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**Ways of the World: A Brief Global
History with Sources**
Second Edition

Chapter 8

China and the World: East Asian Connections,
500–1300

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1. Discuss this picture. What do you see here?

This picture shows a bearded Chinese scholar in a colorful dragon robe next to a globe on which other astronomers' instruments, such as a sextant, are mounted. Above the globe and sextant are a number of Chinese writing symbols. The background wall transitions into a starry night sky, and in the top right corner next to the scholar's cap is another Chinese inscription.

2. Can you explain why this image was printed in Japan?

Chinese astronomers discovered a remarkable number of astronomic phenomena, such as sun spots, solar and lunar eclipses, and supernovae. The Chinese also led in astronomical cartography and the design and construction of astronomic instruments. The Japanese were profoundly influenced by Chinese astronomers, and the Japanese origin of this celebratory picture illustrates this.

3. What does this image tell us about Chinese culture at the beginning of the second millennium?

China had not only developed deep traditions in state building, the military, and religious practices; it also enjoyed a leading role in science and technology long before European nations committed to science and innovation in the Enlightenment.

I. Together Again: The Reemergence of a Unified China

A. A “Golden Age” of Chinese Achievement

1. Sui (589–618), Tang (618–907), & Song (960–1279)
2. Bureaucracy and exam system
3. Economic boom, population growth, and urbanization
4. Hangzhou

I. Together Again: The Reemergence of a Unified China

A. A “Golden Age” of Chinese Achievement

1. Sui (589—618), Tang (618—907), & Song (960—1279): While both Han and Rome collapsed, China was reunified under the Sui. The Sui marked many achievements such as dramatic expansion of the canals but proved to be a short-lived dynasty as their emperors were harsh and warlike. The Tang and Song built upon the achievements of the Sui and established a state system that would last over a thousand years. The Tang and Song were noteworthy for their political achievements but also for their cultural vibrancy and economic dynamism.

2. Bureaucracy and exam system: These dynasties formalized and expanded the Confucian-based exam system. In theory, they cracked down on cheating, and the exams were open to all regardless of class. However, there were irregularities, and the wealthy elite had an economic advantage in that they could pay for schooling and tutors. Nonetheless, schools and colleges grew in number, and the system that trained the efficient bureaucracy that governed China was an apparent success.

3. Economic boom, population growth, and urbanization: Thanks to investments in infrastructure such as the canal system, which allowed the cheap transportation of rice and wheat over long distances, there was a major economic boom in this period. In addition to staples, Chinese farmers could produce specialized crops for specific markets. More food meant more people, and China more than doubled its population in this period. Cities saw tremendous growth and the development of increasingly productive and sophisticated industries. The boom did have clear environmental consequences with much of China’s old growth forest being cut down for fuel.

4. Hangzhou: With a population of over one million, this was the world’s largest city. Hangzhou enjoyed a vibrant cultural life with a lively entertainment industry and growing print culture.



Map 8.1 Tang and Song Dynasty China
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 Page 252 (page 368, *With Sources*)

I. Together Again: The Reemergence of a Unified China

B. Women in the Song Dynasty

1. Tang freedoms, Song patriarchy
2. Weak and distracting
3. Foot binding
4. Changing job opportunities

I. Together Again: The Reemergence of a Unified China

B. Women in the Song Dynasty

1. Tang freedoms, Song patriarchy: While elite women enjoyed various freedoms in the Tang dynasty (due to its cultural influences from the nomadic steppes), the Song era saw a renewed patriarchy based on a very conservative reading of Confucius.
2. Weak and distracting: In the Song, men were to be scholars and administrators and women were viewed as weak and distracting.
3. Foot binding: The practice grew in popularity under the Song. While associated with a construction of frail beauty, the practice also restricted the freedom of women.
4. Changing job opportunities: With the commercialization of weaving, many were pushed out of the textile labor force. However, they found new jobs in other professions such as domestic service, retail, and entertainment (including work as concubines). Women did see an increase in their property rights, as well as new access to education.



Foot Binding
Jodi Cobb/National Geographic Stock
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1. What does the photograph on the left show?

Judging by the freckles on the darkly tanned hands, this is an old woman washing her feet in a wooden vat. One foot is resting inside the vat, while the woman is holding up the other foot and her pale and incredibly thin lower leg. The foot is barely recognizable. The toes are pushed inward to the center, the rest of the foot is pushed upward. This deformity is the result of the ancient tradition of foot-binding that young women in China were forced to submit to.

2. Why did Chinese women have their feet bound to shape them in such a way?

Although foot binding clearly deformed and crippled women's feet, it was associated with esthetic beauty when they were encased in tiny and elaborately decorated shoes. Thus, while foot binding destroyed the natural esthetic of women's feet, it created in the views of many Chinese a new and decorative beauty.

3. Who in Chinese society supported this practice and why?

Foot binding emerged as a practice among dancers and courtesans in the tenth and eleventh centuries and became a more popular practice in the Song Dynasty, where it was part of a tightening patriarchal order. Women with bound feet were admired for their frailty and daintiness, and their disability largely confined them to the home. Since this meant that they had servants for errands and housework, bound feet were a symbol of upper-class status.

4. Discuss the way foot binding may have affected the lives of women exposed to this practice.

It seems difficult to imagine that anyone with such deformed feet could walk without pain or wear shoes other than the small and merely decorative silk shoes. The practice sought to reduce women to decorative dolls in the cruelest way. Of course, this doesn't mean the women with bound feet fully embraced such a submissive identity.



Foot Binding
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Page 256 (page 372, With Sources)

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

A. The Tribute System in Theory

1. China as the “middle kingdom”
2. Tribute missions and kowtows for gifts and prestige
3. A way to manage barbarians

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

A. The Tribute System in Theory

1. China as the “middle kingdom”: China viewed itself as the “middle kingdom,” the height of civilization radiating civilization and culture outwards. Inferior barbarians were expected to recognize Chinese superiority.
2. Tribute missions and kowtows for gifts and prestige: Foreigners were expected to send tribute missions of ceremonial gifts to the capital and perform the kowtow (a series of bows to the ground) to show their recognition of China’s superiority. In return, the missions would get various gifts of great value and the prestige of being allied with China.
3. A way to manage barbarians: For China, this was a way to manage inferior barbarians on the periphery.

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

B. The Tribute System in Practice

1. Nomadic raids into China
2. “Gifts” to Xiongnu and Turkic nomads

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

B. The Tribute System in Practice

1. Nomadic raids into China: In reality, China was vulnerable to raids from the warlike horsemen of the steppes. At times, they not only raided but also conquered parts of China.
2. “Gifts” to Xiongnu and Turkic nomads: The reality of the tribute system for these stronger groups was essentially that the Chinese paid protection to the raiders. Large gifts of wine, silk, and grain kept the nomads from having to steal from the Chinese and allowed the Chinese court to maintain the fiction of its invulnerability. Nonetheless, in times of weakness, China remained vulnerable and the Khitan (907–1125) and Jin or Jurchen (1115–1234) seized parts of northern China after the fall of the Tang and would force the Song to give them silver, silk, and tea.



The Tribute System
Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY
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1. Explain the scene in this painting.

This painting is an idealized representation of the tribute system in China during the Qing Dynasty. On the right sits the emperor on a stage surrounded by court officials. To the left are three men with a white horse, and behind them in a line are two more men with Central Asian headgear, as well as a black horse and a white/brown horse. The man closest to the white horse is on his knees bowing to the Chinese emperor on his throne.

2. Where is this scene set? Why?

This scene takes place not in the emperor's palace but out in the open—there are trees behind the emperor's throne and a pile of rocks in the forefront. It is unlikely that the emperor would have set up court in the wilderness and outdoors, so this scenery is part of the idealization of this painting. The emperor insisted on tribute payments from nomadic tribes in the North and West, and this painting visualizes the fact that through the tribute system the emperor's authority extends far into the provinces and the wilderness.

3. What does this image suggest about the relationship between nomadic tribes and the Chinese empire? Is this an accurate portrayal?

The painting suggests that nomadic tribes were subservient to the Chinese emperor and that they were dependent on his goodwill and

mercy. In reality, the tribute system was far more reciprocal. The Xiongnu federation of nomadic tribes, for example, was able to command "gifts" from the Chinese emperor in exchange for the promise not to raid northern provinces.

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

C. Cultural Influence across an Ecological Frontier

1. Chinese agriculture and lifestyle not possible in the steppes
2. Southern people absorbed into Chinese culture
3. Turkic influence on Tang and Song courts and military
4. Culture of “western barbarians” fashionable in Tang
5. Nativist backlash in the south

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

C. Cultural Influence across an Ecological Frontier

1. Chinese agriculture and lifestyle not possible in the steppes: While some aspects of Chinese culture made their way north, Chinese style agriculture and material life was impossible in the steppes and grasslands of Central Asia. Thus, there was little way to replicate being Chinese amongst the Turkic nomads.
2. Southern people absorbed into Chinese culture: In contrast, the indigenous people of southern China were almost completely absorbed into the great Chinese cultural world.
3. Turkic influence on Tang and Song courts and military: As both the Tang and Song dynasties had their origins in mixed Sino-Turkic families, there was a great influence in the court culture. Turkic battle techniques were also used by Chinese generals in the field.
4. Culture of “western barbarians” fashionable in Tang: For some time in the Tang dynasty, there was a fad for things from the west (Central Asia, Persia, India, and Arabia). Music, fashion, dancing, and other aspects of culture were popular amongst the northern Chinese elites.
5. Nativist backlash in the south: The southern Chinese, who saw themselves as the heirs to the Han, were extremely critical of the fad for things foreign.

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

A. Korea and China

1. Silla (688–900), Koryo (918–1392), and Yi (1392–1910)
2. Tribute, Confucian students, and Confucian patriarchy
3. Yet distinctly Korean

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

A. Korea and China

1. Silla (688–900), Koryo (918–1392), and Yi (1392–1910): With aid from the Tang dynasty, the Silla were the first Korean state to unite the warlike leaders of the peninsula. While they did receive Tang aid, they fiercely guarded their independence.
2. Tribute, Confucian students, and Confucian patriarchy: The new Korean state did agree to be a tribute state and sent many students to China to study the Confucian classics. Later, Confucian schools were developed in Korea. A very orthodox interpretation of Confucianism led to serious restrictions on Korean women.
3. Yet distinctly Korean: While there was a strong Sinitic influence on the Korean elite, little of this made its way down to the poor Korean peasants, living in serf-like conditions. The elite also maintained their language and culture, even developing an alphabet called *hangul* rather than using Chinese characters.



Map 8.2 Korean Kingdoms about 500 C.E.
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Page 262 (page 378, With Sources)

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

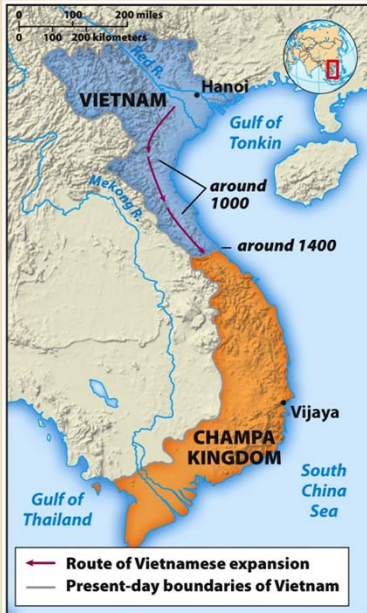
B. Vietnam and China

1. 1,000 years of Chinese rule (111 B.C.E.–939 C.E.)
2. Sinicization of the elite
3. Independent tribute state
4. Many Southeast Asia cultural practices

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

B. Vietnam and China

1. 1,000 years of Chinese rule (111 B.C.E.- 939 C.E.): The Han conquered the Vietnamese heartland around the Red River and ruled it as part of China for 1,000 years. Many Chinese migrated south, bringing Confucianism, culture, and administrative systems.
2. Sinicization of the elite: This prolonged contact thoroughly sinicized the elite. The Vietnamese elite lived as part of the greater Chinese world and were a cultural distinct from the lower classes.
3. Independent tribute state: While independence was won from a fierce rebellion, the new Vietnamese state became a tribute state of China and used Chinese systems and symbols in its statecraft.
4. Many Southeast Asia cultural practices: While the elite were very much in the Chinese cultural world, the lower classes were part of a greater Southeast Asian world, enjoying cockfighting, the betel nut, and greater freedoms for women.



Map 8.3 Vietnam
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 Page 263 (page 379, With Sources)

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

C. Japan and China

1. Voluntary and selective borrowing
2. Shotoku Taishi (572–622)
3. Decentralized state creates the *Samurai*
4. Buddhism and Shinto
5. Relative freedom of elite women

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

C. Japan and China

1. Voluntary and selective borrowing: Because of Japan's physical distance from China, it was never conquered. This allowed the Japanese to voluntarily and selectively borrow what they wanted from China without having anything forced on them.
2. Shotoku Taishi (572–622): A prominent aristocrat who led the movement to study the Chinese political system and use it as a model for the new Japanese state. He launched several large missions where students, monks, scholars, and artists visited China to learn what they could and bring it back to Japan.
3. Decentralized state creates the *Samurai*: The Japanese never created the fully centralized Chinese-style state system. As the emperor was often more ceremonial, the real power fell into the hands of the regional warriors.
4. Buddhism and Shinto: While Buddhism was a Chinese import, it did not replace the indigenous veneration of *kami* or local spirits. Indeed, many Japanese blended Buddhism with Shinto spirit worship.
5. Relative freedom of elite women: Compared to Korean women, Japanese elite women enjoyed much more freedom. Property rights and divorce regulations were much more favorable. This may be because the Japanese studied China during the more liberal Tang dynasty. There were many great works of literature written by elite Japanese women.



Map 8.4 Japan
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IV. China and the Eurasia World Economy

A. Spillovers: China's Impact on Eurasia

1. Salt making, paper, and printing
2. Gunpowder and the compass
3. Finished goods from China, commodities to China

IV. China and the Eurasia World Economy

A. Spillovers: China's Impact on Eurasia

1. Salt making, paper, and printing: China's dynamic economy and technological innovations spread far past its borders and were adopted in the Islamic world and Europe. Paper was a huge innovation and spread through the Islamic world very quickly. While Muslim cultures valued calligraphy and did not take to printing, Europeans would develop printing when they began to use paper (it is unclear if there was a Chinese influence on European printing). Paper and printing allowed for the spread of literacy in Europe, stimulating important changes in the coming centuries.

2. Gunpowder and the compass: Other technologies were modified and expanded upon. Gunpowder, for example, was refined as a key component of warfare by Muslim armies that made cannons and Europeans who would develop personal firearms. Sailors around the world tinkered with the technology of the compass, adapting it to their specific needs.

3. Finished goods from China, commodities to China: The vibrant Chinese economy produced finished goods such as textiles and porcelains for export to distant markets. In return, Chinese began to consume commodities such as spices from the islands of Southeast Asia. This process served to build mutually dependent markets of consumers and producers.

IV. China and the Eurasia World Economy

B. On the Receiving End: China as Economic Beneficiary

1. Cotton, sugar, and faster rice
2. Persian windmills and Buddhist printing
3. Cosmopolitan cities, respected merchants, and monkey gods

IV. China and the Eurasia World Economy

B. On the Receiving End: China as Economic Beneficiary

1. Cotton, sugar, and faster rice: China's contact with the outside world also allowed technology, ideas, and crops to flow into China. From India, the Chinese learned how to raise cotton and sugar cane. These became important sectors of the Chinese agricultural sector. From Vietnam, China gained a faster growing rice that did well in the southern Yangtze basin. This led to a major growth in population and a shift of China's demographic balance from the north to the south.

2. Persian windmills and Buddhist printing: From Persia, China learned of windmills and developed a similar technology. The spread of the Buddhist world into China led to the development of printed images and texts, as devout Buddhists wanted images of the Buddha and short religious texts that could be carried as charms. In the Tang dynasty, Buddhist monasteries transformed the practice of printing with seals into printing with blocks. The first printed book was the Buddhist classic the *Diamond Sutra*. A Buddhist monk from India first identified the soils that contained saltpeter and were flammable, leading to the formula for gunpowder.

3. Cosmopolitan cities, respected merchants, and monkey gods: Thanks to the connections with the Indian Ocean basin trade, the cities of coastal China soon saw the development of communities from Southeast Asia, India, Persia, Arabia, and beyond. Quanzhou had Buddhist, Muslim, and Hindu places of worship and study. While violence could erupt between ethnic communities, as in the massacre of tens

of thousands of foreigners in the 870s, trade with the Indian Ocean world created major economic growth in south China. Merchants increasingly gained a new social acceptance and overcame older Confucian disdain. The culture of the Indian Ocean world also entered in the form of popular stories such as tales of a monkey god, obviously derived from the Hindu deity Hanuman.

V. China and Buddhism

A. Making Buddhism Chinese

1. Foreignness of Buddhism
2. Social instability and Buddhist comforts
3. Translating words and concepts
4. Mahayana and the Pure Land School
5. Sui emperor Wendi and state support

V. China and Buddhism

A. Making Buddhism Chinese

1. Foreignness of Buddhism: When Buddhism first came to China via the Silk Roads during the Han dynasty, it was perceived as too foreign and un-Chinese. The emphasis on individual salvation and withdrawal into monasteries conflicted with the Confucian emphasis on the family and social obligations to be engaged in making the world a more harmonious place. Buddhists' discussions of infinite time fell on deaf ears to a culture that measures time by generations and dynasties.

2. Social instability and Buddhist comforts: Once the Han dynasty began to crumble and then collapse, Buddhism quickly made inroads into Chinese society as Confucianism was discredited and the world became an unstable and dangerous place. While Buddhist teachings gave meaning to a world in chaos and explained suffering as a part of life, monks provided shelter for travelers and refugees. Soon Chinese from all levels of society turned to the Buddha's message, and elite Chinese began to sponsor monasteries and other institutions.

3. Translating words and concepts: Buddhist monks also made a concerted effort to translate the terms and concepts of the faith into a meaningful and acceptable message for Chinese society. For example, there was a greater emphasis on patriarchy.

4. Mahayana and the Pure Land School: With its emphasis on relics, rituals, and deities, the Mahayana branch of the faith spread in China. A popular form of Buddhism was the Pure Land School, which taught that simply repeating the name of an earlier Buddha, Amitabha, would lead to rebirth in a land of paradise. Salvation by faith rather than intensive meditation or study made Indian Buddhism a popular and more Chinese faith.

5. Sui emperor Wendi and state support: Under the Sui dynasty, emperor Wendi built monasteries at China's five sacred mountains and used it as a rationale for his reign and military campaigns. With state support, monasteries became important commercial enterprises and amassed great wealth. The state

supervised the exam system for entry into the monkhood and kept other forms of state control over the Buddhist institutions.



Map 8.5 The World of Asian Buddhism
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 Page 273 (page 389, With Sources)

V. China and Buddhism

B. Losing State Support: The Crisis of Chinese Buddhism

1. Resentment of wealth, withdrawal, and foreignness
2. An Lushan rebellion (755–763)
3. Han Yu's Confucian counter-attack (819)
4. Imperial persecution (841–845)
5. A Confucian thinking cap, a Daoist robe, and Buddhist sandals

V. China and Buddhism

B. Losing State Support: The Crisis of Chinese Buddhism

1. Resentment of wealth, withdrawal, and foreignness: Many resented Buddhism for a variety of reasons. The tax-exempt wealth that the monasteries amassed due to their commercial activities drew jealousy from many quarters, not the least the state, who saw lost revenues. Others did not like Buddhist ideas about withdrawing from society and celibacy as they conflicted with Confucian emphasis on the family. Others disliked the foreign origins and nature of the faith.
2. An Lushan rebellion (755–763): The rebellion against the Tang dynasty was led by a general of foreign origin and increased Chinese xenophobia.
3. Han Yu's Confucian counterattack (819): He launched a scathing counterattack on Buddhism, telling the emperor that the Buddha spoke a foreign language, not that of the Chinese kings.
4. Imperial persecution (841–845): A series of decrees ordered hundreds of thousands of monks and nuns to return to a normal, tax-paying life. Temples and monasteries were destroyed or taken over by the state, and Buddhists could not use precious metals and gems in their art work.
5. A Confucian thinking cap, a Daoist robe, and Buddhist sandals: This Chinese proverb held that all "black haired sons of Han" had elements of all three ideologies within themselves, assimilating Buddhism into other Chinese thoughts and practices.

VI. Reflections: Why Do Things Change?

- A. Debate on the cause of change**
- B. Not necessary to choose**
- C. Contact with strangers**
- D. Internal versus external**

VI. Reflections: Why Do Things Change?

- A. Debate on the cause of change:** This is central to what historians do.
- B. Not necessary to choose:** Often it is a combination of factors.
- C. Contact with strangers:** World historians emphasize external contact as a key factor.
- D. Internal versus external:** Obviously there is some balance between these two sources of change.



Visual Source 8.1 A Banquet with the Emperor
National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan
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Page 405



Visual Source 8.2 At Table with the Empress
National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan
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Page 406



Visual Source 8.3 A Literary Gathering
Palace Museum, Beijing
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Page 407



Visual Source 8.4 An Elite Night Party
Palace Museum, Beijing
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Page 408