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China and the World

East Asian Connections

500–1300



The Reemergence of a Unified China

A “Golden Age” of Chinese
Achievement

Women in the Song Dynasty

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

The Tribute System in Theory

The Tribute System in Practice

Cultural Influence across an
Ecological Frontier

Coping with China: Comparing Korea, Vietnam, and Japan

Korea and China

Vietnam and China

Japan and China

China and the Eurasian World Economy

Spillovers: China’s Impact on Eurasia

On the Receiving End: China as
Economic Beneficiary

China and Buddhism

Making Buddhism Chinese

Losing State Support: The Crisis of
Chinese Buddhism

Reflections: Why Do Things Change?

Considering the Evidence

Documents: The Making of
Japanese Civilization

Visual Sources: The Leisure Life of
China’s Elites

“China will be the next superpower.”¹ That was the frank assertion of an article in the British newspaper *The Guardian* in June 2006. Nor was it alone in that assessment. As the new millennium dawned, headlines with this message appeared with increasing frequency in public lectures, in newspaper and magazine articles, and in book titles all across the world. China’s huge population, its booming economy, its massive trade surplus with the United States, its entry into world oil markets, its military potential, and its growing presence in global political affairs—all of this suggested that China was headed for a major role, perhaps even a dominant role, in the world of the twenty-first century. Few of these authors, however, paused to recall that China’s prominence on the world stage was hardly something new or that its nineteenth- and twentieth-century position as a “backward,” weak, or dependent country was distinctly out of keeping with its long history. Is China perhaps poised to resume in the twenty-first century a much older and more powerful role in world affairs?

IN THE WORLD OF THIRD-WAVE CIVILIZATIONS, even more than during the classical era that preceded it, China cast a long shadow. Its massive and powerful civilization, widely imitated by adjacent peoples, gave rise to a China-centered “world order” encompassing most of eastern Asia.² China extended its borders deep into Central Asia, while its wealthy and cosmopolitan culture attracted visitors from all over Eurasia. None of its many neighbors—whether

Chinese Astronomy: During classical and postclassical times, the impressive achievements of Chinese astronomy included the observation of sunspots, supernovae, and solar and lunar eclipses as well as the construction of elaborate star maps and astronomical devices such as those shown here. The print itself is of Japanese origin and shows a figure wearing the dragon robes of a Chinese official. It illustrates the immense cultural influence of China on its smaller Japanese neighbor. (Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)

nomadic peoples to the north and west or smaller peripheral states such as Tibet, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam—could escape its gravitational pull. All of them had to deal with China. Far beyond these near neighbors, China’s booming economy and many technological innovations had ripple effects all across Eurasia.

Even as China so often influenced the world, it too was changed by its many interactions with non-Chinese peoples. Northern nomads—“barbarians” to the Chinese—frequently posed a military threat and on occasion even conquered and ruled parts of China. The country’s growing involvement in international trade stimulated important social, cultural, and economic changes within China itself. Buddhism, a religion of Indian origin, took root in China, and, to a lesser extent, so did Christianity and Islam. In short, China’s engagement with the wider world became a very significant element in a global era of accelerating connections.

The Reemergence of a Unified China

The collapse of the Han dynasty around 220 C.E. ushered in more than three centuries of political fragmentation in China and signaled the rise of powerful and locally entrenched aristocratic families. It also meant the incursion of northern nomads, many of whom learned Chinese, dressed like Chinese, married into Chinese families, and governed northern regions of the country in a Chinese fashion. Such conditions of disunity, unnatural in the eyes of many thoughtful Chinese, discredited Confucianism and opened the door to a greater acceptance of Buddhism and Daoism among the elite.

Those centuries also witnessed the beginning of Chinese migration southward toward the Yangzi River valley, a movement of people that gave southern China some 60 percent of the country’s population by 1000. That movement of Chinese people, accompanied by their intensive agriculture, set in motion a vast environmental transformation, marked by the destruction of the old-growth forests that once covered much of the country and the retreat of the elephants that had inhabited those lands. Around 800 C.E., the Chinese official and writer Liu Zongyuan lamented what was happening.

A tumbled confusion of lumber as flames on the hillside crackle
Not even the last remaining shrubs are safeguarded from destruction
Where once mountain torrents leapt—nothing but rutted gullies.³

A “Golden Age” of Chinese Achievement

Unlike the fall of the western Roman Empire, where political fragmentation proved to be a permanent condition, China regained its unity under the Sui dynasty (589–618). Its emperors solidified that unity by a vast extension of the country’s canal system, stretching some 1,200 miles in length and described by one scholar as “an engineering feat without parallel in the world of its time.”⁴ Those canals linked northern and southern China economically and contributed

■ Change

Why are the centuries of the Tang and Song dynasties in China sometimes referred to as a “golden age”?

much to the prosperity that followed. But the ruthlessness of Sui emperors and a futile military campaign to conquer Korea exhausted the state's resources, alienated many people, and prompted the overthrow of the dynasty.

This dynastic collapse, however, witnessed no prolonged disintegration of the Chinese state. The two dynasties that followed—the Tang (618–907) and the Song (960–1279)—built on the Sui foundations of renewed unity (see Map 9.1). 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 era

Map 9.1 Tang and Song Dynasty China

During the postclassical millennium, China interacted extensively with its neighbors. The Tang dynasty extended Chinese control deep into Central Asia, while the Song dynasty witnessed incursions by the nomadic Jurchen people, who created the Jin Empire, which ruled parts of northern China.



has long been regarded as a “golden age” of arts and literature, setting standards of excellence in poetry, landscape painting, and ceramics. (See *Visual Sources: The Leisure Life of Chinese Elites*, pp. 417–23, for Chinese painting during this time.) Particularly during the Song dynasty, an explosion of scholarship gave rise to Neo-Confucianism, an effort to revive Confucian thinking while incorporating into it some of the insights of Buddhism and Daoism.

Politically, the Tang and Song dynasties built a state structure that endured for a thousand years. Six major ministries—personnel, finance, rites, army, justice, and public works—were accompanied by the Censorate, an agency that exercised surveillance over the rest of the government, checking on the character and competence of public officials. To staff this bureaucracy, the examination system was revived and made more elaborate, encouraged by the ability to print books for the first time in world history. Efforts to prevent cheating on the exams included searching candidates entering the examination hall and placing numbers rather than names on their papers. Schools and colleges proliferated to prepare candidates for the rigorous exams, which became a central feature of upper-class life. A leading world historian has described Tang dynasty China as “the best ordered state in the world.”⁵

Selecting officials on the basis of merit represented a challenge to established aristocratic families’ hold on public office. Still, a substantial percentage of official positions went to the sons of the privileged, even if they had not passed the exams. Moreover, because education and the examination system grew far more rapidly than the number of official positions, many who passed lower-level exams could not be accommodated with a bureaucratic appointment. Often, however, they were able to combine landowning and success in the examination system to maintain an immense cultural prestige and prominence in their local areas. Despite the state’s periodic efforts to redistribute land in favor of the peasantry, the great families of large landowners continued to encroach on peasant plots. This has been a recurring pattern in rural China from classical times to the present.

Underlying these cultural and political achievements was an “economic revolution” that made Song dynasty China “by far the richest, most skilled, and most populous country on earth.”⁶ The most obvious sign of China’s prosperity was its rapid growth in population, which jumped from about 50 million or 60 million during the Tang dynasty to 120 million by 1200. Behind this doubling of the population were remarkable achievements in agricultural production, particularly the adoption of a fast-ripening and drought-resistant strain of rice from Vietnam.

Many people found their way to the cities, making China the most urbanized country in the world. Dozens of Chinese cities numbered over 100,000, while the Song dynasty capital of Hangzhou was home to more than a million people. A Chinese observer in 1235 provided a vivid description of that city.⁷ Specialized markets abounded for meat, herbs, vegetables, books, rice, and much more, with troupes of actors performing for the crowds. Restaurants advertised their unique offerings—sweet bean soup, pickled dates, juicy lungs, meat pies, pigs’ feet—and some offered vegetarian fare for religious banquets. Inns of various kinds appealed to different



Kaifeng

This detail comes from a huge watercolor scroll, titled *Upper River during Qing Ming Festival*, originally painted during the Song dynasty. It illustrates the urban sophistication of Kaifeng and other Chinese cities at that time and has been frequently imitated and copied since then. (Palace Museum, Beijing)

groups. Those that served only wine, a practice known as “hitting the cup,” were regarded as “unfit for polite company.” “Luxuriant inns,” marked by red lanterns, featured prostitutes, and “the wine chambers [were] equipped with beds.” Specialized agencies managed elaborate dinner parties for the wealthy, complete with a Perfume and Medicine Office to “help sober up the guests.” Schools for musicians offered thirteen different courses. Numerous clubs provided companionship for poets, fishermen, Buddhists, physical fitness enthusiasts, antiques collectors, horse lovers, and many other groups. No wonder that the Italian visitor Marco Polo described Hangzhou later in the thirteenth century as “beyond dispute the finest and noblest [city] in the world.”⁸ (See Document 8.2, pp. 359–62, for a fuller description of Marco Polo’s impressions of Hangzhou.)

Supplying these cities with food was made possible by an immense network of internal waterways—canals, rivers, and lakes—stretching perhaps 30,000 miles. They provided a cheap transportation system that bound the country together economically and created the “world’s most populous trading area.”⁹

Industrial production likewise soared. In both large-scale enterprises employing hundreds of workers and in smaller backyard furnaces, China’s iron industry increased its output dramatically. By the eleventh century, it was providing the government with 32,000 suits of armor and 16 million iron arrowheads annually, in addition to supplying metal for coins, tools, construction, and bells in Buddhist monasteries. Technological innovation in other fields also flourished. Inventions in printing, both woodblock and movable type, generated the world’s first printed books, and by 1000 relatively cheap books on religious, agricultural, mathematical, and medical topics became widely available in China. Its navigational and ship-building technologies led the world. The Chinese invention of gunpowder created within a few centuries a revolution in military affairs that had global dimensions.

Most remarkably, perhaps, all of this occurred within the world's most highly commercialized society, in which producing for the market, rather than for local consumption, became a very widespread phenomenon. Cheap transportation allowed peasants to grow specialized crops for sale, while they bought rice or other staples on the market. 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. Two prominent scholars have described the outcome: "Output increased, population grew, skills multiplied, and a burst of inventiveness made Song China far wealthier than ever before—or than any of its contemporaries."¹⁰

Women in the Song Dynasty

■ Change

In what ways did women's lives change during the Tang and Song dynasties?

The "golden age" of Song dynasty China was perhaps less than "golden" for many of the country's women, for that era marked yet another turning point in the history of Chinese patriarchy. Under the influence of steppe nomads, whose women led less restricted lives, elite Chinese women of the Tang dynasty era, at least in the north, had participated in social life with greater freedom than in classical times. Paintings and statues from that time show aristocratic women riding horses, while the Queen Mother of the West, a Daoist deity, was widely worshipped by female Daoist priests and practitioners (see p. 255 and Visual Sources 9.2 and 9.5, pp. 419 and 422). By the Song dynasty, however, a reviving Confucianism and rapid economic growth seemed to tighten patriarchal restrictions on women and to restore some of the earlier Han dynasty images of female submission and passivity.

Once again Confucian writers highlighted the subordination of women to men and the need to keep males and females separate in every domain of life. The Song dynasty historian and scholar Sima Guang (1019–1086) summed up the prevailing view: "The boy leads the girl, the girl follows the boy; the duty of husbands to be resolute and wives to be docile begins with this."¹¹ Women were also frequently viewed as a distraction to men's pursuit of a contemplative and introspective life. The remarriage of widows, though legally permissible, was increasingly condemned, for "to walk through two courtyards is a source of shame for a woman."¹²

The most compelling expression of a tightening patriarchy lay in foot binding. Apparently beginning among dancers and courtesans in the tenth or eleventh century C.E., 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, all of which were necessarily produced by foot binding. It certainly served to keep women restricted to the "inner quarters," where Confucian tradition asserted that they belonged. Many

mothers imposed this painful procedure on their daughters, perhaps to enhance their marriage prospects and to assist them in competing with concubines for the attention of their husbands.¹³

Furthermore, a rapidly commercializing economy undermined the position of women in the textile industry. Urban workshops and state factories, run by men, increasingly took over the skilled tasks of weaving textiles, especially silk, which had previously been the work of rural women. But as their economic role in textile production declined, other opportunities beckoned in an increasingly prosperous Song China. In the cities, women operated restaurants, sold fish and vegetables, and worked as maids, cooks, and dressmakers. The growing prosperity of elite families funneled increasing numbers of women into roles as concubines, entertainers, courtesans, and prostitutes. Their ready availability surely reduced the ability of wives to negotiate as equals with their husbands, setting women against one another and creating endless household jealousies.

In other ways, the Song dynasty witnessed more positive trends in the lives of women. Their property rights expanded, in terms of both controlling their own dowries and inheriting property from their families. “Neither in earlier nor in later periods,” writes one scholar, “did as much property pass through women’s hands” as during the Song dynasty.¹⁴ Furthermore, lower-ranking but ambitious officials strongly urged the education of women, so that they might more effectively raise their sons and increase the family’s fortune. Song dynasty China, in short, offered a mixture of tightening restrictions and new opportunities to its women.

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

Chinese history has been subjected to two enduring misconceptions in popular thinking, if not in scholarly writing. First, it was often viewed as the story of an impressive but largely static civilization. In fact, however, China changed substantially over the centuries as its state structures evolved, as its various cultural traditions mixed and blended, as its economy expanded, as its population grew and migrated to the south, and as its patriarchy altered in tone and emphasis. A second misconception has portrayed China as a self-contained civilization. The balance of this chapter challenges this impression by showing how China’s many interactions with



Foot Binding

The two young women pictured in this late-nineteenth-century photograph have bound feet, while the boy standing between them does not. A girl of a similar age would likely have begun this painful process already. The practice, dating back to around 1000 c.e., lasted into the twentieth century, when it was largely eliminated by reformist and Communist governments. (Photograph courtesy Peabody Essex Museum; image #A9392)

Snapshot Key Moments in the History of Postclassical China

Collapse of Han dynasty; end of classical era	220
Political fragmentation of China; incursion of nomads in the north; Buddhism takes root	220–581
Sui dynasty; reunification of China	589–618
Reign of Emperor Wendi; state support for Buddhism	581–604
Tang dynasty; golden age of Chinese culture; expansion into Central Asia; high point of Chinese influence in Japan	618–907
Withdrawal of Chinese military forces from Korea	688
Reign of Empress Wu, China's only female emperor	690–705
State action against Buddhism	9th century
Political breakdown between dynasties	907–960
Vietnam establishes independence from China	939
Song dynasty; China's economic revolution; northern China ruled by peoples of nomadic background (Khitan, Jurchen)	960–1279
Yuan dynasty; Mongol rule of China	1271–1368
Ming dynasty; Chinese rule resumed	1368–1644
Maritime expeditions in the Indian Ocean	1405–1433

a larger Eurasian world shaped both China's own development and that of classical and postclassical world history more generally.

■ Connection

How did the Chinese and their nomadic neighbors to the north view each other?

From early times to the nineteenth century, China's most enduring and intense interaction with foreigners lay to the north, involving the many nomadic pastoral or semi-agricultural peoples of the steppes. Living in areas unable to sustain Chinese-style farming, the northern nomads had long focused their economies around the raising of livestock (sheep, cattle, goats) and the mastery of horse riding. Organized locally in small, mobile, kinship-based groups, sometimes called tribes, these peoples also periodically created much larger and powerful states or confederations that could draw upon the impressive horsemanship and military skills of virtually the entire male population of their societies. Such specialized pastoral societies needed grain and other agricultural products from China, and their leaders developed a taste for Chinese manufactured and luxury goods—wine and silk, for example—with which they could attract and reward followers. Thus the nomads were drawn like a magnet toward China, trading, raiding, and extorting in order to obtain the resources so vital to their way of life. For 2,000 years or more, pressure from the steppes and the intrusion of nomadic peoples were constant factors in China's historical development.

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 the nomads out, and often proved unwilling to allow pastoral peoples easy access to trading opportunities within China.¹⁵ And yet the Chinese needed the nomads. Their lands were the source of horses, so essential for the Chinese military. Other products of the steppes and the forests beyond, such as skins, furs, hides, and amber, were also of value in China. Furthermore, pastoral nomads controlled much of the Silk Road trading network, which funneled goods from the West into China. The continuing interaction between China and the northern nomads brought together peoples occupying different environments, practicing different economies, governing themselves with different institutions, and thinking about the world in quite different ways.

The Tribute System in Theory

An enduring outcome of this cross-cultural encounter was a particular view the Chinese held of themselves and of their neighbors, fully articulated by the time of the Han dynasty (200 B.C.E.–200 C.E.) and lasting for more than two millennia. That understanding cast China as the “middle kingdom,” the center of the world, infinitely superior to the “barbarian” peoples beyond its borders. With its long history, great cities, refined tastes, sophisticated intellectual and artistic achievements, bureaucratic state, literate elite, and prosperous economy, China represented “civilization.” All of this, in Chinese thinking, was in sharp contrast to the rude cultures and primitive life of the northern nomads, who continually moved about “like beasts and birds,” lived in tents, ate mostly meat and milk, and practically lived on their horses, while making war on everyone within reach. Educated Chinese saw their own society as self-sufficient, requiring little from the outside world, while barbarians, quite understandably, sought access to China’s wealth and wisdom. Furthermore, China was willing to permit that access under controlled conditions, for its sense of superiority did not preclude the possibility that barbarians could become civilized Chinese. China was a “radiating civilization,” graciously shedding its light most fully to nearby barbarians and with diminished intensity to those farther away.¹⁶

Such was the general understanding of literate Chinese about their own civilization in relation to northern nomads and other non-Chinese peoples. That worldview also took shape as a practical system for managing China’s relationship with these people. Known to us as the “tribute system,” it was a set of practices that required non-Chinese authorities to acknowledge Chinese superiority and their own subordinate place in a Chinese-centered world order. Foreigners seeking access to China had to send a delegation to the Chinese court, where they would 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 for these expressions of submission, he would grant permission for foreigners to trade in China’s rich markets and would provide them with gifts or “bestowals,” often worth far

■ Connection

What assumptions underlay the tribute system?



The Tribute System

This Qing dynasty painting shows an idealized Chinese version of the tribute system. The Chinese emperor receives barbarian envoys, who perform rituals of subordination and present tribute in the form of a horse.

(Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY)

more than the tribute they had offered. This was the mechanism by which successive Chinese dynasties attempted to regulate their relationships with northern nomads; with neighboring states such as Korea, Vietnam, Tibet, and Japan; and, after 1500, with those European barbarians from across the sea.

Often, this system seemed to work. Over the centuries, countless foreign delegations proved willing to present their tribute, say the required words, and perform the necessary rituals in order to gain access to the material goods of China. Aspiring non-Chinese rulers also gained prestige as they basked in the reflected glory of even this subordinate association with the great Chinese civilization. The official titles, seals of office, and ceremonial robes they received from China proved useful in their local struggles for power.

The Tribute System in Practice

■ Connection

How did the tribute system in practice differ from the ideal Chinese understanding of its operation?

But the tribute system also disguised some realities that contradicted its assumptions. Frequently, China was confronting not separate and small-scale barbarian societies, but large and powerful nomadic empires able to deal with China on at least equal terms. An early nomadic confederacy was that of the Xiongnu, established about the same time as the Han dynasty and eventually reaching from Manchuria to Central Asia (see Map 4.5, p. 159). Devastating Xiongnu raids into northern China persuaded the Chinese emperor to negotiate an arrangement that recognized the nomadic state as a political equal, promised its leader a princess in marriage, and, most important, agreed to supply him annually with large quantities of grain, wine, and silk. Although these goods were officially termed “gifts,” granted in accord with the tribute system, they were in fact tribute in reverse or even protection money. In return for these goods, so critical for the functioning of the nomadic state, the Xiongnu agreed to refrain from military incursions into China. The basic realities of the situation were summed up in this warning to the Han dynasty in the first century B.C.E.:

Just make sure that the silks and grain stuffs you bring the Xiongnu are the right measure and quality, that’s all. What’s the need for talking? If the goods you deliver are up to measure and good quality, all right. But if there is any deficiency or the

quality is no good, then when the autumn harvest comes, we will take our horses and trample all over your crops.¹⁷

Something similar occurred during the Tang dynasty as a series of Turkic empires arose in Mongolia. Like the Xiongnu, they too extorted large “gifts” from the Chinese. One of these peoples, the Uighurs, actually rescued the Tang dynasty from a serious internal revolt in the 750s. In return, the Uighur leader gained one of the Chinese emperor’s daughters as a wife and arranged a highly favorable exchange of poor-quality horses for high-quality silk that brought half a million rolls of the precious fabric annually into the Uighur lands. Despite the rhetoric of the tribute system, the Chinese were clearly not always able to dictate the terms of their relationship with the northern nomads.

Steppe nomads were generally not much interested in actually conquering and ruling China. It was easier and more profitable to extort goods from a functioning Chinese state. On occasion, though, that state broke down, and various nomadic groups moved in to “pick up the pieces,” conquering and governing parts of China. Such a process took place following the fall of the Han dynasty and again after the collapse of the Tang dynasty, when the Khitan (907–1125) and then the Jin or Jurchen (1115–1234) peoples established states that encompassed parts of northern China as well as major areas of the steppes to the north. Both of them required the Chinese Song dynasty, located farther south, to deliver annually huge quantities of silk, silver, and tea, some of which found its way into the Silk Road trading network. The practice of “bestowing gifts on barbarians,” long a part of the tribute system, allowed the proud Chinese to imagine that they were still in control of the situation even as they were paying heavily for protection from nomadic incursion. Those gifts, in turn, provided vital economic resources to nomadic states.

Cultural Influence across an Ecological Frontier

When nomadic peoples actually ruled parts of China, some of them adopted Chinese ways, employing Chinese advisers, governing according to Chinese practice, and, at least for the elite, immersing themselves in Chinese culture and learning. This process of “becoming Chinese” went furthest among the Jurchen, many of whom lived in northern China and learned to speak Chinese, wore Chinese clothing, married Chinese husbands and wives, and practiced Buddhism or Daoism. On the whole, however, Chinese culture had only a modest impact on the nomadic people of the northern steppes. Unlike the native peoples of southern China, who were gradually absorbed into Chinese culture, the pastoral societies north of the Great Wall generally retained their own cultural patterns. Few of them were incorporated, at least not for long, within a Chinese state, and most lived in areas where Chinese-style agriculture was simply impossible. Under these conditions, there were few incentives for adopting Chinese culture wholesale. But various modes of interaction—peaceful trade, military conflict, political negotiations, economic extortion, some cultural

■ Connection

In what ways did China and the nomads influence each other?

influence—continued across the ecological frontier that divided two quite distinct and separate ways of life. Each was necessary for the other. (See Visual Sources 8.2, 8.3, and 8.4, pp. 370–74, for another example of Chinese/nomadic interaction.)

On the Chinese side, elements of steppe culture had some influence in those parts of northern China that were periodically conquered and ruled by nomadic peoples. The founders of the Sui and Tang dynasties were in fact of mixed nomad and Chinese ancestry and came from the borderland region where a blended Chinese/Turkic culture had evolved. High-ranking members of the imperial family personally led their troops in battle in the style of Turkic warriors. Furthermore, Tang dynasty China was awash with foreign visitors from all over Asia—delegations bearing tribute, merchants carrying exotic goods, bands of clerics or religious pilgrims bringing new religions such as Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Manichaeism. For a time in the Tang dynasty, almost anything associated with “western barbarians”—Central Asians, Persians, Indians, Arabs—had great appeal among northern Chinese elites. Their music, dancing, clothing, foods, games, and artistic styles found favor among the upper classes. The more traditional southern Chinese, feeling themselves heir to the legacy of the Han dynasty, were sharply critical of their northern counterparts for allowing women too much freedom, for drinking yogurt rather than tea, for listening to “western” music, all of which they attributed to barbarian influence. Around 800 C.E., the poet Yuan Chen gave voice to a growing backlash against this too easy acceptance of things “western”:

Ever since the Western horsemen began raising smut and dust,
Fur and fleece, rank and rancid, have filled Hsien and Lo [two Chinese cities].
Women make themselves Western matrons by the study of Western makeup.
Entertainers present Western tunes, in their devotion to Western music.¹⁸

Coping with China: Comparing Korea, Vietnam, and Japan

Also involved in tributary relationships with China during the postclassical era were the newly emerging states and civilizations of Korea, Vietnam, and Japan. Unlike the northern nomads, these societies were thoroughly agricultural and sedentary. During the first millennium C.E., they were part of a larger process—the globalization of civilization—which produced new city- and state-based societies in various parts of the world. Proximity to their giant Chinese neighbor decisively shaped the histories of these new East Asian civilizations, for all of them borrowed major elements of Chinese culture. But unlike the native peoples of southern China, who largely became Chinese, the peoples of Korea, Vietnam, and Japan did not. They retained distinctive identities, which have lasted into modern times. While resisting Chinese political domination, they also appreciated Chinese culture and sought the source of Chinese wealth and power. In such ways, these smaller East Asian civilizations resembled the “developing” Afro-Asian societies of the twentieth century, which

embraced “modernity” and elements of Western culture, while trying to maintain their political and cultural independence from the European and American centers of that modern way of life. Korea, Vietnam, and Japan, however, encountered China and responded to it in quite different ways.

Korea and China

Immediately adjacent to northeastern China, the Korean peninsula and its people have long lived in the shadow of their imposing neighbor. Temporary Chinese conquest of northern Korea during the Han dynasty and some colonization by Chinese settlers provided an initial channel for Chinese cultural influence, particularly in the form of Buddhism. Early Korean states, which emerged in the fourth through seventh centuries C.E., all referred to their rulers with the Chinese term *wang* (king). Bitter rivals with one another, these states strenuously resisted Chinese political control, except when they found it advantageous to join with China against a local enemy. In the seventh century, one of these states—the Silla kingdom—allied with Tang dynasty China to bring some political unity to the peninsula for the first time. But Chinese efforts to set up puppet regimes and to assimilate Koreans to Chinese culture provoked sharp military resistance, persuading the Chinese to withdraw their military forces in 688 and to establish a tributary relationship with a largely independent Korea.

Under a succession of dynasties—the Silla (688–900), Koryo (918–1392), and Yi (1392–1910)—Korea generally maintained its political independence while participating in China’s tribute system. Its leaders actively embraced the connection with China and, especially during the Silla dynasty, sought to turn their small state into a miniature version of Tang China.

Tribute missions to China provided legitimacy for Korean rulers and knowledge of Chinese court life and administrative techniques, which they sought to replicate back home. A new capital city of Kumsong was modeled directly on the Chinese capital of Chang’an. Tribute missions also enabled both official and private trade, mostly in luxury goods such as ceremonial clothing, silks, fancy teas, Confucian and Buddhist texts, and artwork—all of which enriched the lives of a Korean aristocracy that was becoming increasingly Chinese in culture. Thousands of Korean students were sent to China, where they studied primarily Confucianism but also natural sciences and the arts. Buddhist monks visited centers of learning and pilgrimage in China and brought back popular forms of Chinese Buddhism, which quickly took root in Korea. Schools for the study of Confucianism, using texts in the Chinese language, were established in Korea. In these ways, Korea became a part of the expanding world of Chinese culture, and refugees from the peninsula’s many wars carried Chinese culture to Japan as well.

These efforts to plant Confucian values and Chinese culture in Korea had what one scholar has called an “overwhelmingly negative” impact on

■ Comparison

In what different ways did Korea, Vietnam, and Japan experience and respond to Chinese influence?

Korean Kingdoms about 500 C.E.



Korean women, particularly after 1300.¹⁹ Early Chinese observers noticed, and strongly disapproved of, “free choice” marriages in Korea as well as the practice of women singing and dancing together late at night. With the support of the Korean court, Chinese models of family life and female behavior, especially among the elite, gradually replaced the more flexible Korean patterns. Earlier a Korean woman had generally given birth and raised her young children in her parents’ home, where she was often joined by her husband. This was now strongly discouraged, for it was deeply offensive to Confucian orthodoxy, which held that a married woman belonged to her husband’s family. Some Korean customs—funeral rites in which a husband was buried in the sacred plot of his wife’s family, the remarriage of widowed or divorced women, and female inheritance of property—eroded under the pressure of Confucian orthodoxy. So too did the practice of plural marriages for men. In 1413, a legal distinction between primary and secondary wives required men to identify one of their wives as primary. Because she and her children now had special privileges and status, sharp new tensions emerged within families. Korean restrictions on elite women, especially widows, came to exceed even those in China itself.

Still, Korea remained Korean. After 688, the country’s political independence, though periodically threatened, was largely intact. Chinese cultural influence, except for Buddhism, had little impact beyond the aristocracy and certainly did not penetrate the lives of Korea’s serf-like peasants. Nor did it register among Korea’s many slaves, amounting to about one-third of the country’s population by 1100 C.E. A Chinese-style examination system to recruit government officials, though encouraged by some Korean rulers, never assumed the prominence that it gained in Tang and Song dynasty China. Korea’s aristocratic class was able to maintain an even stronger monopoly on

bureaucratic office than their Chinese counterparts. And in the 1400s, Korea moved toward greater cultural independence by developing a phonetic alphabet, known as *hangul*, for writing the Korean language. Although resisted by male conservative elites, who were long accustomed to using the more prestigious Chinese characters to write Korean, this new form of writing gradually took hold, especially in private correspondence, in popular fiction, and among women. Clearly part of the Chinese world order, Korea nonetheless retained a distinctive culture as well as a separate political existence.

Vietnam and China

At the southern fringe of the Chinese cultural world, the people who eventually came to be called Vietnamese had a broadly similar historical encounter with China. As in Korea, the elite culture of Vietnam borrowed heavily from China—adopting Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, administrative techniques, the examination system, artistic and literary styles—even as its popular culture remained distinctive. And, like Korea, Vietnam achieved political independence, while participating fully in the tribute system as a vassal state.

Vietnam



But there were differences as well. The cultural heartland of Vietnam in the Red River valley was fully incorporated into the Chinese state for more than a thousand years (III B.C.E.–939 C.E.), far longer than corresponding parts of Korea. Regarded by the Chinese as “southern barbarians,” the Vietnamese were ruled by Chinese officials who expected to fully assimilate this rich rice-growing region into China culturally as well as politically. To these officials, it was simply a further extension of the southward expansion of Chinese civilization. Thus Chinese-style irrigated agriculture was introduced; Vietnamese elites were brought into the local bureaucracy and educated in Confucian-based schools; Chinese replaced the local language in official business; Chinese clothing and hairstyles became mandatory; and large numbers of Chinese, some fleeing internal conflicts at home, flooded into the relative security of what they referred to as “the pacified south,” while often despising the local people.²⁰

The heavy pressure of the Chinese presence generated not only a Vietnamese elite thoroughly schooled in Chinese culture but also periodic rebellions. In 39 C.E., a short-lived but long-remembered uprising was launched by two sisters, daughters of a local leader deposed by the Chinese. One of them, Trung Trac, whose husband had been executed, famously addressed some 30,000 soldiers, while dressed in full military regalia:

Foremost I will avenge my country.
 Second I will restore the Hung lineage.
 Third I will avenge the death of my husband.
 Lastly I vow that these goals will be accomplished.²¹

When the rebellion was crushed several years later, the Trung sisters committed suicide rather than surrender to the Chinese, but in literature, monuments, and public memory, they long remained powerful symbols of Vietnamese resistance to Chinese aggression.

The weakening of the Tang dynasty in the early tenth century C.E. finally enabled a particularly large rebellion to establish Vietnam as a separate state, though one that carefully maintained its tributary role, sending repeated missions to do homage at the Chinese court. Nonetheless, successive Vietnamese dynasties found the Chinese approach to government useful, styling their rulers as emperors, claiming the Mandate of Heaven, and making use of Chinese court rituals, while expanding their state

The Trung Sisters

Although it occurred nearly 2,000 years ago, the revolt of the Trung sisters against Chinese occupation remains a national symbol of Vietnam’s independence, as illustrated by this modern Vietnamese painting of the two women, astride war elephants, leading their followers into battle against the Chinese invaders. (From William J. Duiker, *Sacred War: Nationalism and Revolution in a Divided Vietnam* [New York: The McGraw-Hill Companies, 1995])



steadily southward. More so than in Korea, a Chinese-based examination system in Vietnam functioned to undermine an established aristocracy, to provide some measure of social mobility for commoners, and to create a merit-based scholar-gentry class to staff the bureaucracy. Furthermore, the Vietnamese elite class remained deeply committed to Chinese culture, viewing their own country less as a separate nation than as a southern extension of a universal civilization, the only one they knew.²²

Beyond the elite, however, there remained much that was uniquely Vietnamese, such as a distinctive language, a fondness for cockfighting, the habit of chewing betel nuts, and a greater role for women in social and economic life. Female nature deities and even a “female Buddha” continued to be part of Vietnamese popular religion, even as Confucian-based ideas took root among the elite. These features of Vietnamese life reflected larger patterns of Southeast Asian culture that distinguished it from China. And like Korea, the Vietnamese developed a variation of Chinese writing called *chu nom* (“southern script”), which provided the basis for an independent national literature.

Japan and China

Unlike Korea and Vietnam, the Japanese islands were physically separated from China by 100 miles or more of ocean and were never successfully invaded or conquered by their giant mainland neighbor. Thus Japan’s very extensive borrowing from Chinese civilization was wholly voluntary, rather than occurring under conditions of direct military threat or outright occupation. The high point of that borrowing took place during the seventh to the ninth centuries C.E., as the first more or less unified Japanese state began to emerge from dozens of small clan-based aristocratic chiefdoms. That state found much that was useful in Tang dynasty China and set out, deliberately and systematically, to transform Japan into a centralized bureaucratic state on the Chinese model. (See Documents: The Making of Japanese Civilization, pp. 406–16.)

The initial leader of this effort was Shōtoku Taishi (572–622), a prominent aristocrat from one of the major clans. He launched a series of large-scale missions to China, which took hundreds of Japanese monks, scholars, artists, and students to the mainland, and when they returned, they put into practice what they had learned. He issued the Seventeen Article Constitution, proclaiming the Japanese ruler as a Chinese-style emperor and encouraging both Buddhism and Confucianism. In good Confucian fashion, that document emphasized the moral quality of rulers as a foundation for social harmony (see Document 9.1, pp. 406–08). In the decades that followed, Japanese authorities adopted Chinese-style court rituals and a system of court rankings for officials as well as the Chinese calendar. Subsequently, they likewise established Chinese-based taxation systems, law codes, government ministries, and provincial administration, at least on paper. Two capital cities, first Nara and then Heian (Kyoto), arose, both modeled on the Chinese capital of Chang’an.

Japan



Chinese culture, no less than its political practices, also found favor in Japan. Various schools of Chinese Buddhism took root, first among the educated and literate classes and later more broadly in Japanese society, affecting, according to one scholar, “nearly every aspect of Japanese life” (see Document 9.2, pp. 408–10). Art, architecture, education, medicine, views of the afterlife, attitudes toward suffering and the impermanence of life—all of this and more reflected the influence of Buddhist culture in Japan.²³ The Chinese writing system—and with it an interest in historical writing, calligraphy, and poetry—likewise proved attractive among the elite.

The absence of any compelling threat from China made it possible for the Japanese to be selective in their borrowing. By the tenth century, deliberate efforts to absorb additional elements of Chinese culture diminished, and formal tribute missions to China stopped, although private traders and Buddhist monks continued to make the difficult journey to the mainland. Over many centuries, the Japanese combined what they had assimilated from China with elements of their own tradition into a distinctive Japanese civilization, which differed from Chinese culture in many ways.

In the political realm, for example, the Japanese never succeeded in creating an effective centralized and bureaucratic state to match that of China. Although the court and the emperor retained an important ceremonial and cultural role, their real political authority over the country gradually diminished in favor of competing aristocratic families, both at court and in the provinces. A Chinese-style university trained officials, but rather than serving as a mechanism for recruiting talented commoners into the political elite, it enrolled students who were largely the sons of court aristocrats.

As political power became increasingly decentralized, local authorities developed their own military forces, the famous *samurai* warrior class of Japanese society. Bearing their exquisite curved swords, the samurai developed a distinctive set of values featuring great skill in martial arts, bravery, loyalty, endurance, honor, and a preference for death over surrender. This was *bushido*, the way of the warrior, illustrated in Document 9.5, pages 414–16. Japan’s celebration of the samurai and of military virtues contrasted sharply with China’s emphasis on intellectual achievements and political officeholding, which were accorded higher prestige than bearing arms. “The educated men of the land,” wrote a Chinese minister in the eleventh century, “regard the carrying of arms as a disgrace.”²⁴ The Japanese, clearly, did not agree.

Religiously as well, Japan remained distinctive. Although Buddhism in many forms took hold in the country, it never completely replaced the native beliefs and practices, which focused attention on numerous *kami*, sacred spirits associated with human ancestors and various natural phenomena. Much later referred to as Shinto, this tradition provided legitimacy to the imperial family, based on claims of descent from the sun goddess, as illustrated in Document 9.3, pages 410–12. Because veneration of the *kami* lacked an elaborate philosophy or ritual, it conflicted very little with Buddhism. In fact, numerous *kami* were assimilated into Japanese Buddhism as local expressions of Buddhist deities or principles.



The Samurai of Japan

This twelfth-century painting depicts the famous naval battle of Dan-no-ura (1185), in which the samurai warriors of two rival clans fought to the death. Many of the defeated Taira warriors, along with some of their women, plunged into the sea rather than surrender to their Minamoto rivals. The prominence of martial values in Japanese culture was one of the ways in which Japan differed from its Chinese neighbor, despite much borrowing. (Tokyo National Museum. Image: TNM Images Archives. Source: <http://TnmArchives.jp/>)

■ Comparison

In what different ways did Japanese and Korean women experience the pressures of Confucian orthodoxy?

Japanese literary and artistic culture likewise evolved in distinctive ways, despite much borrowing from China. As in Korea and Vietnam, there emerged a unique writing system that combined Chinese characters with a series of phonetic symbols. A highly stylized Japanese poetic form, known as *tanka*, developed early and has remained a favored means of expression ever since. Particularly during the Heian period of Japanese history (794–1192), a highly refined esthetic culture found expression at the imperial court, even as the court’s real political authority melted away. Court aristocrats and their ladies lived in splendor, composed poems, arranged flowers, and conducted their love affairs. “What counted,” wrote one scholar, “was the proper costume, the right ceremonial act, the successful turn of phrase in a poem, and the appropriate expression of refined taste.”²⁵ Much of our knowledge of this courtly culture comes from the work of women writers, who composed their diaries and novels in the vernacular Japanese script, rather than in the classical Chinese used by elite men. *The Tale of Genji*, a Japanese novel written by the woman author Murasaki Shikibu around 1000, provides an intimate picture of the intrigues and romances of court life. So too does Sei Shonagon’s *Pillow Book*, excerpted in Document 9.4, pages 412–14.

At this level of society, Japan’s women, unlike those in Korea, largely escaped the more oppressive features of Chinese Confucian culture, such as the prohibition of remarriage for widows, seclusion within the home, and foot binding. Perhaps this is because the most powerful Chinese influence on Japan occurred during the Tang dynasty, when Chinese elite women enjoyed considerable freedom. Japanese women

continued to inherit property; Japanese married couples often lived apart or with the wife's family; and marriages were made and broken easily. None of this corresponded to Confucian values. When Japanese women did begin to lose status in the twelfth century and later, it had less to do with Confucian pressures than with the rise of a warrior culture. As the personal relationships of samurai warriors to their lords replaced marriage alliances as a political strategy, the influence of women in political life was reduced, but this was an internal Japanese phenomenon, not a reflection of Chinese influence.

Japan's ability to borrow extensively from China while developing its own distinctive civilization perhaps provided a model for its encounter with the West in the nineteenth century. Then, as before, Japan borrowed selectively from a foreign culture without losing either its political independence or its cultural uniqueness.

China and the Eurasian World Economy

Beyond China's central role in East Asia was its economic interaction with the wider world of Eurasia generally. On the one hand, China's remarkable economic growth, taking place during the Tang and Song dynasties, could hardly be contained within China's borders and clearly had a major impact throughout Eurasia. On the other hand, China was recipient as well as donor in the economic interactions of the postclassical era, and its own economic achievements owed something to the stimulus of contact with the larger world.

Spillovers: China's Impact on Eurasia

One of the outcomes of China's economic revolution lay in the diffusion of its many technological innovations to peoples and places far from East Asia as the movements of traders, soldiers, slaves, and pilgrims conveyed Chinese achievements abroad. Chinese techniques for producing salt by solar evaporation spread to the Islamic world and later to Christian Europe. Papermaking, known in China since the Han dynasty, spread to Korea and Vietnam by the fourth century C.E., to Japan and India by the seventh, to the Islamic world by the eighth, to Muslim Spain by 1150, to France and Germany in the 1300s, and to England in the 1490s. Printing, likewise a Chinese invention, rapidly reached Korea, where movable type became a highly developed technique, and Japan as well. Both technologies were heavily influenced by Buddhism, which accorded religious merit to the act of reproducing sacred texts. The Islamic world, however, valued handwritten calligraphy highly and generally resisted printing as impious until the nineteenth century. The adoption of printing in Europe was likewise delayed because of the absence of paper until the fourteenth century. Then movable type was reinvented by Johannes Gutenberg in the fifteenth century, although it is unclear whether he was aware of Chinese and Korean precedents. With implications for mass literacy, bureaucracy, scholarship, the spread of

■ Connection

In what ways did China participate in the world of Eurasian commerce and exchange, and with what outcomes?

religion, and the exchange of information, papermaking and printing were Chinese innovations of revolutionary and global dimensions.

Chinese technologies were seldom simply transferred from one place to another. More often a particular Chinese technique or product stimulated innovations in more distant lands in accordance with local needs.²⁶ For example, as the Chinese formula for gunpowder, invented around 1000, became available in Europe, together with some early and simple firearms, these innovations triggered the development of cannons in the early fourteenth century. Soon cannons appeared in the Islamic world and by 1356 in China itself, which first used cast iron rather than bronze in their construction. But the highly competitive European state system drove the “gunpowder revolution” much further and more rapidly than in China’s imperial state. Chinese textile, metallurgical, and naval technologies likewise stimulated imitation and innovation all across Eurasia. An example is the magnetic compass, a Chinese invention eagerly embraced by mariners of many cultural backgrounds as they traversed the Indian Ocean.

In addition to its technological influence, China’s prosperity during the Song dynasty greatly stimulated commercial life and market-based behavior all across the Eurasian trading world. China’s products—silk, porcelain, lacquerware—found eager buyers from Japan to East Africa, and everywhere in between. The immense size and wealth of China’s domestic economy also provided a ready market for hundreds of commodities from afar. For example, the lives of many thousands of people in the spice-producing islands of what is now Indonesia were transformed as they came to depend on Chinese consumers’ demand for their products. “[O]ne hundred million [Chinese] people,” wrote historian William McNeill, “increasingly caught up within a commercial network, buying and selling to supplement every day’s livelihood, made a significant difference to the way other human beings made their livings throughout a large part of the civilized world.”²⁷ Such was the ripple effect of China’s economic revolution.

On the Receiving End: China as Economic Beneficiary

Chinese economic growth and technological achievements significantly shaped the Eurasian world of the postclassical era, but that pattern of interaction was surely not a one-way street, for China too was changed by its engagement with a wider world. During this period, for example, China had learned about the cultivation and processing of both cotton and sugar from India. From Vietnam, around 1000, China gained access to the new, fast-ripening, and drought-resistant strains of rice that made a highly productive rice-based agriculture possible in the drier and more rugged regions of southern China. This marked a major turning point in Chinese history as the frontier region south of the Yangzi River grew rapidly in population, overtaking the traditional centers of Chinese civilization in the north.

Technologically as well, China's extraordinary burst of creativity owed something to the stimulus of cross-cultural contact. Awareness of Persian windmills, for example, spurred the development of a distinct but related device in China. Printing arose from China's growing involvement with the world of Buddhism, which put a spiritual premium on the reproduction of the Buddha's image and of short religious texts that were carried as charms. It was in Buddhist monasteries during the Tang dynasty that the long-established practice of printing with seals was elaborated by Chinese monks into woodblock printing. The first printed book, in 868 C.E., was a famous Buddhist text, the *Diamond Sutra*. Gunpowder too seems to have had an Indian and Buddhist connection. An Indian Buddhist monk traveling in China in 644 C.E. identified soils that contained saltpeter and showed that they produced a purple flame when put into a fire. This was the beginning of Chinese experiments, which finally led to a reliable recipe for gunpowder.

A further transforming impact of China's involvement with a wider world derived from its growing participation in Indian Ocean trade. By the Tang dynasty, thousands of ships annually visited the ports of southern China, and settled communities of foreign merchants—Arabs, Persians, Indians, Southeast Asians—turned some of these cities into cosmopolitan centers. Buddhist temples, Muslim mosques and cemeteries, and Hindu phallic sculptures graced the skyline of Quanzhou, a coastal city in southern China. Occasionally the tensions of cultural diversity erupted in violence, such as the massacre of tens of thousands of foreigners in Canton during the 870s when Chinese rebel forces sacked the city. Indian Ocean commerce also contributed much to the transformation of southern China from a subsistence economy to one more heavily based on producing for export. In the process, merchants achieved a degree of social acceptance not known before, including their frequent appointment to high-ranking bureaucratic positions. Finally, much-beloved stories of the monkey god, widely popular even in contemporary China, derived from Indian sources transmitted by Indian Ocean commerce.²⁸

China and Buddhism

By far the most important gift that China received from India was neither cotton, nor sugar, nor the knowledge of saltpeter, but a religion, Buddhism. The gradual assimilation of this South Asian religious tradition into Chinese culture illustrates the process of cultural encounter and adaptation and invites comparison with the spread of Christianity into Europe. Until the adoption of Marxism in the twentieth century, Buddhism was the only large-scale cultural borrowing in Chinese history. It also made China into a launching pad for Buddhism's dispersion to Korea and from there to Japan as well. Thus, as Buddhism faded in the land of its birth, it became solidly rooted in much of East Asia, providing an element of cultural commonality for a vast region (see Map 9.2).



Map 9.2 The World of Asian Buddhism

Born in India, Buddhism later spread widely throughout much of Asia to provide a measure of cultural or religious commonality across this vast region.

Making Buddhism Chinese

■ Change

What facilitated the rooting of Buddhism within China?

Buddhism initially entered China via the Silk Road trading network during the first and second centuries C.E. The stability and prosperity of the Han dynasty, then at its height, ensured that the new “barbarian” religion held little appeal for native Chinese. Furthermore, the Indian culture from which Buddhism sprang was at odds with Chinese understandings of the world in many ways. Buddhism’s commitment

to a secluded and monastic life for monks and nuns seemed to dishonor Chinese family values, and its concern for individual salvation or enlightenment appeared selfish, contradicting the social orientation of Confucian thinking. Its abstract philosophy ran counter to the more concrete, “this-worldly” concerns of Chinese thinkers; and the Buddhist concept of infinite eons of time, endlessly repeating themselves, was quite a stretch for the Chinese, who normally thought in terms of finite family generations or dynastic cycles. No wonder that for the first several centuries C.E., Buddhism was largely the preserve of foreign merchants and monks living in China.

In the half millennium between roughly 300 and 800 C.E., however, Buddhism took solid root in China within both elite and popular culture, becoming a permanent, though fluctuating, presence in Chinese life. How did this remarkable transformation unfold? It began, arguably, with the collapse of the Han dynasty around 200 C.E. The chaotic, violent, and politically fragmented centuries that followed seriously discredited Confucianism and opened the door to alternative understandings of the world. Nomadic rulers, now governing much of northern China, found Buddhism useful in part because it was foreign. “We were born out of the marches,” declared one of them, “and though we are unworthy, we have complied with our appointed destiny and govern the Chinese as their prince. . . . Buddha being a barbarian god is the very one we should worship.”²⁹ Rulers and elite families provided money and land that enabled the building of many Buddhist monasteries, temples, and works of art. In southern China, where many northern aristocrats had fled following the disastrous decline of the Han dynasty, Buddhism provided some comfort in the face of a collapsing society. Its emphasis on ritual, morality, and contemplation represented an intellectually and esthetically satisfying response to times that were so clearly out of joint.

Meanwhile, Buddhist monasteries increasingly provided an array of social services for ordinary people. In them, travelers found accommodation; those fleeing from China’s many upheavals discovered a place of refuge; desperate people received charity; farmers borrowed seed for the next planting; the sick were treated; children learned to read. And for many, Buddhism was associated with access to magical powers as reports of miracles abounded. Battles were won, rain descended on drought-ridden areas, diseases were cured, and guilt was relieved—all through the magical ministrations of charismatic monks.

Accompanying all of this was a serious effort by monks, scholars, and translators to present this Indian religion in terms that Chinese could relate to. Thus the Buddhist term *dharma*, referring to the Buddha’s teaching, was translated as *dao*, or “the way,” a notion long familiar in both Daoist and Confucian thinking (see Chapter 5). The Buddhist notion of “morality” was translated with the Confucian term that referred to “filial submission and obedience.” Some Indian concepts were modified in the process of translation. For example, the idea that “husband supports wife,” which reflected a considerable respect for women and mothers in early Indian Buddhism, became in translation “husband controls wife.”³⁰

As Buddhism took hold in China, it was primarily in its broader Mahayana form—complete with numerous deities, the veneration of relics, many heavens and hells, and bodhisattvas to aid the believer—rather than the more psychological and individualistic Theravada Buddhism (see Chapter 5 and Visual Source 5.4, p. 233). One of the most popular forms of Buddhism in China was the Pure Land School, in which faithfully repeating the name of an earlier Buddha, the Amitabha, was sufficient to ensure rebirth in a beautifully described heavenly realm, the Pure Land. In its emphasis on salvation by faith, without arduous study or intensive meditation, Pure Land Buddhism became a highly popular and authentically Chinese version of the Indian faith (see Visual Source 5.5, p. 234).

China's reunification under the Sui and early Tang dynasties witnessed growing state support for Buddhism. The Sui emperor Wendi (reigned 581–604 C.E.) had monasteries constructed at the base of China's five sacred mountains, further identifying the imported religion with traditional Chinese culture. He even used Buddhism to justify his military campaigns. "With a hundred victories in a hundred battles," he declared, "we promote the practice of the ten Buddhist virtues."³¹ With state support and growing popular acceptance, monasteries became centers of great wealth, largely exempt from taxation, owning large estates; running businesses such as oil presses, water mills, and pawn shops; collecting gems, gold, and lavish works of art; and even employing slaves. But Buddhism, while solidly entrenched in Chinese life by the early Tang dynasty, never achieved the independence from state authorities that the Christian church acquired in Europe. The examinations for becoming a monk were supervised by the state, and education in the monasteries included the required study of the Confucian classics. In the mid-ninth century, the state showed quite dramatically just how much control it could exercise over the Buddhist establishment.

Losing State Support: The Crisis of Chinese Buddhism

■ Change

What were the major sources of opposition to Buddhism within China?

The impressive growth of Chinese Buddhism was accompanied by a persistent undercurrent of resistance and criticism. Some saw the Buddhist establishment, at least potentially, as a "state within a state" and a challenge to imperial authority. More important was a deepening resentment of its enormous wealth. One fifth-century critic, referring to monks, put the issue squarely: "Why is it that their ideals are noble and far-reaching and their activities still are base and common? [They] become merchants and engage in barter, wrangling with the masses for profit."³² When state treasuries were short of funds, government officials cast a covetous eye on wealthy and tax-exempt monasteries. Furthermore, Buddhism was clearly of foreign origin and offensive for that reason to some Confucian and Daoist thinkers. The celibacy of the monks and their withdrawal from society, the critics argued, undermined the Confucian-based family system of Chinese tradition.

Such criticisms took on new meaning in the changed environment of China after about 800 C.E. Following centuries of considerable foreign influence in China,

a growing resentment against foreign culture, particularly among the literate classes, increasingly took hold. The turning point may well have been the An Lushan rebellion (755–763), in which a general of foreign origin led a major revolt against the Tang dynasty. Whatever its origins, an increasingly xenophobic reaction set in among the upper classes, reflected in a desire to return to an imagined “purity” of earlier times.³³ In this setting, the old criticisms of Buddhism became more sharply focused. In 819, Han Yu, a leading figure in the Confucian counterattack on Buddhism, wrote a scathing memorial to the emperor, criticizing his willingness to honor a relic of the Buddha’s finger.

Now the Buddha was of barbarian origin. His language differed from Chinese speech; his clothes were of a different cut; his mouth did not pronounce the prescribed words of the Former Kings. . . . He did not recognize the relationship between prince and subject, nor the sentiments of father and son. . . . I pray that Your Majesty will turn this bone over to the officials that it may be cast into water or fire.³⁴

Several decades later, the Chinese state took direct action against the Buddhist establishment as well as against other foreign religions. A series of imperial decrees between 841 and 845 ordered some 260,000 monks and nuns to return to normal life as tax-paying citizens. Thousands of monasteries, temples, and shrines were either destroyed or turned to public use, while the state confiscated the lands, money, metals, and serfs belonging to monasteries. Buddhists were now forbidden to use gold, silver, copper, iron, and gems in constructing their images. These actions dealt a serious blow to Chinese Buddhism. Its scholars and monks were scattered, its creativity diminished, and its institutions came even more firmly under state control.

Despite this persecution, Buddhism did not vanish from China. At the level of elite culture, its philosophical ideas played a role in the reformulation of Confucian thinking that took place during the Song dynasty. At the village level, Buddhism became one element of Chinese popular religion, which also included the veneration of ancestors, the honoring of Confucius, and Daoist shrines and rituals. Temples frequently included statues of Confucius, Laozi, and the Buddha, with little sense of any incompatibility among them. “Every black-haired son of Han,” the Chinese have long said, “wears a Confucian thinking cap, a Daoist robe, and Buddhist sandals.” Unlike Europe, where an immigrant religion triumphed over and excluded all other faiths, Buddhism in China became assimilated into Chinese culture alongside its other traditions.

Reflections: Why Do Things Change?

The rapidity of change in modern societies is among the most distinctive features of recent history, but change and transformation, though at various rates, have been

constants in the human story since the very beginning. Explaining how and why human societies change is perhaps the central issue that historians confront, no matter which societies or periods of time they study. Those who specialize in the history of some particular culture or civilization often emphasize sources of change operating within those societies, although there is intense disagreement as to which are most significant. The ideas of great thinkers, the policies of leaders, struggles for power, the conflict of classes, the impact of new technologies, the growth or decline in population, variations in local climate or weather—all of these and more have their advocates as the primary motor of historical transformation.

Of course, it is not necessary to choose among them. The history of classical and postclassical China illustrates the range of internal factors that have driven change in that civilization. The political conflicts of the “era of warring states” provided the setting and the motivation for the emergence of Confucianism and Daoism, which in turn have certainly shaped the character and texture of Chinese civilization over many centuries. The personal qualities and brutal policies of Shihuangdi surely played a role in China’s unification and in the brief duration of the Qin dynasty. The subsequent creation of a widespread network of canals and waterways as well as the country’s technological achievements served to maintain that unity over very long periods of time. But the massive inequalities of Chinese society generated the peasant upheavals, which periodically shattered that unity and led to new ruling dynasties. Sometimes natural events, such as droughts and floods, triggered those rebellions.

World historians, more than those who study particular civilizations or nations, have been inclined to find the primary source of change in contact with strangers, in external connections and interactions, whether direct or indirect. The history of China and East Asia provide plenty of examples for this point of view as well. Conceptions of China as the “middle kingdom,” infinitely superior to all surrounding societies, grew out of centuries of involvement with its neighbors. Some of those neighbors became Chinese as China’s imperial reach grew, especially to the south. Even those that did not, such as Korea, Vietnam, and Japan, were decisively transformed by proximity to the “radiating civilization” of China. China’s own cuisine, so distinctive in recent centuries, may well be a quite recent invention, drawing heavily on Indian and Southeast Asian cooking. Buddhism, of course, is an obvious borrowing from abroad, although its incorporation into Chinese civilization and its ups and downs within China owed much to internal cultural and political realities.

In the end, clear distinctions between internal and external sources of change in China’s history—or that of any other society—are perhaps misleading. The boundary between “inside” and “outside” is itself a constantly changing line. Should the borderlands of northern China, where Chinese and Turkic peoples met and mingled, be regarded as internal or external to China itself? And, as the histories of Chinese Buddhism and of Japanese culture so clearly indicate, what comes from beyond is always transformed by what it encounters within.

Second Thoughts

What's the Significance?

Sui dynasty	tribute system	Trung sisters
Tang dynasty	Xiongnu	Shotoku Taishi
Song dynasty economic revolution	Khitan/Jurchen people	<i>bushido</i>
Hangzhou	Silla dynasty (Korea)	Chinese Buddhism
foot binding	<i>hangul</i>	Emperor Wendi
	<i>chu nom</i>	

To assess your mastery of the material in this chapter, visit the **Student Center** at bedfordstmartins.com/strayer.

Big Picture Questions

1. In what ways did Tang and Song dynasty China resemble the classical Han dynasty period, and in what ways had China changed?
2. Based on this chapter, how would you respond to the idea that China was a self-contained or isolated civilization?
3. In what different ways did nearby peoples experience their giant Chinese neighbor, and how did they respond to it?
4. How can you explain the changing fortunes of Buddhism in China?
5. How did China influence the world beyond East Asia? How was China itself transformed by its encounters with a wider world?

Next Steps: For Further Study

Samuel Adshead, *Tang China: The Rise of the East in World History* (2004). Explores the role of China within the larger world.

Patricia Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters* (1993). A balanced account of the gains and losses experienced by Chinese women during the changes of the Song dynasty.

Mark Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past* (1973). A classic account of the Chinese economic revolution.

Edward Shaffer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand* (1985). Examines the interaction between China and Central Asia during the Tang dynasty.

Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji*, translated by Royall Tyler (2002). Written around 1000, this saga of Japanese court life is sometimes called the world's first novel.

Arthur F. Wright, *Buddhism in Chinese History* (1959). An older account filled with wonderful stories and anecdotes.

Upper River during the Qing Ming Festival, <http://www.ibiblio.org/ulysses/gec/painting/qingming/full.htm>. A scrolling reproduction of a huge Chinese painting, showing in detail the Song dynasty city of Kaifeng.

For Web sites and additional documents related to this chapter, see **Make History** at bedfordstmartins.com/strayer.

Documents

Considering the Evidence: The Making of Japanese Civilization



Japan's historical development during the postclassical era places it among the third-wave civilizations—Russian, Swahili, Srivijaya, west European, Islamic—that took shape between 500 and 1500. Each of them was distinctive in particular ways, but all of them followed the general patterns of earlier civilizations in the creation of cities, states, stratified societies, patriarchies, written languages, and more. Furthermore, many of them borrowed extensively from nearby and older civilizations. In the case of Japan, that borrowing was primarily from China, its towering neighbor to the west. The documents that follow provide glimpses of a distinctive Japanese civilization in the making, even as that civilization selectively incorporated elements of Chinese thinking and practice (see pp. 394–97).

Document 9.1

Japanese Political Ideals

As an early Japanese state gradually took shape in the sixth and seventh centuries, it was confronted by serious internal divisions of clan, faction, and religion. Externally, Japanese forces had been expelled from their footholds in Korea, while Japan also faced the immense power and attractiveness of a reunified China under the Sui and Tang dynasties (see pp. 380–85). In these circumstances, Japanese authorities sought to strengthen their own emerging state by adopting a range of Chinese political values and practices. This Chinese influence in Japanese political thinking was particularly apparent in the so-called Seventeen Article Constitution issued by Shotoku, which was a set of general guidelines for court officials.

- What elements of Buddhist, Confucian, or Legalist thinking are reflected in this document? (Review pp. 192–95 and 199–201 and Documents 4.3, pp. 174–75, and 5.1, pp. 217–19.)
- What can you infer about the internal problems that Japanese rulers faced?

- How might Shotoku define an ideal Japanese state?
- Why do you think Shotoku omitted any mention of traditional Japanese gods or spirits or the Japanese claim that their emperor was descended from the sun goddess Amaterasu?

Despite this apparent embrace of all things Chinese, Shotoku's attitude toward China itself is less clear. In various letters that he sent to the Chinese Sui dynasty ruler, Shotoku inscribed them as follows: "The Son of Heaven of the Land of the Rising Sun to the Son of Heaven of the Land of the Setting Sun." Another read: "The Eastern Emperor Greets the Western Emperor."³⁵ Considering their country as the Middle Kingdom, greatly superior to all its neighbors, Chinese court officials were incensed at these apparent assertions of equality. It is not clear whether Shotoku was deliberately claiming equivalence with China or if he was simply unaware of how such language might be viewed in China.

SHOTOKU

The Seventeen Article Constitution

604

1. Harmony is to be valued, and an avoidance of wanton opposition to be honored. All men are influenced by class feelings, and there are few who are intelligent. Hence there are some who disobey their lords and fathers, or who maintain feuds with the neighboring villages. But when those above are harmonious and those below are friendly, and there is concord in the discussion of business, right views of things spontaneously gain acceptance....

2. Sincerely reverence the three treasures... the Buddha, the Law [teachings], and the Priesthood [community of monks]....

3. When you receive the Imperial commands, fail not scrupulously to obey them. The lord is Heaven, the vassal is Earth. Heaven overspreads,

and Earth upbears.... [W]hen the superior acts, the inferior yields compliance.

4. The Ministers and functionaries should make decorous behavior their leading principle.... If the superiors do not behave with decorum, the inferiors are disorderly....

5. Ceasing from gluttony and abandoning covetous desires, deal impartially with the [legal] suits which are submitted to you....

6. Chastise that which is evil and encourage that which is good. This was the excellent rule of antiquity....

7. Let every man have his own charge, and let not the spheres of duty be confused. When wise men are entrusted with office, the sound of praise arises. If unprincipled men hold office, disasters and tumults are multiplied. In this world, few are born with knowledge: wisdom is the product of earnest meditation. In all things, whether great or small, find the right man, and they will surely be well managed....

Source: W. G. Aston, trans., *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697* (London: Paul, Trench, Truebner, 1896), 2:129–33.

10. Let us cease from wrath, and refrain from angry looks. Nor let us be resentful when others differ from us. For all men have hearts, and each heart has its own leanings. . . . [All] of us are simply ordinary men. . . .

11. Give clear appreciation to merit and demerit, and deal out to each its sure reward or punishment. In these days, reward does not attend upon merit, nor punishment upon crime. You high functionaries, who have charge of public affairs, let it be your task to make clear rewards and punishments. . . .

12. Let not the provincial authorities or the [local nobles] levy exactions on the people. In a country, there are not two lords. . . . The sovereign is the master of the people of the whole country. . . .

15. To turn away from that which is private, and to set our faces toward that which is public—this is the path of a Minister. . . .

16. Let the people be employed [in forced labor] at seasonable times. This is an ancient and excellent rule. Let them be employed, therefore, in the winter months, when they are at leisure. But from spring to autumn, when they are engaged in agriculture or with the mulberry trees, the people should not be so employed. For if they do not attend to agriculture, what will they have to eat? If they do not attend the mulberry trees, what will they do for clothing?

17. Decisions on important matters should not be made by one person alone. They should be discussed with many.

Document 9.2

Buddhism in Japan: The Zen Tradition

Buddhism was perhaps Japan's most significant cultural borrowing. Although the religion had begun in India and entered Japan from Korea in the mid-sixth century, it was widely viewed as a Chinese import, conveying, according to one historian, a "Chinese-style dignity and civilization" for an emerging Japanese state. To the rulers of that new state, Buddhism was politically useful, for it provided a potentially unifying religious tradition for a divided society and support for the imperial regime.³⁶ Yet Buddhism in Japan was never a single tradition, for a great variety of Buddhist sects, practices, and schools of thought, most of them of Chinese origin, took root in Japan. Frequently they were at odds with one another and with the Japanese state as well.

The Pure Land school of Buddhist practice achieved widespread popularity in Japan beginning in the twelfth century and represented a democratization of a religion that had earlier given special prominence to monks and to elites in aristocratic circles. Its goal was no longer *nirvana*, the enlightenment gained in this life by the strenuous personal effort of a few individuals, but rather rebirth in the Pure Land of the Western Paradise, a heavenly place of beauty and delight where full awakening was virtually guaranteed (see Visual Source 5.5, p. 234). That possibility was now open to many simply by calling repeatedly on the name of Amida, a compassionate Buddha figure from ages past and an earlier incarnation of the historical Buddha. *Nama Amida Butsu* (Praise be to Amida Buddha)—that was the invocation, known as *nembutsu*, that offered divine assistance to all struggling seekers, ordinary people as well as monks, women as well as men, and even outcasts and the impure.

Zen Buddhism, often known as Chan in China, was introduced to Japan about the same time that Pure Land was taking root. Both were concerned with making Buddhism available to the widest possible audience, for all persons possessed a Buddha nature and could potentially achieve awakening. But the Zen tradition decisively rejected the idea of relying on an external divine source, such as the Amida Buddha. Rather, serious practitioners should look within themselves through a highly disciplined form of meditation known as *zazen*. This meant much less emphasis on religious texts and philosophical discussion than in some other expressions of Buddhism. Furthermore, Zen valued very highly the transmission of teachings from master to disciple in an unbroken line of succession from the historical Buddha himself. Document 9.2 presents extracts from the writings of Dogen (1200–1253), among the first and most well-known of those Japanese monks who introduced Zen to their homeland, after extensive study in China.

- What was distinctive about Zen practice?
- Why do you think Zen was particularly attractive for Japan's warlords and its *samurai* warrior class?
- What distinguished Zen from Pure Land Buddhism in Japan?
- What understandings lie behind the strict discipline of Zen? How might Buddhist critics of this approach take issue with Dogen?

DOGEN

Writings on Zen Buddhism Thirteenth Century

We teach: For all the Buddha dharma—preserving Zen ancestors and Buddhas, sitting upright in the practice of self-actualizing *samādhi* [concentration] is the true path of awakening. Both in India and in China, all who have attained awakening did so in this way. Because in every generation each teacher and each disciple intimately and correctly transmitted this marvelous art, I learned the genuine initiation.

In the correctly transmitted Zen lineage we teach: This directly transmitted, authoritative Buddha dharma is the best of the best. Once you start study-

ing under a good teacher, there is no need for lighting incense, worshipful prostrations, recalling the Buddha (*nembutsu*), repentance, or chanting scripture. Just sit and slough off body-mind. . . .

* * *

When I stayed at T'ien-t'ung monastery [in China], the venerable Ching used to stay up sitting until the small hours of the morning and then after only a little rest would rise early to start sitting again. In the meditation hall he went on sitting with the other elders, without letting up for even a single night. Meanwhile many of the monks went off to sleep. The elder would go around among them and hit the sleepers with his fist or a slipper, yelling at them to wake up. If their sleepiness persisted, he would go out to the hallway and ring the bell to summon the

Source: William Theodore de Bary et al., *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 1:321; William Theodore de Bary, *The Buddhist Tradition in India, China and Japan* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), 372–73.

monks to a room apart, where he would lecture to them by the light of a candle.

“What use is there in your assembling together in the hall only to go to sleep? Is this all that you left the world and joined holy orders for? . . . Great is the problem of birth and death; fleeting indeed is our transitory existence. Upon these truths both the scriptural and meditation schools agree. What sort of illness awaits us tonight, what sort of death tomorrow? While we have life, not to practice Buddha’s Law but to spend the time in sleep is the height of foolishness. Because of such foolishness Buddhism today is in a state of decline. . . .

Upon another occasion his attendants said to him, “The monks are getting overtired or falling ill, and some are thinking of leaving the monastery, all because they are required to sit too long in medita-

tion. Shouldn’t the length of the sitting period be shortened?” The master became highly indignant. “That would be quite wrong. A monk who is not really devoted to the religious life may very well fall asleep in a half hour or an hour. But one truly devoted to it who has resolved to persevere in his religious discipline will eventually come to enjoy the practice of sitting, no matter how long it lasts. When I was young I used to visit the heads of various monasteries, and one of them explained to me, ‘Formerly I used to hit sleeping monks so hard that my fist just about broke. Now I am old and weak, so I can’t hit them hard enough. Therefore it is difficult to produce good monks. In many monasteries today the superiors do not emphasize sitting strongly enough, and so Buddhism is declining. The more you hit them the better,’ he advised me.”

Document 9.3

The Uniqueness of Japan

Despite Japan’s extensive cultural borrowing from abroad, or perhaps because of that borrowing, Japanese writers often stressed the unique and superior features of their own country. Nowhere is this theme echoed more clearly than in *The Chronicle of the Direct Descent of Gods and Sovereigns*, written by Kitabatake Chikafusa (1293–1354). A longtime court official and member of one branch of Japan’s imperial family, Kitabatake wrote at a time of declining imperial authority in Japan, when two court centers competed in an extended “war of the courts.” As an advocate for the southern court, Kitabatake sought to prove that the emperor he served was legitimate because he had descended in unbroken line from the Age of the Gods. In making this argument, he was also a spokesman for the revival of Japan’s earlier religious tradition of numerous gods and spirits, known later as Shintoism.

- In Kitabatake’s view, what was distinctive about Japan in comparison to China and India?
- How might the use of Japan’s indigenous religious tradition, especially the Sun Goddess, serve to legitimize the imperial rule of Kitabatake’s family?
- How did Kitabatake understand the place of Confucianism and Buddhism in Japan and their relationship to Shinto beliefs?

KITABATAKE CHIKAFUSA

The Chronicle of the Direct Descent of Gods and Sovereigns

1339

Japan is the divine country. The heavenly ancestor it was who first laid its foundations, and the Sun Goddess left her descendants to reign over it forever and ever. This is true only of our country, and nothing similar may be found in foreign lands. That is why it is called the divine country.

In the age of the gods, Japan was known as the “ever-fruitful land of reed-covered plains and luxuriant ricefields.” This name has existed since the creation of heaven and earth. . . . [I]t may thus be considered the prime name of Japan. It is also called the country of the great eight islands. This name was given because eight islands were produced when the Male Deity and the Female Deity begot Japan. . . . Japan is the land of the Sun Goddess [Amaterasu]. Or it may have thus been called because it is near the place where the sun rises. . . . Thus, since Japan is a separate continent, distinct from both India and China and lying in a great ocean, it is the country where the divine illustrious imperial line has been transmitted.

The creation of heaven and earth must everywhere have been the same, for it occurred within the same universe, but the Indian, Chinese, and Japanese traditions are each different. . . .

In China, nothing positive is stated concerning the creation of the world, even though China is a country which accords special importance to the keeping of records. . . .

The beginnings of Japan in some ways resemble the Indian descriptions, telling as it does of the world’s creation from the seed of the heavenly gods. However, whereas in our country the succession to the throne has followed a single undeviating line since the first divine ancestor, nothing of the kind has existed in India. After their first ruler, King People’s

Lord, had been chosen and raised to power by the populace, his dynasty succeeded, but in later times most of his descendants perished, and men of inferior genealogy who had powerful forces became the rulers, some of them even controlling the whole of India. China is also a country of notorious disorders. Even in ancient times, when life was simple and conduct was proper, the throne was offered to wise men, and no single lineage was established. Later, in times of disorder, men fought for control of the country. Thus some of the rulers rose from the ranks of the plebians, and there were even some of barbarian origin who usurped power. Or some families after generations of service as ministers surpassed their princes and eventually supplanted them. There have already been thirty-six changes of dynasty since Fuxi, and unspeakable disorders have occurred.

Only in our country has the succession remained inviolate from the beginning of heaven and earth to the present. It has been maintained within a single lineage, and even when, as inevitably has happened, the succession has been transmitted collaterally, it has returned to the true line. This is due to the ever-renewed Divine Oath and makes Japan unlike all other countries. . . .

Then the Great Sun Goddess . . . sent her grandchild to the world below. Eighty million deities obeyed the divine decree to accompany and serve him. Among them were thirty-two principal deities. . . . Two of these deities . . . received a divine decree specially instructing them to aid and protect the divine grandchild. [The Sun Goddess] uttered these words of command: “Thou, my illustrious grandchild, proceed thither and govern the land. Go, and may prosperity attend thy dynasty, and may it, like Heaven and Earth, endure forever.” . . .

Because our Great Goddess is the spirit of the sun, she illuminates with a bright virtue which is incomprehensible in all its aspects but dependable alike in the realm of the visible and invisible. All

Source: William Theodore de Bary et al., *Sources of Japanese Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 1:358–63.

sovereigns and ministers have inherited the bright seeds of the divine light, or they are descendants of the deities who received personal instruction from the Great Goddess. Who would not stand in reverence before this fact? The highest object of all teachings, Buddhist and Confucian included, consists in realizing this fact and obeying in perfect consonance its principles. It has been the power of the dissemination

of the Buddhist and Confucian texts which has spread these principles. . . . Since the reign of the Emperor Ōjin, the Confucian writings have been disseminated, and since Prince Shōtoku's time Buddhism has flourished in Japan. Both these men were sages incarnate, and it must have been their intention to spread a knowledge of the way of our country, in accordance with the wishes of the Great Sun Goddess.

Document 9.4

Social Life at Court

For many centuries, high culture in Japan—art, music, poetry, and literature—found a home in the imperial court, where men and women of the royal family and nobility, together with various attendants, mixed and mingled. That aristocratic culture reached its high point between the ninth and twelfth centuries, but, according to one prominent scholar, it “has shaped the aesthetic and emotional life of the entire Japanese people for a millennium.”³⁷ Women played a prominent role in that culture, both creating it and describing it. Among them was Sei Shonagon (966–1017), a lady-in-waiting to the Empress Sadako. In her *Pillow Book*, a series of brief and often witty observations, Sei Shonagon described court life as well as her own likes and dislikes.

- What impression does Sei Shonagon convey about the relationship of men and women at court?
- How would you describe her posture toward men, toward women, and toward ordinary people? What insight can you gain about class differences from her writing?
- In what ways does court life, as Sei Shonagon describes it, reflect Buddhist and Confucian influences, and in what ways does it depart from, and even challenge, those traditions?

SEI SHONAGON

Pillow Book

ca. 1000

That parents should bring up some beloved son of theirs to be a priest is really distressing. No

doubt it is an auspicious thing to do; but unfortunately most people are convinced that a priest is as unimportant as a piece of wood, and they treat him accordingly. A priest lives poorly on meager food, and cannot even sleep without being criticized. While he is young, it is only natural that he should be

Source: Ivan Morris, trans. and ed., *The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 25–26, 39, 44–45, 47, 49–50, 53, 254–55.

curious about all sorts of things, and, if there are women about, he will probably peep in their direction (though, to be sure, with a look of aversion on his face). What is wrong about that? Yet people immediately find fault with him for even so small a lapse. . . .

A preacher ought to be good-looking. For, if we are properly to understand his worthy sentiments, we must keep our eyes on him while he speaks; should we look away, we may forget to listen. Accordingly an ugly preacher may well be the source of sin. . . .

When I make myself imagine what it is like to be one of those women who live at home, faithfully serving their husbands—women who have not a single exciting prospect in life yet who believe that they are perfectly happy—I am filled with scorn. . . .

I cannot bear men who believe that women serving in the Palace are bound to be frivolous and wicked. Yet I suppose their prejudice is understandable. After all, women at Court do not spend their time hiding modestly behind fans and screens, but walk about, looking openly at people they chance to meet. Yes, they see everyone face to face, not only ladies-in-waiting like themselves, but even Their Imperial Majesties (whose august names I hardly dare mention), High Court Nobles, senior courtiers, and other gentlemen of high rank. In the presence of such exalted personages the women in the Palace are all equally brazen, whether they be the maids of ladies-in-waiting, or the relations of Court ladies who have come to visit them, or housekeepers, or latrine-cleaners, or women who are of no more value than a roof-tile or a pebble. Small wonder that the young men regard them as immodest! Yet are the gentlemen themselves any less so? They are not exactly bashful when it comes to looking at the great people in the Palace. No, everyone at Court is much the same in this respect. . . .

Hateful Things

... A man who has nothing in particular to recommend him discusses all sorts of subjects at random as though he knew everything. . . .

An admirer has come on a clandestine visit, but a dog catches sight of him and starts barking. One feels like killing the beast.

One has been foolish enough to invite a man to spend the night in an unsuitable place—and then he starts snoring.

A gentleman has visited one secretly. Though he is wearing a tall, lacquered hat, he nevertheless wants no one to see him. He is so flurried, in fact, that upon leaving he bangs into something with his hat. Most hateful! . . .

A man with whom one is having an affair keeps singing the praises of some woman he used to know. Even if it is a thing of the past, this can be very annoying. How much more so if he is still seeing the woman! . . .

A good lover will behave as elegantly at dawn as at any other time. He drags himself out of bed with a look of dismay on his face. The lady urges him on: "Come, my friend, it's getting light. You don't want anyone to find you here." He gives a deep sigh, as if to say that the night has not been nearly long enough and that it is agony to leave. Once up, he does not instantly pull on his trousers. Instead he comes close to the lady and whispers whatever was left unsaid during the night. Even when he is dressed, he still lingers, vaguely pretending to be fastening his sash. . . .

Indeed, one's attachment to a man depends largely on the elegance of his leave-taking. When he jumps out of bed, scurries about the room, tightly fastens his trouser-sash, rolls up the sleeves of his Court cloak, over-robe, or hunting costume, stuffs his belongings into the breast of his robe and then briskly secures the outer sash—one really begins to hate him. . . .

It is very annoying, when one has visited Hase Temple and has retired into one's enclosure, to be disturbed by a herd of common people who come and sit outside in a row, crowded so close together that the tails of their robes fall over each other in utter disarray. I remember that once I was overcome by a great desire to go on a pilgrimage. Having made my way up the log steps, deafened by the fearful roar of the river, I hurried into my enclosure, longing to gaze upon the sacred countenance of Buddha. To my dismay I found that a

throng of commoners had settled themselves directly in front of me, where they were incessantly standing up, prostrating themselves, and squatting down again. They looked like so many basket-worms

as they crowded together in their hideous clothes, leaving hardly an inch of space between themselves and me. I really felt like pushing them all over sideways.

Document 9.5

The Way of the Warrior

As the Japanese imperial court gradually lost power to military authorities in the countryside, a further distinctive feature of Japanese civilization emerged in the celebration of martial virtues and the warrior class—the *samurai*—that embodied those values. From the twelfth through the mid-nineteenth century, public life and government in Japan was dominated by the samurai, while their culture and values, known as *bushido*, expressed the highest ideals of political leadership and of personal conduct. At least in the West, the samurai are perhaps best known for preferring death over dishonor, a posture expressed in *seppuku* (ritual suicide). But there was much more to bushido than this, for the samurai served not only as warriors but also as bureaucrats—magistrates, land managers, and provincial governors—acting on behalf of their lords (*daimyo*) or in service to military rulers known as *shoguns*. Furthermore, although bushido remained a distinctively Japanese cultural expression, it absorbed both Confucian and Buddhist values as well as those of the indigenous Shinto tradition.

The two selections that follow reflect major themes of an emerging bushido culture, the way of the warrior. The first excerpt comes from the writings of Shiba Yoshimasa (1349–1410), a feudal lord, general, and administrator as well as a noted poet, who wrote a manual of advice for the young warriors of his own lineage. Probably the man who most closely approximated in his own life the emerging ideal of a cultivated warrior was Imagawa Ryoshun (1325–1420), famous as a poet, a military commander, and a devout Buddhist. The second excerpt contains passages from a famous and highly critical letter Imagawa wrote to his adopted son (who was also his younger brother). The letter was published and republished hundreds of times and used for centuries as a primer or school text for the instruction of young samurai.

- Based on these accounts, how would you define the ideal samurai?
- What elements of Confucian, Buddhist, or Shinto thinking can you find in these selections? How do these writers reconcile the peaceful emphasis of Confucian and Buddhist teachings with the military dimension of bushido?
- What does the Imagawa letter suggest about the problems facing the military rulers of Japan in the fourteenth century?

SHIBA YOSIMASA

Advice to Young Samurai

ca. 1400

Wielders of bow and arrow should behave in a manner considerate not only of their own honor, of course, but also of the honor of their descendants. They should not bring on eternal disgrace by solicitude for their limited lives.

That being said, nevertheless to regard your one and only life as like dust or ashes and die when you shouldn't is to acquire a worthless reputation. A genuine motive would be, for example, to give up your life for the sake of the sole sovereign, or serving under the commander of the military in a time of need; these would convey an exalted name to children and descendants. Something like a strategy of the moment, whether good or bad, cannot raise the family reputation much.

Warriors should never be thoughtless or absentminded but handle all things with forethought. . . .

It is said that good warriors and good Buddhists are similarly circumspect. Whatever the matter, it is vexing for the mind not to be calm. Putting others' minds at ease too is something found only in the considerate. . . .

Source: Thomas Cleary, trans. and ed., *Training the Samurai Mind* (Boston: Shambhala, 2008), 18–20.

When you begin to think of yourself, you'll get irritated at your parents' concern and defy their instructions. Even if your parents may be stupid, if you obey their instructions, at least you won't be violating the principle of nature. What is more, eighty to ninety percent of the time what parents say makes sense for their children. It builds up in oneself to become obvious. The words of our parents we defied in irritation long ago are all essential. You should emulate even a bad parent rather than a good stranger; that's how a family culture is transmitted and comes to be known as a person's legacy. . . .

Even if one doesn't perform any religious exercises and never makes a visit to a shrine, neither deities nor buddhas will disregard a person whose mind is honest and compassionate. In particular, the Great Goddess of Ise,^o the great bodhisattva Hachiman,^o and the deity of Kitano^o will dwell in the heads of people whose minds are honest, clean, and good.

^o**Great Goddess of Ise:** Amaterasu, the sun goddess.

^o**Hachiman:** a Japanese deity who came to be seen as a Buddhist bodhisattva.

^o**Kitano:** patron god of learning.

IMAGAWA RYOSHUN

The Imagawa Letter

1412

As you do not understand the Arts of Peace^o your skill in the Arts of War^o will not, in the end, achieve victory.

^o**Arts of Peace:** literary skills including poetry, history, philosophy, and ritual.

^o**Arts of War:** horsemanship, archery, swordsmanship.

You like to roam about, hawking and cormorant fishing, relishing the purposelessness of taking life.

You live in luxury by fleecing the people and plundering the shrines.

Source: From Carl Steenstrup, trans., "The Imagawa Letter," *Monumenta Nipponica* 28, no. 3 (Autumn 1973), 295–316.

To build your own dwelling you razed the pagoda and other buildings of the memorial temple of our ancestors.

You do not distinguish between good and bad behavior of your retainers, but reward or punish them without justice.

You permit yourself to forget the kindness that our lord and father showed us; thus you destroy the principles of loyalty and filial piety.

You do not understand the difference in status between yourself and others; sometimes you make too much of other people, sometimes too little.

You disregard other people's viewpoints; you bully them and rely on force.

You excel at drinking bouts, amusements, and gambling, but you forget the business of our clan.

You provide yourself lavishly with clothes and weapons, but your retainers are poorly equipped.

You ought to show utmost respect to Buddhist monks and priests and carry out ceremonies properly.

You impede the flow of travelers by erecting barriers everywhere in your territory.

Whether you are in charge of anything—such as a province or a district—or not, it will be difficult to put your abilities to any use if you have not won the sympathy and respect of ordinary people.

Just as the Buddhist scriptures tell us that the Buddha incessantly strives to save mankind, in the same way you should exert your mind to the utmost in all your activities, be they civil or military, and never fall into negligence.

It should be regarded as dangerous if the ruler of the people in a province is deficient even in a single [one] of the cardinal virtues of human-heartedness, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and good faith.

You were born to be a warrior, but you mismanage your territory, do not maintain the army, and are not ashamed although people laugh at you. It is, indeed, a mortifying situation for you and our whole clan.

Using the Evidence: The Making of Japanese Civilization

1. **Considering cultural borrowing and assimilation:** What evidence of cultural borrowing can you identify in these documents? To what extent did those borrowed elements come to be regarded as Japanese?
2. **Looking for continuities:** What older patterns of Japanese thought and practice persisted despite much cultural borrowing from China?
3. **Noticing inconsistencies and change:** No national culture develops as a single set of ideas and practices. What inconsistencies, tensions, or differences in emphasis can you identify in these documents? What changes over time can you identify in these selections?
4. **Considering Japanese Buddhism:** In what different ways did Buddhism play a role in Japan during the postclassical era? How did Buddhism change Japan, and how did Japan change Buddhism?

Visual Sources

Considering the Evidence: The Leisure Life of China's Elites



From the earliest centuries of Chinese civilization, that country's artists have painted—on pottery, paper, wood, and silk; in tombs, on coffins, and on walls; in albums and on scrolls. Relying largely on ink rather than oils, their brushes depicted human figures, landscapes, religious themes, and images of ordinary life. While Chinese painting evolved over many centuries, both in terms of subject matter and technique, by most accounts it reached a high point of artistic brilliance during the Tang and Song dynasties.

Here, however, we are less interested in the aesthetic achievements of Chinese painting than in what those works can show us about the life of China's elite class—those men who had passed the highest-level examinations and held high office in the state bureaucracy and those women who lived within the circles of the imperial court. While they represented only a tiny fraction of China's huge population, such elite groups established the tone and set the standards of behavior for Chinese civilization. For such people, leisure was a positive value, a time for nurturing relationships and cultivating one's character in good Confucian or Daoist fashion. According to the Tang dynasty writer and scholar Duan Chengshi,

Leisure is good.
Dusty affairs don't entangle the mind.
I sit facing the tree outside the window
And watch its shadow change direction three times.³⁸

Action and work, in the Chinese view of things, need to be balanced by self-reflection and leisure. In the visual sources that follow, we can catch a glimpse of how the Chinese elite lived and interacted with one another, particularly in their leisure time.

Leading court officials and scholar-bureaucrats must have been greatly honored to be invited to an elegant banquet, hosted by the emperor himself, such as that shown in Visual Source 9.1. Usually attributed to the emperor Huizong (1082–1135)—who was himself a noted painter, poet, calligrapher, and collector—the painting shows a refined dinner gathering of high officials drinking tea and wine with the emperor presiding at the left.³⁹ This emperor's great attention to the arts rather than to affairs of state gained him a reputation

as a negligent and dissolute ruler. His reign ended in disgrace as China suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of northern nomadic Jin people, who took the emperor captive.

- What features of this painting contribute to the impression of imperial elegance?
- What mood does this painting evoke?
- What social distinction among the figures in the painting can you discern?
- How is the emperor depicted in this painting in comparison to that on page 388? How would you explain the difference?
- How might you imagine the conversation around this table?



Visual Source 9.1 A Banquet with the Emperor (National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan)



Visual Source 9.2 At Table with the Empress (National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan)

Elite women of the court likewise gathered to eat, drink, and talk, as illustrated in Visual Source 9.2, an anonymous Tang dynasty painting on silk. Hosting the event is the empress, shown seated upright in the middle of the left side of the table, holding a fan and wearing a distinctive headdress. Her guests and paid professional musicians sit around the table.

- How does this gathering of elite women differ from that of the men in Visual Source 9.1? How might their conversation differ from that of the men?
- To what extent are the emperor and empress in Visual Sources 9.1 and 9.2 distinguished from their guests? How do you think the emperor and empress viewed their roles at these functions? Were they acting as private persons among friends or in an official capacity?
- What differences in status among these women can you identify?
- What view of these women does the artist seek to convey?
- What does the posture of the women suggest about the event?



Visual Source 9.3 A Literary Gathering (Palace Museum, Beijing)

Confucian cultural ideals gave great prominence to literature, poetry, and scholarly pursuits as leisure activities appropriate for “gentlemen” (see pp. 193–95). Confucius himself had declared that “gentlemen make friends through literature, and through friendship increase their benevolence.” Thus literary gatherings of scholars and officials, often in garden settings, were common themes in Tang and Song dynasty paintings. Visual Source 9.3, by the tenth-century painter Zhou Wenju, provides an illustration of such a gathering.

- What marks these figures as cultivated men of literary or scholarly inclination?
- What meaning might you attribute to the outdoor garden setting of this image and that of Visual Source 9.1?
- Notice the various gazes of the four figures. What do they suggest about the character of this gathering and the interpersonal relationships among its participants?
- Do you think the artist was seeking to convey an idealized image of what a gathering of officials ought to be or a realistic portrayal of an actual event? What elements of the painting support your answer?

Chinese scholars and bureaucrats are often shown, in their leisure hours, as solitary contemplatives, immersing themselves in nature. The famous Song dynasty painter Ma Yuan (1160–1225) depicted such an image in his masterpiece entitled *On a Mountain Path in Spring*. In Visual Source 9.4, a scholar walks in the countryside watching several birds, while his servant trails behind carrying his master's *qin* (lute). A short poem in the upper right reads:

Brushed by his sleeves, wild flowers dance in the wind;
Fleeing from him, the hidden birds cut short their songs.⁴⁰

- How would you define the mood of this painting? What techniques did Ma Yuan use to evoke this mood?
- How might this painting reflect the perspectives of Daoism (see pp. 195–97)? How does it differ from the more Confucian tone of Visual Source 9.3?
- What relationship with nature does this painting convey?
- During Ma Yuan's lifetime, the northern part of China was coming under the control of the feared Mongols. How might an awareness of this situation affect our understanding of this painting?



Visual Source 9.4 Solitary Reflection (National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan)



Visual Source 9.5 An Elite Night Party (Palace Museum, Beijing)

Not all was poetry and contemplation of nature in the leisure-time activities of China's elite. Nor were men and women always so strictly segregated as the preceding visual sources may suggest. Visual Source 9.5 illustrates another side of Chinese elite life. These images are part of a long tenth-century scroll painting entitled *The Night Revels of Han Xizai*. Apparently, the Tang dynasty emperor Li Yu became suspicious that one of his ministers, Han Xizai, was overindulging in suspicious night-long parties in his own home. He therefore commissioned the artist Gu Hongzhong to attend these parties secretly and to record the events in a painting, which he hoped would shame his wayward but talented official into more appropriate and dignified behavior. The entire scroll shows men and women together, sometimes in flirtatious situations, while open sleeping areas suggest sexual activity.

- What kinds of entertainment were featured at this gathering?
- What aspects of these parties shown in the scroll paintings might have caused the emperor some concern? Refer back to the “singsong girls,” shown on page 253. In what respects might these kinds of gatherings run counter to Confucian values?
- How are women portrayed in these images? In what ways are they relating to the men in the paintings?

Using the Evidence: The Leisure Life of China's Elites

1. **Describing elite society:** Based on these visual sources, write a brief description of the social life of Chinese elites during the Tang and Song dynasties.
2. **Defining the self-image of an elite:** What do these visual sources suggest about how members of the elite ideally viewed themselves? In what ways do those self-portraits draw upon Confucian, Daoist, or Buddhist teachings?

3. **Noticing differences in the depiction of women:** In what different ways are women represented in these paintings? Keep in mind that all of the artists were men. How might this affect the way women were depicted? How might female artists have portrayed them differently?
4. **Using images to illustrate change:** Reread the sections on Chinese women (pp. 253–55 and 384–85). How might these images be used to illustrate the changes in women's lives that are described in those pages?
5. **Seeking additional sources:** What other kinds of visual sources might provide further insight into the lives of Chinese elites?