

# UNIT I: The Global Tapestry from c. 1200 to c. 1450

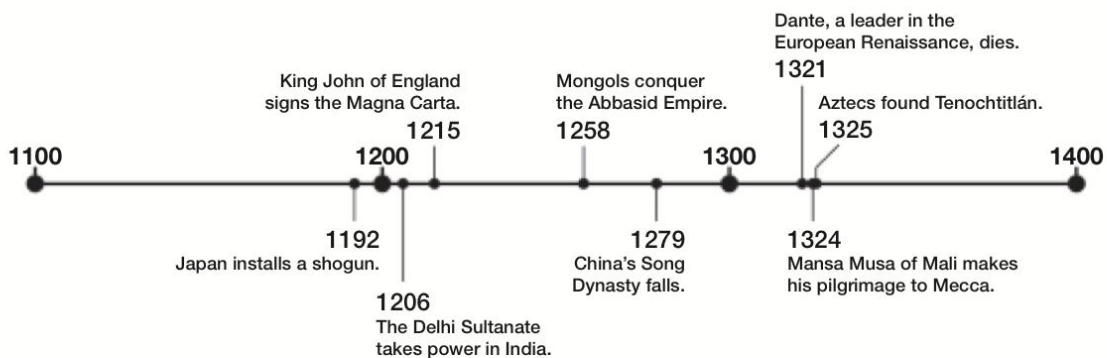
## Understand the Context

Between 1200 and 1450, several large empires emerged around the world. Some were modified revivals of earlier empires in their region. Others represented new developments. All were shaped by the context of regional trade, which had been increasing since around 600.

**The Revival of Large Empires** Between 1200 and 1450, the wealthiest and most innovative empire in the world was the Song Dynasty in China. It was the latest in a series of states that had ruled a unified and prosperous China. Similarly, in Mesoamerica, the rise of the Aztec was influenced by an earlier empire under the Mayans. Two other centers of great intellectual achievement, Baghdad and Spain, reflected the emphasis on learning in the Islamic world.

However, in parts of Africa and Southeast Asia, the growth of regional trade produced larger and more complex states than had previously existed in those regions. Trade across the Sahara resulted in the West African empires of Ghana and Mali. Trade in the Indian Ocean provided the context for large states in Zimbabwe in East Africa and various states in India and Southeast Asia.

**Unity in Central Eurasia** Shaping the context for events throughout Eurasia between 1200 and 1450 was the remarkable emergence of the Mongols. A group of nomads from Central Asia, the Mongols conquered lands from central Europe to the Pacific Ocean, creating the largest land empire in human history. The conquest came with great devastation. However, the unity of so much territory under the rule of one group allowed trade to flourish once again across Eurasia, with new ideas and technology spreading easily. These developments set the stage for the intensifying global interactions that helped define the period after 1450.



# Developments in East Asia

*From now on, our ordinances will be properly enforced and the morality of our people will be restored.*

—Ming Dynasty “Prohibition Ordinance” (1368–1644)

**Essential Question:** How did developments in China and the rest of East Asia between c. 1200 and c. 1450 reflect continuity, innovation, and diversity?

**T**he Song Dynasty in China (960–1279) was the leading example of diversity and innovation in Afro-Eurasia and the Americas during the 13th century. China enjoyed great wealth, political stability, and fine artistic and intellectual achievements. Neo-Confucian teachings, illustrated in the above quotation, supported the government and shaped social classes and the family system. In addition, China developed the greatest manufacturing capability in the world. However, the spread of Confucianism and Buddhism might be the most enduring testimony to Chinese influence.

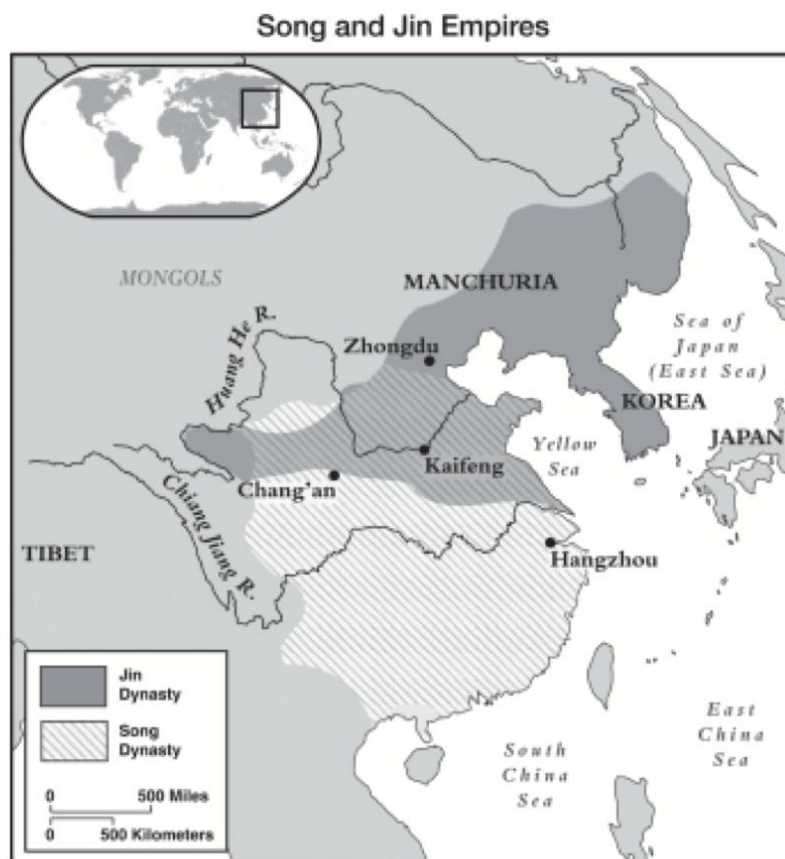
## Government Developments in the Song Dynasty

The **Song Dynasty** replaced the Tang in 960 and ruled for more than three centuries. They lost control of northern lands to invading pastoralists from Manchuria who set up the Jin Empire. Although the Song ruled a smaller region than the Tang, their reign was prosperous and under them the arts flourished.

**Bureaucracy** China’s strength was partially the result of its **imperial bureaucracy**, a vast organization in which appointed officials carried out the empire’s policies. The bureaucracy had been a feature of Chinese government since the Qin dynasty (221 B.C.E.–207 B.C.E.). It represented a continuity across centuries and dynasties. Under the Song, China’s bureaucracy expanded. Early in the dynasty, this strengthened the dynasty.

**Meritocracy and the Civil Service Exam** One of Emperor Song Taizu’s great achievements was that he expanded the educational opportunities to young men of the lower economic classes so they could score well on the civil service exams. By scoring well, a young man could obtain a highly desired job in the bureaucracy. These exams were based on knowledge of Confucian texts. Because officials obtained their positions by demonstrating their merit on these exams, China’s bureaucratic system was known as a **meritocracy**. Though





the poor were vastly underrepresented in the bureaucracy, the Chinese system allowed for more upward mobility than any other hiring system of its time.

However, by the end of the Song, the bureaucracy had grown so large that it contributed to the empire's weakness. By creating so many jobs and by paying these officials so handsomely, the Song increased the costs of government to the point that they began drying up China's surplus wealth.

## Economic Developments in Postclassical China

The flourishing Tang Dynasty had successfully promoted agricultural development, improved roads and canals, encouraged foreign trade, and spread technology. These accomplishments led to rapid prosperity and population growth during the Song Dynasty. The **Grand Canal** was an inexpensive and efficient internal waterway transportation system that extended over 30,000 miles. Expanding the canal enabled China, under the Song Dynasty, to become the most populous trading area in the world.

**Gunpowder** Although gunpowder had been invented in China in previous dynasties, innovators in the Song Dynasty made the first guns. Over centuries, the technology of making gunpowder and guns spread from China to all parts of Eurasia via traders on the Silk Roads.

**Agricultural Productivity** Some time before the 11th century, **Champa rice**, a fast-ripening and drought-resistant strain of rice from the Champa



Kingdom in present-day Vietnam, greatly expanded agricultural production in China. This rice and other strains developed through experimentation allowed farming to spread to lands where once rice could not grow, such as lowlands, riverbanks, and hills. In some areas, it also allowed farmers to grow two crops of rice per year, a summer crop and a winter crop.

Innovative methods of production contributed to agricultural success. For example, Chinese farmers put manure (both human and animal) on the fields to enrich the soil. They built elaborate irrigation systems using ditches, water wheels, pumps, and terraces to increase productivity. New heavy plows pulled by water buffalo or oxen allowed previously unusable land to be cultivated.

The combination of these changes in agriculture produced an abundance of food. As a result, China's population grew quickly. In the three centuries of Song Dynasty rule, China's population increased from around 25 percent of the total world population to nearly 40 percent.

**Manufacturing and Trade** Industrial production soared, as did China's population. China's discovery of "black earth"—coal—in the 4th century B.C.E. enabled it to produce greater amounts of cast iron goods. Though massive use of coal to power machines wouldn't happen until the 18th century, China did have the greatest manufacturing capability in the world. The Chinese later learned how to take the carbon out of cast iron and began to manufacture steel. They used steel to make or reinforce bridges, gates, and ship anchors. They also used steel to make religious items, such as pagodas and Buddhist figurines. Steel also strengthened the agricultural equipment, contributing to the abundance of food production as well.

Under the Song—and earlier than in Western Europe—China experienced **proto-industrialization**, a set of economic changes in which people in rural areas made more goods than they could sell. Unlike later industrialization, which featured large-scale production in factories using complex machinery, proto-industrialization relied more on home-based or community-based production using simple equipment. For example, **artisans**, or skilled craftworkers, produced steel and other products in widely dispersed smelting facilities under the supervision of the imperial government. Artisans also manufactured porcelain and silk that reached consumers through expanding trade networks, especially by sea. Porcelain was highly desired because it was light-weight yet strong. Further, it was light-colored, so it could be easily painted with elaborate designs.

The Chinese used the compass in maritime navigation, and they redesigned their ships to carry more cargo. China's ability to print paper navigation charts made seafaring possible in open waters, out of sight of land, and sailors became less reliant on the sky for direction.

China became the world's most commercialized society. Its economy changed from local consumption to market production, with porcelains, textiles, and tea the chief exports. The Grand Canal supported a vibrant internal trade while advances in naval technology allowed China to control trade in the South China Sea.



**Taxes** The Song also promoted the growth of a commercial economy by changing how they built public projects, such as roads and irrigation canals. Instead of requiring that people labor on these projects, the government paid people to work on them. This change increased the amount of money in circulation, promoting economic growth.

**Tributes** Another source of income for the government came from the tributary system, an arrangement in which other states had to pay money or provide goods to honor the Chinese emperor. This system cemented China's economic and political power over several foreign countries, but it also created stability and stimulated trade for all parties involved. The origins of the system existed in the Han Dynasty. By the time of the Song Dynasty, Japan, Korea, and kingdoms throughout southeast Asia were tributary states. The emperor expected representatives from tributary states to demonstrate their respect by performing a *kowtow*, a ritual in which anyone greeting the Chinese emperor must bow his or her head until it reached the floor. The Chinese sent out tremendous fleets led by Zheng He to demonstrate the power of the emperor and to receive tribute. (Zheng He's voyages are described in more detail in Topic 2.3.)

## Social Structures in China

Through most of Chinese history, the majority of people lived in rural areas. However, urban areas grew in prominence in this productive period. At the height of the Song Dynasty, China was the most urbanized land in the world, boasting several cities containing more than 100,000 people. The largest cities, Chang'an (an ancient capital), Hangzhou (at the southern end of the Grand Canal), and the port city of Guangzhou were cosmopolitan metropolises—active centers of commerce with many entertainment options to offer.

**China's Class Structure** Though urbanization represented a significant development in China, life in rural areas grew more complex as well. The bureaucratic expansion created an entirely new social class, the **scholar gentry**. They soon outnumbered the aristocracy, which was comprised of landowners who inherited their wealth. The scholar gentry were educated in Confucian philosophy and became the most influential social class in China.

Three other classes ranked below the scholar gentry: farmers, artisans, and merchants. The low status of merchants reflected Confucian respect for hard work and creating value. The tasks of merchants did not require physical strength or endurance, and they simply exchanged goods without growing or making anything new.

Lower rungs of Chinese society included peasants who worked for wealthy landowners, often to pay off debts, and the urban poor. The Song government provided aid to the poor and established public hospitals where people could receive free care.

**Role of Women** Confucian traditions included both respect for women and the expectation that they would defer to men. This patriarchal pattern





strengthened during the Tang and Song dynasties. One distinctive constraint on women's activities in China was the practice of **foot binding**, which became common among aristocratic families during the Song Dynasty. From a very young age, girls had their feet wrapped so tightly that the bones did not grow naturally. A bound foot signified social status, something suitors particularly desired. It also restricted women's ability to move and hence to participate in the public sphere. Foot binding was finally banned in 1912.

## Intellectual and Cultural Developments

During the Tang and Song eras, China enjoyed affluence, a well-educated populace, and extensive contact with foreign nations. As a result, intellectual pursuits (technology, literature, and visual arts) thrived.

**Paper and Printing** The Chinese had invented paper as early as the 2nd century C.E., and they developed a system of printing in the 7th century. They were the first culture to use **woodblock printing**. A Buddhist scripture produced in the 7th century is thought to be the world's first woodblock printed work. (For information on the Gutenberg press, a related technology, see Topic 1.6.) In the Song era, printed booklets on how to farm efficiently were distributed throughout rice-growing regions.

### CHINESE WOODBLOCK PRINTING



Source: Thinkstock

With the development of woodblock printing in China, people could make multiple copies of art or written texts without laboriously copying each by hand.



**Reading and Poetry** The development of paper and printing expanded the availability of books. Though most peasants were illiterate, China's privileged classes had increased access to literature. Confucian scholars not only consumed literature at a tremendous rate, they were also the major producers of literature throughout the era. The Tang and Song dynasties' emphasis on schooling created generations of well-rounded scholar-bureaucrats. Later, Europeans with such diverse skills would be called "Renaissance men."

## Religious Diversity in China

**Buddhism** had come to China from its birthplace in India via the Silk Roads. Its presence is evident during the anarchic period between the later Han and the Sui dynasties. However, its popularity became widespread during the Tang Dynasty. The 7th century Buddhist monk Xuanzang helped build Buddhism's popularity in China.

**Buddhism and Daoism** Three forms of Buddhism from India came to shape Asia, each developing a different emphasis:

- **Theravada Buddhism** focused on personal spiritual growth through silent meditation and self-discipline. It became strongest in Southeast Asia.
- **Mahayana Buddhism** focused on spiritual growth for all beings and on service. It became strongest in China and Korea.
- **Tibetan Buddhism** focused on chanting. It became strongest in Tibet.

All three include a belief in the Four Noble Truths, which stress the idea that personal suffering can be alleviated by eliminating cravings or desires and by following Buddhist precepts. All three also embrace the Eight-Fold Path, the precepts (including right speech, right livelihood, right effort, and right mindfulness) that can lead to enlightenment or nirvana.

Monks introduced Buddhism to the Chinese by relating its beliefs to Daoist principles. For example, Buddhism's idea of dharma became translated as dao ("the way"). Eventually, Buddhist doctrines combined with elements of Daoist traditions to create the **syncretic**, or fused, faith **Chan Buddhism**, also known as **Zen Buddhism**. Like Daoism, Zen Buddhism emphasized direct experience and meditation as opposed to formal learning based on studying scripture. Because of its fusion with Chinese beliefs, Buddhism became very popular in China. Monasteries—buildings where monks lived together—appeared in most major cities.

The presence of these monasteries became a problem for the Tang bureaucracy. Many leaders of the Tang Dynasty, which considered itself the "Middle Kingdom," had trouble accepting that a foreign religion would have such prominence in society. Buddhism's popularity, which drew individuals away from China's native religions, made Daoists and Confucians jealous. Despite monasteries' closures and land seizures, however, Chan Buddhism remained popular among ordinary Chinese citizens.



**Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism** The Song Dynasty was somewhat more friendly towards Buddhism, but it did not go out of its way to promote the religion. It preferred to emphasize China's native traditions, such as Confucianism. However, Buddhism had a strong presence and many Confucians began to adopt its ideals into their daily lives. The development of printing had made Buddhist scriptures widely available to the Confucian scholar gentry. The Song Dynasty benefited from the Confucian idea of **filial piety**, the duty of family members to subordinate their desires to those of the male head of the family and to the ruler. The emphasis on respect for one's elders helped the Song maintain their rule in China.

**Neo-Confucianism** evolved in China between 770 and 840. It was a syncretic system, combining rational thought with the more abstract ideas of Daoism and Buddhism. This new incarnation of Confucianism emphasized ethics rather than the mysteries of God and nature. It became immensely popular in the countries in China's orbit, including Japan, Korea, and Vietnam.

## Comparing Japan, Korea, and Vietnam

An important dynamic in the histories of Japan, Korea, and Vietnam was each country's relationship with China. When China was unified, its political strength, economic wealth, religious traditions, intellectual advances, and technological innovations made the world's most powerful realm. Its smaller neighbors benefited from being so close to China but faced a challenge of maintaining their own distinctive cultures. Each had to confront the issue of sinification, or the assimilation of Chinese traditions and practices.

### Japan

Since Japan was separated from China by a sea rather than land, it had more ability to control its interactions with China than Korea or Vietnam could. The impact of Chinese culture appeared in many aspects of life:

- Japan's Prince Shotoku Taishi (574–622) promoted Buddhism and Confucianism along with Japan's traditional Shinto religion. During this era, Japan learned how to do woodblock printing from China.
- During the **Heian period** (794–1185) Japan emulated Chinese traditions in politics, art, and literature.
- However, Japanese writers also moved in new directions. For example, in the 11th century, a Japanese writer composed the world's first novel, *The Tale of Genji*. It is the story of a Japanese prince and his life at court, particularly his many romances.

**Feudalism** For hundreds of years, Japan had been a feudal society without a centralized government. Landowning aristocrats, the *daimyo*, battled for control of land, while the majority of people worked as rice farmers.





Japanese feudalism was similar to European feudalism, which is described in Topic 1.6. Both featured very little social mobility, and both systems were built upon hereditary hierarchies. In Japan, peasants, known as serfs, were born into lives of economic dependency, while samurai were born into their roles as protectors and daimyo were born into lives of privilege. In Europe, the three groups were serfs, knights, and nobles.

What distinguishes Japanese feudalism from that of Europe was that the daimyo enjoyed much more power than the nobility in Europe did. The daimyo ruled over vast stretches of land and, in reality, were more powerful than either the emperor or the shogun. By contrast, Europe's hierarchy placed the monarch above the nobility. Though there were periods when authority of the monarch waned and power was distributed among nobility, the main centralized power structure of European feudalism would not change until the Modern Industrial Era.

In Europe, the ideal knight held to the code of chivalry, with duty to countrymen, duty to God, and duty to women, the last expressed through courtly love and the virtues of gentleness and graciousness. In Japan, the code was known as *bushido* and stressed frugality, loyalty, the martial arts, and honor unto death.

Japan also differed from China in how it was governed. China was ruled by an emperor who oversaw a large civilian bureaucracy. For much of its history, China had a central government strong enough to promote trade and peace. In contrast, when the Heian court declined, a powerful land-owning family, the Minamoto clan, took charge. In 1192, the Minamoto installed a shogun, or military ruler, to reign. Though Japan still had an emperor, he had little power. For the following four centuries, Japan suffered from regional rivalries among aristocrats. Not until the 17th century would shoguns create a strong central government that could unify the country. (Connect: In a paragraph, explain how Buddhism and Confucianism influenced the development of Chinese governments in the period from 1200 to 1450. See Prologue.)

## Korea

Korea's location gave it a very direct relationship with China. The countries shared a land boundary, and China extended both the north and south of Korea.

**Similarity to China** Through its tributary relationship, Korea and China were in close contact. Thus, Korea emulated many aspects of China's politics and culture. It centralized its government in the style of the Chinese. Culturally, Koreans adopted both Confucian and Buddhist beliefs. The educated elite studied Confucian classics, while Buddhist doctrine attracted the peasant masses. Koreans adopted the Chinese writing system, which proved to be very awkward. The Chinese and Korean languages remained structurally very different. In the 15th century, Korea developed its own writing system.

**Powerful Aristocracy** One important difference between Korea and China was that the landed aristocracy were more powerful in Korea than in



China. As a result, the Korean elite were able to prevent certain Chinese reforms from ever being implemented. For example, though there was a Korean civil service examination, it was not open to peasants. Thus, there was no truly merit-based system for entering the bureaucracy.

## Vietnam

Like Japan and Korea, Vietnam traded with and learned from China. For example, Vietnam adapted the Chinese writing system and architectural styles. However, Vietnam had a more adversarial relationship with China. At times, the Vietnamese launched violent rebellions against Chinese influence.

**Gender and Social Structure** Vietnamese culture differed from Chinese culture in several ways, which explains the strong resistance to Chinese power. For example, Vietnamese women enjoyed greater independence in their married lives than did Chinese women in the Confucian tradition. While the Chinese lived in extended families, the Vietnamese preferred **nuclear families** (just a wife, husband, and their children). Vietnamese villages operated independently of a national government; political centralization was nonexistent.

Although Vietnam adopted a merit-based bureaucracy of educated men, the Vietnamese system did not function like the Chinese scholar-bureaucracy. Instead of loyalty to the emperor, scholar-officials in Vietnam owed more allegiance to the village peasants. In fact, Vietnamese scholar-officials often led revolts against the government if they deemed it too oppressive. Vietnamese women resented their inferior status under the Chinese. In particular, they rejected the customs of foot binding and **polygyny**, the practice of having more than one wife at the same time. In spite of Vietnamese efforts to maintain the purity of their own culture, sinification did occur.

**Military Conflict with China** As the Tang Dynasty began to crumble in the 8th century, Vietnamese rebels pushed out China's occupying army. In their battles against the Chinese, they showed a strong capacity for guerilla warfare, perhaps due to their deep knowledge of their own land.

KEY TERMS BY THEME		
<p><b>ECONOMICS:</b> China Champa rice proto-industrialization artisans</p> <p><b>SOCIETY:</b> China scholar gentry filial piety</p> <p><b>ENVIRONMENT:</b> China Grand Canal</p>	<p><b>GOVERNMENT:</b> China Song Dynasty imperial bureaucracy meritocracy</p> <p><b>TECHNOLOGY:</b> China woodblock printing</p> <p><b>CULTURE:</b> China foot binding Buddhism Theravada Buddhism Mahayana Buddhism</p>	<p>Tibetan Buddhism syncretic Chan (Zen) Buddhism Neo-Confucianism</p> <p><b>GOVERNMENT:</b> Japan Heian period</p> <p><b>CULTURE:</b> Vietnam nuclear families polygyny</p>





## THINK AS A HISTORIAN: CONTEXTUALIZE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS

To contextualize is to look at an event, development, or process in history within the situation, or context, in which it occurs. After you place events in context, you begin to see themes and patterns emerge in history. Historians use these themes and patterns to understand the interactions of laws, institutions, culture, events, and people.

For example, one way to understand the Song Dynasty's success from 960 to 1279 is to place its political, social, and economic development in the context of what came before and after it. In the context of what came before, the imperial bureaucracy represents a political continuity, since the bureaucratic system had been in place in earlier dynasties as well. However, its modification under the Song to allow more upward mobility represents a change. Similarly, considering the Song imperial bureaucracy in the economic context of what came after, you might gain insights into causation. That is, the cost of supporting the bureaucracy drained China of its wealth, which in turn helped create problems that led to the decline of the Song Dynasty. Contextualizing also promotes understanding of comparisons among different cultures and time periods.

*Explain how the passage below provides context for the spread of Buddhism in China in light of other developments of the time.*

In 629, a Chinese Buddhist monk named Xuanzang left China to go on a pilgrimage to India, the birthplace of Buddhism. He traveled west on the Silk Roads to Central Asia, then south and east to India, which he reached in 630. Along the way and in India he met many Buddhist monks and visited Buddhist shrines. In order to gain more insight into Buddhism, he studied for years in Buddhist monasteries and at Nalanda University in Bihar, India—a famous center of Buddhist knowledge. After 17 years away, Xuanzang finally returned to China, where people greeted him as a celebrity. He brought back many Buddhist texts, which he spent the rest of his life translating into Chinese. These writings were highly instrumental in the growth of Buddhist scholarship in China.

## REFLECT ON THE TOPIC ESSENTIAL QUESTION

1. In one to three paragraphs, explain how developments in China and other parts of East Asia between c. 1200 and c. 1450 reflect continuity, innovation, and diversity.