China and the World
East Asian Connections 600-1300
China and the World

- In the world of third-wave civilizations, China cast a long shadow.

- Its massive and powerful civilization was widely imitated by surrounding peoples, giving rise to a China-centered set of relationships encompassing most of eastern Asia.
  - None of its neighbors – whether nomadic peoples to the north/west or smaller states such as Korea, Japan, and Vietnam – could escape its pull.
  - Its booming economy, overall wealth, cosmopolitan nature and technological innovations also attracted visitors from all over Eurasia
The Reemergence of a Unified China

- The collapse of the Han dynasty around 220 CE ushered in over three centuries of political fragmentation in China that resulted in:
  - The rise of powerful and locally entrenched aristocratic families.
  - 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 were seen as unnatural in the eyes of many Chinese, discrediting Confucianism and resulting in a greater acceptance of Daoism and Buddhism.
Even as China was influenced the world, it too was changed by its interactions with non-Chinese peoples.

- Northern nomads – “barbarians” – frequently posed a military threat and at times, conquered and ruled portions of China.
- The country’s involvement in international trade stimulated social, cultural, and economic changes within China.
- Buddhism, and to a lesser extent, Christianity and Islam, also took root.
The Reemergence of a Unified China

- Those centuries of political disunity also witnessed substantial Chinese migration southward toward the Yangzi River Valley, giving southern China 60% of the country’s population by 1000.
  - The movement of Chinese people, accompanied by intensive agriculture, set in motion vast environmental transformations, including the destruction of old-growth forests and the retreat of elephants.

- Around 800 CE, the Chinese official/writer Liu Zongyuan lamented: “
  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.”
New Varieties of Rice

A farm house on the outskirts of the city, Beijing qingming scroll

“In the early part of the Song dynasty ... a new variety of early-ripening rice was introduced into China from Champa, a kingdom then located near the Mekong River Delta in what is now Vietnam, and by 1012 it had been introduced in the lower Yangzi and Huai river regions. ... Because the variety of rice was relatively more drought-resistant, it could be grown in places where older varieties had failed, especially on higher land and on terraces that climb hilly slopes, and it ripened even faster than the other early-ripening varieties already grown in China. This made double-cropping possible in some areas, and in some places, even triple-cropping became possible ... the hardiness and productivity of various varieties of rice were and are in large part responsible for the density of population in South, Southeast, and East Asia.

According to the Buddhist monk, Shu Wenying, the Song Emperor Zhengzhong (998-1022), when he learned that Champa rice was drought-resistant, sent special envoys to bring samples back to China.”

— Lynda Noreen Shaffer
A Golden Age of Chinese Achievement

- The dynastic collapse of the Sui, 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. Together these two dynasties established patterns of Chinese life that endured into the 20th century.

- Culturally, this era has been regarded as the “golden age” or arts and literature, setting standards of excellence in poetry, landscape painting, and ceramics.
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 initial unity under the Sui dynasty (589–618). Its emperors solidified that unity by creating a vast extension of canals, stretching 1,200 miles, and connecting northern and southern China economically.
  - However, the ruthlessness of the Sui emperors and a futile military campaign to conquer Korea drained the state’s resources, alienated the people, and resulted in the overthrow of the dynasty.
A Golden Age of Chinese Achievement

- An explosion of scholarship gave rise to Neo-Confucianism, an effort to revive Confucian thinking while incorporating into it some of the insights of Daoism and Buddhism.

- Politically, the Tang and Song dynasties built a state structure that enduring for a thousand years: six major ministries – personnel, finance, rites, army, justice, and public works.

- These ministries were accompanied by the Censorate (an agency that conducted surveillance over the rest of the government, checking on character and competence in public officials)
A Golden Age of Chinese Achievement

- To staff the bureaucracy, the examination system was revived and made more elaborate, facilitated by the ability to print books.
- 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.
- Tang China was described as “the best ordered state in the world”
Examples of printing woodblock and woodblock-printed book (top) and bronze movable type blocks and movable-type-block-printed book (bottom) from the National Palace Museum.

Click on the image to get more information about the objects from the NPM website.
Problem 1: Though selecting officials on the basis of merit represented a challenge to established aristocratic families’ hold on public office, a substantial number of official positions still went to the sons of the privileged, even if they had not passed their exam.

Problem 2: The education and examination system grew far more rapidly than the number of official positions, and many who passed the lower-level exam could not be accommodated with a bureaucratic position.

- However, a combination of landowning and success on the examination system allowed some individuals to maintain immense cultural prestige and prominence in local areas.

Problem 3: Despite the state’s periodic efforts to redistribute land to the peasantry, the great families of large landowners continued to encroach on peasant plots.
A Golden Age of Chinese Achievement

- Underlying the 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.”
  - Rapid population growth from 50-60 million to 120 million by 1200 (Tang)
  - Achievements in agricultural production, particularly the adoption of a fast-ripening and drought-resistant strain of rice from Vietnam.
Donkeys pulling cart

Horses and donkeys
Women often traveled by palanquin
There are several boats moored along the river
A merchant directs men moving bales of grain
Camels used to transport goods
A Golden Age of Chinese Achievement

- 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.

- 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 and offered vegetarian fare for religious banquets.
Life by the city gate, Beijing qingming Scroll

The city depicted in the Beijing qingming scroll is a lively urban center, full of people and street life. The scene above is of the area just inside the city gate.

Get a closer look at the street life around the city gate...
Inns of various kinds appealed to different groups.

- Inns that served only wine ("hitting the cup") was regarded as "unfit for polite company".
- Luxuriant inns marked by red lanterns featured prostitutes and wine chambers equipped with beds.
- Specialized agencies managed elaborate dinner parties for the wealthy, complete with a Perfume and Medicine Office to "help sober up guests".
- Schools for musicians offered thirteen different courses.
- Numerous clubs provided companionship for poets, fishermen, Buddhists, physical fitness enthusiasts, antique collectors, equestrian riders, and many other groups.
Market Activity during the Song

Customers at a shop selling cloth, Beijing qingming scroll

The role of merchants in the Song (and throughout Chinese history) belies the conventional stereotype of China suppressing merchant activity:

“The older Tang market system, which had strictly confined trade to cities and within cities to specific sites and hours, utterly broke down as urban commerce spread throughout cities and into extramural mercantile quarters. Over long distances, large cities and whole regions of dense population came to depend on ship-borne bulk trade in staple goods, especially rice. Over shorter distances, trade penetrated the countryside, drawing farmers into new periodic market centers and rapidly proliferating market towns.”
— Robert Hymes

A lively street scene from the Beijing qingming scroll.
A Golden Age of Chinese Achievement

- Supplying these cities with food was made possible by the immense network on internal waterways – canals, rivers, and lakes - that provided cheap transportation and bound the country together.

- Industrial production 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 11th 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 for Buddhist monasteries.

- Industrial growth was fueled almost entirely by coal, which also came to provide more of the energy for heating homes and cooking (air pollution).

- The industrial revolution would stall after invasions and the Mongol conquest.
A Golden Age of Chinese Achievement

- Technological innovation in other fields flourished.
  - Inventions in printing, both woodblock and movable type generated the world’s first printed books
  - By 1000 relatively cheap books on religious, agricultural, mathematical, and medical topics became widely available in China
  - Chinese navigational and shipbuilding techniques led the world
  - The Chinese invention of gunpowder created within a few centuries a revolution in military affairs that had global dimensions
Stereotypes Concerning Chinese Culture and Scientific Inquiry

Because the European “Scientific Revolution” of the 16th and 17th centuries is generally regarded as the foundation of the modern sciences and because in the late 19th and 20th centuries China lagged behind the most developed areas of Europe both economically and technologically, it is too commonly assumed that there was something about Chinese culture or Confucian thought that was incompatible with scientific inquiry and experimentation. But as Joseph Needham notes in his *Science and Civilisation in China*, China was for a time well ahead of the West in the development of several fields of knowledge about the physical world — including magnetism and optics — and Chinese advances in engineering were, at least until 1500, “frequently superior to anything which Europe could show.” (5)
Examples of Song ceramics from the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the British Museum. Click on the image to get a full description of the object from the museum website.

Pillow, early 11th C. Cizhou (Tz'u-chou) Ware
Click for full description.
© Minneapolis Institute of Arts

The crowded “rainbow bridge” is the centerpiece of the Beijing qingming scroll.
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- Gunpowder
  - Created by accident in the search for the Daoist “elixir of immortality” – then used by entertainers for fireworks and pyrotechnics at the Chinese imperial court.
  - Its use in war developed during the Song dynasty as an incendiary in weapons that would set fire to their target
    - Song engineers borrowed techniques from fireworks to create “Thunderclap Bombs” designed to scare and disorient opposing troops with noise and light.
    - By the time of the invasion of the Mongols, China was able to deploy stronger “Heaven-Shaking Thunder Crash Bombs” which were able to blow up their target
Customers at a shop selling bows and arrows,
Beijing qingming scroll
Illustrations of whip-arrows (L) and raised “flower” and ball bombs (R), from Zeng Gongliang and Ding Du, *Wujing zongyao*, late Ming (Wanli Period) edition, in *Zhongguo bingshu jicheng*, Volume 3 to 5, edited by the *Zhongguo bingshu jicheng* Editing Committee (Beijing and Shenyang: Jiefangjun chubanshe and Liaoshen shushe, 1988), 12:56 (p.633).

from A Visual Sourcebook for Chinese Civilization, Patricia Ebrey, University of Washington
A Golden Age of Chinese Achievement

- The Mongols, further encouraged the development of this technology, encouraging stronger and stronger bombs. A Chinese technician also developed the first rockets, which were also employed in battle by the 13th century.
- Experiments with more powerful forms of gunpowder culminated in the emergence of weapons designed to fire projectiles
  - Evolving from earlier fire lances, bamboo or metal tubes were combined with gunpowder which acted as a propellant to fire projectiles
  - Cannons were in use in China by the 1350s
  - Gunpowder and gunpowder based weapons spread across Eurasia from the 13th century, changing the nature of warfare in India, the Middle East, and Europe (remaining dominant in war until the development of nitroglycerin in the mid-nineteenth century)
A Golden Age of Chinese Achievement

- Tang and Song China remained the world’s most highly commercialized society, in which producing for market, rather than local consumption became a widespread phenomenon.
  - Cheap transportation allowed peasants to grow specialized crops for sale, while they purchased rice or other staples on the market.
  - Government demand for taxes paid in cash rather than in kind required peasants to sell something – their products or their labor – 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 contributed to further commercialization of Chinese society.

- “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”
Bronze *Kaiyuan tongbao* coin
Tang dynasty, first issued 621 CE
© The British Museum

Great Ming Circulating Treasure Note
Ming dynasty, first issued 1375 CE
© The British Museum
The Song Confucian Revival

- With roots in the Tang period, the Song period saw a vigorous revival of Confucianism in both the North and South of China.

- The revival would continue into the following Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties.

- This new form of revived Confucianism is often known as Neo-Confucianism.
Scholar by a Waterfall
Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279), late 12th-early 13thcentury
Ma Yuan (Chinese, active ca. 1190-1225)
Album leaf: ink and color on silk;
Signed: "Servitor, Ma Yuan"
© The Metropolitan Museum of Art

"[T]his album leaf [shows] a gentleman in a gardenlike setting, the jagged rhythms of the pine tree and garden contrast with the quiet mood of the scholar, who gazes pensively into the bubbling rapids of the cascade. ..."
The revival of Confucianism was accomplished by both scholar-officials and teachers during the Song period. Both sets of individuals gave Confucian teachings new relevance.

Scholar-officials such as Fan Zhongyan (989-1052) and Sima Guang (1019-1086) provided key examples of Neo-Confucius teachings as men who put service to the state above personal interests.

Fan Zhongyan (989-1052)
A prominent statesman, strategist, educator, and writer of the Northern Song Dynasty.

Sima Guang (1019-1086)
Historian and high-ranking official of the Northern Song best known compiling his monumental 294-chapter history of China, entitled Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance (Zizhi tongjian).
Confucianism naturally underwent significant change throughout the centuries.

While Confucius’s own teachings, as recorded in the *Analects*, and the Confucian classics were still central elements, Confucianism's close association with the state and competition from Buddhism, forced Confucian teachers to develop their own account of the natural and human world.
• The scholar Zhu Xi (1130-1200) was also very influential in the Confucian revival during the Song dynasty.

• Responsible for the synthesis of various philosophical ideas regarding Confucianism, his ideas would become accepted as orthodox interpretation on Confucianism in the Ming and Qing dynasties, as well as other East Asian countries.

**The Five Confucian Classics**
- Classic of Poetry (Shijing)
- Classic of History (Shujing)
- Classic of Changes (Yijing)
- Record of Rites (Li Ji)
- Chronicles of the Spring and Autumn Period (Chunqiu)

**The Four Books**
- The Great Learning (Daxue)
- The Doctrine of the Mean (Zhongyong)
- The Analects of Confucius (Lunyu)
- The Mencius (Mengzi)
In addition to the Five Classics that had been the basis of Confucian study in the Han dynasty (202 BCE and 220 CE), Zhu Xi emphasized the Four Books as a basis for study for both the civil service examinations and Confucian learning.

Active in both the theory and practice of education, he also extolled Confucian tradition as central to the education of scholars.

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Neo-Confucianism in the Song period emphasized self-cultivation as a path to individual self-fulfillment, as well as a path to the formation of a virtuous and harmonious society and state. These teachings became central to political discourse, family life, the civil service examination system, and the identity of the scholar-official class in China.
The Centrality of the Family

- According to Confucian teachings:
  - The family is considered the most basic unit of society and each individual is expected to respect and obey his or her parents.
  - Each individual should put the interests of his or her family before any personal interests. This form of “filial piety” even extends to ancestors.
  - It is essential that everyone marry so that family lines can continue.
The Classic of Filial Piety, a text composed between 350 and 200 B.C., teaches a simple but all-embracing lesson: “Beginning humbly at home, filial piety not only ensures success in a man’s life but also brings peace and harmony to the world at large.”

During the Song dynasty, the above text became one of the thirteen classics of the Neo-Confucian canon and remained a cornerstone of traditional Chinese moral teaching until modern times.
The Status of Children

Children made possible the continuation of the family. As such, children were expected to learn to be filial. However, children were often indulged with toys and other gifts.
The Status of Women Part 1

During the Song dynasty women had increased rights to property.

Mothers and mother-in-laws were considered to be very powerful within their families.

Some women such as Li Qingzhao (1084-1151) also became famous Chinese poets or artists.
The Status of Women

- Girls left their families when they married.
- If the woman gave birth to sons, she would eventually gain a respected place in their family of marriage. She would also be treated as ancestors by their sons and sons’ sons.
- Therefore, mothers and grandmothers had important and respected places in their families.
In comparison to the Tang dynasty, the Song dynasty is often seen as a period when the status of women declined.

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 show women riding horses
- The Queen Mother of the West, A Daoist deity, was widely worshipped among female Daoist priests and practitioners

By the Song dynasty, a reviving Confucianism and rapid economic growth tightened patriarchal restrictions on women

Overall, women were:
- Less active in politics.
- Less commonly seen on the streets.
- Asked to refrain from remarrying
Attempts to restore some of the earlier Han dynasty order led to images of women as submissive and passive.

Confucian writers highlighted the subordination of women to men and the need to keep males and females separate in every domain of life.

According to the Confucian structure of society, women at every level were to occupy a lower position than men. Subservience to men was seen as natural and proper.

Biographies written about admirable women emphasized unselfish, loyal, and self-sacrificing willingness to do anything to help their husband and family.

“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.”
Women were 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.”

The most compelling expression of a tightening of patriarchy lay in the practice of foot binding.

The practice began among dancers and courtesans in the 10th or 11th century.

It involved the practice of tight wrapping of young girls’ feet, usually breaking the bonds of the foot and causing intense pain.

During the Tang the practice was widely practiced among the elite families and later became more widespread.
Foot binding was associated with new images of female beauty which 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 they belonged.

Many mothers imposed this painful procedure on their daughter in order to assist them in their marriage prospects and to assist them in competing with concubines for the attention of their husbands.
● A rapidly commercializing economy also undermined the position of women, especially in the textile industry.

● Urban workshops and state factories, run by men, increasingly took over the skilled task of weaving textiles, especially silk, which had previously been the work of rural women.

● However, as their economic role in the textile industry declined, other opportunities did beckon. In cities, women operated restaurants, sold fish and vegetables, and worked as maids, cooks, and dressmakers.

● The growing prosperity of elite families funneled an increasing number of women into roles as concubines, entertainers, courtesans, and prostitutes.
  ● Their ready ability surely reduced the ability of wives to negotiate as equals with their husbands, setting women against one another and creating endless household jealousy.
● In other ways, the Song dynasty witnessed 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.
* A scholar wrote, “Neither in earlier nor later times did as much property pass through a woman's hands”

● 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, therefore, offered a mixture of tightening restrictions and new opportunities for women.
● “A woman's duty is not to control or take charge.”
● "Woman's greatest duty is to produce a son."
● "A woman ruler is like a hen crowing."
● "A husband can marry twice, but his wife must never remarry."
  "We should not be too familiar with the lower orders or with women."
● "The woman with no talent is the one who has merit."
● "It will be woman’s neither to do wrong nor to do good. Only about the spirits and the food will they have to think."
● "Disorder is not sent down by Heaven, it is produced by women."
● "Women's nature is passive."
● "Those who cannot be taught, cannot be instructed. These are women and eunuchs."

● "Man is honored for strength; a woman is beautiful on account of her gentleness."

● "There are three unfilial acts: the greatest of these is the failure to produce sons."

● "A woman ruler is like a hen crowing."

● "A husband may marry twice, but his wife must never remarry."

● "We should not be too familiar with the lower orders or with women."

● "A woman should look on her husband as if he were Heaven itself, and never weary of thinking how she may yield to him."

● "Women are to be led and to follow others."
Do you think that beliefs about differences between males or females can influence how people act, and how they feel about themselves?

How do you think men were expected to behave? How might such beliefs about men effect them?

Can you think of any beliefs, or sayings, about how girls should act in the U.S. today? About how boys should act? What effects might these beliefs have?