Reunification of Sui and Tang Dynasties

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Timeline

220 c.e.
End of Han dynasty

220-589 c.e.
Era of Division, political discord, and height of Buddhist influence in China

589-618 c.e.
Rise of Sui dynasty in Northern China; building of Grand Canal

589-618 c.e.
Era of Division, political discord, and height of Buddhist influence in China

618-907 c.e.
Li Yuan won throne; laid basis for golden age in the Tang dynasty; abdicated throne to Son

623-626 c.e.
Tang dynasty

627-649 c.e.
Tang Taizong emperor

690-705 c.e.
Empress Wu; Buddhism peaks

712-756 c.e.
Xuanzong emperor

840s c.e.
Period of Buddhist persecution

907 c.e.
End of Tang dynasty; rise of Song

Timeline adapted from World Civilizations: the Global Experience, 258
Rebuilding the Imperial Edifice in The Sui-Tang Era

- Rise of the Sui dynasty (580c. e.) signaled strong dynastic control in China after the fall of the Han dynasty
- Tang Era following the Sui involved revival of Confucian philosophy and bureaucracy
- Initial rise of Sui dynasty appeared as factional struggle to gain control
Wendi

- Member of Prominent northern Chinese noble family
- Created contacts with northern Zhou empire through marriage alliance between his daughter and ruler of the empire
- Seized throne of son-in-law and proclaimed himself emperor
- 589c.e. conquered Chen kingdom (ruled the South)
- Reunited traditional core areas of Chinese civilization for the first time in 3 ½ centuries
Security of Power
- Obtained support of nomadic military commanders in neighboring areas
- Reconfirmed commanders titles

Security of Support
- Lowered taxes
- Established granaries throughout domain
- Maintained food staple during floods and drought
Yangdi

- Committed patricide to gain throne from Wendi
- Grew father’s conquests
- Defended land
- Established a milder legal code
- Restored examination systems, regulating entry into Bureaucracy
- Promoted scholar-gentry

Sui Excesses and Collapse
Downfall of Sui Dynasty: Pt. 1

- Educational reforms disserviced the upper class
- Yangdi was fond of luxury
- [Yangdi] Forcibly made hundreds of thousands of peasants build palaces, creating a new capital city at Loyang
- [Yangdi] Created a series of canals to link parts of empire
- ^Demands on people seemed limitless
- Constructed game park in new capital
Downfall of Sui Dynasty: Pt. 2

- [Yangdi] led exhausted, angry subjects into unsuccessful wars
- Attempted to bring Korea back under Chinese rule (611-614 c.e.)
- Defeat in central Asia at the hands of Turkic nomads (615 c.e.) spread revolts through empire
- Eventually Yangdi was assassinated by his minister (618 c.e.)
Emergence and Restoration of the Tang Empire: Pt. 1

- Li Yuan, Duke of Tang, emerged victor of the factional struggle to the throne after the assassination of Yangdi
- Li Yuan laid the foundation for the golden age of the Tang dynasty
- Completed construction projects from Sui (The Great Wall)
- Tang army victories led to many nomadic leaders submitting to Tang rule
- Established frontier armies
- Sons of Turkic Tribal leader taken as hostages to ensure good behavior of tribes
Emergence and Restoration of the Tang Empire: Pt. 2

- Empire extended to parts of Tibet in the west, the Red valley homeland of the Vietnamese in the south, and Manchuria in the North
- Korea overrun by Chinese armies
- Vassal kingdom, Silla, established
- The Tang had built an empire that was much larger than even that of early Han empire whose boundaries extended beyond the borders of present-day China.
Rebuilding the Bureaucracy

- Efforts of Tang monarchs to restore and expand imperial bureaucracy were crucial to the restoration of Chinese unity during Tang Dynasty
- Revived scholar-gentry elite
- Leaders needed loyal, well educated officials
- Reworked Confucian ideology
- Scholar-gentry bureaucrats offset aristocratic power and control over court life
- Ministries rose:
  1. One secretariat drafted imperial decrees
  2. A second secretariat monitored reports and petitions
  3. Executive ran ministries (6)- maintained day-to-day life - war - justice - public works
  4. Bureau of Censors’ chief task was to keep track of officials
Growing Importance of the Examination System

- Tang Emperors patronized academics
- Trained state officials and educated them in Confucian classics
- Numbers of educated scholar-gentry (bureaucrats) grew higher than in the Han
- Examination systems greatly expanded
  - Ministry of Rites- administered several kinds of examination
- Only the highest offices were obtained by those able to pass exams in philosophy/legal classics
Growing Importance of the Examination System

- Examinations passed on Chinese literature earned title of jinshi
  - family position secured with prospects of high office
- Success in exams won students special social status
  - Earned the right to wear special clothing
  - Exempted from corporal punishment
- High positions mostly reserved for members of the old aristocracy still
- Merit and ability counted for something; birth and family influence counted for more
State and Religion in the Tang and Song Eras

- Patronage for confucian learning threatened old aristocratic families and threatened Buddhist monastic orders
- Most rulers of pre-Tang era were devout Buddhists
- Salvationists pure land strain of Mahayana Buddhists won conversions
- Members of elite class drawn to the Chan (or Zen in Japan) variant of Buddhism
The Chan variant of Buddhism, also called Zen in Japan and the west attracted members from elite classes.

Zen had great appeal for the educated classes of China.

Zen stressed the importance of meditation and had appreciation for natural and artistic beauty.
Empress Wu (r. 690-705)

Buddhism was a strong social, economic, and political force by the time of Tang unification

- Tried to elevate Buddhism to status of state religion
- Commissioned many Buddhist paintings and sculptures
  - Statues were as tall as two to three stories
  - Large pagodas were built
- Buddhism reached its height in the beginning of the Tang rule
- In the mid-9th century, 50,000 monasteries and hundreds of thousands of Buddhist monks and nuns were present in China

State and Religion in the Tang-Song era
The Anti-Buddhist Backlash

- Buddhists successes aroused hatred of Confucian and Daoists rivals
- Daoist monks tried to appeal to masses by stressing predictive and magical forces
- Confucian scholar-administrators were convinced Buddhism threatened Tang economics
  - monastic lands and resources not taxed
  - state denied labor power - could not tax or conscript peasants working on monastic estates
Emperor Wuzong (r. 841-847 c.e.)

Emperor Wuzong expanded restrictions of Buddhism into open persecution.

- Destroyed thousands of monasteries and Buddhist shrines
- Hundreds of thousands of monks and nuns were forced to abandon monastic orders
  - Returned to civilian lives
  - Again forced into taxation
- Buddhist monastic orders never again had the political power and economic gain experienced in the 1st century of the Tang

Despite severe persecution, Buddhism left a lasting imprint on Chinese art, language, and ideologies, paving the way for the rise of Confucianism.


