

China and the World: East Asian Connections

500–1300

CHAPTER LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To explore the role of China as “superpower” among the third-wave civilizations
- To examine China’s deep influence on East Asia
- To consider the ways in which interaction with other peoples had an impact on China
- To encourage students to question modern assumptions about China

CHAPTER OUTLINE

I. Opening Vignette

- A. Many believe that China will be the next superpower.
- B. China was a major player among the third-wave civilizations.
 1. a China-centered “world order” encompassed most of eastern Asia
 2. China’s borders reached far into Central Asia
 3. its wealthy and cosmopolitan culture attracted visitors from afar
 4. all of China’s neighbors felt its gravitational pull

5. China’s economy and technological innovation had effects throughout Eurasia
- C. China was also changed by its interactions with non-Chinese peoples.
 1. nomadic military threat
 2. international trade as catalyst of change

II. Together Again: The Reemergence of a Unified China

- A. The Han dynasty collapsed around 220 C.E.
 1. led to 300 years of political fragmentation
 2. nomadic incursion from the north
 3. conditions discredited Confucianism in many eyes
 4. Chinese migration southward to Yangzi River valley began
- B. A “Golden Age” of Chinese Achievement
 1. the Sui dynasty (589–618) reunified China
 - a. Sui rulers vastly extended the canal system
 - b. but their ruthlessness and failure to conquer Korea alienated people, exhausted state’s resources
 - c. dynasty was overthrown, but state didn’t disintegrate
 2. Tang (618–907) and Song (960–1279) dynasties built on Sui foundations
 - a. established patterns of Chinese life that lasted into twentieth century

- b. regarded as a golden age of arts and literature
- 3. Tang and Song politics
 - a. six major ministries were created, along with the Censorate for surveillance over government
 - b. examination system revived to staff the bureaucracy
 - c. proliferation of schools and colleges
 - d. a large share of official positions went to sons of the elite
 - e. large landowners continued to be powerful, despite state efforts to redistribute land to the peasants
- 4. economic revolution under the Song
 - a. great prosperity
 - b. rapid population growth (from 50 million–60 million people during Tang dynasty to 120 million by 1200)
 - c. great improvement in agricultural production
 - d. China was the most urbanized region in the world
 - e. great network of internal waterways (canals, rivers, lakes)
 - f. great improvements in industrial production
 - g. invention of print (both woodblock and movable type)
 - h. best navigational and shipbuilding technology in the world
 - i. invention of gunpowder
- 5. production for the market rather than for local consumption was widespread
 - a. cheap transportation allowed peasants to grow specialized crops
 - b. government demanded payment of taxes in cash, not in kind
 - c. growing use of paper money and financial instruments
- C. Women in the Song Dynasty
 - 1. the era wasn't very "golden" for women
 - 2. during the Tang dynasty, elite women in the north had been allowed greater freedom (influence of steppe nomads)

- 3. Song: tightening of patriarchal restrictions on women
- 4. literature highlighted the subjection of women
- 5. foot binding started in tenth or eleventh century C.E.
 - a. was associated with images of female beauty and eroticism
 - b. kept women restricted to the house
- 6. textile production became larger scale, displacing women from their traditional role in the industry
 - a. women found other roles in cities
 - b. prosperity of the elite created demand for concubines, entertainers, courtesans, prostitutes
- 7. in some ways the position of women improved
 - a. property rights expanded
 - b. more women were educated, in order to raise sons better

III. China and the Northern Nomads: A Chinese World Order in the Making

- A. For most of its history, China's most enduring interaction with foreigners was in the north, with the peoples of the steppes.
 - 1. northern nomads typically lived in small kinship-based groups
 - 2. occasional creation of powerful states or confederations
 - 3. pastoral societies needed grain and other farm products from China
 - 4. leaders wanted Chinese manufactured and luxury goods
 - 5. steppe pressure and intrusion was a constant factor in Chinese history for 2,000 years
 - 6. nomads often felt threatened by the Chinese
 - a. Chinese military attacks on the steppes
 - b. Great Wall
 - 7. China needed the nomads
 - a. steppes provided horses and other goods
 - b. nomads controlled much of the Silk Roads

- B. The Tribute System in Theory
 1. the Chinese understood themselves as the center of the world (“middle kingdom”), far superior to the “barbarian” outsiders
 2. establishment of “tribute system” to manage relations with non-Chinese peoples
 - a. non-Chinese authorities must acknowledge Chinese superiority
 - b. present tribute to the emperor
 - c. would receive trading privileges and “bestowals” in return (often worth more than the tribute)
 3. the system apparently worked for centuries
- C. The Tribute System in Practice
 1. but the system disguised contradictory realities
 2. some nomadic empires could deal with China on at least equal terms
 - a. Xiongnu confederacy (established around 200 B.C.E.)
 - b. Turkic empires of Mongolia were similar
 3. steppe nomads usually did not want to conquer and rule China
 - a. preferred extortion
 - b. but nomads moved in when the Chinese state broke down
 - c. several steppe states took over parts of northern China
- D. Cultural Influence across an Ecological Frontier
 1. nomads who ruled parts of China often adopted Chinese ways
 2. but Chinese culture did not have great impact on steppe nomads
 - a. pastoral societies retained their own cultural patterns
 - b. most lived where Chinese-style agriculture was impossible
 3. interaction took the form of trade, military conflict, negotiations, extortion, and some cultural influence

4. steppe culture influenced the parts of northern China that were ruled frequently by nomads
 - a. founders of Sui and Tang dynasties were of mixed blood
 - b. Tang dynasty: fad among northern Chinese elites for anything connected to “western barbarians”

IV. Coping with China: Comparing Korea, Vietnam, and Japan

- A. The emerging states and civilizations of Korea, Vietnam, and Japan also had tributary relationships with China.
 1. agricultural, sedentary societies
 2. their civilizations were shaped by proximity to China but did not become Chinese
 3. similar to twentieth-century Afro-Asian societies that accepted elements of Western culture while maintaining political/cultural independence
- B. Korea and China
 1. interaction with China started with temporary Chinese conquest of northern Korea during the Han dynasty, with some colonization
 2. Korean states emerged in fourth–seventh centuries C.E.
 - a. the states were rivals; also resisted Chinese political control
 - b. seventh century: the Silla kingdom allied with Tang dynasty China to bring some political unity
 3. Korea generally maintained political independence under the Silla (688–900), Koryo (918–1392), and Yi (1392–1910) dynasties
 - a. but China provided legitimacy for Korean rulers
 - b. efforts to replicate Chinese court life and administration
 - c. capital city Kumsong modeled on Chinese capital Chang’an
 4. acceptance of much Chinese culture
 - a. Chinese luxury goods, scholarship, and religious influence

- b. Confucianism had negative impact on Korean women, especially after 1300
- 5. Korea maintained its Korean culture
 - a. Chinese cultural influence had little effect on Korea's serf-like peasants or large slave population
 - b. only Buddhism moved beyond the Korean elite
 - c. examination system for bureaucrats never won prominence
 - d. in 1400s, Korea developed a phonetic alphabet (hangul)
- C. Vietnam and China
 - 1. the experience of Vietnam was broadly similar to that of Korea
 - 2. but Vietnam's cultural heartland in the Red River valley was part of the Chinese state from 111 B.C.E. to 939 C.E.
 - a. real effort at cultural assimilation of elite
 - b. provoked rebellions
 - 3. Vietnamese rulers adopted the Chinese approach to government
 - a. examination system helped undermine established aristocrats
 - b. elite remained deeply committed to Chinese culture
 - 4. much of distinctive Vietnamese culture remained in place
 - a. language, cockfighting, betel nuts, greater roles for women
 - b. kept nature goddesses and a female Buddha in popular belief
 - c. developed a variation of Chinese writing, chu nom (southern script)
- D. Japan and China
 - 1. Japan was never invaded or conquered by China, so borrowing of Chinese culture was voluntary
 - 2. main period of cultural borrowing was seventh–ninth centuries C.E., when first unified Japanese state began to emerge
 - a. creation of Japanese bureaucratic state modeled on China began with Shotoku Taishi (572–622)
 - b. large-scale missions to China to learn
 - c. Seventeen Article Constitution
 - d. two capital cities (Nara and then Heian) were founded, both modeled on Chinese capital (Chang'an)
 - 3. elements of Chinese culture took root in Japan
 - a. several schools of Chinese Buddhism
 - b. art, architecture, education, medicine, religious views
 - c. Chinese writing system
 - 4. Japanese borrowings were selective
 - 5. Japan never created an effective centralized and bureaucratic state
 - a. political power became decentralized
 - b. local authorities developed their own military forces (samurai)
 - 6. religious distinctiveness
 - a. Buddhism never replaced native belief system
 - b. the way of the kami (sacred spirits), later called Shinto
 - 7. distinctive literary and artistic culture
 - a. unique writing system mixed Chinese characters with phonetic symbols
 - b. early development of tanka (highly stylized poetry)
 - c. highly refined aesthetic court culture, especially in Heian period (794–1192)
 - 8. elite women escaped most of Confucian oppression
- V. **China and the Eurasian World Economy**
 - A. Spillovers: China's Impact on Eurasia
 - 1. many of China's technological innovations spread beyond its borders
 - a. salt production through solar evaporation
 - b. papermaking
 - c. printing (though resisted by the Islamic world)
 - d. gunpowder invented ca. 1000, but used differently after it reached Europe
 - e. Chinese textile, metallurgical, and naval technologies also stimulated imitation and innovation (e.g., magnetic compass)

2. Chinese prosperity stimulated commercial life all over Eurasia
- B. On the Receiving End: China as Economic Beneficiary
 1. China learned cotton and sugar cultivation and processing from India
 2. China was transformed around 1000 by introduction of new rice strains from Vietnam
 3. technological creativity was spurred by cross-cultural contact
 4. growing participation in Indian Ocean trade
 - a. foreign merchant settlements in southern Chinese ports by Tang era
 - b. sometimes brought violence, e.g., massive massacre of foreigners in Canton in the 870s
 - c. transformation of southern China to production for export instead of subsistence

VI. China and Buddhism

- A. Buddhism was India's most important gift to China.
 1. China's only large-scale cultural borrowing until Marxism
 2. China was the base for Buddhism's spread to Korea and Japan
- B. Making Buddhism Chinese
 1. Buddhism entered China via Silk Roads in first–second centuries C.E.
 - a. had little appeal at first
 - b. Indian culture was too different from Chinese
 2. Buddhism took root 300–800 C.E.
 - a. collapse of the Han dynasty ca. 200 C.E. brought chaos and discrediting of Confucianism
 - b. nomadic rulers in northern China favored Buddhism
 - c. Buddhism was comforting
 - d. monasteries provided increasing array of social services
 - e. Buddhists appeared to have access to magical powers

VII. Reflections: Why Do Things Change?

- A. Change and transformation are constants in human history.
 1. explaining why and how societies change is historians' most central issue
 2. disagreement about what is the most important catalyst of change
- B. The case of China illustrates the range of factors that drive change.
 - f. serious effort to present Buddhism in a form accessible to the Chinese
 - g. it was Mahayana form of Buddhism that became popular

1. world historians tend to find contact with strangers to be the primary source of change
2. the history of China and East Asia helps illustrate this view
3. but perhaps it's misleading to distinguish between internal and external sources of change

LECTURE STRATEGIES