13.1 China’s Reunification and Development
What were the greatest achievements of the Tang and Song dynasties?

Explore

The Tang Dynasty
How did the Tang Dynasty succeed where the Sui Dynasty failed?

Chinese Reunification
Use the graphic organizer to record the different dynasties that took power and their characteristics.

Li Yuan (566–635) was a general during the Sui era. When the Sui dynasty collapsed in 618, Li Yuan headed one of several groups fighting to take control during the period of rebellion and chaos. By 621, he had taken control of eastern China. By 624, he held most of the country, with only a few groups of rebels remaining in the north.

The influence of the Tang dynasty reached much farther than China. The neighboring regions of Japan, Korea, and Vietnam recognized China as the dominant regional power. Chinese culture heavily influenced their cultures. Military success spread this powerful Chinese influence throughout Central Asia. The expansion of trade through the Silk Road led to cultural exchanges that stretched through much of Eurasia.

One of the major reasons Li Yuan succeeded was that he built on the good ideas of the Sui dynasty, while avoiding its mistakes. In fact, because the Sui dynasty was so short, and so many of its achievements were continued by the Tang dynasty, the two are sometimes considered part of the same era.

The Tang dynasty was an age of prosperity. Many civic improvements were made throughout the empire. One of the most important developments was the Grand Canal. The canal, which was begun under Sui Emperor Yangdi, connected a network of canals that already existed across northern and southern China. The canal helped to improve trade and travel throughout the empire and brought wealth to more of the country than ever before.

The restoration of Han policies that began during the Sui dynasty expanded during the Tang dynasty. The Han dynasty had staffed a bureaucracy with civil servants recommended by local officials. The Sui dynasty systematized this process and made it official. The Tang dynasty set up schools where civil service candidates could study. The candidates were tested on their knowledge of Confucianism, which was also restored by the
Sui and supported by the Tang dynasty.

The golden age of Chinese culture that had begun in the Sui dynasty was brought to new heights during the Tang dynasty. Music from Persia and Central Asia was played alongside traditional Chinese court music and common music. The famous poet Li Bo (701–762, also known as Li Bai), a Daoist wanderer, wrote during the Tang era.

“
A cup of wine, under the flowering trees;
I drink alone, for no friend is near.
Raising my cup I beckon the bright moon,
For he, with my shadow, will make three men.

—Li Bo, Drinking Alone by Moonlight
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Poems often accompanied paintings. It was believed that the elaborate brushstroke calligraphy used in Chinese writing added beauty to the paintings. Portraits of important figures, along with paintings of court scenes, were popular during this age. Sculpture and metalwork also flourished during this time. Sculptures often focused on religious subjects, especially the Buddha. Metalworkers created jewelry and ritual objects. Gold and silver were commonly used during this time.

In the second half of the 700s, rebellions broke out in the northeast. Emperor Xuanzong fled west to the Sichuan region. The rebellions were eventually stopped, but the country’s sense of unity was splintered. By the second half of the 800s, more rebellions broke out and the government grew weaker. In 907, the Tang dynasty collapsed and China split into five separate kingdoms.