



Empress Wu Zhao

WITNESS HISTORY AUDIO

The Only Female Emperor in China

Many people in China had reason to distrust Empress Wu Zhao (woo jow). From a lowly place at court, she had risen to a position of influence with the emperor. After his death, she ruthlessly took power into her own hands. She even unseated her own sons from the throne. She declared herself “Son of Heaven,” the age-old title of China’s emperors. No other woman had ever dared do such a thing!

Focus Question Describe the political, economic, and cultural achievements of the Tang and Song dynasties.

Two Golden Ages of China

Objectives

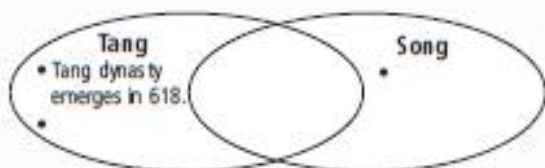
- Summarize how the Tang dynasty reunified China
- Explain how the Song dynasty grew rich and powerful despite military setbacks.
- Understand how China created an ordered society.
- Describe the cultural achievements of the Tang and Song dynasties.

Terms, People, and Places

Tang dynasty	Song dynasty
Tang Taizong	gentry
tributary state	dowry
land reform	pagoda

Note Taking

Reading Skill: Compare and Contrast Create a Venn diagram to take notes on the Tang and Song dynasties. Include information that applies to both dynasties where the circles overlap.



In the late 600s, Wu Zhao became the only woman to rule China in her own name. Her strong rule helped guide China through one of its most brilliant periods. At a time when Europe was fragmented into many small feudal kingdoms, two powerful dynasties—the Tang and the Song—restored unity in China.

The Tang Dynasty Reunifies China

After the Han dynasty collapsed in 220, China broke apart and remained divided for nearly 400 years. Yet China escaped the decay that disrupted Western Europe after the fall of Rome. Farm production expanded and technology slowly improved. Buddhism spread, while learning and the arts continued to flourish. Even Chinese cities survived.

Although invaders stormed northern China, they often adopted Chinese civilization rather than demolishing it. Meanwhile, various dynasties rose and fell in the south. During the brief Sui (swEE) dynasty (589–618), the emperor Sui Wendi reunited the north and south. But China was not restored to its earlier glory until the emergence of the **Tang dynasty** in 618.

The Tang Build an Empire The first Tang emperor, Li Yuan (lee yoo AHN), was a general under the Sui dynasty. When the Sui began to crumble, Li Yuan’s ambitious 16-year-old son, Li Shimin, urged him to lead a revolt. Father and son crushed all rivals and

established the Tang dynasty. Eight years later, Li Shimin compelled his aging father to step down and mounted the throne himself, taking the name **Tang Taizong** (ty DZUNG). A brilliant general, government reformer, historian, and master of the calligraphy brush, Tang Taizong would become China's most admired emperor.

Later Tang rulers carried empire-building to new heights, conquering territories deep into Central Asia. Chinese armies forced the neighboring lands of Vietnam, Tibet, and Korea to become **tributary states**. That is, while these states remained self-governing, their rulers had to acknowledge Chinese supremacy and send regular tribute to the Tang emperor. At the same time, students from Korea and Japan traveled to the Tang capital to learn about Chinese government, law, and arts.

The Government and Economy Grow Tang rulers, such as Empress Wu Zhao, helped restore the Han system of uniform government throughout China. They rebuilt the bureaucracy and enlarged the civil service system to recruit talented officials trained in Confucian philosophy. They also set up schools to prepare male students for the exams and developed a flexible new law code.

Tang emperors instituted a system of **land reform** in which they broke up large agricultural holdings and redistributed the land to peasants. This policy strengthened the central government by weakening the power of large landowners. It also increased government revenues, since the peasants who farmed their own land would be able to pay taxes.

The Tang Dynasty Declines Like earlier dynasties, the Tang eventually weakened. Later Tang emperors lost territories in Central Asia to the Arabs. Corruption, high taxes, drought, famine, and rebellions all contributed to the downward swing of the dynastic cycle. In 907, a rebel

Vocabulary Builder

compelled—(kum PELD) *v.* forced to do something

The Tang Dynasty

The Western Market (below left) of the Tang dynasty specialized in foreign goods. Tang Taizong (below right) is considered one of the greatest monarchs in the history of China. *What led to the decline of the Tang Dynasty?*



Technology of Tang and Song China

In addition to the advances shown below, the Chinese developed a smallpox vaccine, invented a spinning wheel, and pioneered the use of arches in bridge building. In time, many of these developments traveled westward. Modernized versions of most of these inventions are still widely used today. How could one of the inventions shown here have aided the spread of Chinese civilization to other lands?



Gunpowder, 850 ▲

The earliest form of gunpowder was made from a mixture of saltpeter, sulfur, and charcoal, all found in abundance in China. It was first used in fireworks and later in weapons. Song forces were the first to use a cannon (shown above), according to historical records.



◀ Mechanical Clock, 700s

The Chinese learned of water-powered clocks from Middle Easterners. Mechanical clocks used a complex series of wheels, shafts, and pins, turning at a steady rate, to tell exact time.



Block Printing, 700s, and ▲ Movable Type, 1040s

Block printing, developed during the Tang dynasty, involved carving a full page of characters onto a wooden block (above). China improved on this printing process during the Song dynasty by inventing movable type, in which precut characters were combined to form a page.

general overthrew the last Tang emperor. This time, however, the chaos following the collapse of a dynasty did not last long.

✔ **Checkpoint** How did the Tang dynasty reunify China?


The Song Dynasty

In 960, a scholarly general named Zhao Kuangyin reunited much of China and founded the **Song** (sung) **dynasty**. The Song ruled for 319 years, slightly longer than the Tang, but they controlled less territory than the Tang. The Song also faced the constant threat of invaders in the north. In the early 1100s, the battered Song retreated south of the Huang River. There, the southern Song continued to rule for another 150 years. As you will learn, however, in the late 1200s invaders from the north called the Mongols attacked and overthrew the Song.

Despite military setbacks, the Song period was a time of great achievement. China's wealth and culture dominated East Asia even when its armies did not. Under the Song, the Chinese economy expanded because of improved farming methods and open border policy. The latter allowed a new type of faster-growing rice to be imported from Southeast Asia. Farmers were now able to produce two crops a year, one of rice and one of a cash crop to sell. The rise in productivity created surpluses, allowing more people to pursue commerce, learning, or the arts.

Through China's history, a system of canals had been built that encouraged internal trade and transportation. The Grand Canal, completed during the Sui dynasty, linked the Huang River to the Chang River. As a result, food grown in the south could be shipped to the capital in the north. The Grand Canal reached its peak during the Song dynasty, when thousands of tons of grain were shipped to northern China each year.

Under both the Tang and Song, foreign trade flourished. Merchants arrived from India, Persia, and Arabia. Chinese merchants carried goods to Southeast Asia in exchange for spices and special woods. Song porcelain has been found as far away as East Africa. To improve trade, the government issued paper money. China's cities, which had been mainly centers of government, now prospered as centers of trade.

 **Checkpoint** How was the Song dynasty able to continue its prosperity despite threats from the north?

China's Ordered Society

Under the Tang and Song, China was a well-ordered society. At its head was the emperor, whose court was filled with aristocratic families. The court supervised a huge bureaucracy, from which officials fanned out to every part of China. China's two main social classes were the gentry and the peasantry.

The Gentry Value Education As in previous dynasties, the scholar-official class formed the top stratum of society. Most scholar-officials at court came from the **gentry**, or wealthy landowning class. They alone could afford to spend years studying the Confucian classics in order to pass the grueling civil service exam. When not in government service, the gentry often served in the provinces as allies of the emperor's officials.

The Song scholar-gentry valued learning more than physical labor. They supported a revival of Confucian thought. New schools of Confucian philosophers emphasized social order based on duty, rank, and proper behavior. Although corruption and greed existed among civil servants, the ideal Confucian official was a wise, virtuous scholar who knew how to ensure harmony in society.

Peasants Work the Land Most Chinese were peasants who worked the land, living on what they produced. Drought and famine were a constant threat, but new tools and crops did improve the lives of many peasants. To add to their income, some families produced handicrafts such as baskets or embroidered items. They carried these products to nearby market towns to sell or trade for salt, tea, or iron tools.

Peasants lived in small, largely self-sufficient villages that managed their own affairs. "Heaven is high," noted one Chinese saying, "and the emperor far away." Peasants relied on one another rather than the government. When disputes arose, a village leader and council of elders put pressure on the parties to resolve the problem. Only if such efforts failed did villagers take their disputes to the emperor's county representative.

In China, even peasants could move up in society through education and government service. If a bright peasant boy received an education and passed the civil service examinations, both he and his family rose in status. Slaves in early China, however, did not have such opportunities. As in many other parts of the world, slavery played a role in early China, though a limited one.

Merchants Have Lowest Status In market towns and cities, some merchants acquired wealth. Still, according to Confucian tradition, merchants had an even lower social status than peasants since their riches came from the labor of others. An ambitious merchant, therefore, might buy land and educate one son to enter the ranks of the scholar-gentry.



Pair of shoes for a woman with bound feet in China

The Confucian attitude toward merchants affected economic policy. Some rulers favored commerce but sought to control it. They often restricted where foreign merchants could live and even limited the activities of private traders. Still, Chinese trade flourished during Song times.

The Status of Women Women had higher status in Tang and early Song times than they did later. Within the home, women were called upon to run family affairs. A man's wife and his mother had great authority, managing servants and family finances. Still, families valued boys more than girls. When a young woman married, she became a part of her husband's family. She could not keep her **dowry**, the payment that a woman brings to a marriage, and could never remarry.

Women's subordinate position was reinforced in late Song times when the custom of foot binding emerged. The custom probably began at the imperial court but later spread to the lower classes. The feet of young girls were bound with long strips of cloth, producing a lily-shaped foot about half the size of a foot that was allowed to grow normally. Tiny feet and a stilted walk became a symbol of nobility and beauty. Foot binding was extremely painful, yet the custom survived. Even peasant parents feared that they could not find a husband for a daughter with large feet.

Not all girls in China had their feet bound. Peasants who needed their daughters to work in the fields did not accept the practice. Yet most women did have to submit to foot binding. Women with bound feet often could not walk without help. Thus, foot binding reinforced the Confucian tradition that women should remain inside the home.

✓ **Checkpoint** How did most Chinese people live?

The Tang and Song Develop a Rich Culture

A prosperous economy supported the rich culture of Tang and Song China. Although their splendid royal palaces were long ago destroyed, many paintings, statues, temples, and ceramics have survived.

Artists Paint Harmony Along with poetry, painting and calligraphy were essential skills for the scholar-gentry. In both of these crafts, artists sought balance and harmony through the mastery of simple strokes and lines. The Song period saw the triumph of Chinese landscape painting. Steeped in the Daoist tradition, painters sought to capture the spiritual essence of the natural world. "When you are planning to paint," instructed a Song artist, "you must always create a harmonious relationship between heaven and earth."

Misty mountains and delicate bamboo forests dominated Chinese landscapes. Yet Chinese painters also produced realistic, vivid portraits of emperors or lively scenes of city life.

Architecture and Porcelain Buddhist themes dominated sculpture and influenced Chinese architecture. The Indian stupa evolved into the graceful Chinese **pagoda**, a multistoried temple with eaves that curve up at the corners. Chinese sculptors created striking statues of the Buddha. These statues created such a strong impression that many people today picture the Buddha as a Chinese god rather than an Indian holy man.



● **INFOGRAPHIC**

◀ The ideal woman during the Tang dynasty was sophisticated and wore head ornaments, combs, and powders. Like this woman, Tang women piled their hair high upon their heads.

Women prepare a feast in this tenth-century painting on silk. This residence is typical of those owned by imperial or wealthy families. ▼

A CHINESE HOUSE

Dwellings during the Tang and Song dynasties ranged from caves to round tents to palaces. Ideally, all types of Chinese homes were built facing south so that they received warmth from the sun in the winter. Wealthy families lived in compounds that consisted of groups of buildings separated by a varying number of courtyards as shown in the painting below. Each structure within the compound had a distinct purpose for such things as ancestor worship, a library, or a music hall. Covered walkways, or porticos, joined the buildings. Atop the compound, expensive rooftops made of sloping tiles had terra cotta animals and dragons that adorned the ridges and eaves. Grand gardens with hills, ponds, rare flowers, twisted pine trees, and stones, were an important part of the finest homes. The building and gardens together produced an overall harmonious effect.

Features of the Home

- A** Roofs were the most expensive and striking feature of the home. The finest homes had roofs with upturned edges and colorful tiles painted yellow, pale green, or jade green.
- B** Most houses included enclosed shaded courtyards.
- C** Each pavilion had a special purpose, whether for banquets or for playing music.
- D** Trees with gnarled trunks were common adornments for the home.
- E** Houseguests stayed in rooms located along the outer edge of the compound.

Thinking Critically

1. **Draw Inferences** According to the images shown here, what can you say about the status of women during this time?
2. **Synthesize Information** How does this compound illustrate the belief of the Tang and Song that a harmonious relationship should exist between home and gardens?





Li Bo, Chinese poet

The Chinese perfected techniques in making porcelain, a shiny, hard pottery that was prized as the finest in the world. They developed beautiful glazes to decorate vases, tea services, and other objects that Westerners would later call “chinaware.” Artists also produced porcelain figures of camels, elegant court ladies playing polo, and bearded foreigners newly arrived from their travels on the Silk Road.

Chinese Writing Prose and poetry flowed from the brushes of Tang and Song writers. Scholars produced works on philosophy, religion, and history. Short stories that often blended fantasy, romance, and adventure made their first appearance in Chinese literature.

Among the gentry, poetry was the most respected form of Chinese literature. Confucian scholars were expected to master the skills of poetry. We know the names of some 200 major and 400 minor Tang and Song poets. Their works touched on Buddhist and Daoist themes as well as on social issues. Many poems reflected on the shortness of life and the immensity of the universe.

Probably the greatest Tang poet was Li Bo (lee boh). A zestful lover of life and freedom, he moved about from one place to another for most of his life. He wrote some 2,000 poems celebrating harmony with nature or lamenting the passage of time. A popular legend says that Li Bo drowned when he tried to embrace the reflection of the moon in a lake.

More realistic and less romantic were the poems of Li Bo’s friend Du Fu. His verses described the horrors of war or condemned the lavishness of the court. A later poet, Li Qingzhao (lee ching jow), described the experience of women left behind when loved ones went off to war. Her poems reflect a time when invasion threatened to bring the brilliant Song dynasty to an end.

✓ Checkpoint What themes did Tang and Song arts and literature address?

1 Assessment

Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-quiz with vocabulary practice
Web Code: naa-1211

Terms, People, and Places

- For each term, person, or place listed at the beginning of the section, write a sentence explaining its significance.

Note Taking

- Reading Skill: Compare and Contrast** Use your completed diagram to answer the Focus Question: Describe the political, economic, and cultural achievements of the Tang and Song dynasties.

Comprehension and Critical Thinking

- Draw Conclusions** In what ways did the rise of the Tang dynasty unify and benefit China?

- Determine Relevance** What was the significance of the Grand Canal to the Song dynasty?

- Recognize Ideologies** (a) Describe the social structure of China under the Tang and Song dynasties. (b) How did the social structure reflect Confucian traditions?

- Analyze Information** What ideas and traditions shaped Chinese paintings?

Writing About History

Quick Write: Make a Cause-Effect Tree
To make a cause-and-effect tree, choose either the Tang or Song dynasty and write its name in the center of a piece of paper. Above the dynasty’s name, write the causes that led to its downfall.