

Teachers notes for the Premium TimeMaps Unit

Medieval China

Contents

Introduction: How to use this unit	p. 2
Section 1: Whole-class presentation notes	p. 3
Section 2: Student-based enquiry work	p. 26
Appendices	
1. TimeMaps articles for further reference	p. 30
2. Using the unit with AP World History	p. 31

Introduction

This Premium TimeMaps unit is a sequence of maps which follows the history of China 600 CE to 1450 CE, that is from the early Sui dynasty to the mid-Ming dynasty.

The unit's aim is to quickly and clearly show the main episodes in Medieval Chinese history. Apart from the key events, it looks at the way Chinese government, society and culture changed during this period.

Teachers of AP World History, who have a huge amount of ground to cover, may not wish to spend too much time on Medieval China. You can use this TimeMap to simply skate through the period, picking out the points you wish to draw your students' attention to. The bullet points in the Presentation notes below will help you do this.

For those who have the opportunity to go into more depth, the notes provide comprehensive coverage of all the thinking skills, themes and key concepts relevant to this Period 3 topic.

How to use this unit

The unit can be used in two ways:

(1) Whole-class presentation

or

(2) Student-based enquiry work

Teachers may wish to use both approaches, perhaps using (1) as a quick introduction, and then (2) for students to carry out a more in-depth enquiry using the student-based questions; or (if you feel your students can manage this) starting them off with (2), to allow them to find out for themselves what happened at this period, before using (1) as a reinforcement exercise.

How does this unit fit in with other Premium TimeMaps units?

The unit follows on from *Ancient China*, for Period 2, and leads onto *Late Imperial China*, for Period 4.

Section 1: Whole-class presentation

Using a big screen, show the map sequence to your class, talking through each map. To help you do this, we have prepared accompanying Presentation Notes, which are set out below. You can use these either as a script or *aide-memoire*.

This activity can be used as a wrap up / reinforcement exercise, or as a stand-alone unit.

For each map, these notes mostly follow the same formula:

1. Date and introduction

The date to which the map refers, followed by a small introductory paragraph which seeks to encapsulate in a sentence or two what's going on in the map. These are in **bold**.

2. Bullet points

One or more bullet points cover different points of interest in the map, or in the period it covers.

If you are not wanting to spend much time on the topic, these bullet points will be all you need to give your students a clear overview.

3. Additional Notes

The premium map sequence offers a superb framework on which to hang a large amount of information. This more in-depth information is offered in additional notes. If the aim is to give a brief overview of the topic, then skip them.

If you wish to use these Additional Notes, we suggest that, prior to showing the Presentation to your class, you read them through and highlight sections you want to draw on.

These notes cover the vast majority of, if not all, the points referred to in the AP World History course document (these are covered in even more depth in the TimeMaps articles listed at the end of this guidance.)

Some key words or phrases are in **bold**; they are also there to help you see at a glance the key points in a paragraph.

4. Questions

The notes for several of the maps end with one or more suggested questions. These are in *italics*.

They are designed to be tackled as part of the Presentation, and as a class activity, but they are NOT essential to the Presentation. Please ignore them if you wish, or have better questions to ask.

The questions aim to give students the opportunity to engage with the subject and are designed to either reinforce points made in the Presentation, or provoke discussion; they do not necessarily have a "correct" answer.

Some (though not all) of the questions will work just as well if used as reinforcement exercises at the end of the Presentation.

If you don't want to use the questions suggested, there is one question that can probably be usefully asked for most if not all maps:

How has this map changed from the last one?

Presentation Notes

If using these in class it might be helpful to print these notes out.

Notes for Map 1, 600 CE: China reunited

After 350 years of division, China has been recently reunited under the Sui dynasty.

- During the centuries of disunity the **north** was divided into a number of kingdoms under non-Chinese rulers from **central Asia**, whereas the **south** remained united under a series of native Chinese dynasties (note 1).
- This period of disunity was a time of turmoil, but in both north and south China, the old Han **bureaucratic** form of government has continued (note 2).
- Great changes have come to China - major shifts in **population** from north to south, important **technological** advancements, and new **religions** coming to the fore (note 3).
- In 589 CE the **Sui dynasty** reunified the huge country and set in train long-term developments that would transform China (note 4).

Additional notes

1. A China divided

After the fall of the **Han dynasty** in 220 CE, China experienced more than 350 years of disunity and barbarian invasion. Northern China, the traditional heartland of Chinese civilization, was over-run by non-Chinese peoples from central Asia, who had established several kingdoms there.

Southern China remained united under native Chinese dynasties. These were unstable and weak, and were unable to reconquer the north.

2. The civilization of Ancient China had been preserved intact.

Unlike in the West, where the fall of the western Roman empire led to the loss of much of the ancient civilization of Greece and Rome, the Chinese succeeded in preserving their civilization throughout this difficult period.

A large reason for this success was that in all the various kingdoms into which China was divided, whether ruled by Chinese or non-Chinese dynasties, the old Han **civil service** continued to function, at least to some extent.

As the officials needed to be educated to carry out their tasks, this had helped preserve the literate culture of China.

However, in all parts of China, powerful landed **aristocracies** gained control of government, and came to possess most of the farmland in China. Many ordinary peasants lost their land, becoming landless **serfs** tied to the large estates on which they worked.

3. The period of disunity was a time of great changes for China.

Population movements

In ancient times, the bulk of the population had lived in northern China; the south was a thinly inhabited frontier region.

Following the fall of the Han dynasty, the chaotic conditions in the north had caused a large-scale **migration** of peasants southwards. By 600 CE about a third of the population live there.

Technological advance

The **stirrup** and **horse collar** had been introduced, making controlling horses easier and allowing them to carry heavier loads. **Water clocks** and **water mills**, both of which had been invented in Ancient China, have also been improved during this period.

Religion and thought

Confucianism had been the official ideology of the Han empire. **Daoism** had also been popular amongst all levels of society; and **ancestor worship** was generally practiced as well.

During the troubled period of division, **Buddhism**, introduced into China by missionaries from India and central Asia, had become firmly established across China. Confucianism retained its status as the basis of education and government ideology, but had lost its hold over the hearts and minds of most people, even at the highest levels of society.

4. The reunification of China under the Sui dynasty

In 589 CE China was reunited by a general who founded the **Sui dynasty**. The first Sui emperor, **Wendi**, brought firm government to the whole country, and introduced changes that would have great importance for long-term developments in China.

Good government

After centuries in which high government posts had been held by members of a few aristocratic families, Wendi made sure that officials were recruited and promoted on merit. He even instituting a rudimentary **examination system** for some new recruits.

The "Equal-Fields" system

Wendi imposed the **Equal-Fields** system, which had been pioneered in one of the northern kingdoms, the Wei, across the whole of China. This freed ordinary farmers from the control of powerful landowners and gave them their own plots of land with which to feed themselves and their families.

The Grand Canal

He had a system of waterways, known as the **Grand Canal**, constructed. These would allow grain and other commodities to be transported in bulk all over China, at comparatively low cost. This would prove a huge boon to the economy of China.

Wendi also had many new **roads** constructed, and more repaired.

Pushing out the borders

As happened so often when the whole of China came under unified rule, Wendi was able to **expand the borders** of his empire considerably, especially out into **central Asia**.

Question:

What is the most important change that the emperor Wendi introduces, do you think?
(No correct answers - but the picture might become clearer later.)

Notes for Map 2, 624 CE: A new dynasty

The second Sui emperor overstretched his empire's resources, and so brought about the fall of the dynasty. A new dynasty came to power, the Tang.

- To complete huge projects and to fight wars, millions of peasants were required to do years of **forced labour** and **military service**. This caused great suffering and discontentment (note 1).
- **Rebellions** started to break out, which eventually, in 618 CE, brought a new dynasty, the **Tang**, to the throne (note 2).

Additional notes

1. The Sui lose popular support

The huge projects which the first Sui emperor, Wendi, had ordered, such as the Grand Canal and the road-building schemes, had great benefits for the economy of China.

Unfortunately for the Sui dynasty, these benefits would only become apparent later. Meanwhile, their construction projects fell heavily on the peasantry.

Throughout Chinese history peasants were required to do labor-service - **corvée** - for the government, and wise emperors tried to ensure that these burdens were not too onerous.

The second emperor of the Sui dynasty, the emperor **Yangdi** (reigned 604-618) seems to have been a megalomaniac whose appetite for grand public works inflicted huge suffering on the people. An immense amount of forced labour was required for the construction of the Grand Canal and many other major projects.

The peasants were also liable for **military service**, and the second Sui emperor waged long and very costly wars in **Korea** and elsewhere. This added to the peasants' burdens, and in the end achieved nothing.

2. The rise of the Tang dynasty

The Chinese believed that a dynasty could only reign so long as they ruled wisely, for the benefit of the people. While they did this, they enjoyed the support of Heaven (or, as Westerners would say, God). Once this **Mandate of Heaven** had been taken from them, however, they would swiftly be replaced by another dynasty.

Rebellions started to break out in different parts of the country from 613 CE onwards. One of these was led by a leading general, the duke of Tang, who within a few years had gained control of China from the Sui. The Sui emperor Wangdi was assassinated in 618, and the general founded the **Tang dynasty**.

Question:

The Sui were a short-lived dynasty which imposed unity on the whole of China. Does this remind you of a previous episode from Chinese history?

(Hopefully students will recall the Qin dynasty of Ancient China.)

Notes for Map 3, 698 CE: The Tang dynasty at its height

The early Tang period was a time of great prosperity for China, and the empire's borders reached far out into central Asia.

- The early Tang rulers brought **peace and prosperity** to China, and pushed its borders far out into **central Asia** (note 1).
- China's influence on its **neighbors** reached a peak at this time (note 2).
- This was a time of **good government** and **economic expansion** at home, as well as being one of the high points of Chinese **literary culture** (note 3).
- It was also the period when **Buddhism** reached a peak of influence within China (note 4).

Additional notes

1. The early Tang emperors

The first two Tang emperors were great generals and administrators. After them, China was ruled by the famous and highly capable **empress Wu**, the only woman in Chinese history to reign in her own right.

The Tang empire reached its height under the **emperor Xuanzong** (reigned 712-762 CE). Abroad, Chinese armies moved as far west as they would ever go. However, they met defeat at the hands of an army of the Arab Caliphate at the battle of the river **Talas** (751).

One important outcome of this battle, little noticed at the time but of great significance for the future of the Middle East and Europe, was that some Chinese soldiers, captured by the Arabs, passed on the techniques of **paper-making** to their new Arab masters. This had been developed in China more than 600 years before. From the Arabs this very important technology would later spread to Europe.

2. China and its neighbors in early Tang times

All the peoples who bordered China had been deeply influenced by Chinese civilization for centuries, but this process reached a dramatically new level under the Tang.

Korea and **Japan**, in particular, sent regular **tribute embassies** and (either now or previously) imported many features of Chinese civilization. These included

- China's system of writing;
- China's bureaucratic institutions, complete with the examination system;
- Confucianism;
- Buddhism;
- and Chinese styles of art and architecture.

3. Peace, prosperity and culture

Good government under the early Tang

The Tang expanded the rudimentary **examination system** inherited from the Sui, so that more officials (though still a minority) were recruited on merit. Also a special department called the **Censorate** had the job of ensuring high standards of administration were maintained.

Society under the early Tang

Peace within the borders of the enormous country allowed **trade** and **industry** to flourish, and **merchants** and **craftsmen** grew in numbers and wealth. Both internal and international trade reached new heights. The Grand Canal and the road network greatly stimulated trade, and the famous international trade route across the center of Asia known as the **Silk Road** flourished as never before. In the south, ports such as Guangdong (**Canton**) became major bases of maritime trade in the **Indian Ocean**.

The expansion of the economy was reflected in a strong rise of **urbanization**, as towns and cities increased in size and number. **Chang'an**, the capital, was the greatest city in the world at that time.

The population of China expanded, especially in the south.

High culture under the early Tang

The emperor Xuanzong presided over perhaps the most intellectually brilliant court in the history of China. It was particularly famous for its **poetry**. In **calligraphy**, too, the Tang period was a time of pioneering achievement, with the skillful use of brush and ink becoming an art form.

Xuanzong also established the famous **Han Lin Academy**, an institution in which the best scholars of the day met at court and were available for consultation by the government when required, for example on the correct drafting of state documents.

4. Religion and thought under the early Tang

Buddhism reached its peak of influence in China under the early Tang. Buddhist teaching was greatly aided when a monk, **Xuanzang**, visited India and brought back many Buddhist texts.

Chan Buddhism established a firm foothold in China at this time - it would later become the dominant form of that religion.

Confucianism, however, remained the official ideology of the imperial government.

Question:

In what ways did the Tang dynasty benefit from the achievements of their predecessors, the Sui?

(Answers could include the reunification of China, which the Tang were able to quickly restore; the examination system and selection of good officials; the Grand canal, which boosted China's economy, and the road system.)

Notes for Map 4, 761 CE: The later Tang dynasty

The last years of Xuanzong's reign saw a terrible rebellion break out, which gravely weakened the Tang dynasty.

- Between 755 and 763, a very destructive rebellion instigated by a leading general, **An Lushan**, caused huge destruction over northern China (note 1).
- As a result of the rebellion, China saw great changes, but her civilization continued to advance under the **late Tang** (note 2).
- **Buddhism** lost its place as the dominant belief-system in China, and began to be replaced by a reviving **Confucianism** (note 3).
- The weakening of Tang rule within China was accompanied by a weakening of Chinese **cultural influence** on its neighbors (note 4).

Additional notes

1. A great rebellion

An Lushan's uprising is regarded as was one of the most famous - and catastrophic - events in China's history.

In the years leading up to the rebellion, the elderly emperor Xuanzong was spending more and more time indulging his interests in poetry and culture, and falling under the spell of one of his **concubines**. As was so often the case when an emperor was not attentive and forceful, **factionalism** increased at court.

Tensions mounted between powerful frontier generals, many of whom were linked to one or other of the court factions. In 755, one of these, the general An Lushan, fearing that he was being out-manuevred at court and greedy for supreme power, marched on the capital and captured it, forcing the emperor and his court to flee.

It took until 762 for the rebellion to be put down, not before bitter fighting over much of northern and eastern China had caused many cities to be destroyed, including the capital, Chang'an (though it was later rebuilt on a smaller scale). Whole provinces had been ravaged, and the regions of **central Asia** had all been lost to Chinese rule.

2. The impact of the rebellion

Government

Although the **civil service** continued to function, the late Tang emperors were never able to regain the firm rule over the whole of China that the early Tang emperors had had. Some provincial governors were able to escape the tight control of the court and become largely independent of it - and even to pass on their offices to their sons, rather than to officials appointed by the court.

The rebellion weakened the landed **aristocracy** which had dominated China's governments since the late Han period. Much of the aristocracy's wealth (and therefore power) was based in north-central China, the ancient heartland of Chinese civilization.

This is where the destruction of the rebellion had been most intense. Some aristocratic families had been wiped out, and many others ruined, their estates ravaged and depopulated,

The diminished power of the aristocracy enabled more officials to be selected on merit by means of the public **examination** system.

Population

An Lushan's rebellion had brought great destruction to northern China, setting off another huge wave of **migration** to the south. By the time order had been restored, China's population was more or less equally divided between north and south for the first time in its history.

The economy and technological advance

The economic center of gravity in China shifted decisively southwards, and the **trading cities** there flourished and expanded. Chinese merchants there became more active in **overseas trade**, establishing communities throughout **south east Asia**. Some began developing direct trading links with **India** and the **Middle East**, and perhaps as far as East Africa.

The expansion in economic activity led to important technological advances. **Wood block printing**, **gunpowder**, **porcelain** and **paper money** were all first recorded at this time.

3. Religion and thought in the Late Tang period

Buddhism began to lose ground, especially amongst the ruling classes. The Buddhist **monasteries'** vast wealth became too tempting a target for the cash-strapped Tang court to ignore. In a purge between 841 and 845, the vast majority of Buddhist monasteries were closed, their wealth confiscated by the government and their monks forced to enter normal society.

Buddhism never recovered as a public organization, though it remained a popular religion in the towns and villages of China right down to the 20th century. **Chan Buddhism**, which had never relied on official support much, was left as the dominant form of Buddhism in China.

This period also saw the first stirrings of a revival of **Confucianism** as a source of spirituality and intellectual influence (see information on the next map).

4. China and her neighbors in late Tang times

China's neighbors had sent regular tribute missions to the Tang court up to the time of the rebellion. After it, these became less frequent, and eventually stopped altogether.

Nanzhao became a fully independent kingdom, and **Korea** and **Japan** both loosened their ties, political and cultural, with China: Chinese elements were not ditched; rather, they were synthesized with their more ancient native traditions to produce the distinctive national cultures which have come down to modern times.

Question:

In what ways was the later Tang period the same as, and different from, the former Tang period?

(Points include:

- Central government was weaker*
- the examination system more prominent as a channel of recruitment for officials*
- state and society were no longer dominated by the landed aristocracy to the same extent as before.*
- the center of gravity of population and the economy had shifted more to the south, and this favored maritime trade with SE Asia and beyond.)*

Notes for Map 5, 907 CE: The “Five Dynasty” period

With the end of the Tang dynasty, China fragmented into separate states.

- At the beginning of the 10th century the last Tang emperor was finally deposed, and China fragmented into several kingdoms: the “**Five Dynasty**” period had begun (note 1).
- **Non-Chinese** kingdoms were established in northern and western frontier regions, and the rest of northern China was damaged by repeated rounds of anarchy (note 2).
- **Southern China**, though covered by several rival states, mostly experienced peace, and the **economic expansion** of late Tang times continued (note 3).
- The **technological advances** which can be traced to the late Tang period now became widespread (note 4).

Additional notes

1. The fall of the Tang dynasty

During the 9th century, the Tang regime became less and less effective. Weak emperors and child emperors were unable to impose their will on the imperial court, which became increasingly consumed by **factional in-fighting**. Standards of government began to slip badly.

The government was now unable to protect the population from oppression by corrupt officials, and little by little they started to fall under the control of big landowners again. From the late 9th century onwards, large-scale **peasant uprisings** broke out. In 881 rebels seized the capital, Chang’an, and the Tang court again had to flee.

From now on the emperors were mere pawns in the hands of rival warlords and foreign invaders. The feeling spread that the **Mandate of Heaven** had at last left the Tang dynasty.

In 907 a warlord deposed the last of the Tang emperors and mounted the throne himself. This was the signal for rival warlords to declare their independence, and the Tang empire simply **broke apart** into several independent kingdoms.

2. Northern China

Instability

Much of northern China was covered by one large state. This experienced chronic **political instability** as repeated rounds of heavy fighting saw a series of regimes (the “Five Dynasties” of traditional Chinese historiography) rise and fall in rapid succession.

The bouts of anarchy ruined key areas of the north, including the great historic capital, Chang’an, and the region round it. This became largely depopulated, never again to be the center of the Chinese world.

In this process, what remained of the old landed aristocracy vanished.

The northern border areas

At the end of the Tang period, the northern and western border areas of China fell away from Chinese control altogether and formed two kingdoms under non-Chinese rule, the **Liao** and the **Western Xia**.

3. Southern China

The region was covered by **several states** of varying size and power. The rulers of these states were for the most part content to govern without ambitions to conquer the whole of China. Wars between them did occur from time to time, but were on a comparatively small scale.

For most of the time the people of southern China experienced **peace**, and the region was able to continue the **economic expansion** which had begun during the Tang period.

4. Technological advances

In southern China, **printing** became much more common. Numerous publishing houses sprang up, **education** and **literacy** spread amongst large sections of the population. The first fiction books began to appear.

The use of government-backed printed deposit certificates, which functioned as proto-**paper money**, spread rapidly, as did the **banking system** which developed to support it. **Porcelain**, also, became a major industry with state backing.

Notes for Map 6, 980 CE: Song dynasty China

The Song dynasty period saw China's economy reach new heights.

- A northern general founded the **Song dynasty**, and went on to unify most of China under his rule (note 1).
- The Song regime paid close attention to good government. Many more officials were recruited through the **examination system** than before (note 2).
- The period was one in which **population** grew, the **economy** expanded strongly and **technological** advance continued (note 3).
- Under the Song a revised version of Confucianism, which modern scholars label "**Neo-Confucianism**", came to dominate Chinese thought (note 4).

Additional notes

1. Re-unification

In the northern kingdom, a general deposed the last emperor of the last of the **Five Dynasties**, and took the throne himself, founding the **Song dynasty**.

He then went on to **unify most of China** under his rule. He did this as more by **diplomacy** than by military action.

However the **non-Chinese kingdoms** of the Liao and Western Xia continued to exist in the far north and west of China.

2. Government under the Song

Under the Song dynasty, government officials were recruited and promoted on merit rather than on birth to a much greater extent than before. The **examination system** was expanded so that the majority of officials were recruited in this way. This ensured that most officials were able men and trained in the Confucian ideology, with its emphasis on good government. The public examinations therefore came to be regarded as playing a key role in **legitimizing** government in the eyes of the ordinary people.

Thus finally emerged that iconic figure in Chinese history, the **scholar-official**, and with him, the triumph of the **gentry** as the ruling class of China, in place of the aristocracy

This development was made possible by the fact that the ruin of the old **landed aristocracy**, already weakened by An Lushan's rebellion in mid-Tang times, had been completed in the anarchy of the Five Dynasty period. The devastation of these years had been much worse in north-central China than elsewhere, and this was where the aristocracy's wealth and power had been based.

3. Economy and society under the Song

Agriculture

New crops and technologies led to major **population growth** in the 10th and 11th centuries. New crops, above all **Champa rice** from Vietnam, were introduced, and crop yields multiplied. Improved **agricultural techniques** were promoted by the Song government.

In the countryside, more and more of the **peasantry** were forced to sell their land to richer neighbors. **Estates** grew in size and number, worked by tenant farmers and semi-free peasants. This suited the Song government, as not only were many of its officials wealthy landowners, but large estates were much more efficient than small farms, and so could feed the growing population better.

Industry, commerce and finance

Industry and **commerce** expanded. Internal trade thrived on the back of the bulk transportation of grain along the **waterways** of China (with the **Grand Canal** at their center). A **banking** system spread throughout the empire, providing a full range of services including the acceptance of deposits, the making of loans, issuing notes and long-distance remittance of money. Printed **paper money**, issued by the government, circulated widely.

Porcelain, silk and other products were manufactured for both home consumption and export. The **iron, steel** and **coal** industries flourished, meeting the demands of the huge army.

There was a marked growth in **maritime trade** to **south east Asia** and beyond. **Communities of Chinese merchants** appeared in overseas trading ports.

Technological advances

Inventions and innovations of great significance made their appearance in Song times, or came into widespread use:

- **moveable-type printing** (which helped Song China to be by far the most literate society in the world at this time);
- the **compass** and printed **charts** to aid navigation;
- **gunpowder weapons** such as rockets, primitive grenades and proto-guns;
- and other advances such as highly engineered **water-powered mechanical clocks**, and improvements in the production of fine **porcelain**.

Towns and cities

The pace of **urbanization** increased, especially in the south. An upper class of wealthy **merchants, industrialists** and **bankers** flourished, and an urban **middle class** of businessmen, teachers, doctors and business managers grew.

Education expanded dramatically, due to the spread of printing and the incentive provided by the examination system, which held out the prospect of rising high in government for any bright boy.

4. Religion and Thought in Song China

Under the early Song a revised version of Confucianism, which could trace its roots back to the late Tang period and which modern scholars label **Neo-Confucianism**, came to dominate Chinese thought.

This borrowed metaphysical and cosmological ideas from Buddhism and Daoism, and turned Confucianism into a belief-system which could exert a deep hold over both the hearts and minds of educated people.

One practice which began to spread amongst the upper classes, which traced its origins back to the “Five Dynasties” period, was **foot binding** for women. This development may have been linked to the revival Confucianism emphasis on **patriarchy**.

Question:

In what ways did the Song period see the culmination of trends dating back to at least the late Tang?

(My list would include :

- the rise of the examination system - linked to the decline and fall of the old aristocracy, and the consequent rise of the scholar-official;*
- The rise of Neo-Confucianism - and the decline of Buddhism;*
- the rise of southern China - population growth and migrations to the south;*
- economic expansion - including the impact of the Grand Canal in tying China's economy together and promoting internal trade, industry and prosperity;*
- technological advances.)*

Notes for Map 7, 1127 CE: The Southern Song dynasty

In 1126 Song forces were driven out of northern China by the Jürchen, a non-Chinese people, thus beginning the Southern Song dynasty period of Chinese history (1126-1279).

- The Song were never able to reconquer the north, and the **Jürchen** were never able to conquer the south: for a century and a half China was **divided** in two (note 1).
- In South China, **population** and **economic** expansion continued (note 2).
- During this period **Chinese influence** over its neighbors waned, but certainly did not cease altogether (note 3)

Additional notes

1. Northern China

The **Jürchen** were a tribal group from a region to the north-east of China which lies in today's Manchuria and Inner Mongolia. In the early 1120s they conquered the Liao kingdom of northern China and founded the **Jin dynasty** kingdom.

Many Jürchen leaders had a deep respect for Chinese culture, and the Jin soon erected a system of administration along Chinese lines.

The Song were never strong enough to reconquer the north, and the Jürchen could never conquer the south. This was largely due to their inability to master the kind of amphibious warfare that was required amongst the rivers, lakes, swamps and canals of southern China.

2. Southern China under the Southern Song

The Jürchen invasion of the north led to another wave of **migration** from north to south China, shifting population levels decisively in favor of the latter for the first time in history. South China had already become the wealthiest part of the country, and economic and population expansion continued in the region. **Hangzhou**, the Southern Song capital and a major port, was by far the largest city in the world at this time.

3. China and her neighbors in Southern Song times

The Southern Song made no claims to superiority over their neighbors - indeed they themselves usually paid large amounts of **tribute** to the Jürchen state of northern China.

This is not to say that Chinese civilization had ceased to exert cultural influence throughout East Asia. Korean and Japanese scholars and monks still visited China, and Chinese Buddhist monks still visited Korea and Japan.

It was in Southern Song times that **Chan Buddhism**, which had become the dominant form of that religion in China, passed to Japan, where, as Zen Buddhism, it would become a key element of Japanese civilization.

Notes for Map 8, 1236 CE: The Mongols conquer northern China

Over the period 1215 to 1236 the Mongols conquered northern China. This caused terrible suffering for the population of the region.

- The **Mongols** were warlike **nomads** who inhabited the **steppes** of Mongolia, in central Asia, who forged a vast empire under their leaders, **Genghis Khan** and his sons (note 1).
- The Mongol conquered **northern China** between 1215 and 1236, with catastrophic results for the people of that region (note 2).
- the **Southern Song** state in southern China continued to flourish as before (note 3).

Additional note:

1. The Mongol conquest of northern China

In 1206 Genghis Khan was elected the leader of the Mongols. He and his sons led Mongol armies across much of Eurasia, bringing vast territories under their control - all of central Asia, much of the Middle East and Russia, and northern China.

2. The Mongol impact on northern China

Cities were sacked, huge areas of crop-growing farmland were devastated, and the population shrank drastically.

There is even a story that the Mongol leader, **Ogedei**, considered annihilating the population of northern China and turning the whole region over to pasturage for the Mongols' herds of horses.

The people were saved (so the story goes) by a Chinese official, who proposed instead that the land was of far more value to the Mongols if it were farmed and taxed.

Whether this story is true or not, evidence suggests that the north's share of China's population shrank to a quarter.

3. The Southern Song

The Mongols tried at this time to conquer the Southern Song more than once. However, Mongol armies were completely unsuited to the type of terrain found in this region: formations of horse nomad found it difficult to campaign in land broken by numerous rivers, canals, lakes and paddy fields. They were unsuccessful, just as previously the armies of the Jürchen had been.

Notes for Map 9, 1279 CE: The Mongols conquer southern China

Genghis Khans' grandson, Kublai Khan added southern China to the mighty Mongol empire.

- **Kublai Khan** completed the conquest of southern China in 1279. He founded the **Yuan dynasty**, and ruled more as a Chinese emperor than a Mongol warlord (note 1).
- He did much to restore China's economy, and Mongol control of **central Asia** allowed long-distance trade on the **Silk Road** to flourish on an unprecedented scale (note 2).

Additional notes

1. Kublai Khan completes the Mongols' conquest of China

Kublai Khan completed the conquest of southern China in 1279. He accomplished this by abandoning the traditional nomadic warfare used by Mongol armies. He drafted large numbers of northern **Chinese troops** experienced in fighting in the watery terrain of southern China, and by forming his own river-based **naval forces**.

He founded the **Yuan dynasty**, and ruled more as a Chinese emperor than a Mongol khan. He established his capital at Dadu, the modern city of **Beijing**, in north-east China. This had been the Jürchen capital.

Kublai modeled his court and **bureaucracy** on Chinese lines, though the topmost posts were usually filled by Mongols and other central Asians, with Chinese officials taking a secondary position.

He also brought China's neighbors, including **Tibet** and **Korea** under Mongol rule. He attempted to conquer **Japan** and **Java**, launching huge naval expeditions against them, but was unsuccessful.

The Tribute System revived

Nevertheless, the other countries in East Asia with the exception of Japan sent **tribute** to the Yuan court in Beijing. Once again, therefore, China was at the center of an international tribute system, as it had been under the Tang. Moreover, China's cultural influence on its neighbors was still far from dead: it was in this period that **Neo-Confucianism** crossed to Korea and then to Japan.

By Kublai's time, the other Mongol khanates were effectively independent states, though while he lived they continued to recognize him as the **Great Khan** of the Mongols. After his death they asserted their independence and the empire broke up. Kublai's Yuan dynasty ruled China and neighboring countries for nearly another century.

2. Kublai's rule

Kublai worked hard to restore China's economy and society, particularly in the north, after the devastation of the Mongol conquests.

He constructed roads, improved canals, including the repair and extension of the **Grand Canal**, and he developed the **postal system**. **Paper currency** facilitated commercial activity.

In **popular culture**, plays and novels became much more popular under the Mongols than before.

The Silk Road

The Mongol control of central Asia allowed long-distance trade along the **Silk Road** on an unprecedented scale. As well as luxury goods such as **silk** and **porcelain**, ideas and technologies travelled out of China along this route, notably **gunpowder** and probably **block printing**.

The **maritime** trade routes from southern China to **South East Asia** and **India** also thrived.

For the first time, Christian and Muslim **travelers** from Europe, the Middle East and North Africa left detailed accounts of travels to and within China. The most famous of these were the Italian **Marco Polo** and the Muslim **Ibn Battuta**.

Question:

Looking at this and the previous map, list the pros and cons of the Mongol conquest of China.

(My answer would include

- *Pros: Kublai's comparatively good rule; the boost to international trade along the silk road;*
- *Cons: the devastation in the north, alien rule, with Chinese officials no longer in the top positions.)*

Notes for Map 10, 1450 CE: Early Ming China

A huge rebellion drove the Mongol dynasty out of China in 1368, and the rebel leader founded a new dynasty, the Ming.

- Under Kublai's successors, Mongol rule became corrupt and oppressive, and **peasant revolts** drove them out of the country. A new dynasty, the **Ming**, was established (note 1).
- The Yongle emperor (reigned 1402-1424) built the **Forbidden City** in Beijing, and ordered a series of **great voyages** to venture as far as the coast of East Africa (note 2).
- The Mongols destroyed a Ming army in 1449, and captured the young emperor. The Ming government then set about upgrading the **Great Wall** (note 3).
- The Ming dynasty has given China a large measure of political **stability** and internal **peace**. The economy has flourished, even though international trade has declined from levels seen under the Yuan (note 4).

Additional notes:

1. The decline of the Yuan dynasty

Under Kublai's successors, the quality of Mongol rule seriously declined. Weak rulers allowed corruption to become rampant. To fund the extravagance at court, taxation and demands for the peasants' **labor service** ("corvée") grew more exacting; also more and more peasants were forced into serfdom when their lands were put into vast estates granted to court favorites or Mongol garrisons.

Large-scale **peasant revolts** began to break out from the late 1320s onwards. A series of terrible **floods** afflicted northern China in the 1330s and 1340s, as did a **plague** which was probably the Black Death.

These misfortunes fueled anti-Mongol feeling: the disasters pointed, in the Chinese mind, to the idea that the **Mandate of Heaven** had left the Yuan dynasty.

Finally, in 1368, the rebels occupied the capital, and the Mongol court fled across the borders of China into Mongolia.

Zhu Yuanzhang, the leader of the great rebellion against the Mongols, took the throne in 1368 and became the first emperor of the **Ming dynasty**.

2. The Yongle emperor

The third emperor of the Ming dynasty, the **Yongle** emperor (reigned 1402-1424) had the great imperial palace complex known as the **Forbidden City**, in Beijing, constructed.

He is best known, however, for the series of **great voyages** which he ordered to be carried out. These astonishing armadas were commanded by the court eunuch **Zeng He**, and were made up of hundreds of ships. Some of these, the fabled treasure ships, were by far the largest in the world at the time.

These huge fleets eventually reached as far as the coast of East Africa.

3. The Mongol threat and the Great Wall of China

The Mongols, though driven out of China, had not disappeared as a threat to China. In 1449 they inflicted a famous humiliation on the Ming regime by destroying a Chinese army sent against them, and capturing the young emperor who had accompanied it.

After this humiliation, the Ming government set about refurbishing and extending the great defense system known as the **Great Wall** of China. Most of what tourists see today is the staggering result of this huge construction program.

4. China under the Ming

Ming China was, at least until its later years, very well governed by pre-modern standards. Officials were recruited through the very tough **examination system** and promoted on merit. They ensured that the routine business of government remained at a high standard - despite the fact that the imperial court was often rent by struggles between ministers and senior officials, on the one hand, and the **eunuchs** who surrounded the emperor on the other.

The economy

The economy of China soon recovered from the turbulence of the last years of the Yuan dynasty. Apart from international trade, which the Ming effectively prohibited (see below), the government took a hands-off approach to commerce and industry. The upgrading of the **Grand Canal** under the emperor Yongle, plus the construction of many roads and bridges, was a stimulant to **internal trade**. The **porcelain, glassware** and **silk** industries boomed.

Paper money remained in widespread circulation, but loose government policies soon caused inflation to take off, and the Ming regime went back to a purely metal coinage, based on silver.

Peace and stability brought renewed **population growth**. The Ming took particular pains to repopulate the north, and its share rose again to about a third of the total.

International trade and tribute

After the expansionist program of the Yongle emperor, the Ming court adopted a very different approach. Private merchants were largely forbidden to engage in overseas trade, which was increasingly confined to a single port, **Canton**. International trade across central Asia also declined, with the **Silk Road** now being in the hands of hostile tribes.

To some extent the decline in international trade was compensated for by the increased use made of **tribute missions**. The Ming had inherited this from the Mongols.

Korea, Burma and other countries (but not Japan) continued to send tribute missions to Beijing, just as they had under the Yuan; they thus acknowledged the Ming emperor as their superior. These missions involved trade as well as diplomacy, and many merchants accompanying the officials.

After the Presentation:

Here is a quick **Quiz** you might like to use to make sure your students haven't gone to sleep.

The answers are given (*in Italics*).

1. What was the dynasty which reunited China after centuries of division? (*The Sui dynasty*)
2. What major innovation in government did this dynasty implement? (*The examination system*)
3. What major inland waterway did this dynasty construct? (*The Grand Canal*)
4. What dynasty succeeded this dynasty after a brief rebellion? (*The Tang*)
5. What religion reached its peak under the early emperors of this dynasty? (*Buddhism*)
6. What was the period following this dynasty called? (*The Five Dynasties*)
7. What dynasty followed this period? (*The Song*)
8. What was the revised version of an ancient Chinese philosophy which evolved around this time called? (*Neo-Confucianism*)
9. What two technological developments reached fruition under this dynasty? (*You could chose printing, gunpowder, the compass or printed navigation charts*)
10. What people from the steppes of central Asia conquered first north, and then south, China in the 13th century? (*The Mongols*)
11. Who was the Great Khan of this people, who ruled as a Chinese emperor and established a Chinese dynasty? (*Kublai Khan*)
12. What was the great trade route called which ran across Asia? (*The Silk Road*)
13. Name either the European or the Muslim traveller who visited China during this period? (*Marco Polo or Ibn Battuta*)
14. What was the dynasty called which ruled China after these rulers from central Asia had been driven out? (*The Ming dynasty*)
15. The Yongle emperor was the second emperor of this dynasty - what is he particularly famous for? (*Voyages to the west*)
16. What palace complex did this dynasty construct? (*The Forbidden City in Beijing*)
17. What great defensive system did this dynasty renovate? (*The Great Wall of China*)
18. China governed its relations with neighboring countries through a particular system of trade and diplomacy - what was this called? (*The Tribute system*)
19. What was the quasi-religious concept which was so important in the Chinese mind which determined whether a dynasty should continue ruling? (*The Mandate of Heaven*)
20. What was the highly-prized kind of ceramic which the Chinese developed in these centuries? (*Porcelain*)

Section 2: Student-based enquiry work

Some (though not all) of the questions in the Presentation notes will work just as well if used as a reinforcement exercise at the end of the Presentation, or as student-based tasks. The two tasks below are more substantial.

The students can tackle the tasks either as individuals or in small groups. They will obviously need to have access to this Premium TimeMap unit.

They can present their answers in essay form or as presentations.

The questions are designed to stimulate enquiry, thought and discussion. We have offered suggested points that students might cover in their answers. These are given in *italics* just below the questions.

For teachers of AP World History, between them these questions address two of the five thinking skills and three of the four themes.

Task 1

Either as a whole-class activity or in small groups, list key events in Chinese history in this period. If in groups, compare your results. Come up with a whole-class chronological list for all to see.

Then, as a class or in small groups, list which were the two or three most important events, in your opinion. Debate these as a class activity.

My suggestions (those in bold are what I would consider could be chosen as key turning points, and those in red are what I actually do choose - students may disagree!)

589 - Unification under Sui (*ended centuries of division, and the Sui introduced important changes eg. Grand Canal, examination system*)

618 - Replacement of Sui by Tang (*change of dynasty, but most things continued as before and Tang built on Sui reforms*)

755-63 - An Lushan rebellion (*ended one of the great periods of Chinese history, but inaugurated or boosted several major changes which occurred in later Tang, Five Dynasties and Song: shift of center of gravity southwards of Chinese population and economy, decline of aristocracy and rise of examination system, fall of Buddhism, start of rise of Neo-Confucianism, technological advances*)

908 - Fall of Tang, start of Five Dynasties (*interrupted unity of China for c. half a century; completed shift of center of gravity to south China, continued prosperity of south v weakening of north, technological advances continue*)

963 - **Unification under Song** (*ended short period of disunity, and under Song consolidated south China as center of Chinese civilization; economic expansion and technological advance continued*)

1127 - Song driven from north - start of Southern Song period (*Unity of China ended again; but life continued much as before - including economic expansion - in South*)

1236 - Mongols conquer N China (*end of Jin dynasty in north, hastened decline of north*)

1279 - Mongols conquer S China (*all China under alien rule for first time in its history; but much continuity - south dominant; but foreign influences*)

1368 - Mongols driven out of China (*native Chinese rule restored*)

Task 2

Identify three long-term themes or trends within Chinese history in the period between 600 and 1450, and track them through these centuries, and give reasons for the development which took place in them.

Present your findings in essay or presentations form

OR for less able or confident students:

In small groups, choose (or be allocated) one of the trends/themes below and track it through the period 600 to 1450 CE.

Explain what changes occurred, and why; and if relevant identify what did not change, or continuities from the past. If students have the time, they could profitably go back to Classical China unit and pick up these themes there.

Population trends

Social trends

Economic trends

Government

Technological advance

Religion and philosophy

International relations

Suggested items for inclusion are:

Population trends - north and south China: post-Han chaos (one third of population in south), An Lushan's rebellion (half and half), chaos at end of Tang, the Jürchen invasion (decisive majority in south), Mongol conquest of north (three quarters in south), Kublai Khan's policies (back to about a third in north); also, increasing urbanization of population.

Social trends - decline of aristocracy as a result of the troubles in the An Lushan rebellion and the Five Dynasty period; rise of the gentry and the scholar-official in Tang and Song times, the up-and-down fortunes of the peasantry, urbanization in late Tang and Song times, emergence of a middle class (especially under the Song), spread of education (ditto).

Economic trends - peace and stability, Grand Canal, roads, international trade - Silk Road, shift to south and rise of maritime trade - agricultural productivity, new crops, technological advance, finance, main products such as silk and porcelain.

Government - examination system and change of personnel, scholar official - reasons why the examination system became so central to Chinese state and society (produced good officials, gave regimes increased legitimacy, encouraged spread of education, and key to rise of educated gentry leadership in localities).

Technological advance - including printing, gunpowder, compass, printed charts, printed money, porcelain

Religion and philosophy - *Confucianism, rise and fall of Buddhism, widespread popularity of Chan Buddhism, emergence of Neo-Confucianism*
International relations (*especially relations with neighboring countries (tribute system, Japan and Korea, central Asian peoples esp. Mongols)*)

Task 3

Discuss or write essay:

What were the main challenges facing regimes in governing China during this period?

Answers should deal with what the threats were to strong government, how these could undermine a dynasty's position, and what measures regimes took to try to counter them.

Students should draw out linkages between various elements, and discuss issues of cause and consequence.

Also, you might like to tease out why such dynastic policies did not work over a long period (i.e. all the dynasties collapsed sooner or later).

Items could include: foreign threats...inadequate emperors...factionalism at court...corruption in government and its impact - neglect of frontier defenses and of dykes, canals and irrigation systems...increased oppression of the peasantrypeasant unrest and huge rebellions.

OR

Looking at the decline and fall of Chinese dynasties during this period, are there common features for some or all of these episodes?

See above for what should be included in this.

OR

What impact did the traditional Chinese idea of the Mandate of Heaven have on Chinese history during this period, do you think? In what ways was it more than just a popular belief?

Answers should include:

If things not going well (foreign invasions, floods, droughts, bad government) encouraged widespread feeling that a dynasty had lost its legitimacy, and ultimately provoked peasant rebellions, which accompanied the decline of most dynasties.

It must have acted as a spur for emperors and their ministers to maintain the efficiency of government, keep corruption official oppression in check, keep up flood defenses and irrigation systems properly, to minimize the risk of natural calamities such as floods and famines, and maintain frontier defenses so as to minimize risks of successful invasions.

Other possible questions:

Why did China not sink back into centuries of division after the fall of the Tang, do you think?

(it had done so under the fall of the Han)

No fixed answers

possible ideas: idea of unified china now too strong - Tang had reinforced idea that China a single country

growth of interregional trade, grand canal etc

no major barbarian invasions

also wise policies of Song founder, using diplomacy more than force

Q. In the light of what happened later, what is the most significant change that the first Sui emperor Wendi introduced, do you think?

re-unified China

Examination system

Grand Canal

Roads

Equal fields system

Pushing out the borders

My own choice would be between the Grand Canal, as this helped lay the foundations for China's future economic (and therefore population) growth, and the examination system, which became so central to Chinese government and society.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: TimeMaps articles for further reading

A list of all TimeMaps articles for Period 2 can be found on the Encyclopedia home page. Here is a selected list of the key articles which students should find most helpful.

Medieval China

Society and Economy in Medieval China

Government and warfare in Medieval China

Philosophy, Religion and Culture in Medieval China

Ancient China

The Han Dynasty

Divided China

The Sui Dynasty

The Tang Dynasty

The Song Dynasty

The Mongol Empire

The Ming Dynasty

Appendix 2: Using the Medieval China unit with AP World History

China, Period 3: c. 600 C.E. to c. 1450

Key Concept 3.1. Expansion and Intensification of Communication and Exchange Networks

I. Transportation and trade

A. Existing trade routes flourished and promoted the growth of powerful new trading cities. Required examples of existing trade routes:

- [The Silk Roads](#)

[Teach one illustrative example of new trading cities, either from the list below or an example of your choice:

- [Hangzhou](#)

C. The growth of interregional trade in luxury goods was encouraged by significant innovations in previously existing transportation and commercial technologies, including more sophisticated caravan organization; use of the compass, astrolabe, and larger ship designs in sea travel; and new forms of credit and monetization:

- [Silk textiles](#)
- [Porcelain](#)

- [Bills of exchange](#) • [Credit](#)
- [Banking](#)

D. Commercial growth was also facilitated by state practices, trading organizations, and state-sponsored commercial infrastructures like the Grand Canal in China:

- [Minting of coins](#)
- [Use of paper money](#)

E. The expansion of empires facilitated Trans-Eurasian trade and communication as new peoples were drawn into their conquerors' economies and trade networks:

- [Tang dynasty empire](#)
- [The Mongols](#)

II. The movement of peoples

A. The expansion and intensification of long-distance trade routes often depended on environmental knowledge and technological adaptations to it: [Chinese ship design and construction: seagoing junks; good charts; compass](#)

B. Some migrations had a significant environmental impact. Required examples of migration and their environmental impact: [Chinese internal migration, north to south](#)

III. Trade networks and cross-cultural exchanges

B. In key places along important trade routes, merchants set up diasporic communities where they introduced their own cultural traditions into the indigenous culture:

- Muslim, Nestorian Christian, Sogdian and Jewish merchant communities in China
- Chinese merchant communities in Southeast Asia

C. The writings of certain interregional travelers illustrate both the extent and the limitations of intercultural knowledge and understanding:

- Marco Polo
- Xuanzang

D. Increased cross-cultural interactions resulted in the diffusion of literary, artistic, and cultural traditions:

- The influence of Neo-Confucianism and Buddhism in East Asia

E. Increased cross-cultural interactions also resulted in the diffusion of scientific and technological traditions:

- The spread of printing and gunpowder technologies from East Asia into the Islamic empires and Western Europe

IV. There was continued diffusion of crops and pathogens throughout the Eastern Hemisphere along the trade routes.

- New rice varieties in China

B. The spread of epidemic diseases, including the Black Death, followed the well established paths of trade and military conquest.

Key Concept 3.2. Continuity and Innovation of State Forms and Their Interactions

State formation in this era demonstrated remarkable continuity, innovation and diversity in various regions: development of bureaucracy, organized hierarchically and departmentally by function, and recruited and promoted on merit and by examination

I. Empires collapsed and were reconstituted: successive Chinese dynasties; In some regions new state forms emerged: aristocratic state gave way to gentry state

A. Following the collapse of empires, the Chinese dynasties — Sui, Tang, and Song — combined traditional sources of power and legitimacy with innovations better suited to the current circumstances.

- Patriarchy
- Religion
- Land-owning elites

- Tributary systems
- and my example, examination system

B. In some places, new forms of governance emerged, including the Mongol Khanate's synthesis with Chinese governmental practices

C. Some states synthesized local and borrowed traditions:

- Chinese traditions that influenced states in Japan, and Korea and N Vietnam

II. Interregional contacts and conflicts between states and empires encouraged significant technological and cultural transfers:

- Between Tang China and the Abbasids - paper
- Across the Mongol empire - gunpowder, possibly printing

Key Concept 3.3. Increased Economic Productive Capacity and Its Consequences

I. Innovations stimulated agricultural and industrial production in many regions.

A. Agricultural production increased significantly due to technological innovations:

- Champa rice varieties under Song dynasty
- Improved agricultural techniques under Song dynasty

C. Chinese artisans and merchants expanded their production of textiles and porcelains for export; industrial production of iron and steel expanded in China.

II. The fate of cities varied greatly, with periods of significant decline, and with periods of increased urbanization buoyed by rising productivity and expanding trade networks.

A. Multiple factors contributed to the declines of urban areas in this period:

- Chang'an

B. Multiple factors contributed to urban revival.

- Internal peace
- Grand Canal and road network
- Increased agricultural productivity and subsequent rising population
- Population growth

C. While cities in general continued to play the roles they had played in the past as governmental, religious, and commercial centers, many older cities declined at the same time that numerous new cities emerged to take on these established roles.

- Chang'an

III. Despite significant continuities in social structures and in methods of production, there were also some important changes in labor management and in the effect of religious conversion on gender relations and family life.

A. As in the previous period, there were many forms of labor organization.

- Serfs
- Free peasant
- Tenant farmers
- Forced labor (corvée)
- Nomadic pastoralism
- Craft production and guild organization
- Military service

B. As in the previous period, social structures were shaped largely by class and caste hierarchies. Patriarchy persisted;

- Neo-Confucianism
- Foot-binding

C. Peasant rebellions:

- fall of Sui, Tang and Yuan dynasties