East Asia in the Post-Classical Period

All the birds have flown up and gone;
A lonely cloud floats leisurely by.
We never tire of looking at each other –
Only the mountain and I.

—Li Bo, “Alone Looking at the Mountain” (date unknown)

Poet Li Bo (701–762 C.E.) was one of the most accomplished artists of the Tang era in China. Many of his poems, such as the one above, describe someone contemplating nature. Others focus on attending parties and other ways people enjoy life with friends. These themes, both positive and uplifting, seem to reflect the buoyancy of Post-Classical China. During the 600 years of the Tang and Song dynasties, China enjoyed great wealth, political stability, and fine artistic and intellectual achievements. These years were a golden era in Chinese history.

During the Post-Classical period, China dominated East Asia. Its neighbors, including Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, developed vibrant and distinctive cultural traditions, but each also displayed China’s influence.

Political Structures in China

After the collapse of the Han Dynasty in the third century C.E., China fell into a state of anarchy for nearly 400 years. People suffered from reduced trade and greater political turmoil until the short-lived Sui Dynasty (581–618 C.E.).

Unity under the Sui Dynasty Emperor Sui Yangdi unified China through violence and repression. Successful military expeditions to the south expanded the reach of China’s government. He also sent troops into Korea and Central Asia. Sui Yangdi ruled through harsh, dictatorial methods, which made dissent risky.

Grand Canal The greatest accomplishment of the dynasty was the inception of the construction of the Grand Canal. This ambitious public works project involved thousands of conscripted peasants working for many years. The idea behind the canal was to provide a means of transporting rice and other crops from the food-rich Yangtze River valley in the south to populous northern China and the center of government of Luoyang. At the southern end of the
Grand Canal was the city of Hangzhou, which expanded greatly during the Sui Dynasty because of the increased trade. It was during the Sui Dynasty that the city leaders had a defensive wall built around the city. The Sui used conscripts also to reinforce the “Long Wall” in the north begun by earlier dynasties. (The Long Wall would later become part of the Great Wall of China.)

**Downfall of the Sui** The rule by the Sui lasted only 40 years. People complained about high taxes needed to pay for the expensive military escapades, the conscription of laborers for the building projects, and the emperor’s dictatorial ways. The emperor was assassinated in 618, and the dynasty ended.

**Tang Dynasty**

The short Sui Dynasty prepared the way for the longer, more influential *Tang Dynasty* (618–907 C.E.). During this period, China enjoyed relative prosperity and stability. Rulers extended the territory of the Chinese Empire. At its height, the Tang Dynasty extended west to Central Asia, north to Manchuria, and south into modern-day Vietnam.

**Tributary System** The Tang Dynasty dominated its neighbors. The Chinese viewed their country as the *Middle Kingdom*, a society around which the whole world revolved. At the very least, China was the center of a *tributary*
system, an arrangement in which other states had to pay money or provide goods to honor the Chinese emperor. For example, the Silla Kingdom in Korea was not part of China, but it had to pay a large tribute to the emperor. The tributary system cemented China’s economic and political power over several foreign countries, but it also created stability and stimulated trade for all parties involved.

Tang emperors also expected representatives from tributary states to perform a ritual kowtow, a requirement in which anyone greeting the Chinese emperor must bow his or her head until it reached the floor. This act was a way to acknowledge China’s superior status.

**Tang Accomplishments** The Tang Dynasty had some notable achievements. Emperor Tang Taizong (ruled 627–649) further developed modes of transportation that had begun during the Sui Dynasty, such as roads and canals, as well as postal and messenger services. His government successfully reduced the dangers from bandits.

Tang Taizong expanded the empire’s bureaucracy, which developed into an important and ongoing feature of Chinese government. Candidates for the bureaucracy had to pass an extremely rigorous civil service examination. The examination had a tremendous impact on Chinese culture. Since the examination was difficult, education became increasingly important in China, a development that fostered economic growth for many centuries. Further, serving in the bureaucracy was highly regarded. So, just as communities today might take pride in producing an Olympic athlete or a noted actor, communities in China took pride in their natives who won a good position working for the government. Though most bureaucrats earned their positions in government, some were appointed. Aristocratic families had greater access to high-level positions in the bureaucracy than did any other group.

**Spread of Buddhism** In 629, a Chinese Buddhist monk named Xuanzang left China to go on a pilgrimage to India, the birthplace of Buddhism. He traveled west on the Silk Roads to Central Asia, then south and east to India, which he reached in 630. Along the way and in India he met many Buddhist monks and visited Buddhist shrines. In order to gain more insight into Buddhism, he studied for years in Buddhist monasteries and at Nalanda University in Bilar, India—a famous center of Buddhist knowledge. After 17 years away, Xuanzang finally returned to China, where people greeted him as a celebrity. He brought back many Buddhist texts, which he spent the rest of his life translating into Chinese. These writings were highly instrumental in the growth of Buddhist scholarship in China.

**An Lushan** By the eighth century, the Tang Empire already showed signs of weakness. Emperor Hsuan Tsung (ruled 712–756) was not devoted to administering the affairs of government and became distracted by his favorite concubine, Yang Guifei. A military leader named An Lushan orchestrated a rebellion involving about a hundred thousand soldiers, overthrowing Hsuan Tsung in 755. Finally, an army of Uighurs, an ethnic group living in Central Asia on land controlled by China, arrived from the west to restore power to the government and defeat the rebels. The rebellion did tremendous damage.
The death toll from the fighting, combined with the starvation and disease associated with the conflict, reached the millions and maybe the tens of millions. It was probably one of the most devastating wars in human history. The Tang survived, but they never fully recovered their power. They had to pay an annual tribute to the Uighurs. The Tang Dynasty finally collapsed in 907.

**Song Dynasty**

The *Song Dynasty* began in 960 and lasted until 1279. Because nomadic pastoralists from Manchuria invaded its lands, captured the northern part, and set up their own empire (the *Jin*, with a capital in Beijing), the Song came to rule a smaller region than the Tang had. Nevertheless, China under the Song was quite prosperous, and the arts flourished.

**Bureaucracy and Meritocracy** Under the Song, China’s bureaucracy expanded, and the number of bureaucratic positions in government increased. Moreover, Emperor Song Taizu made special efforts to expand the educational opportunities to young men of the lower strata so they could pass the civil service exams. Though the poor were still extremely underrepresented in the

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**SONG AND JIN EMPIRES**

![Map of Song and Jin Empires](image)
bureaucracy, the Chinese system of meritocracy allowed for more upward mobility than any other hiring system of its time.

However, under the Song Dynasty, the bureaucracy had gotten so large it contributed to the empire’s weakness. By creating more positions within the bureaucracy and by paying these officials quite handsomely, Song Taizu increased the costs of government enough that it began drying up China’s surplus wealth.

Another problem was that Song Taizu and other emperors asked some bureaucrats to be responsible for military affairs. Government officials, who were together known as the scholar gentry, had studied in-depth the teachings of Confucius and the Chinese classics, but they were not experts in military tactics and strategy. Their lack of expertise left Chinese armies more vulnerable to nomadic incursions.

A Shifting Capital Because of threats from nomads, the Song Dynasty moved its capital from Chang’an (the modern city of Xian) about 530 miles to the east, to Kaifeng. In 1127, under continuous pressure from incursions by nomads, the empire was forced to move its capital again, this time 400 miles further south, to Hangzhou.

The Southern Song Dynasty survived until 1279, when the nomadic Mongol Empire vanquished the government and established the Yuan Dynasty. In the years leading up to the Mongol conquest of China, the Song Empire had been paying tribute to the Mongol nomads as a way to stave off conquest. However, this tribute was not enough to save China from Mongol domination.

Economic Developments in Post-Classical China

The Tang Dynasty’s efforts to promote agricultural development, improve infrastructure, encourage foreign trade, and spread technology led to rapid prosperity and population growth during the Song Dynasty. For the first 150 years under the Song, China may have grown faster than any country ever had.

Land Reform Reforms in agriculture spurred economic growth. As was the case in many societies of the era, a feudal hierarchy prevented most people from owning any land or from owning sufficient land to live on. As discussed earlier, Wang Mang attempted to redistribute land during the Han Dynasty, when social tensions reached their peak. This created widespread unrest and weakened the Han Dynasty permanently.

Six hundred years after Wang Mang’s failed reforms, the Tang Empire reintroduced an equal-field system, which attempted to ensure that all Chinese families had a parcel of land to cultivate. The empire’s intent was not humanitarian; its goal was to wrest power away from the landed aristocracy. This reform proved effective for about 100 years, resulting in an increase in rural wealth. In the eighth century, though, the landed aristocracy used their money and power to bribe government officials to let them keep owning their land. Though the equal-field system reform did not last, rural wealth did grow, and increased prosperity provided some stability for the countryside.
Agricultural Productivity  Agriculture prospered also because of new methods of production. The Chinese put manure (both human and animal) on the fields to enrich the soil. They built elaborate irrigation systems using ditches, water wheels, pumps, and terraces to increase productivity. New heavy plows pulled by water buffalo or oxen allowed previously unusable land to be cultivated.

Under the Tang Dynasty (618–907), fast-ripening rice (also known as Champa rice) added to Chinese agricultural surpluses. This grain is native to northern Vietnam, which came under the control of China during the Tang Dynasty. Fast-ripening rice allowed peasants in the warmer agricultural region of southern China to grow two crops a year. Thus, both land redistribution and food surpluses were instrumental in spreading China’s prosperity.

Because of the Sui Dynasty’s construction of the Grand Canal, one of the biggest infrastructure efforts of its time, agricultural products from southern China traveled more easily to the less fertile lands of northern China. The Grand Canal moved the centers of agricultural production of China from the barren north to the fertile south.

In most societies in world history prior to the time of the Song, agricultural goods dominated the economy and trade. Song China produced more nonagricultural goods for commercial use than any earlier civilization. Two of these goods stand out: porcelain and silk. Under the Song, China went through proto-industrialization, a phase that precedes and enables full industrialization later, earlier than Western Europe. (Test Prep: Write a paragraph comparing China’s proto-industrialization with the cottage industries of Western Europe. See page 287.)

Urbanization  Like the Abbasid civilizations, Song China featured growing urban areas. Chinese cities impressed Marco Polo, a visitor from Western Europe’s most sophisticated urban area—Venice. Polo wrote extensively about the high levels of urbanization he saw in the thirteenth century.

They use paper money as currency. The men as well as the women are fair-skinned and handsome. Most of them always dress themselves in silk, as a result of the vast quantities of that material produced in Hangzhou, exclusive of what the merchants import from other provinces.

Hangzhou was large—it was home to about one million people—but other Chinese cities were larger. Chang’an had about two million. However, Hangzhou was the center of culture in southern China, the home of poets such as Lu Yu and Xin Qiji. And, located at the southern end of the Grand Canal, it was a center of trade. Like other important cities of the era, such as Novgorod in Russia, Timbuktu in Africa, and Calicut in India, the city grew and prospered as its merchants imported and exported goods. This trade brought diversity to Hangzhou, including a thriving community of Arabs.

Tax Policy  The Song reduced the requirement that people labor for the government. Instead, they paid people to work on public projects. This increased the money in circulation, thereby promoting economic growth.
Metal, Gunpowder, and Guns  Iron and steel production increased greatly in China as people developed their skills in smelting, the process of separating a metal from ore. One major advance in metal production was to convert coal into coke, a process that removes many of the impurities found in coal. By using coke, the Chinese could make metal that was stronger and make better plows, weapons, and bridges.

During the ninth century, Chinese researchers, trying to find elements that might lead to longer or even eternal life, discovered that blending certain ingredients created a powder that, when touched with a flame, exploded. This was gunpowder. They soon learned to use gunpowder to produce both entertaining fireworks displays and weapons. The first guns were made in the Song Dynasty. Over centuries, the technology of making gunpowder and guns spread from China to all parts of Eurasia via traders on the Silk Roads and through the movement of nomadic peoples such as the Mongols along the steppes, the long stretch of grasslands from Mongolia to Hungary.

Foreign Trade  As discussed in earlier chapters, interregional trade along the Silk Roads created many intercultural connections during the Classical Era. After the collapse of classical civilizations such as the Roman and Han empires, activity on the Silk Roads declined dramatically. However, by the eighth and ninth centuries, Arab merchants from the Abbasid Empire revived the land route of the Silk Roads as well as sea routes in the Indian Ocean. Tang China had much to offer the newly revived global trade network, including the compass, paper, and gunpowder. China exported porcelain, tea, and silk. From other parts of Asia, China imported cotton, precious stones, pomegranates, dates, horses, and grapes. These luxury goods appealed to the upper class of Chinese society, whose members reveled in their country’s newfound affluence.

To manage the increasing trade, China developed new financial systems. Because copper coins became too unwieldy to transport for everyday transactions, the government developed a system of credit known as flying cash. This allowed a merchant to deposit paper money under his name in one location and withdraw the same amount at another location. Merchants and tax collectors used abacuses to calculate their transactions. The system of flying cash became the model for the banks of the modern era. Later, Chinese governments would prohibit private individuals and businesses from making paper money, reserving that right for themselves.

Advances in naval technology allowed China to control trade in the South China Sea. Chinese scientists developed the magnetic compass and improved the rudder, both of which helped aid navigation and ship control along the seas. The Chinese junk, developed in the Han Dynasty, was a boat similar to the Southwest Asian dhow (discussed in Chapter 8), had multiple sails and was as long as 400 feet—at least triple the size of the typical Western European ship of its time. The hull of a junk was divided into compartments. The walls making these divisions strengthened the ship for rough voyages at sea and made sinking less likely.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial Instrument</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Origin Date</th>
<th>Early Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coin</td>
<td>Minted precious metals (silver, bronze, gold) with own inherent value</td>
<td>c. 500 B.C.E.</td>
<td>Lydia, Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caravanserai</td>
<td>Inns along trade routes where travelers could trade, rest, and replenish</td>
<td>c. 500 B.C.E.</td>
<td>Persian Empire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper Money</td>
<td>Currency in paper form</td>
<td>c. 800 C.E.</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanseatic League</td>
<td>First common market and confederation of merchant guilds</td>
<td>1296 C.E.</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banking House</td>
<td>Precursor to modern bank</td>
<td>c. 200 B.C.E.</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill of Exchange</td>
<td>A written order without interest which binds one party to pay a fixed sum to another party at a predetermined date in the future</td>
<td>c. 700 C.E.</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Social Structures in China**

Through most of Chinese history, the majority of people lived in rural areas. The Tang and Song eras were no exception. However, this was the first time in China’s history when urban areas grew in prominence. At the height of the Song Dynasty, China was the most urbanized land in the world, boasting several cities containing more than 100,000 people. The largest cities, Chang’an, Hangzhou, and Guangzhou, were cosmopolitan metropolises—active centers of commerce with many entertainment options to offer. Taverns, restaurants, street vendors, markets, theaters, and specialty shops filled with imported luxuries were all available to residents of these bustling cities, many of which were located on the southeastern coast of China. The size and wealth of these cities amazed foreign visitors and traders, who came from as far away as Italy.

**New Social Class** Though urbanization represented a significant development in China’s economic and social landscape, life in rural areas grew more complex as well. As discussed earlier, the Song Dynasty expanded the bureaucracy immensely, opening up opportunities for well-paying jobs to men of modest backgrounds. This expansion created an entirely new social class, the *scholar gentry*. They soon outnumbered the aristocracy, which was comprised of landowners who inherited their wealth. The scholar gentry were educated in Confucian philosophy, had more money than their ancestors, and, because of their numbers, became the most influential social class in China.
Other Classes Three other classes ranked below the scholar gentry: farmers, artisans and craftsmen, and the merchant class. Merchants were considered by the gentry as the lowest in rank because they didn’t produce anything new; they merely profited from the exchange of others’ handiwork and labor. Even so, the merchant was often quite wealthy and held considerably more influence in society than their rank would suggest.

Role of Women As in many societies, in China, men ruled and women assumed subordinate roles. China’s patriarchal society strengthened during the Song and Tang dynasties. One distinctive constraint on women’s activity in China was the practice of foot binding, which began during the Song Dynasty. From a very young age, girls from aristocratic families had their feet wrapped so tightly that the bones did not grow naturally. Though the small feet were considered a sign of beauty, foot binding was quite painful and often made it difficult for women to walk. Many women had to use canes to get around, and some had servants carry them to their desired destinations. Because it restricted a woman’s movement, foot binding was not prevalent among rural peasants. Thus, a bound foot signified social status, something particularly desired when choosing a suitable mate. Often, such practices have served to restrict women and thus limit their contributions to the public sphere.

CHINESE WOOD-BLOCK PRINTING

Source: Thinkstock

With the development of wood block printing in China, people could make multiple copies of art or written texts without laboriously copying each by hand.
Intellectual and Cultural Developments

Perhaps because of China’s increased affluence, better-educated populace, and extensive contact with foreign nations, intellectual pursuits (technology, literature, and visual arts) flourished during the Tang and Song eras.

**Paper and Printing** The Chinese had invented paper as early as the second century C.E., and they developed a system of printing in the seventh century. They were the first culture to use *wood-block printing*. In that method, an artist carves a block of wood so that the carved parts of the wood will appear as blank spaces on the page. The artist then coats the remaining raised parts of the block with ink, and the mirror image of the block is created when pressed against a page. A Buddhist scripture produced in the seventh century is thought to be the world’s first wood-block printed work. (For more on the Gutenberg press, see page 278.)

**Reading and Poetry** The development of paper and printing expanded the availability of books. Though most peasants were illiterate, China’s privileged classes had increased access to literature. Confucian scholars not only consumed literature at a tremendous rate, they also were the major producers of literature throughout the Post-Classical Era. The Tang and Song dynasties’ emphasis on schooling created generations of well-rounded scholar-bureaucrats with leisure time on their hands, which they might spend composing romantic verses or dabbling in painting. These members of a privileged class were the world’s first “Renaissance men.”

The secular backgrounds of many writers were revealed in their poetry. For example, *Li Bo*’s verse of the eighth century was light and airy; his subjects were love, friendship, and the pleasures of wine. (See the example at the beginning of the chapter.) His writing stands in contrast to the more somber poetry of *Du Fu*, in the same century. Du Fu is known as the “poet-historian” of China’s Post-Classical Era. As the Tang Dynasty began to crumble, Du Fu’s writing dealt with the hardships of daily life. The works of these two prolific writers continue to be read in modern times.

**Painting** Another art form that flourished during the Post-Classical Era was landscape painting. Landscape in Chinese literally means “mountain-water.” Human figures on the canvas are miniscule in comparison to the work’s vast empty spaces or mountains. Daoism’s emphasis on nature shows itself in these paintings.

**Religious Diversity in China**

Many Chinese respected the ideals of Daoism and combined Daoist beliefs with Confucianism. The two belief systems existing alongside each other in people’s everyday beliefs and practices. For example, the scholar gentry who created meditative landscape paintings were also well-versed in Confucianism. However, Confucians and Buddhists did not coexist comfortably.
Buddhism had come to China from its birthplace in India via the Silk Roads. Its presence is evident during the anarchic period between the later Han and the Sui dynasties. However, its popularity became widespread during the Tang Dynasty. The seventh century Buddhist monk Xuanzang was instrumental in building Buddhism’s popularity in China.

**Buddhism and Taoism** Monks introduced Buddhism to the Chinese by relating its beliefs to Daoist principles. For example, Buddhism’s idea of dharma became translated as dao (“the way”). Eventually, Buddhist doctrines combined with elements of Daoist traditions to create the syncretic faith *Chan Buddhism*, also known as *Zen Buddhism*. Similar to Taoism, this new form of Buddhism emphasized direct experience and meditation as opposed to formal learning based on scripture.

Thanks to this religious syncretism, Buddhism’s popularity in China grew immensely. Monasteries—homes of monks—appeared in virtually every major city, which became a problem in itself for the Tang bureaucracy. Wealthy converts donated large tracts of land to monasteries, which did not pay taxes, annoying the Confucian bureaucracy.

More broadly, it was difficult for many leaders of the Tang Dynasty, which considered itself the “Middle Kingdom”—the center of world affairs—to accept that a foreign religion would have such prominence in society. Buddhism’s popularity, which drew individuals away from China’s native religions, made Daoists and Confucians quite jealous. Thus, during the eighth century, Tang officials ordered that Buddhist monasteries be closed and their lands seized. Nevertheless, Chan Buddhism remained popular among ordinary Chinese citizens.

**Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism** The Song Dynasty was somewhat friendlier towards Buddhism, but it did not go out of its way to promote the religion, preferring to emphasize China’s native traditions, such as Confucianism, which itself went through changes. Buddhism’s presence had been so strong that many Confucians had begun to adopt its ideals into their daily lives. The development of printing had made Buddhist scriptures widely available to the Confucian scholar gentry. In spite of themselves, the scholars found that they appreciated the thoughtfulness that Buddhism devoted to issues of the soul and the meaning of life. Thus, *Neo-Confucianism*, another syncretic faith, evolved in China between 770 and 840. Neo-Confucianism is a social and ethical philosophy, not a religious belief, that combines rational thought with the metaphysics of Taoism and Buddhism. This new incarnation of Confucianism also became immensely popular in the countries in China’s orbit, including Japan, Korea, and Vietnam.

**Japan**

Though the “Middle Kingdom” was powerful, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam had their own political and cultural traditions. That said, China cast a long shadow
over its neighbors. During the Post-Classical Era, these societies were forced to adapt to the rise of China and grapple with the changes that its predominance brought to their lands.

**Fear of China** During the Post-Classical Era, Japan’s isolation was interrupted by China’s emergence as a global power. Though China did not invade Japan during this time, it did have a presence in nearby Korea, which troubled the Japanese government. Japanese officials worried that the “Middle Kingdom” would soon be encroaching upon their land.

Under Prince *Shotoku Taishi* (lived 574–622), of the dominant Yamato region, Japan responded by attempting to implement Chinese practices in Japan. For example, the prince wrote a new constitution that consolidated power for all of Japan in one ruler. He argued for a centralized government with a merit-based system of selecting bureaucrats. He hired skilled Chinese laborers to come to Japan to share their knowledge in various crafts and construction. The court also sent Japanese nobility to China to study Chinese culture. They promoted Buddhism and Confucianism as supplements to Japan’s traditional Shinto religion, and introduced wood-block printing to Japan (Test Prep: In a paragraph compare Japan’s reaction to China with its reaction to Western powers in the 1800s. See page 454.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Affiliations in Japan Today</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religion</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shinto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: The World Factbook, cia.gov.*

*Many Japanese consider themselves followers of more than one religion.*

**Taika Reforms** After Shotoku’s death, his successor enacted other reforms, known as the *Taika Reforms*, in 646. One goal of the reforms was increasing efficiency; the other was to wrest control of society from the landed aristocracy. The new laws put all farmland under government ownership, which meant that all taxes would be paid directly to the central government, rather
than the nobility. This was a major blow to the power of the feudal lords and a large step toward creating a powerful centralized government.

In the 710, the Fujiwara clan took control of the government and moved the capital city to Nara, which was built in the style of China’s capital city, Chang’an. Indeed, the Fujiwara clan continued in the tradition of Shotoku in modeling itself after Tang China in many ways.

**Return to Decentralized Government** Eventually, however, the power of the aristocracy was too strong, and in 794, the current emperor moved the capital back to Heian, where the emperor had more support. Unlike the Chinese emperors, the emperor of Japan was merely a figurehead to whom the Japanese people gave respect. In the Post-Classical Era, power truly rested in the hands of the Fujiwara family.

Leaders of the empire during the Heian Period (794–1185) still tried to emulate Chinese political traditions. They were not successful, though, as Heian Japan slipped back into a pattern of political decentralization. Though the government had instituted an equal-field system similar to China’s, it failed because of the nobility’s influence. The merit-based bureaucracy actually served to strengthen the nobility because the civil service examination was not open to all social classes.

**The Tale of Genji** Although leaders of Heian Japan failed to consolidate government power, their cultural achievements are notable. Literature flourished during this period. Most notably, a noblewoman known as Murasaki Shikibu, who lived at the Japanese court, wrote *The Tale of Genji*. The main character, Genji, is a prince. As Murasaki tells of his various trials, adventures, and romances, she provides a window into the life of aristocratic Japan. However, the book is more than just a melancholy story about life among Japan’s elite. Earlier books in cultures throughout the world were often collections of loosely connected tales or stories in which characters changed little from beginning to end. However, *The Tale of Genji* focuses on the psychological development of one main character, the way many modern stories do. Because of this focus, it is often cited at the world’s first novel.

**Military Rule** Political weakness and aristocratic greed caused the downfall of the Heian court. Thereafter, the Minamoto clan rose to power. From the end of the twelfth century until the late sixteenth century, power would stay in the hands of the Minamoto family, which installed a shogun, or military ruler, to reign supreme. This shogun was separate from the emperor, who had even less power during this period than before. While the Nara and Heian courts tried to emulate China’s scholarly and courtly traditions, the Minamoto shogunate emphasized military prowess.

Because power became decentralized under the Minamoto clan, noble families returned to battling over estates. To protect their lands, nobles recruited *samurai*, professional warriors who, in return for their sacrifice, received clothing, shelter, and food from their landlord. In the absence of any army or central political force to stabilize the society, the samurai played a central role in the 400-year period (the Kamakura and Muromachi shogunates) after
Feudalism For hundreds of years, Japan had been a feudal society without a centralized government. Landowning aristocrats, the *daimyo*, battled for supreme power over the land, while the majority of people worked as rice farmers.

Japanese feudalism was similar to European feudalism, which is described in Chapter 12. Both featured very little social mobility, and both systems were built upon hereditary hierarchies. In Japan, peasants, known as serfs, were born into lives of economic dependency, while samurai were born into their roles as protectors and daimyo were born into lives of privilege. In Europe, the three groups were serfs, knights, and nobles.

What distinguishes Japanese feudalism from that of Europe was that the daimyo enjoyed much more power than the nobility in Europe did. The daimyo ruled over vast stretches of land and, in reality, were more powerful than either the emperor or the shogun. By contrast, Europe’s hierarchy placed the monarch above the nobility. Though there were periods when authority of the monarch waned and power was distributed among nobility, the main centralized power structure of European feudalism would not change until the Modern Industrial Era.

In Europe, the ideal knight held to the code of chivalry, with duty to countrymen, duty to God, and duty to women, the last expressed through courtly love and the virtues of gentleness and graciousness. In Japan, the code was known as *bushido* and stressed frugality, loyalty, the martial arts, and honor unto death.

Korea

Since it shared a land border with China, Korea had a much more direct relationship with China than Japan. The Tang Dynasty demanded that representatives of the Korean Silla Kingdom perform the ritual kowtow when meeting the Chinese emperor and Silla become a tributary state of China. In order to appease the Chinese, the Korean kingdom agreed. Giving tributes to China had its benefits: Korea began receiving valuable Chinese exports to which it may not have otherwise had access.

Similarity to China Through its tributary relationship, Korea and China were in close contact. Thus Korea emulated many aspects of China’s politics and culture. For example, it modeled its capital city, *Kumsong*, on Chang’an. It centralized its government in the style of the Chinese. Culturally, Koreans adopted both Confucian and Buddhist beliefs. The educated elite studied Confucian classics, while Buddhist doctrine attracted the peasant masses. Koreans adopted the Chinese writing system, which proved to be very awkward. While the long and close contacts between people in China and Korea resulted in many shared words, the Chinese and Korean languages remained structurally very different.
Korean Bureaucracy  One important difference between Korea and China was that the landed aristocracy was more powerful in Korea than in China. As a result, the Korean elite were able to prevent certain Chinese reforms from ever being implemented. For example, though there was a Korean civil service examination, it was not open to peasants. Thus there was no truly merit-based system for entering the bureaucracy.

Vietnam

Vietnam’s adversarial relationship with China stands in stark contrast to Korea’s peaceful one. The Vietnamese realized the benefits of new technology and trade, but they did not willingly give up their own identity to China. Sinification, or the assimilation of Chinese traditions and practices, was not welcomed wholeheartedly in Vietnam.

Trade  The Han Dynasty had expanded south into Vietnam during the Classical Era. It did not significantly alter Vietnam’s culture or government, though it did bring trade to this Southeast Asian land. In exchange for Chinese silk, the Vietnamese exported tortoise shells, ivory, peacock feathers, and pearls.

Language  Vietnamese schools educated their students in Chinese, which led the Vietnamese to develop their own written language based on Chinese characters. They still retained their spoken language, however, which is not at all related to the Chinese language. (Test Prep: Write a paragraph in which you compare and contrast the way Vietnam dealt with the Chinese language with the way Korea dealt with the Chinese language. See page 193.)

Gender and Social Structure  Several aspects of Vietnamese culture differed from Chinese culture, which is why so many resisted Chinese incursion into their lifestyles. For example, women in Vietnamese culture enjoyed greater independence in their married lives than did Chinese women in the Confucian tradition. While the Chinese lived in extended families, the Vietnamese preferred nuclear families (just a wife, husband, and their children). Vietnamese villages operated independently of a national government; political centralization was nonexistent.

Although Vietnam adopted a merit-based bureaucracy of educated men, the Vietnamese system did not function like the Chinese scholar-bureaucracy. Instead of loyalty to the emperor, scholar-officials in Vietnam owed more allegiance to the village peasants. In fact, Vietnamese scholar-officials often led revolts against the government if they deemed it too oppressive. Vietnamese women resented their inferior status under the Chinese, as well as Confucian practices such as polygyny (the practice of having more than one spouse at the same time).

In spite of Vietnamese efforts to maintain the purity of their own culture, sinification did occur. For example, the majority of the Vietnamese converted
to Buddhism and became serious adherents to the faith. Politically, Vietnamese kings modeled their palaces after those in China but with less grandeur and opulence. Formal education continued to be conducted in Chinese.

Military Conflict with China As the Tang Dynasty began to crumble in the eighth century, Vietnamese rebels took the opportunity to drive out China’s occupying army. In their battles against the Chinese, they showed a strong capacity for guerilla warfare, perhaps due to their deep knowledge of their own land. One tactic used by the Vietnamese against the naval forces of the Chinese (and later, the Mongols) was to place sharpened logs in the harbor that were low enough that ships could easily sail in during high tide. However, when the tide went out, the sticks would trap the ships in the harbor, where they could be attacked from land. The Vietnamese won a major victory in 938, when their small army defeated a Chinese force nearly three times larger.

Comparing Japan, Korea, and Vietnam

One of the most important dynamics in the histories of Japan, Korea, and Vietnam was each country’s relationship with China. Each developed its own distinct language and culture, but it did so in the shadow of China. When China was unified, it became the world center of political power, economic wealth, religious and intellectual traditions, and technological innovations. Its smaller neighbors benefited from being so close to China but faced a challenge of maintaining their own distinctive culture.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES: WHO INVENTED GUNPOWDER AND GUNS?

The development of gunpowder and its use in guns revolutionized world history. However, historians have not agreed on who was responsible for starting this revolution.

Chinese Claims and European Doubts While the Chinese long took credit for developing both gunpowder and guns, European historians were traditionally skeptical because they doubted the Chinese had the technological ability to make such advances. For example, Henry Hime, a British military officer, argued in his 1904 book, *Gunpowder and Ammunition: Their Origin and Progress*, that the Chinese “possessed little genius for mechanical or chemical inventions” so they had probably “obtained their first gunpowder and firearms from the West.”

Fireworks Europeans slowly acknowledged Chinese contributions to the technologies that led to the development of guns. They first recognized that the Chinese had invented gunpowder and that knowledge of the explosive substance had been carried by traders and the Mongols to Europe in the thirteenth century. However, European historians continued to argue that the Chinese had used gunpowder only
for fireworks, not for weaponry. Historian Jack Kelly, in a recent book about the history of gunpowder, noted that historians had not moved much beyond Hime’s argument in their views of Chinese abilities. “The notion of China’s benign relationship with gunpowder sprang in part from Western prejudices about the Chinese character. Some viewed the Chinese as dilettantes who stumbled onto the secret of gunpowder but couldn’t envision its potential. Others saw them as pacifist sages who wisely turned away from its destructive possibilities.”

**Agreement** The next step was for Europeans to acknowledge that the Chinese historians were correct, and that the Chinese had begun using gunpowder to make early forms of guns since the tenth century. British scholar Joseph Needham revolutionized Western attitudes toward China with his multivolume work *Science and Civilization in China.* Begun in 1954, it continued after Needham’s death under other scholars and now includes more than 25 volumes. By 1986, Needham called the development of gunpowder “no doubt the greatest of all Chinese military inventions.” And he concluded that the Chinese had developed the first gun “before other peoples knew of the invention at all.”

**KEY TERMS BY THEME**

**ECONOMICS**
- equal-field system
- fast-ripening rice
- proto-industrialization
- flying cash
- paper money
- magnetic compass
- rudder
- junk
- wood-block printing

**SOCIAL STRUCTURES**
- nuclear family
- sinification
- polygyny
- Xuanzang
- Hsuan Tsung
- An Lushan
- scholar gentry
- daimyo

**STATE-BUILDING**
- Sui Dynasty
- Grand Canal
- Hangzhou
- Tang Dynasty
- Middle Kingdom
- Silla Kingdom
- tributary system
- Song Dynasty
- Southern Song
- Taizong
- Song Taizu
- Chang’an
- Kaifeng
- Yuan Dynasty
- Ming Dynasty
- Minamoto clan
- shogun
- samurai
- Kumsong
- guerilla warfare

**CULTURE**
- kowtow
- Uighurs
- foot binding
- Li Bo
- Du Fu
- Chan (Zen)
- Buddhism
- Neo-Confucianism
- Shotoku Taishi
- Taika Reforms
- Fujiwara clan
- Nara
- Heian
- Murasaki Shikibu
- *The Tale of Genji*
- bushido
Questions 1.1 to 1.3 refer to the passage below.

“One alderman shall be appointed for each ward in the capital, and one chief alderman for four wards. The latter shall be responsible for maintaining the household registers and investigating criminal matters. The chief alderman shall be chosen from those men belonging to the wards, of unblemished character, strong and upright, who can discharge the duties of the time effectively. In principle, aldermen of rural villages or of city wards, shall be selected from ordinary subjects belonging to the villages of city wards, who are sincere, incorrupt, and of strong disposition. . . .

The prefects for these districts shall be chosen from local nobles (*kuni no miyatsuko*), of unblemished character, strong and upright, who can discharge the duties of the time effectively. . . . Men of ability and intelligence, who are skilled in writing and arithmetic shall be appointed to assist them in the tasks of governance and book-keeping.”

The Reform Edict of Taika, 646

1.1 The main purpose of this document is to establish or re-establish
(A) traditional, decentralized government structures in Japan
(B) a more centralized government, run by bureaucrats and scholars
(C) a political structure in Japan based on Buddhist beliefs
(D) laws allowing government officials to exploit Japanese peasants

1.2 What statement supports the conclusion that ministers who had traveled to China persuaded Japanese Emperor Shotoku to enact these reforms?
(A) The document describes political reforms that would create a very decentralized government, similar to China’s.
(B) The word *taika* in Japanese means “China.”
(C) The document emphasizes Confucian values, such as education, virtue, and ethical behavior.
(D) Both Japan and China used the words *kuni no miyatsuko* to describe local nobles.

1.3 How did the Taika Reforms affect the political structure of Japan?
(A) Japan became a vassal state of China.
(B) The reforms encouraged wider participation in government because the civil service examination system became open to all people.
(C) The Japanese emperor shed his role as political figurehead and took a new, more active role in political affairs in Japan.
(D) Japan did not sustain the political reforms enacted by the Taika Reforms and soon developed a feudal political structure.
Questions 2.1 to 2.3 refer to the passage below.

"In this part [of the city of Hangzhou, China] are the ten principal markets, though besides these there are a vast number of others in the different parts of the town. The former are all squares of half a mile to the side, and along their front passes the main street, which is 40 paces in width, and runs straight from end to end of the city, crossing many bridges of easy and commodious [convenient] approach. At every four miles of its length comes one of those great squares of 2 miles (as we have mentioned) in compass [i.e., square miles]. So also parallel to this great street, but at the back of the market places, there runs a very large canal, on the bank of which towards the squares are built great houses of stone, in which the merchants from India and other foreign parts store their wares, to be handy for the markets. In each of the squares is held a market three days in the week, frequented by 40,000 or 50,000 persons, who bring thither for sale every possible necessary of life."

Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, c. 1300

2.1 Which of the statements concerning trading cities in China, such as Hangzhou, is most accurate?

(A) Foreigners were not welcome in Chinese trading cities, because they were considered barbarians and had nothing of value to trade.

(B) Many of the people coming to trade in cities in China were Europeans traveling along the Silk Roads.

(C) The invention of "flying cash" made trade easier by enabling Chinese merchants to use paper money instead of cumbersome copper coins.

2.2 What development, which began prior to Marco Polo's travels to China, allowed Europeans to obtain the products of China and other parts of Asia?

(A) The Islamic caliphates and Chinese dynasties, such as the Tang and the Song, grew stronger, so long-distance trade could be conducted with less risk.

(B) The improvement in maritime technology allowed for ocean-going ships to establish sea-trade routes from Asia to Europe via Southern Africa.

(C) The Tang Dynasty expanded into the Middle East, which meant that the trade routes between Europe and Africa were under one ruler.

(D) Europeans defeated the Islamic caliphates, which allowed those Europeans to establish direct contracts with the Tang and the Song Dynasties.
2.3 What products would Indians and other non-Chinese merchants be most likely to purchase in a market such as the one described in the passage?

(A) silk, porcelain, and tea
(B) pepper, nutmeg, and cinnamon
(C) cows, pigs, and oxen
(D) rugs, parchment, and horses

Questions 3.1 and 3.2 refer to the passage below.

“Foot-binding is believed to have begun during, or just before, the Song Dynasty in China around the 10th century, and became widespread within a couple of hundred years. Bound feet were seen as a status symbol for wealthy women who did not need to work, although eventually the practice became widespread.

[Photographer Jo] Farrell writes: ‘Although considered fairly barbaric, it was a tradition that enabled women to find a suitable partner. Matchmakers or mothers-in-law required their son’s betrothed to have bound feet as a sign that she would be a good wife (she would be subservient and without complaint).’”


3.1 One result of the custom of foot-binding during the Song Dynasty was that

(A) the patriarchal system grew stronger, particularly among aristocrats
(B) peasant women suffered more difficulty working than did aristocratic women
(C) women in aristocratic families looked for additional ways to demonstrate their status
(D) aristocratic women resisted the procedure because they considered it barbaric

3.2 During the Post-Classical period, gender relations in China and the societies of Sub-Saharan Africa were

(A) similar in that both societies allowed women to have very little economic or political status
(B) similar because both societies were matrilineal in practice
(C) different because women in China had a greater role in politics and the economy
(D) different because some societies in Sub-Saharan Africa were matrilineal, and women there were not as restricted as women in China
Question 1 refers to the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese Dynasties, 221 B.C.E. to 1279 C.E.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Era</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classical Era</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Han</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post-Classical Era</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sui</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five Dynasties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Answer parts A, B, and C.
   A. Identify and analyze ONE continuity in the methods of political control between one Classical Era dynasty and one Post-Classical Era dynasty.
   B. Identify and analyze ONE change in the social structure between one Classical Era dynasty and one Post-Classical Era dynasty.
   C. Identify and analyze ONE continuity in the economies of one Classical Era dynasty and one Post-Classical Era dynasty.

2. Answer parts A and B.
   A. Identify and explain TWO effects of the spread of Buddhism on China.
   B. Identify and explain ONE effect on Buddhism from contact with Chinese culture.