

Name: _____

Period: _____

China: Sui, Tang, and Song Dynasties

Sui Dynasty

Tang Dynasty

Song Dynasty

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The Sui Dynasty, 589-618 CE

In 220 AD, the Han dynasty of China came to an end. China then experienced an age of civil war as various groups fought to become the rulers of China. This chaos finally came to an end under the hand of Sui Wen-ti, a general. He united the northern kingdoms of China under his rule, centralized the government, reformed the taxation structure, and conquered southern China--all in a single lifetime. The government he established was remarkably stable during his lifetime, and he began ambitious building and economic projects, such as building the "Grand Canal." The Grand Canal was built to link the Yellow and Yangtze rivers and make it easier to ship rice from the north to the south. However, unlike the founders of the Han dynasties, Sui Wen-ti did not adopt Confucianism as the state philosophy, but rather embraced Buddhism and Taoism. Sui Wen-ti employed Buddhist advisors in his program to unify the country, and Buddhism would become the government philosophy until the founding the Song dynasty several centuries later.

Sui-Wen-ti's son, Sui Yang-ti, who rose to be emperor on the death of his father, soon overextended himself, leading military expeditions against Korea. Eventually, these wars with Korea, in combination with a series of unlucky natural disasters, bankrupted the government. So he placed high taxes on his citizens, which soon led to widespread rebellion. Sui Yang-ti was assassinated. Afterwards, Li Yuan, one of Sui Yang-ti's generals, began a new dynasty, the Tang, which lasted for another three hundred years.

Sui Dynasty

1. What was the Grand Canal and why was it built?
2. Which Chinese philosophies were spread by the Sui dynasty?
3. Explain why the Sui dynasty was overthrown?

The Tang Dynasty, 618-907 CE

Tang Culture

The Tang dynasty is known as the "golden age" of Chinese culture. The capital of the Tang Dynasty, Chang-an, became incredibly wealthy and supported the flowering of Chinese culture. Because of massive, dynamic trade with other cultures, Chang-an became a meeting place of many cultures and religions: Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Islam, all of which entered China during the Tang dynasty and influenced Chinese culture. Syrians, Jews, Arabs, Persians, Koreans, Tibetans, and Japanese all lived side by side with the Chinese of Chang-an. In 636, Christians from Syria were allowed to build a church and hold Christian services barely six hundred years after the founding of Christianity and less than three hundred years after Christianity had become the state religion of Rome. The foreigners not only brought in new religions, but new clothes, cuisine, literature, and music as well. The imperial court itself had

several performing troupes of actors and musicians gathered from surrounding nations permanently performing at the court.

Decline of the Tang

The Tang in its earliest years expanded its military power greatly. Like all dynasties before them, the military expansion of the Tang was followed by a slow contraction under the pressures of foreign countries. The Tang were pushed back primarily by the Mongols in Manchuria, the Turks to the west, and the Tibetans to the south.

The Tang met these challenges by sending armies, which always succeeded in the short-run but failed to keep these foreign powers down for good. Although the Tang forged alliances with other foreigners and built up defensive works, none of these strategies really worked, and eventually the Empire's borders slowly contracted back to the original Tang kingdom.

The Tang government continued to lose authority all through the ninth century. Civil war in southern China, roving bands of thieves, wars with border territories, and frequent rebellions slowly converted the provinces of China into autonomous kingdoms under the control of warlords. Chang-an itself was sacked by one of these warlords and the remaining decades of the Tang dynasty were essentially a period of chaos among small, fractious kingdoms. Finally, in 907, the dynasty fell and the country fell into a fifty-year period of disunion before another strong dynasty would reunify the country, the Song.

4. How did Chinese culture under the Tang Dynasty become influenced by foreign cultures?

5. Describe how the Tang Dynasty weakened and was overthrown.

The Song Dynasty, 960-1279 CE

Under the Song Dynasty, China experienced an agricultural and commercial revolution. China had always had a major problem with poor farmers. Unequal land distribution and unfair taxation caused unmanageable poverty for most farmers, who were tied to the land like slaves. These farmers often rebelled, and many Chinese dynasties had fallen to these rebellions. Farmers saw their prosperity increase under the Song dynasty however. Individual farmers gained the right to buy and sell land. This allowed farmers the freedom to enter other professions. They could sell their land and use the money to open up a business or move to the city. Successful farmers could also now purchase land from their neighbors and expand their farms. Also, farmers could pay their taxes in money and not grain. Originally, farming families were forced to pay the government a certain amount of grain. So if you were born into a farming family, you would have to become a farmer as well to pay your taxes, because you would need to provide the government grain. Under the Song, you could use money, thus freeing you to enter other professions. Finally, the Song more or less eliminated the forced conscription of labor, which had been a regular part of Chinese life since the Qin dynasty. So farmers could spend

more time working on their fields, instead of having to work for the Emperor. These factors resulted in a phenomenal increase in agricultural production, and the wealth of the individual farmer increased significantly (though most farmers never became “wealthy.”) Two major effects resulted from this agricultural revolution: greater wealth for the general population and for the government, and more freedom as farmers were no long enslaved to their land.

The most important economic innovation of the Song was the widespread use of money. In the form of copper coins and later silver, the use of money greatly accelerated trade within China, since money encourages trade since it is easier to use than bartering. In addition, cities slowly became centers for commercial activity, as people began moving to urban areas to engage in business. Along the Yangtze River, cities grew dramatically and became the cultural and economic centers of China. While China in the Tang period and before was largely agricultural, Song China saw the explosion of urban populations, which grew by factors of four or five. The city of Kaifeng eventually had a population of 250,000 households. The city of Hangchow had a population of 391,000 households. Here are some numbers to put this into perspective: during the Song period, Rome had an average population of about 35,000 households and London had a population of about 20,000 households. No civilization on earth was comparable. These cities were buzzing with mercantile activities and services. The demand for goods and services was so great that China began an unprecedented acceleration of foreign trade. Chinese goods were traded as far away as Africa and the Middle East, and all the major trade routes and ports were controlled by Chinese merchants.

Even though they were prosperous, the Song Dynasty also fell like every other Chinese dynasty before it. This time, they were overrun by a dangerous people to their north: the Mongols.

Song Dynasty

6. Explain the THREE reforms made during the Song Dynasty that improved the lives of farmers.

7. What effect did the use of coin money have on China?

8. Describe how cities were changed during the Song Dynasty.