Lecture 17: China under the Tang Dynasty

Topics:
- Eurasian empires from 600-1100 CE
- Intellectual life, government, and the economy

Questions:
- What were the characteristics of the reunified Chinese empire?
- What role did intellectuals play in society and politics?
- What explains the cultural flourishing associated with the Tang?
**Period of Division (220-581 CE)**

**North**
- 304-439 - “Sixteen Kingdoms of the Five Barbarians”
- 439-581 - Northern Wei

**South**
- “Six Dynasties”

Nomads Sinicize + Patronize Buddhism
flourishes in the South

Elite Chinese Culture flourishes in the South

Economy Revives in both North & South by end 5th c. CE
• **Sui Dynasty (581-618 CE)**
  - End of non-Chinese rule (581)
  - Reunification of China (589)
  - Harsh, tyrannical government
  - New capital at Chang’an
  - Grand Canal (linking Yellow and Yangzi rivers)

• **Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE)**
  - Restoration of fair government
  - Rely on scholar-officials
  - Encourage trade (Silk Road & south)
  - Integrate Buddhism into Chinese culture
  - Cultural “golden age”
Chang’an

Sui & Tang capital
begun 583 CE

World’s largest city
approx. 1 million

Terminus for the Silk Road

Foreign emissaries and court officials
Integration of the South

Chinese ships sail south for imports from Southeast Asia
Emperor Tang Taizong
(627-649 CE)

Equal field system
Examination system

Governmental Reform

Confucian principles
Legal reform
projects authority of centralized bureaucratic state
also relies on maintenance of social order by family

“The king occupies the most honorable position and receives Heaven’s precious decrees. Like Heaven and Earth, he acts to shelter and support, thus serving as the father and mother of the masses. As his children, as his subjects, they must be loyal and filial. Should they dare to cherish wickedness and have rebellious hearts, however, they will run counter to Heaven’s constancy and violate human principle. Therefore, this is called ‘plotting rebellion.’”
Scholar-Officials

- Meritocracy
  - Government position based on intellectual abilities
  - Confucian classics
- Bureaucrats loyal to emperor
  - Not aristocrats
  - Civilian control of military
- Link local people to emperor
- Vested interest in the state
- Self-conscious “class”
  - Distinctive dress
  - Scholarly pursuits

Printing
Art of the Elite

- Poetry
- Calligraphy
- Landscape painting
Buddhism under the Tang Dynasty

• Royal patronage
• Xuanzang (602-64 CE)
• Integration into Chinese culture
  • Translate Buddhist scripture into Chinese spiritual idiom
    • dharma (teaching) = dao (the Way)
  • Distinctly Chinese artistic styles
• New schools of Buddhism, esp. Chan (= Zen)
• Influence elsewhere in East Asia
JAPAN

CHINESE INFLUENCE
- governmental organization
- script
- intellectual ideals

CONFUCIANISM
BUDDHISM

Illustration from *Tale of Genji*

Buddha (late Heian period)

Nara (710-94 CE)
Heian (794-1192 CE)
Flourishing Economy

Increase agricultural production
State actively promotes commerce
Huge market for foreign goods

A stereotypical foreign merchant

Porcelain = new export commodity

Tang ceramics

Ladies of the Tang Court