CHAPTER 8 CHINA AND THE WORLD

![Map of China with Sui Dynasty highlighted (581-618)]
THE REEMERGENCE OF A UNIFIED CHINA

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- It also meant the incursion of northern nomads, many of whom adopted Chinese customs.
- Disunity was considered unnatural in the eyes of many Chinese and weakened Confucianism’s hold on China, allowing greater acceptance of Buddhism and Daoism among the elite.
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This southward migration toward the Yangzi River Valley gave southern China some 60% of the country’s population by 1000 CE.
But unlike the fall of the western Roman Empire where political fragmentation proved a permanent condition, China regained unity under the Sui dynasty (589-618).

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- The Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal is the longest and oldest man-made waterway in the world, stretching 1,794 km from Beijing to Hangzhou.

- Construction of the Grand Canal began in the late Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC) under the order of Duke Wu of the State of Wu. The canal was initially built to control flooding and transport materials.

- The canal continues to be navigable today, with modern improvements such as locks and tunnels.

- The canal passes through several major cities, including Tianjin, Shijiazhuang, Cangzhou, Dezhou, Jinan, Nanjing, and Hangzhou.

- The canal is a significant cultural and historical landmark, reflecting the ingenuity of ancient Chinese engineers.

- The canal is also an important economic artery, facilitating trade and commerce across China.

- The canal is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, recognized for its historical and cultural significance.
However, no prolonged disintegration of the Chinese state

The Tang (618-907) and the Song (960-1279) dynasties that followed built on the Sui foundations of renewed unity.

Together they established patterns of Chinese life that endured into the twentieth century, despite a fifty-year period of disunity between the two dynasties.

Culturally, this period has been regarded as a “golden age” of arts and literature.

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- Selecting officials on the basis of merit

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Supplying cities with food was possible due to the immense network of internal waterways, stretching perhaps 30,000 miles.

Industrial production soared. China’s iron industry increased its output dramatically.

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In addition, government demands for taxes paid in cash rather than in kind required peasants to sell something in order to meet their obligations. The growing use of paper money as well as financial instruments such as letters of credit and promissory notes further contributed to the commercialization of Chinese society.
Women in the Song Dynasty

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- Under the influence of steppe nomads, women led less restricted lives.
  - Elite women of the Tang dynasty had participated in social life with greater freedom than in classical times.
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Once again Confucian writers highlighted the subordination of women to men and the need to keep males and females separate. But the most compelling expression of a tightening patriarchy lay in foot binding.
Beginning apparently among dancers and courtesans in the tenth or eleventh century CE, this practice involved the tight wrapping of young girls’ feet, usually breaking the bones of the foot and causing intense pain.

During the Tang dynasty, foot binding spread widely among elite families and later became even more widespread in Chinese society.

It was associated with new images of female beauty and eroticism that emphasized small size, delicacy, and reticence.

And a rapidly commercializing economy undermined the position of women in the textile industry as urban workshops and state factories, run by men, increasingly took over the skilled tasks of weaving textiles, especially silk.
Foot binding restricted women to the “inner quarters” due to the pain that now accompanied walking.
CHINA AND NORTHERN NOMADS

- From early times to the nineteenth century, China’s most enduring and intense interaction with foreigners lay to the north, involving nomadic pastoral or semi-agricultural peoples of the steppes
  - Mastery of horse riding
  - Emphasis on raising livestock
- Nomads were drawn to China through trading, raiding, and extorting in order to obtain resources vital to their way of life like grain and other agricultural products as well as a desire for China’s luxury goods
But from the nomads’ point of view, the threat often came from the Chinese, who periodically directed their own military forces deep into the steppes, built the Great Wall to keep nomads out, and often proved unwilling to allow pastoral peoples easy access to trading opportunities within China.
And yet China needed the nomads, particularly its horses, horses that were essential for the Chinese military.

Nomads also controlled much of the Silk Road trading network.

The Chinese came to view China as the “middle kingdom” or the center of the world, infinitely superior to the “barbarians” beyond its borders.

That worldview took shape as a practical system for managing China’s relations with its northern nomads and other non-Chinese peoples.

-A “tribute system”

-A set of practices that required non-Chinese to acknowledge Chinese superiority and their own subordinate place in the world.
Foreigners had to perform the kowtow, a series of ritual bowings and prostrations, and present their tribute, produce of value from their countries, to the Chinese emperor. In return, the emperor would grant permission for foreigners to trade.
But sometimes China was confronting large and powerful nomadic empires like the Xiongnu, established about the same time as the Han dynasty. Rather than tribute, the Chinese were forced to pay a kind of “protection money” to the Xiongnu. Then the Xiongnu refrained from military incursions into China.
But the founders of the Sui and Tang dynasties were of mixed nomad and Chinese ancestry and came from the borderland regions where a blended Chinese/Turkic culture had evolved. So, the boundaries between Chinese and nomadic cultures were rarely culturally fixed boundaries.