAMES

Identify

- Tang Taizong
- Wu Zhao
- movable type
- gentry

2. TAKING NOTES

Create a Venn diagram showing the similarities and differences between the Tang and Song dynasties.



3. RECOGNIZING EFFECTS

What impact did improvements in transportation have on Tang and Song China?

THINK ABOUT

- ways transportation was improved
- how these improvements were made
- relationships among regions in China
- trade with other countries

4. ANALYZING THEMES

Empire Building What actions taken by the Sui, Tang, and Song emperors strengthened China's empire? What actions weakened it?

THINK ABOUT

- military gains and losses
- changes to the government
- improvements in transportation and trade
- cultural changes

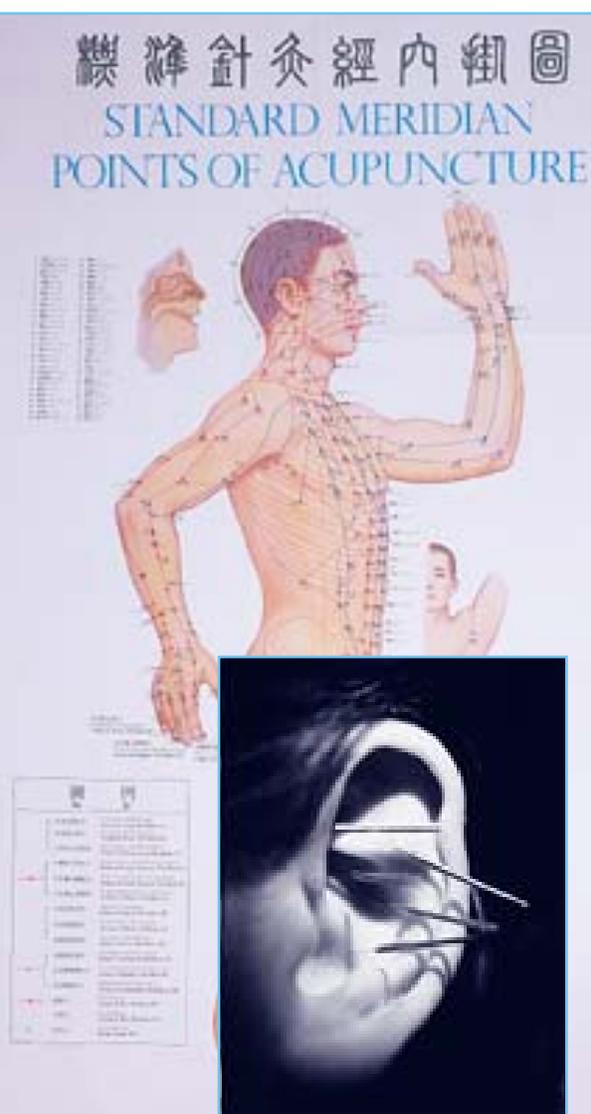


SOMETHING IN COMMON *across cultures*

Healing Arts

Since illness is a part of living, every society has developed ways to treat health problems. For thousands of years, Chinese doctors have used acupuncture to relieve pain and cure diseases. During the Song Dynasty, the Chinese carefully studied human anatomy and created charts and models of the body. These improved the practice of acupuncture.

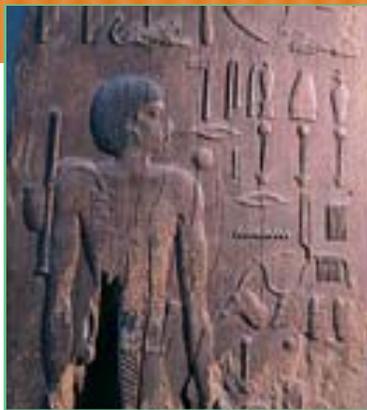
Acupuncture developed from traditional Chinese beliefs about the forces of nature. Likewise, in other cultures, the healing arts have been shaped by the cultures' beliefs about nature. Think about this connection as you read about the practices described here.



Chinese Acupuncture

Acupuncture is based on the belief that an energy force known as *qi* (chee) flows through the body and keeps people alive. According to this idea, *qi* flows along channels called meridians. Pain or illness arises when the *qi* does not flow properly. The treatment is to insert slender needles in the body at specific points (such as the ear) along the meridians, depending on the problem. This adjusts the flow of *qi* and restores health.





A Physician, Ancient Egypt

Health care in ancient Egypt was remarkably complex. The Egyptians believed that gods and demons influenced health.

Therefore, a doctor's treatment often called for certain spells, chants, or prayers. At the same time, doctors had a great deal of practical knowledge about symptoms and useful treatments and medicines. The Egyptians passed down their medical knowledge by recording it on scrolls and tablets. This stone tablet from about 2600 B.C. shows a portrait of Hesy-Re, one of the earliest known physicians.

Stone Age Surgery, England

Archaeologists have discovered many Stone Age skulls, such as this one found in England, with portions deliberately removed. This procedure, called trepanning (trih-PAN-ihng), may have been performed to allow demons to escape the head. In some cases, it probably helped relieve painful pressure on the skull resulting from injury or disease. Remarkably, scientists can see evidence in the trepanned skulls that many patients survived for a long time after their operation.



Modern Surgery, U.S.A.

The scientific approach of Western medicine reflects the modern belief that technology can improve people's lives. Brain surgery, as shown below, has been transformed by high-tech equipment, specialized training, pain-killing drugs, and other advances. Today's scientific medicine has made some diseases less threatening and increased the human life span.



The tradition of Chinese herbal medicine dates back thousands of years. This modern pharmacy in Singapore dispenses Chinese medicines. Pharmacists may stock 1,500 herbs for use as remedies. Medicines can also include bark, twigs, and animal or insect parts.



Connect to History

Making Inferences Look again at the healing arts of the four cultures described on these pages. How are each culture's beliefs about nature reflected in the culture's health practices?

SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK, PAGE R16

Connect to Today

Interviewing Conduct a brief interview with someone who practices a non-Western or "alternative" type of medicine. Find out if this type of medicine has changed over time and, if so, how. Share what you learn with your classmates.

For an Internet activity on Chinese Healing Arts . . .

