CHAPTER 14

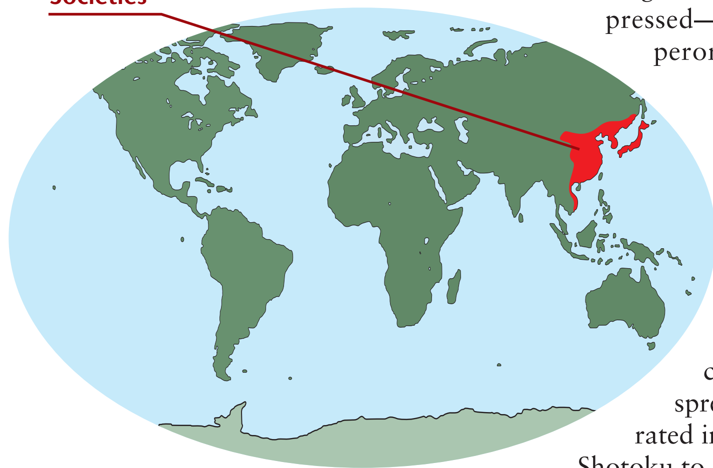
The Evolution and Expansion of East Asian Societies, 220–1240 C.E.

- China's Age of Disunity, 220–589
- China's Age of Preeminence, 589–1279
- Highlights and Hallmarks of Chinese Society
- Vietnam and the Chinese Impact
- Korea and the Chinese Impact
- The Emergence of Japan
- Chapter Review

Buddhist Mandala

In the third through seventh centuries C.E., aided by increased connections among Indian, Central Asian, and East Asian societies, Buddhism emerged as East Asia's main belief system. This Buddhist diagram from ninth-century Japan, depicting numerous holy figures, is called a mandala and used as a focus for prayer and meditation.

Although revered as the father of Japanese culture, Prince Shotoku (*shō-TŌ-koo*), regent of Japan from 593 to 622, borrowed many ideas from neighboring China. He actively promoted Buddhism, which recently had spread from China to Japan. He sent Japanese missions to the Chinese mainland, brought Chinese artisans and artists to Japan, and adopted the Chinese calendar for Japanese use. To strengthen his government, he instituted a bureaucratic system based on the Chinese model. He even asserted equality with the Chinese emperor, sending him a letter addressed "from the ruler of the land of the sunrise to the ruler of the land of the sunset."



According to Chinese sources, the emperor was not impressed—his reply was haughtily addressed "the emperor speaks to the prince."

Shotoku's story illustrates several important aspects of East Asian history in the centuries following the collapse of China's Han dynasty in 220 C.E. (Chapter 4). One decisive development was the expansion of Buddhism. In the third through sixth centuries, as the Chinese endured a prolonged era of disunity, Buddhism spread from India through Central Asia to China, eventually becoming China's main faith. From China it spread to Korea and Japan, where it was incorporated into the cultures and used by leaders such as Shotoku to enhance their authority.

Another key feature of East Asia in this era was the preeminence of China, reflected in Shotoku's borrowing of Chinese ideas and in the Chinese emperor's refusal to address Japan's prince regent as an equal. In the late sixth century, reunited and reinvigorated after centuries of chaos, China re-emerged as one of history's most powerful and prosperous empires. For the next seven centuries, its cohesion, commerce, technology, and influence were unsurpassed in East Asia. So successful was the Chinese system, and so strong was the Chinese state, that neighboring countries, including Prince Shotoku's Japan, often found it advantageous to imitate Chinese ways. Even the nomadic warriors from the north, who conquered much of northern China in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, adopted many features of Chinese society.

A third key East Asian reality, embodied in Shotoku's assertion of equality with the Chinese emperor, was the ability of China's smaller neighbors to preserve their cultural autonomy in the face of Chinese preeminence. Vietnam, Korea, and Japan adopted Chinese concepts and conventions but altered them to fit their own cultures, creating in the process their own unique variants of East Asian civilization. And the northern nomadic invaders, after conquering parts of China, used Chinese methods and ideas to organize, govern, and exploit the lands that they had conquered. Connections and conflicts with neighboring peoples thus not only promoted China's preeminence but also in time helped these neighboring peoples hold their own against China.

China's Age of Disunity, 220–589

The foundations of Chinese preeminence had been laid by the end of the Han Empire (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.), which rivaled the concurrent Roman Empire in size, population, and influence. After the fall of the Han, however, China endured an Age of Disunity (220–589 C.E.) that was in some ways similar to Europe's Early Middle Ages. As in the West, the Chinese Empire was torn apart by internal divisions and nomadic invaders. As in the West, the collapse of imperial authority was followed by a general decline in learning and commerce. And as in the West, where people in these troubled times sought comfort in Christianity, East Asians likewise found a new faith, turning to Buddhism for consolation in the midst of chaos.

The Three Kingdoms Era

Civil war and devastation mark the Three Kingdoms Era

The fall of China's Han dynasty in 220 C.E. resulted in the creation of three separate kingdoms in the north, south, and west, none strong enough to defeat the others (Map 14.1). Dominated by powerful families and warlords, these kingdoms engaged each other in an endless series of brutal battles. For most of the century, China was torn apart by civil wars and ravaged by diseases and natural disasters. By the year 280 the population, which had approached 60 million at the height of the Han dynasty, had declined to only 16 million by official counts. It was a terrifying time.

Despite all the devastation, however, the Chinese later came to see the era as exciting and heroic, full of great exploits and adventures. The *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, China's most beloved epic tale, was told, retold, and embellished over the ages until it was finally published in its modern form in the sixteenth century. For countless generations, people in China have thrilled to its stories of three heroic blood brothers who, in the declining years of the Han dynasty, joined in the famous "Oath of the Peach Garden" to fight together for their country (see "Excerpts from *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*"). At times they managed to outwit their mortal enemy Cao Cao (*TSOW-TSOW*), a character based on a real Chinese general who seized power in northern China at the end of the Han era. In the long run, however, the three heroes failed to reunite China or preserve the Han dynasty.

Nomadic Xiongnu overrun northern China in early 300s

The actual Three Kingdoms era (220–280) was disastrous for China. For decades descendants of the real Cao Cao fought against descendants of his foes, wreaking widespread havoc. By 280 a general from the north had managed to conquer the south and west, briefly reuniting the realm under the short-lived Jin (*JĒN*) dynasty. But after he died a decade later his 25 sons vied for power, dividing the domain into numerous warring states. Then one of them unwisely asked for assistance from the **Xiongnu** (*shē-ONG NOO*), warlike Turkic nomads from the Central Asian steppes who had long threatened China from the north. This request gave the Xiongnu, many of whom had entered the empire during its years of division, a new opportunity to overrun northern China. And they did so with a vengeance. By 317 the Xiongnu had laid waste to northern China's great cities, destroyed the imperial library at Chang'an, and driven the Jin emperors out of the north. The Xiongnu rulers also claimed the Mandate of Heaven, thereby asserting that they had divine approval to rule over China (Chapter 4).

FOUNDATION MAP 14.1 China's Age of Disunity, 220–589

With the fall of the Han Dynasty, China experienced a long age of disunity, beginning with the Three Kingdoms Era (220–280), depicted in Map A. Notice that, after splintering into numerous small states in the Sixteen Kingdoms Era (304–439), shown in Map B, northern China was reunified under Toba (Northern Wei) rule from 439 to 534 (Map C) but again divided by the mid-500s (Map D), while southern China endured a succession of short-lived regimes known as the Six Dynasties. How did this age of disunity affect China's culture and religion?

A. China in 250 (The Three Kingdoms)

B. China in 400

C. China in 500

D. China in 560

Division, Invasion, Adaptation, and Migration

For the next century the Yellow River region, birthplace of Chinese culture, endured further ruin as Xiongnu chieftains and other tribal leaders ravaged the land and warred among themselves. This era was known in the north as the time of the Sixteen Kingdoms (304–439) for its rapid succession of short-lived regimes, most of which failed to establish any dynastic continuity. The era finally ended in 439 when the Toba (*TŌ-BAH*), a Mongolian nomadic tribe, gained control over the entire northern region (Map 14.1).

Document 14.1 Excerpts from *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*

Told and retold over the centuries until published in its modern form, Romance of the Three Kingdoms is China's most beloved epic tale. In the following excerpts from early in the story, its three heroes meet, agree to fight as one, and together take the "Oath of the Peach Garden" swearing brotherhood and mutual fidelity.

Empires wax and wane; states cleave asunder and coalesce . . . The rise of the fortunes of Han began with the slaughter of the White Serpent. In a short time the whole Empire was theirs and their . . . heritage was handed down until the days of Kuang-Wu . . . A century later came to the throne the Emperor Hsien, doomed to see the beginning of the division . . . known to history as the Three Kingdoms . . .

The Government went quickly from bad to worse, till the country was ripe for rebellion . . .

Yüan-tê was twenty-eight when the outbreak of the rebellion called for soldiers. The sight of the notice saddened him and he sighed . . . Suddenly a rasping voice behind him cried, "Noble Sir, why sigh if you do nothing to help your country?" Turning quickly he saw standing there a man . . . with a bullet head like a leopard's, large eyes, a pointed chin, and a bristling moustache. He spoke in a loud bass voice . . . "Chang Fei is my name . . . I live near here where I have a farm; and I am a wine-seller and a butcher as well. And I like to become acquainted with worthy men . . ."

Yüan-tê replied, "I am of the Imperial Family, Liu by name, and my distinguishing name is Pei. . . . I would destroy these rebels and restore peace to the land, but alas! I am helpless."

"I am not without means," said Fei. "Suppose you and I raised some men and tried what we could do."

. . . The two betook themselves to the village inn to talk over the project. As they were drinking, a huge, tall fellow appeared pushing a hand cart . . . He had eyes like a phoenix and fine bushy eyebrows like silkworms. His whole appearance was dignified and awe-inspiring. "I am Kuan Yü" said he; ". . . I have been a fugitive . . . for five years because I slew a ruffian who . . . was a bully. I have come to join the army here.

Then Yüan-tê told him his own intentions and all three went away to Chang Fei's farm . . . Said Fei, "The peach trees in the orchard behind the house are just in full flower. Tomorrow we will institute a sacrifice there and solemnly declare our intention before Heaven and Earth . . ."

All three being of one mind, the next day they prepared the sacrifices, a black ox, a white horse, and wine for libation. Beneath the smoke of the incense burning on the altar they bowed their heads and recited this oath: "We three, Liu Pei, Kuan Yü and Chang Fei, though of different families, swear brotherhood, and promise mutual help to one end. We will rescue each other in difficulty, we will aid each other in danger. We swear to serve the state and save the people. We ask not the same day of birth but we seek to die together. May Heaven, the all-ruling, and Earth, the all-producing, read our hearts, and if we turn aside from righteousness or forget kindliness may Heaven and man smite us!"

SOURCE: Lo Kuan-Chung, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1959) I: 1, 2, 4–6.

Then, as so often happened after such conquests, the victors adopted features of the conquered society, thus connecting and combining the cultures. To strengthen and sustain their rule, for example, the Toba established a Chinese-style administrative system, staffed it with Chinese officials, and created a new dynasty called the Northern Wei (*WAY*) that restored to northern China a semblance of stability for most of the next century. In the 490s they even moved their capital to Luoyang, which had also been the capital during the Later Han, and made Chinese the official language of their realm.

Nomadic conquerors adopt Chinese ways, creating internal strife

In time these cultural adaptations helped to produce new conflicts. The adoption of the Chinese language created serious strife among the Toba warriors, many of whom resented the submersion of their own Mongolian language. Their resentment fueled internal strife, and by the 530s northern China was once again divided into different domains and dynasties.

Turmoil in north prompts mass migration to south

Meanwhile, China's ongoing turmoil had prompted a mass migration. As chaos enveloped the north in the third through sixth centuries, thousands of wealthy and educated Chinese families fled to the south. As a result this region, long accustomed to domination from the north, gradually emerged as China's cultural center as well as its most populous and prosperous zone. Largely spared the ravages that befell the north, southern China nonetheless experienced recurrent power struggles throughout the Age of Disunity as six successive short-lived regimes, later called the "Six Dynasties," sought but failed to achieve a long-lasting reign.

Central Asian Connections and the Arrival of Buddhism

During these tumultuous times, a new religion began to flourish in China. Founded in northern India in the sixth century B.C.E. by the man later called the Buddha, Buddhism was based on the belief, embodied in his Four Noble Truths, that one could best avoid life's pain by curbing desire and living righteously. After spreading throughout India, it was later adopted by the Kushans (*koo-SHAHNZ*), who ruled the region to India's northwest from roughly 50 to 240 C.E., and who fostered the Buddhist faith in many Central Asian towns and cities (Chapter 3).

Buddhism spreads to China from India via Asian trade routes

By this time there was regular contact between Central Asia and China. Most of the connections were commercial, as merchants traded along the Silk Road established in the early Han dynasty. But over time the trade routes conveyed not just goods but ideas, including religious beliefs. Promoted in Central Asia by the Kushans, Buddhist ideas spread from there along the Silk Road to China, arriving in the Later Han dynasty (Map 14.2).

Statue of the Buddha from Central Asia, Third Century C.E.

Buddhism, meanwhile, had split into two branches. Theravada (*ter-ah-VAH-dah*) Buddhism, prevailing in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, largely remained true to the simple beliefs originally advanced by the Buddha. But Mahayana (*mah-hah-YAH-nah*) Buddhism, the branch that came to China through Central Asia, had all the trappings of an established religion, with priests, sects, monasteries, convents, and bodhisattvas (*bō-dih-SAHT-vuhz*). Said to be former mortals who had earned the endless peace called nirvana but postponed it to help others get there, bodhisattvas were revered as saviors by Mahayana Buddhists, who sought to follow their examples of mercy, hope, and love.

Mahayana Buddhism fits with Chinese traditions

Mahayana's features coincided with certain aspects of the Confucian and Daoist traditions, long prevalent in China. Its stress on charity, compassion, and good works, for example, paralleled the Confucian ethic of benevolence, civility, and public service. At the same time, its basic Buddhist emphasis on meditation and curbing desire concurred with Daoism's focus on silence and passivity. Furthermore, like Mahayana Buddhism, Daoism had evolved over time into a complex religion with numerous devotions and divinities, a hierarchical structure of priests and officials, and a network of monasteries and convents. In fact, although Daoism and Buddhism retained their separate identities, to the common people of China they were often indistinguishable from each other. Chinese people could thus adopt Buddhism without forsaking their traditional beliefs.

Map 14.2 Buddhism Spreads to East Asia, Second Through Sixth Centuries C.E.

In the early centuries of the common era, Buddhism expanded from its origins in India throughout the eastern part of Asia. Notice that, while Theravada Buddhism spread across Southeast Asia, Mahayana Buddhism expanded through Central Asia to China, where it took hold during the Age of Disunity (220–589), and eventually spread from there to Korea and Japan. What factors and conditions facilitated Buddhism's spread?

The Spread of Buddhism in China

Initially Buddhism did not make much of an impact in China. As long as the Han dynasty flourished, Confucianism reigned as the official philosophy, and the Confucian bureaucrats who ran the country enjoyed great prestige as preservers of stability and order.

Foreign religions such as Buddhism, dismissed by Confucians as alien cults, attracted little following.

Instability and disunity aid Buddhism's spread

In the Age of Disunity, however, the cultural climate changed. As nomadic invasions and civil wars shattered China's stability, the prestige of the Confucians declined, and Chinese cultural confidence gave way to confusion and anxiety. People began to look for relief in creeds such as Buddhism and Daoism, which promised inner peace and relief from life's burdens.

Buddhist temple in northwestern China.

In the fourth century, then, in the chaotic conditions of northern China, Buddhism began to thrive. With its emphasis on avoiding desire and ambition, the faith was actively fostered by Xiongnu warlords, who hoped to keep power by promoting passivity among the people. Buddhism's premise that life was painful reflected the people's perceptions, while Buddhism's promise of escape from pain consoled them. The faith offered hope of salvation from suffering and the prospect of attaining nirvana, perpetual peace. Buddhism's numerous shrines and temples gave Chinese artists and sculptors opportunities to express creativity, while its monasteries and convents, like the ones in Christian Europe, provided a refuge for those who felt called to a life of contemplation and devotion. By 400 C.E. most of northern China had accepted the new faith.

Buddhism comes to southern China from India and from the north

By this time Buddhism had also begun to penetrate the south. Partly it came from northern China, where it was already established, and partly it arrived over land and sea routes from India and Southeast Asia. From 399 to 414 a Chinese Buddhist monk named Faxian (*FAH shē-YAN*) made a historic pilgrimage from China to India, crossing treacherous mountain passes on foot. After spending a decade in India, visiting Buddhist shrines and talking with Indian Buddhists, he returned by sea to southern China with hundreds of Indian Buddhist texts, which he painstakingly translated into Chinese. During the rest of the fifth century, his efforts and those of other monks and missionaries helped make Buddhism increasingly popular in southern China, where it attracted both leaders and common folk. Finally, in 517, it was proclaimed the official religion there by Liang Wudi (*lē-AHNG WOO DĒ*), the so-called Bodhisattva Emperor, a ruler so devout that, much to his advisors' dismay, he twice gave up his throne to become a Buddhist monk. By 589, when China re-emerged as a unified empire, the entire land had become a bastion of Buddhism.

China's Age of Preeminence, 589–1279

History does not repeat itself, but similar patterns do at times recur. There are, for example, striking parallels between China's initial unification in the third century B.C.E. (Chapter 4) and its reunification in the sixth century C.E. In both instances a ruler from the north united the realm after centuries of chaos, establishing a powerful but brief regime that paved the way for a far more eminent, enduring dynasty. In the third century B.C.E., the First Emperor ended the Warring States Era by conquering all of China, founded the short-lived Qin dynasty, and opened the way for four centuries of Han dynastic rule. In the sixth century C.E. a northern general named Yang Jian (*YAHNG jē-AHN*) ended the Age of Disunity by conquering all of China, founded the short-lived Sui (*SWAY*) dynasty, and opened the way for six centuries of Chinese preeminence under the Tang (*TAHNG*) and Song (*SŌNG*) dynasties.

China Reunited: The Sui Dynasty, 589–618

Yang Jian conquers and reconnects China, initiating Sui dynasty

Yang Jian, a general with both Chinese and Toba ancestry, emerged as China's dominant force through crafty opportunism. First he married a wealthy noblewoman, whose status helped him become the main advisor to a northern emperor; then he wed his daughter to that emperor. When that emperor died soon after she bore him a son, Yang Jian arranged to have himself named regent for his own grandson, the infant who inherited the throne. Then, in 581, he deposed the boy monarch and claimed Heaven's Mandate for himself, starting a new dynasty called the Sui. Using skillful propaganda, carefully cultivated Buddhist support, and a well-planned river and land campaign, he conquered one-by-one the several weak states that had survived in the south. By 589, for the first time in centuries, one man ruled all of China.

Central rule is restored as Grand Canal links north and south

Yang Jian, who reigned from 581 to 604 as Wendi (*WUN-DĒ*), proved a resourceful emperor. He devised a nationwide law code and restored the civil service system begun by the Han dynasty. He centered his government at Chang'an, earlier the Han capital, and built it into one of the world's great cities. He also began construction of the Grand Canal, a thousand-mile waterway linking the Yellow River in the north with the Yangzi River in the south. Henceforth, since China's great rivers flow from west to east, the canal played a crucial role in connecting the north with the south, transporting troops and grain, and thereby combining the north's military might with the south's agricultural prosperity.

Yang Jian's son and heir, however, was a disastrous ruler. Yangdi (604–618) has gone down in Chinese annals as a despot who reportedly poisoned his father to hasten his own rule, then alienated his people by imposing harsh taxes and sacrificing millions of laborers' lives to erect an extravagant palace, complete the Grand Canal, and rebuild the Great Wall. He also launched a series of disastrous wars that ruined the economy and prompted widespread rebellions. Then he abandoned his armies and fled to the rural south where he lived in luxuriant debauchery until he was murdered in 618. That same year the powerful Duke of Tang, one of Yangdi's most effective governors and generals, declared himself emperor and assumed the Mandate of Heaven, thereby putting an end to the Sui dynasty.

The Grand Canal.

China Triumphant: The Tang Dynasty, 618–907

The new Tang Dynasty builds on Sui foundations

The seizure of power by the Duke of Tang ushered in a new regime known as the Tang dynasty (618–907). Under its dominion, China attained new heights in political stability, economic prosperity, military expansion, cultural sophistication, and technological innovation.

The Tang era's most successful ruler was Li Shimin (*LĒ SHUR-MIN*), son of the Duke of Tang. After persuading his reluctant father to claim the throne, the 18-year-old Li led a series of skillful campaigns against numerous revolts while holding back the northern nomadic invaders. Then, after ambushing and killing his two older brothers, he forced his father to abdicate and assumed the throne himself at age 26. Bold and energetic, Li then reigned from 626 to 649 as the Emperor Taizong (*TĪ-ZŌNG*).

Nothing seemed impossible to Taizong. He forced the northern nomads to become his vassals and allies, then with their help invaded Central Asia and conquered Turkestan (Map 14.3). He even sent an army to India to arrest a local ruler who had insulted his ambassador. In China he promoted education, patronized the arts, and revitalized the

Map 14.3 China Under the Tang Dynasty, 618–907

Under the Tang Dynasty, China expanded into Central Asia, reopening trade routes and cultural ties with its various neighbors. Observe that the Grand Canal, constructed under the Sui Dynasty (589–618) and expanded under the Tang, linked the Yellow and Yangzi Rivers and the port of Hangzhou, expediting commerce and communication between China's north and south. How did good internal connections contribute to the Tang Empire's power and wealth?

civil service. Although a Confucian, he promoted religious toleration and devotion among the Buddhist and Daoist masses. Revered as a hero, he attained a legendary status among the Chinese people.

Wu Zhao rises from concubine status to become Empress Wu

Another notable Tang-era leader was Wu Zhao (*WOO-JOW*), later known as Empress Wu. According to traditional accounts, in her youth she was one of Taizong's many concubines and was obliged to enter a Buddhist convent after he died. But she was only 24 and reportedly a reluctant nun. When the new emperor visited her convent, the accounts assert, she seduced him and won his heart. She became his full-time consort and

then his official empress. In 660, when his eyesight failed, she took over as informal regent and skillfully ruled the realm, staffing the government with her supporters and killing those who got in her way. In 683, when the emperor died, she had their sons locked in the palace and ruled as regent until 690, when she formally claimed the throne for herself. Finally, in 705, a palace coup forced the aged Empress Wu to abdicate the throne and resume her long-lost calling as a nun.

Empress Wu.

Although disgruntled male Confucian historians later denounced her as a brutal and shameless opportunist, Wu Zhao actually accomplished a great deal. During her long period of power she granted tax relief, improved the civil service system, decreased the power of the old nobility, fostered military expansion, and promoted economic prosperity.

Not long after Wu Zhao's removal, one of her grandsons took the throne as Emperor Xuanzong (*shu-WAHN ZŌNG*), reigning from 713 to 756. His early reign was a time of peace, prosperity, and cultural achievements, the age of China's most beloved poets and a high point of Chinese art. The emperor himself patronized the arts, lengthened the Grand Canal, reformed the bureaucracy and coinage, and maintained a magnificent court. But in his later years, after falling madly in love with a concubine called Yang Guifei (*YAHNG GWĀ-FĀ*), he neglected his duties and let her relatives run the country. In 751, as the empire drifted without strong direction, its armies were driven from Central Asia by Islamic forces. In 755 a massive revolt led by An Lushan (*AHN LOO-SHAHN*), a Chinese general of Turkish descent, forced the emperor and Yang Guifei to flee from the capital for their lives. Thus began a civil war that brought about the strangling of Yang Guifei, the abdication of Xuanzong, and the devastation of China.

Revolts, religious strife, and famine destroy the Tang dynasty

The Tang dynasty survived the An Lushan revolt, but it never regained its earlier domination. Local warlords took advantage of the turmoil to reassert their power, while the palace eunuchs guarding the emperor's concubines came to dominate the court. Religious strife broke out as Confucian civil servants came to resent the untaxed wealth of Buddhist monasteries, some of which had acquired vast riches through generous donations. In the mid-800s, as Confucian civil servants worked to suppress Buddhism as a "foreign cult," a Daoist emperor who hated all things foreign ordered thousands of Buddhist shrines and monasteries destroyed. Later that century a famine in eastern China sparked a mass rebellion and convinced many that the Tang regime had lost Heaven's Mandate. Finally in 907, as local warlords carved up the country, one of them overthrew the dynasty, leading to a new age of disunity.

China in Turmoil: Ten Kingdoms and Five Dynasties, 907–960

Nomads again move into northern China during turmoil

Fifty-three years of dynastic disruption followed the end of the Tang era. The south was partitioned into warring states, later called the Ten Kingdoms. The north retained a measure of unity under a string of brief regimes called the Five Dynasties but also lost a number of border provinces to the Khitans (*KĒ-TAHNZ*), a people from Manchuria who emerged as a new nomadic threat. Establishing a capital at what is now Beijing (*BĀ-JĒNG*), the Khitans created an expansive domain called the Liao (*lē-OW*) Empire,

Map 14.4 Song China and the Khitan Liao Empire, 960–1125

Under the Song Dynasty (960–1279), China enjoyed a renewed era of stability and prosperity. Notice, however, that the northernmost part of China was controlled by the Khitans, a nomadic people from the northeast, whose Liao Empire (907–1125) also ruled much of what is now Manchuria and Mongolia. How did the Song approach to northern nomadic peoples differ from that of the Tang?

which for the next few centuries ruled Manchuria, Mongolia, and parts of northern China (Map 14.4).

Meanwhile, in 960, a Chinese general named Zhao Kuangyin (*JOW KWAHNG-YIN*) began the reunification of the rest of China. He overthrew the last of the north's Five Dynasties at the urging of his troops, who proclaimed him emperor and pledged him their absolute allegiance. Once they had done so, he compelled his key officers to retire, thus preventing their emergence as warlords and ensuring that none of them could threaten his rule. He then annexed most of the south's Ten Kingdoms, exploiting their peoples' hunger for unity and peace.

China Resurgent: The Song Dynasty, 960–1127

In the process of reunifying China, Zhao Kuangyin founded the Song Dynasty, which lasted from 960 until 1279. In its later years, however, it ruled only the south, and it never matched the size or military success of the Han and Tang dynasties. But it was second to none in political and economic vitality.

Zhao Kuangyin, who reigned from 960 to 976 as Emperor Taizu (*TĪ-DZUH*), took a series of decisive steps. He restored and strengthened the Confucian civil service, promoting professional governance. He banned court eunuchs from holding high state office, preventing conflicts between them and the civil servants. He centralized control over the army, reducing the influence of local nobles and warlords. Toward the end of his life he decreed that he would be succeeded, not by his young son, but by his talented brother, who then completed the conquest of the south to consolidate dynastic control.

The Song regime placates neighbors rather than fighting them

Unlike their predecessors, however, the Song rulers made little attempt to conquer or control foreign lands, judging that such ventures in the past had drained the country's resources. In 1004, for example, after a futile effort to subdue the Khitans and win back the border provinces they ruled, the Song made peace and agreed to pay them a large annual tribute. Similar settlements, far less costly than conquest and control, were also arranged with other peoples on China's borders. This policy reversed China's age-old practice of making weaker neighbors pay tribute, but it did enable China to buy peace with tribute in silver and silks.

The Song regime reduces the power of generals and nobles

Instead of expanding outward, the dynasty focused its energies on controlling China itself. To stop the rise of local warlords and prevent armed revolts, it tightly managed the army, frequently rotating commands among generals to keep them from turning the forces they led into their own personal armies. To limit the power of aristocratic families that had often dominated regional affairs, it enticed some of them to move to the new capital at Kaifeng (*KĪ-FUNG*), where they lived in splendor but had little local power.

The Song regime strengthens the civil service and exam system

To administer the empire, the Song regime consolidated the Confucian civil service bureaucracy. **Civil service exams**, established initially in the Han dynasty and revived under the Sui and Tang, were now standardized and strengthened, requiring of applicants comprehensive knowledge of the Confucian classics. Potential state bureaucrats were required to pass a series of extremely rigorous exams, first on the regional and then on the national level. So competitive were the tests that not even 1 percent of the candidates actually became state officials. Those who did, once in office, had to earn their promotions through performance. As a result, their loyalty was largely to those who had the power to promote them—that is, to the emperor and central government, which hence became more autocratic than ever.

Chinese civil servants typically were quite conservative. Trained in the ancient classics, which many had learned by heart, Confucian bureaucrats were steeped in tradition and devoted to the system that reinforced stability, fostered civility, and brought them great power and prestige. Most came from wealthy families, since they could send their sons to schools or hire tutors to prepare them for the civil service exams. To ensure they had the means to do so, families of state officials often intermarried with those of wealthy landowners. This practice over time helped create a Confucian **scholar gentry**—an

educated elite class supported by both official state posts and large rural estates—that tended to be self-perpetuating and resistant to change.

Confucians thwart efforts to reform Chinese economy

As the Song regime searched for ways to cover the costs of its vast army and bureaucracy, however, a key civil servant decided that change was needed. From 1069 to 1085 a reforming official named Wang Anshi (*WAHNG AHN-SHUR*), as the emperor's main advisor, sought to boost state revenues by increasing the wealth of the farmers and merchants who paid the state taxes and duties. He intervened in the economy, establishing price controls and government monopolies, introducing a graduated land tax that increased with the soil's productivity, and providing low-interest loans to peasants so they could increase their harvest by buying seeds and tools. He engaged the state directly in commerce, acquiring products in one area and selling them elsewhere at a profit. He even tried to open up the civil service exams to more talented young men. But his actions horrified other civil servants, who, as members of the Confucian elite, looked down upon merchants, had little use for commerce, and feared that his reforms would upset their domination of the social order. When floods, droughts, and famine, sparking widespread unrest, seemed to show that Heaven did not favor Wang Anshi, his enemies managed get him dismissed and undo most of his reforms.

Commerce makes Song China an economic giant

Wang's enemies could not, however, undo the growing influence of the commercial class. Although Confucians ranked merchants as nonproducers at the bottom of the social scale, merchants helped to bring about huge advances in money and banking, trade and transport, manufacturing, and technology, fostering a Chinese commercial revolution. Combined with vast increases in agricultural output, these advances also promoted urbanization. By the twelfth century the empire had at least fifty large cities, each with hundreds of thousands of inhabitants. With abundant capital and resources, expanding foreign and domestic markets, many miles of roads and canals, merchant ships, textile mills, printed books, advanced military technology, flourishing farmlands, and thriving cities, Song China appeared to have all that was needed for sustained economic and industrial growth, and perhaps even global domination.

China Divided: Jurchens and Southern Song, 1127–1279

Warlike nomads again overrun northern China

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, however, China's growth was disrupted again by nomads to the north. In 1114 the Jurchens (*JUR-chenz*), warlike pastoral nomads from Manchuria, staged a massive rebellion against the Khitans and their Liao Empire. Seeing this rebellion as an opportunity to win back for China the northern border provinces under Khitan control, the Song emperor allied with the Jurchens. The result was disaster for the dynasty. In the 1120s, after totally crushing the Khitans, the Jurchens turned violently against their Chinese allies. By 1127 the Jurchens had overrun all of northern China, plundered the capital at Kaifeng, and driven the Song armies deep into the south (Map 14.5).

The Song regime eventually rallied, but it never regained control of the north, where the Jurchens ruled for the rest of the century. The Song rulers could do little more than secure and stabilize the south. Establishing a new capital in 1138 at the bustling

Map 14.5 The Jurchens and the Southern Song, 1127–1279

After overthrowing the Khitan Liao Empire in the 1120s, the Jurchens, nomadic warriors from the Manchurian Plain, attacked the Song Dynasty and overran all of northern China. Note, however, that the Song Dynasty, now called the Southern Song (1127–1279), continued to govern the south, where it ruled over a prosperous realm with thriving commerce until the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century. How did southern China continue to prosper despite the loss of the north?

eastern port of Hangzhou (*HAHNG-JŌ*), they maintained their regime in southern China until 1279.

The Song regime survives and thrives in south until the Mongol conquest

During this era, known as the Southern Song, the regime ruled only half the country. But the half it ruled was probably the most prosperous place on earth. Agriculture and technology continued to advance and flourish; cities and commerce continued to grow and thrive. Although substantially reduced in its size and power, the realm was as rich as ever. Nonetheless, despite its great wealth and technical sophistication, it could not survive the great challenge of the thirteenth century, when first the Jurchens and later the Song fell to the Mongol conquests (Chapter 15).

Highlights and Hallmarks of Chinese Society

From the sixth through twelfth centuries, during the Tang and Song dynasties, China may well have been the world's most prosperous and cosmopolitan culture. The empire had extensive trade; innovative technology; inspiring poetry and art; robust religious institutions; large, vibrant cities; and intense intellectual creativity. But many Chinese people, including most peasants and women, derived little benefit from their country's commercial and cultural preeminence.

Commercial and Technological Innovations

Stability, security, roads, and waterways strengthen Chinese commerce

China's commercial preeminence was based on such factors as effective governance, agricultural abundance, and creative innovation. The Tang and Song regimes, with their capable civil servants and soldiers, typically provided the internal stability, effective law enforcement, and security from foreign threats needed for commerce to thrive. They also constructed and maintained the thousands of miles of waterways and highways, including the bustling Grand Canal and the tree-lined roads alongside it, that connected China's productive farmlands with its urban commercial economy.

Terraced rice fields in southern China.

Government-forged connections also contributed to China's agricultural abundance. Tang and Song domination of northern Vietnam, for example, introduced farmers in southern China to new strains of fast-growing rice developed in the region of Champa (now central Vietnam). Since Champa rice matured in three months, rather than in five like other strains, farmers could double their output by growing two crops in succession, rather than one, each year. Other agricultural innovations, including the use of animal-powered pumps and waterwheels to bring new lands under irrigation, added substantially to China's food supply.

Farming advances increase population and commerce

Farming advances in turn helped sustain China's growing population, which rose from under 50 million in the seventh century to over 100 million in the twelfth, and contributed to the rise of commercial farming. As cultivating rice took up less of their time, Chinese farmers additionally produced and sold marketable goods such as silk, cotton, and tea, a distinctive Chinese drink that emerged in the Age of Disunity and later gained global popularity. Most important, perhaps, the growing food supply supported large numbers of merchants, manufacturers, artisans, and inventors, some of whom developed innovations that would transform the world.

Some innovations improved domestic commerce. As copper and silver grew scarce, for example, and as the coins made from them proved cumbersome for interregional trade, enterprising Tang era merchants introduced "flying cash" (mobile money)—paper notes that could be bought in one region and redeemed for face value in another. These notes in turn prepared the way for the use of checks, credit certificates, and government-issued paper money during the Song era. The invention and use of the abacus, a computing device with sliding counters grouped in multiples of ten, also greatly aided commercial calculations.

Giant ships and magnetic compasses enhance international trade

Other innovations enhanced international trade. As bandits and brigands made land trade dangerous along the Central Asian Silk Road (Chapter 4), especially after Tang armies lost control of that region in 751 C.E., Chinese merchants increasingly transported their silks, ceramics, tea, and other goods by sea. Giant ships, sailing from Chinese ports,

were equipped by Song times with multiple masts, watertight compartments, and magnetic compasses. The compass was especially influential, enabling ships to stay on course while traveling great distances with no land in sight. Adopted from the Chinese by Arab sailors, and later used by European explorers, the compass eventually helped open an era of global trade and travel.

Gunpowder and other Chinese innovations will have a global impact

Additional Chinese innovations also had global impact. Gunpowder, which eventually revolutionized warfare around the world, was originally used in Tang China for fireworks, then by Song armies in grenades, flame-throwers, and crude early cannons. Coal was first used in northern China as fuel, and was later used to smelt iron and make steel, eventually resulting in sturdier weapons and farm tools the world over. Song-era China also developed, among other things, a mechanical clock and cotton textile mills centuries before other societies.

China's most influential invention, however, may have been the printing process. The printing of books, using blocks of wood that were carved for each page and brushed with ink to make impressions on paper, began in Tang China and improved during Song times. Song-era printers also experimented with moveable type, using small blocks of print for each character, but since Chinese writing employs thousands of characters, most Chinese printers found it more efficient to simply make a block for each page. Printing eventually spread westward from China to the Muslim and Christian worlds, sparking a global revolution in information and learning.

Early carved woodblock used for Chinese printing.

Spiritual, Intellectual, and Cultural Creativity

Stability and prosperity foster cultural creativity

In China itself, printing was used first to publish Buddhist scriptures and later to record the works of religious thinkers, scholars, philosophers, and poets. By providing writers, artists, and artisans with security and food so they could specialize in diverse pursuits, Tang and Song stable governance and agricultural abundance also contributed to China's flourishing intellectual and cultural life.

In the early Tang era, while Buddhism enjoyed broad support from the people and their rulers, several innovative Buddhist sects became very influential. One was **Pure Land Buddhism**, which claimed that humans could not achieve enlightenment by their own works and instead preached salvation by faith in the Buddha of Infinite Light who ruled the Western Paradise, or "Pure Land." Another was **Chan** (*CHAHN*) **Buddhism**, known in Japan as **Zen**, which taught that meditation was the only path to enlightenment, and stressed love of nature, simplicity of life, and individual self-discipline.

Confucianism rebounds and synthesizes learning and tradition

In the late Tang era, as noted above, Confucian officials began suppressing Buddhism as a "foreign cult," bringing about both a Buddhist decline and Confucian revival that continued into the Song era. But the "neo-Confucianism" that emerged triumphant was far more complex and theoretical than the simple, pragmatic ethical system devised by Confucius and his followers over a millennium earlier. Responding to the challenge of Buddhism and Daoism, neo-Confucian thinkers grappled with such concepts as the nature of reality and the meaning of life. In contrast to the Buddhists and Daoists, however, neo-Confucians concluded that reality is understood through education and reason rather than through meditation, and that life derives meaning from action and involvement rather than withdrawal. By the twelfth century, when the great philosopher

Zhu Xi (*JOO-SHĒ*) created a neo-Confucian synthesis stressing tradition, education, and personal morality, neo-Confucianism reigned supreme among the educated elite. Buddhism retained a following but ceased to be China's main faith, while Daoism continued to thrive among peasants, poets, artists, and others who had close connections with nature.

Chinese poetry flourishes in the Tang era

China's most beloved poets, Li Bai (*LĒ-BĪ*) and Du Fu (*DOO-FOO*), flourished in the early Tang era. Li Bai (701–763) was a homeless wanderer and Daoist free spirit, undisciplined and romantic, a lover of nature and wine. He wrote more than 20,000 poems, including the haunting "Drinking Alone by the Moonlight," which contains the following lovely but lonely lines:

> A cup of wine, under the flowering trees;
>
> I drink alone, for no friend is near.
>
> Raising my cup, I beckon the moon to join me;
>
> For he, with my shadow, will make three men . . .

According to legend, Li Bai's career ended during a drunken nighttime boat ride, when the sentimental poet drowned while trying to embrace the moon's reflection on the water.

Although a great friend and admirer of Li Bai, Du Fu (712–770) was a more refined and sober poet who wrote in structured verse and was known for his Confucian compassion and strong social conscience. Having failed the civil service exams as a young man, he lived for years in poverty and endured many hardships. Some of his poems contrast the wasteful indulgence of the rich with the sufferings of the common people, as reflected in these famous phrases:

> Inside the red gates the wine and meat go to waste;
>
> On the roadside lie the bones of men who died from cold . . .

Turning away from Confucianism, a system that stamped him a failure, Du Fu became a Buddhist and spent his last years as an impoverished pilgrim. On one of his journeys he met a government official who had read and appreciated his poetry. The delighted official took the poet home, wined and dined him, and gave him his own bed to sleep in. Du Fu died the next morning.

Arts and crafts thrive in Tang and Song eras

Chinese arts and crafts likewise flourished in the Tang and Song eras. Tang sculptors produced splendid Buddhist statues to adorn many temples as well as lifelike figures of horses and soldiers to guard the emperors' tombs. Other skilled artisans fashioned fine porcelain vessels and glazed pottery statuettes. Song-era painters refined the technique of working with a flexible brush on silk, creating naturalistic masterpieces ranging from magnificent vistas and landscapes to exquisite studies of birds, insects, bamboo sprigs, and flowers.

Glazed pottery horse from the Tang era.

Urban and Rural Society

China's commercial, cultural, and intellectual life was centered mainly in the cities, especially the imperial capitals, which ranked among the world's largest and busiest metropolitan areas. While urban dwellers enjoyed abundant goods and cultural activities, however,

village farmers, who made up most of the population, lived in stark simplicity. Women of all classes were typically subordinate to men.

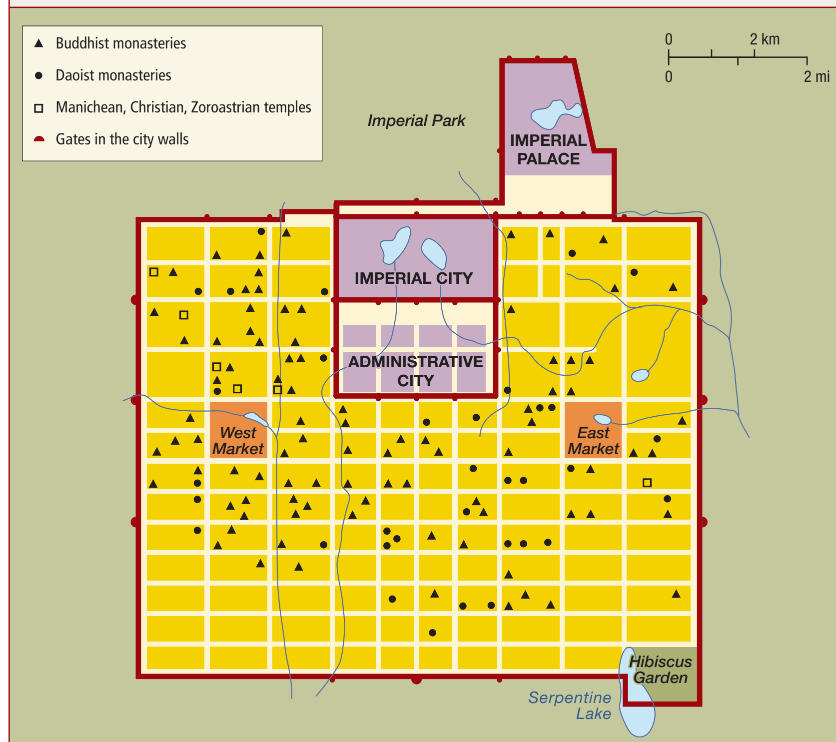
Chang'an, China's capital during the Tang dynasty, was that era's grandest city, with an overall population of almost two million, half of whom lived within its walls. It was laid out as a rectangle, roughly five by six miles, with wide north-south and east-west boulevards connecting its main gates and other avenues dividing it into a huge grid (Map 14.6). The city was dotted with Buddhist and Daoist temples and monasteries. Its two large markets boasted goods and visitors from all over Asia, as well as performers, musicians, artists, craftsmen, and fashionably dressed shoppers. The emperor's palace sat in the north, behind the Imperial City, a section of Chang'an that served as government headquarters.

Kaifeng and Hangzhou, the Song era capitals, strove to imitate Chang'an's size and splendor. Kaifeng, located near where the Grand Canal connected with the Yellow River, was a commercial hub that had shops, warehouses, shipyards, restaurants, and hotels

China's great cities provide extensive commerce and diverse activities

Map 14.6 Chang'an: China's Imperial Capital, 589–907

Chang'an, the imperial capital of China during the Sui and Tang Dynasties, featured rows of blocks and boulevards in a symmetrical rectangular layout. Observe that its city walls, within which lived up to a million people, also encompassed markets, temples, monasteries, gardens, lakes, and government facilities. What other features and diversions did this great city provide?



but lacked the elegant symmetry of Chang'an. Hangzhou, situated south of the Yangzi River at the canal's other end, was a striking seaport brimming with bridges and waterways, merchants and shops, cabarets and tea houses, entertainers and artisans, public baths and brothels. In the thirteenth century, long after Hangzhou had passed its prime, European observer Marco Polo nonetheless described it as the world's "finest and noblest city."

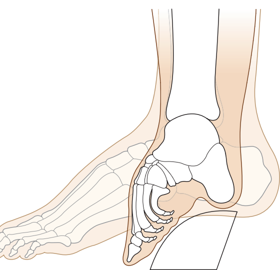
The peasants, who made up most of China's population, knew little of this urban elegance. Dwelling in rustic rural villages, they rarely traveled farther than the nearest market town. The young men worked the fields around the village, and the elder males reigned as family patriarchs. But women typically ran the household, preparing meals, raising children, tending the chickens and silkworms, and helping in the fields when needed.

Patriarchal Chinese society subjects women to men

No matter what class they belonged to, women were subject to men: first to their fathers, then to their husbands, and finally (if widowed) to their sons. Parents arranged marriages as compacts between families, often engaging in complex negotiations to decide such matters as the size of the dowry to be supplied by the bride. Society demanded virginal brides and faithful wives, but placed no such requirements on men, who might have mistresses or concubines if they could support them. Property and inheritance laws favored men, as did the education and civil service systems. A few women, such as Empress Wu and Yang Guifei, did exercise great influence, but even they achieved their goals mainly by working through men.

Parents sometimes bind girls' feet to help attract wealthy husbands

Women of means, whose lives were not burdened by physical labor, sometimes paid a painful price for this exemption. Starting in Song times, many girls from urban and well-off rural families underwent **foot binding**, a process in which their feet were tightly wrapped with strips of cloth for years, beginning in early childhood. Foot binding was designed to restrict the foot's growth and achieve a "lily-foot" effect, with toes and heels pointed downward to resemble the bell-shaped lily flower. Since many Chinese men considered women with tiny feet sexually attractive, and since men of means saw it as a sign of wealth and status to have a wife with feet so dainty that she could not work, mothers often bound their daughters' feet to help them attract wealthy husbands. But the process was extremely painful, and the resulting deformation frequently made it hard for the woman to walk without a cane. Foot binding thus became an indicator of social status, distinguishing idle upper class ladies from hardworking peasant women.



Foot reshaped by foot binding compared to normal foot.

Vietnam and the Chinese Impact

Overshadowed by China's vast size and wealth, the lands on its borders often served as its colonies or tribute-paying vassals, while their societies broadly imitated Chinese ideas and ways. China's neighbors nonetheless managed to preserve key elements of their traditional cultures and even, in time, to secure their political autonomy. Especially successful in these endeavors were the Vietnamese.

Vietnam Under Chinese Dominion

Vietnam occupies the easternmost part of the huge Southeast Asian peninsula, which extends out from southwestern China, west of the South China Sea (Map 14.7). A lush subtropical region with abundant sunshine, rainfall, mountains, forests, rivers, and plains,

Map 14.7 Early Vietnam and Its Expansion in the Tenth Through Fifteenth Centuries

Throughout most of its history, Vietnam was linked with China by strong political, cultural, and commercial connections. Notice, however, that after gaining political autonomy from China in the mid-900s, Vietnam expanded its rule southward in ensuing centuries over the region of Champa. What distinctive social and cultural patterns developed in Vietnam that distinguished it from China?

it was one of Asia's first agricultural areas, with early farmers raising yams, rice, chickens, and pigs. In what is now northern Vietnam, a thousand miles from the early centers of Chinese society, people produced fine works of bronze, traded throughout Southeast Asia, and developed a distinctive culture centered on village societies in which women played a leading role.

Various Chinese dynasties rule northern Vietnam

In 218 B.C.E. this region was conquered by China's Qin dynasty. Although Qin rule ended with the dynasty's demise in 206 B.C.E., the Han Martial Emperor (Wudi) reconquered the Red River valley in 111 B.C.E. For much of the next millennium the region was ruled by the Chinese, who imposed on it their language, writing system, Confucian ideals, and bureaucratic structures. It briefly regained independence under the legendary Trung Sisters, who reportedly rebelled and reigned as independent queens from 39 to 41 C.E., and later during China's Age of Disunity (220–589), when the region was divided, like China itself, among local warlords. It again came under Chinese rule during the Sui dynasty (589–618) and throughout the Tang era (618–907).

Vietnam blends Chinese beliefs and ways into its own culture

Thus, unlike the rest of Southeast Asia, which was heavily influenced by India's culture, northern Vietnam was overlaid with Chinese ideals and institutions. While Theravada Buddhism spread through the rest of Southeast Asia, for example, the Vietnamese adopted from China the Mahayana branch of that faith, combining it with Confucianism and Daoism to form a blended belief system called the **Three Religions**. Vietnam also adapted various aspects of Chinese education, urban life, architecture, and administration to fit traditional Vietnamese culture.

Vietnamese women retain a distinctive role and status

As a result of this adaptation, Vietnam retained distinctive social and family patterns, which gave women a relatively prominent role. Among both rural villagers and urban dwellers, Vietnamese women enjoyed a higher status than women in China. A Vietnamese woman, for example, could take an active part in selecting her spouse, receive from his family a wedding endowment rather than giving him a dowry, and have him come to join her family's household rather than going to join his. Thus supported by ongoing connections with their families of origin, Vietnamese women apparently could also seek and obtain divorces, inherit and bequeath family wealth, and even keep their own family names after marriage. These practices, which predated the imposition of Chinese culture, were never completely eradicated by it.

Vietnamese Autonomy

Vietnam becomes autonomous in the 900s

With its distinctive social structure and distance from China's power centers, Vietnam maintained its own cultural identity throughout the many centuries of Chinese rule. Finally, in 939, during the chaotic decades following the fall of the Tang, the Vietnamese managed to regain their political autonomy. Then, in 968, a legendary leader named Dinh Bo Linh (*DIN-BŌ-LIN*), having defeated the other warlords and unified the realm, proclaimed himself Vietnam's first emperor.

Henceforth Vietnam was ruled mostly by native regimes rather than by outsiders, but this autonomy did not mean the end of Chinese influence. Indeed, as China regained its unity and strength under the Song dynasty, Dinh Bo Linh and his successors found it advisable to recognize Song rulers as official overlords and pay them tribute. In response China's rulers largely left the Vietnamese alone, free to develop their own institutions and policies. But Vietnam's rulers continued to imitate practices that had proven successful in China. Borrowing ideas from the great empire to their north, the Vietnamese formed a stable state with its capital at Hanoi, developed a Chinese-style bureaucracy, and eventually even experienced their own succession of dynastic cycles. They also began gradually expanding to the south, incorporating over the next five centuries the various kingdoms that made up the region called Champa, whose culture had hitherto been influenced by India. This process eventually brought the whole eastern coastline of Southeast Asia under Vietnamese rule (Map 14.7).

Vietnam expands southward along Southeast Asian coast

Korea and the Chinese Impact

China's influence was also felt in Korea, the large peninsula that extends from Manchuria toward Japan, across the Yellow Sea from northeast China. Like the Vietnamese, the Koreans developed a distinctive language and culture, then came under Chinese rule in

the second century B.C.E. Also like the Vietnamese, the Koreans adapted Chinese ideas and institutions to their local culture. Eventually the Koreans, too, regained their political autonomy, but for centuries they continued to pay tribute to China's emperors.

Early Chinese Influence in Korea

Korea is influenced by Chinese migrations and conquest

Chinese influence in Korea dates from the third and fourth centuries B.C.E., when refugees from China's Warring States Era migrated to the Korean peninsula, bringing Chinese farming and writing techniques. Later, in 109–108 B.C.E., Han China's Wudi conquered northern Korea, only a few years after he had conquered the Vietnamese. As in Vietnam, he and his Han successors imposed in Korea their Confucian cultural values and administrative system.

Three kingdoms emerge in Korea during China's Age of Disunity

Also as in Vietnam, the collapse of China's Han dynasty in the third century C.E. brought to the Koreans both autonomy and division into warring states. Eventually, in the disarray of the fourth century C.E., three rival kingdoms emerged in the Korean peninsula: Silla (*shē-ILL-ah*) in the southeast, Paekche (*PĪK-chā*) in the southwest, and Koguryo (*kō-GOOR-yō*) in the north (Map 14.8). During the next few

Map 14.8 Early Korea and Its Kingdoms in the Fourth Through Tenth Centuries

Korea's culture, commerce, and beliefs were strongly influenced by its connections with China. Observe that, after gaining autonomy from China in the third century C.E., Korea was divided into three rival kingdoms from the fourth through seventh centuries. Then, with Chinese help, Silla emerged predominant until the tenth century, when Koguryo gained control of the peninsula, ruling as the Kingdom of Koryo. In what ways was Korean culture influenced by connections with China? How did Korean society and governance differ from that of China?

centuries, as these three realms fought each other for supremacy, new waves of refugees arrived from China's Age of Disunity, spreading their Buddhist beliefs among the Koreans.

After China was reunified in 589 C.E., both the Sui and the Tang rulers made repeated efforts to reconquer the Koreans but were rebuffed by Koguryo's rugged resistance. In the 660s, however, aiming to dominate all of Korea, Silla joined forces with China to conquer Paekche and Koguryo. Then, having unified Korea with Chinese help, Silla used its united forces to resist full Chinese control, agreeing instead to pay tribute to the Tang regime.

Korea blends Chinese ways and beliefs into its own culture

For the next few centuries Silla ruled Korea as a semi-autonomous tributary of China, broadly imitating its society and culture. During this era Korea, like Vietnam before it, adopted China's writing system, imitated its architecture, and sought to replicate its great cities and civil service bureaucracy. Mahayana Buddhism, with monasteries, temples, statues, shrines, and sects similar to those then flourishing in Tang China, spread across the peninsula. Koreans copied Chinese customs and commodities and even produced ceramics and porcelain ware superior to China's.

In several respects, however, the administrative and social structure of Korea differed from that of China. Governmental posts in Korea remained under the control of local aristocratic families, rather than being staffed through a system of civil service exams. Despite the outward appearance of a Confucian civil service bureaucracy, Korea's regions and provinces continued to be governed mostly by warlords rather than scholar-officials, and its peasants remained in a status similar to serfdom.

Korean porcelain vase from the Kingdom of Koryo.

The Kingdom of Koryo, 935–1392

During the ninth century the deterioration of the Silla regime, accompanied by the decline of China's Tang dynasty, gave the kingdoms of Paekche and Koguryo a chance to reassert their autonomy. But eventually Wang Kon (*WAHNG-KŌN*), a wealthy northern merchant who became a military officer, seized control of Koguryo and reunited Korea by conquering Silla in 935 and Paekche in 936. He then shortened the name of his kingdom to Koryo (*KOR-yō*), from which comes the name Korea, and established a dynasty that lasted until 1392.

Koryo was even more imitative of China than Silla had been. It set up a new capital at Kaesong (*KĪ-SŌNG*), modeled after the great Chinese city of Chang'an, with a similar gridlike pattern and impressive imperial palace. Koryo established a Confucian-style administration with its own civil service exams—but the old aristocracy nonetheless maintained its monopoly of the major posts. And in the eleventh century, after experiencing several invasions by the Khitans, Koryo even built its own version of the Great Wall across the northern part of the peninsula.

Like Vietnam, then, Korea blended Chinese ways with its own distinctive culture. In the meantime, across the sea to Korea's east, another East Asian society adopted Chinese ideas, then diverged from them to become more distinctive from China than Vietnam and Korea.

The Emergence of Japan

Of the various East Asian peoples, Japan's were among the last to develop a complex culture based on farming settlements. Living mostly on four main islands, more than a hundred miles east of the Korean coast, the early Japanese were largely isolated from outside influence (Map 14.9). With a mild climate, abundant rainfall, a scenic mountainous terrain, and ready access to the sea, they lived for centuries on hunting, fishing, and gathering wild food. Rice farming began by the third century B.C.E., along with the use of bronze and iron. By 300 C.E. the land was dominated by native warrior clans called uji (*OO-JĒ*).

Japan develops a distinctive religion worshipping spirits in nature

A distinctive religion emerged, based on the worship of divine spirits called kami (*KAH-MĒ*), which included not only gods and goddesses of the sun, moon, and earth but also the spirits of ancestors, animals, and natural objects such as rocks, trees, and waterfalls. Worship centered on fertility and purification rites, often performed in a festival atmosphere. Originally nameless, this nature-based Japanese religion was later called **Shinto** (*SHĒN-TŌ*), the "way of the kami."

Yamato clan forms a dynasty that claims divine status

By 500 C.E. the Yamato (*YAH-MAH-TŌ*) uji, a powerful warrior clan, had brought approximately two-thirds of Japan under its control, thereby establishing itself as the ruling dynasty. Tracing their descent from the Shinto sun goddess, the Yamato emperors

Map 14.9 Japan Emerges as an Island Nation in the Sixth Through Twelfth Centuries

Although it borrowed many ideas and features from China, Japan developed as an independent nation with a distinctive culture. Notice that Japan, endowed with a mild climate and mountainous terrain, is located on islands over a hundred miles from the Asia mainland. Nara and later Heian (eventually called Kyoto) served as the early capitals and homes of Japan's emperors, even as others exercised real power in their name. How did Japan's society and governance differ from that of China?

claimed a divine status that helped perpetuate their position. Although others have often ruled in their name, the Yamato heirs have persistently maintained the imperial title, and they still reign today as history's longest enduring dynasty.

Early Borrowing from China

In the mid-sixth century, a new religion came to Japan from China by way of Korea. Buddhism, promoted in Japan by the Soga clan as a compelling new faith from the mainland, was rejected by other clans as an alien cult, eventually resulting in warfare. In 587 the Soga won and later installed their own Prince Shotoku as regent to the Yamato ruler.

Shotoku promotes Buddhism and Chinese ways in Japan

Prince Shotoku, whose exploits are highlighted at the start of this chapter, directed affairs from 593 until his death in 622. Determined to learn from China's experience and to borrow concepts useful for Japan, he sent at least four large missions to China for trade and cultural exchange. He instituted in Japan a Chinese-style bureaucracy, based on ranks that were assigned by merit rather than uji status, thus improving government effectiveness and strengthening the central state at the expense of the warrior clans. He further promoted Buddhism—building temples, supporting monasteries, and issuing precepts urging adherence to Buddhist ideals—so effectively that he would later be revered as a bodhisattva.

Ancient Buddhist temple near Nara, Japan.

Thus began an era of extensive borrowing from China. Over the next two centuries, the Japanese adopted China's writing system and imitated Chinese literature, poetry, philosophy, art, and architecture. The Fujiwara clan, which came to dominate the Japanese court in the 640s, surpassed the Soga in copying China's laws, taxes, roads, and civil service. The city of Nara, erected in 710 as Japan's new capital, was modeled after Chang'an, and Japan's Nara Period (710–784) was marked by imitation of Chinese ways.

The Heian Era: Divergence from China

By 794 a new capital, even more imitative of Chang'an than Nara, was constructed at Heian (*HĀ-YAHN*), later called Kyoto (*kē-YŌ-TŌ*), where the emperors would reside for more than a thousand years. During the Heian Period (794–1185), Japan gradually stopped imitating China, developing instead a distinctive new culture that blended Japanese and Chinese ways.

Japan develops a distinctive culture blending Japanese and Chinese ways

Emperor Kammu (*KAH-MOO*), who built the new capital during his reign (781–806), sought to unite his realm religiously by blending Buddhism, the faith imported from China, with Japan's native Shinto beliefs. He thus promoted various sects that accepted conflicting beliefs as different levels of truth or that depicted Shinto as an early revelation of Buddhist beliefs in Japan.

Japanese women develop a distinctive literature

In the ninth century, a new writing system developed called **kana** (*KAH-NAH*), which used simplified Chinese characters to create a phonetic Japanese alphabet. By 1000 C.E., while men in Japan still struggled to write Chinese, which they considered a superior language, Japanese women, typically denied an education in Chinese, were using kana to produce Japanese prose classics. The most famous is *The Tale of Genji* (*GEN-jē*), a subtle, sensitive portrayal of the refined court life at Heian and the romantic

Document 14.1 Excerpts from *The Tale of Genji*

Murasaki Shikibu's classic tale portrays in exquisite detail the lives and loves of an emperor and his court. These excerpts describe the emperor's love affair with Genji's mother, the birth of Genji, the death of his mother, and the emperor's abiding love for them both.

In a certain reign there was a lady not of the first rank whom the emperor loved more than any of the others. The grand ladies with high ambitions thought her a presumptuous upstart, and the lesser ladies were still more resentful. Everything she did offended someone. Probably aware of what was happening, she fell seriously ill . . .

It may have been because of a bond in a former life that she bore the emperor a beautiful son, a jewel beyond compare . . .

With the birth of the son, it became yet clearer that she was the emperor's favorite. The mother of the eldest son began to feel uneasy. If she did not manage carefully, she might see the new son designated crown prince . . .

When the young prince reached the age of three, the resources of the treasury . . . were exhausted to make the ceremonial bestowing of trousers as elaborate as that for the oldest son. Once more there was malicious talk, but the prince himself, as he grew up, was so superior of mien and disposition that few could find it in themselves to dislike him . . .

In summer the boy's mother, feeling vaguely unwell, asked that she be allowed to go home . . . The emperor . . . begged her to stay, and see what course her health might take. It was steadily worse . . .

So, in desolation, he let her go. He passed a sleepless night.

He sent off a messenger and was beside himself with impatience . . . The man arrived to find the house echoing with laments. She had died shortly past midnight . . . The emperor closed himself up in his private apartments. He would have liked to keep the boy with him, but no precedent could be found for having him away from his mother's house through the mourning . . .

The months passed and the young prince returned to the palace. He had grown into a lad of such beauty that he hardly seemed meant for this world . . . When, the following spring, it came time to name a crown prince, the emperor wanted very much to pass over his first son in favor of the younger, who, however, had no influential maternal relatives . . .

Lacking the support of maternal relatives, the boy would be most insecure as a prince . . . As a commoner he could be of great service . . . The emperor therefore encouraged the boy in his studies, at which he was so proficient that it seemed a waste to reduce him to common rank. And yet—as a prince he would arouse the hostility of those who had cause to fear his becoming emperor. Summoning an astrologer . . ., the emperor . . . concluded that the boy should become a commoner with the name Minamoto or Genji.

SOURCE: Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji*, translated by Edward G. Seidensticker (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978) 1–4, 13, 15.

affairs of a fictional prince named Genji (see "Excerpts from *The Tale of Genji*"). The tale was composed by a court lady known as Murasaki Shikibu (*moo-RAH-sah-kē SHĒ-kē-boo*), who, while vastly enriching Japanese literature, offered the world what may well be its oldest complete novel.

Political changes in Heian Japan brought further divergence from the Chinese model. The powerful Fujiwara clan increasingly dominated the imperial family, first by forcing the emperors to marry Fujiwara women, then by serving as regents for their offspring. As soon as an emperor had a son by his Fujiwara wife, the clan leaders would

force that emperor to retire so they could rule as regents for his infant son who became the new emperor. But this farce only weakened the central government because other ambitious clans, deprived of influence at court, built power bases in the countryside, while smaller landowners submitted to their protection to avoid taxation.

The Rise of the Warrior Class

Peasant serfs and samurai warriors embrace new Buddhist sects

Minamoto clan creates a dominant military leader called the shogun

Regional warlords and samurai warriors come to dominate Japan

By the twelfth century, although the court at Heian continued to claim authority, Japan was actually dominated by local warlords ruling independent estates. Each warlord developed his own army of warriors, later known as **samurai** (*SAH-MOO-RĪ*), who provided military service to their lords. These warriors were often supported by peasant labor on land given them in reward for military service, similar to the manors of medieval Europe (Chapter 9). In time the samurai became Japan's dominant class, with a unique code of conduct. Rejecting the urbane Heian society, which they saw as decadent and weak, the samurai instead adopted an austere rural culture based on courage, honor, discipline, simplicity, and indifference to pain. Supported by foot soldiers and protected by elaborate armor, the samurai fought on horseback, using bows, arrows, and tempered steel swords. Professing total loyalty to their lords, they were trained to value death over dishonor. In a practice called **seppuku** (*SEP-OO-KOO*), also known as hara-kiri, or "belly-cutting," a defeated warrior could restore his honor by taking his own life without showing pain.

Wooden statue of Buddhist monk from Kamakura era.

This rise of the samurai reduced the peasants to serfdom, forcing them to work the land in servitude to support the warrior class. For comfort many peasants turned to Pure Land Buddhism, the Chinese creed that promised its faithful salvation in the Western Paradise. The samurai, meanwhile, embraced Zen, Japan's name for China's Chan Buddhism, perhaps because its stress on meditation, discipline, simplicity, and self-understanding seemed akin to their warrior code.

The rise of the samurai also brought an end to the political power of the Heian court. In 1185, when the Minamoto (*MĒ-NAH-MŌ-TŌ*) clan defeated the forces controlling Heian in a great naval battle, clan leader Minamoto Yoritomo (*YŌ-RĒ-TŌ-MŌ*) emerged as the country's dominant warlord. In contrast to what often happened in such situations in China, however, he did not seize the throne and end the Yamato dynasty, whose emperors were worshipped as descendants of the gods. Instead, in a move that set a precedent for future conquering warlords, in 1192 he assumed a new post called **shogun** (*SHŌ-GOON*), the commander-in-chief of Japan's armed forces and its real ruler. Thenceforth, while the emperors still reigned in Heian (Kyoto) as religious figures, they lacked political power. Minamoto Yoritomo and his successors as shogun actually ruled from the city of Kamakura (*KAH-MAH-KOO-RAH*), which served as Japan's true political center from 1192 until 1333.

Chapter Review

Putting It in Perspective

Despite the disasters of the third through sixth centuries, China survived its Age of Disunity, merging its new Buddhist faith with the basic elements of its ancient society and emerging reunited in 589 C.E. Then, for almost seven centuries, under the Sui, Tang, and Song dynasties, China flourished as one of the world's largest and most cosmopolitan societies. Its officials mastered the art of governing an expansive empire, its merchants and manufacturers produced unprecedented prosperity, and its farmers found ways to feed its rural masses and large urban populations. Its poets, artists, inventors, intellectuals, and religious believers created a culture noted for its elegance, complexity, and technological sophistication.

So successful was China's experience that other East Asian cultures often followed its example, sometimes compelled by Chinese conquest, sometimes encouraged by commercial and cultural connections with China. The Vietnamese, Koreans, and Japanese all copied or adapted features of Chinese society, especially its writing system, Buddhist beliefs, Confucian civil service, art, architecture, and urban organization. Thus, through a series of connections and conflicts, Chinese culture dominated most of East Asia.

Conflicts, however, also undermined China's preeminence. For all its power and wealth, China never fully succeeded in subduing the nomads to its north. The Tang dynasty held them off and sometimes even conquered their homelands. But in the tenth century, after that dynasty's fall, tribal Khitan warriors captured some of China's northern provinces and added them to their Liao Empire. Eventually China's Song dynasty, after failing to defeat these warriors, decided instead to pay them tribute. But in the twelfth century the Jurchens, after the Song rulers helped them conquer the Khitans, overran and dominated the whole northern half of China.

This disaster did not mark the end of China's troubles. For in the thirteenth century the Mongols, an even more expansionist group of nomadic invaders from the north, would conquer the Jurchens and then all of China and most of Eurasia as well.

Reviewing Key Material

KEY CONCEPTS

Xiongnu, 325
civil service exams, 335
scholar gentry, 335
Pure Land Buddhism, 339
Chan (Zen) Buddhism, 339
foot binding, 342
Three Religions, 344
Shinto, 347
kana, 348
samurai, 350
seppuku, 350
shogun, 350

KEY PEOPLE

Prince Shotoku, 324, 348
Cao Cao, 325
Faxian, 330
Liang Wudi, 330
Yang Jian (Wendi), 330
Yangdi, 331
Duke of Tang, 331
Li Shimin (Taizong), 331
Wu Zhao (Empress Wu), 332
Xuanzong, 333
Yang Guifei, 333
An Lushan, 333
Zhao Kuangyin (Taizu), 334
Wang Anshi, 336
Zhu Xi, 340
Li Bai, 340
Du Fu, 340
Trung Sisters, 343
Dinh Bo Linh, 344
Wang Kon, 346
Kammu, 348
Murasaki Shikibu, 349
Minamoto Yoritomo, 350

ASK YOURSELF

1. How and why did Buddhism spread throughout China, emerging as its main religion, during the Age of Disunity? Why did Buddhism decline in China by the middle of the Song era?
2. After China was reunified in 589, what steps did the Sui, Tang, and Song regimes take to maintain its unity and prosperity during the next seven centuries? How did these various regimes respond to the ongoing threat of the northern nomadic peoples?
3. What were the main hallmarks and achievements of Chinese society during the Tang and Song eras? How did the lives of rural peasants differ from the lives of

city-dwellers? How did the roles and rights of women differ from those of men?

4. Why and how did Vietnam, Korea, and Japan emulate Chinese ideas and institutions? How did they blend their own cultures and traditions with ideas and institutions adapted from China?

GOING FURTHER

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Key Dates and Developments

China

Date	Development
220–589	China's Age of Disunity
300–500	Buddhism spreads throughout China
581–589	Unification of China by Yang Jian
589–618	Sui Dynasty
618–907	Tang Dynasty
626–649	Reign of Taizong (Li Shimin)
660–705	Dominance of Wu Zhao (Empress Wu, 690–705)
713–756	Reign of Xuanzong
720–770	Poetry of Li Bai and Du Fu
755–766	An Lushan revolt
907–960	Fall of the Tang and renewed disunity
907–1125	Khitans rule northern borderlands (Liao Empire)
960–1279	Song Dynasty
960–976	China Reunified under Zhao Kuangyin (Song Taizu)
1069–1085	Wang Anshi Reforms
1127–1206	Jurchens conquer Khitans and rule northern China

Vietnam and Korea

Date	Development
111 B.C.E.	Chinese conquer northern Vietnam
108 B.C.E.	Chinese conquer northern Korea
220–589	Age of Disunity in China, Korea, and Vietnam
300s–668	Korea divided into three kingdoms
668–935	Korea unified under Silla rule
936–1392	Korea unified under Koryo rule
939	Northern Vietnam gains autonomy from China
968	Din Bo Linh unifies northern Vietnam, becomes emperor
1000–1500	Vietnam expands southward into Champa

Japan

Date	Development
by 300	Emergence of Uji warrior clans
by 500	Emergence of Yamato clan as Japan's imperial dynasty
500–600	Buddhism spreads to Japan
592–622	Prince Shotoku guides Japan, emulates Chinese culture
710–784	Nara era: intensive emulation of China
794–1185	Heian era: emergence of the samurai
1000–1010	*Tale of Genji*, by Murasaki Shikibu
1185–1333	Kamakura era: reign of the Minamoto shoguns
1192	Minamoto Yoritomo becomes shogun