Module 3

Empires in East Asia

Essential Question
In general, was China helpful or harmful to the development of neighboring empires and kingdoms?

About the Photo: Angkor Wat was built in the 1100s in the Khmer Empire, in what is now Cambodia. This enormous temple was dedicated to the Hindu god Vishnu.

In this module you will learn how the cultures of East Asia influenced one another, as belief systems and ideas spread through both peaceful and violent means.

Videos, including...
- A Mongol Empire in China
- Ancient Discoveries: Chinese Warfare
- Ancient China: Masters of the Wind and Waves
- Marco Polo: Journey to the East
- Rise of the Samurai Class
- Lost Spirits of Cambodia
- How the Vietnamese Defeated the Mongols

SS.912.W.2.19 Describe the impact of Japan’s physiography on its economic and political development. SS.912.W.2.20 Summarize the major cultural, economic, political, and religious developments in medieval Japan. SS.912.W.2.21 Compare Japanese feudalism with Western European feudalism during the Middle Ages. SS.912.W.2.22 Describe Japan’s cultural and economic relationship to China and Korea. SS.912.G.2.1 Identify the physical characteristics and the human characteristics that define and differentiate regions. SS.912.G.4.9 Use political maps to describe the change in boundaries and governments within continents over time.

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**East and Southeast Asia**

- **618** Tang Dynasty begins 289-year rule in China.
- **794** Heian period begins in Japan.
- **935** Koryo Dynasty controls Korea.
- **960** Song Dynasty established in China.
- **1192** Kamakura Shogunate rules Japan.
- **1279** Kublai Khan conquers China.

**World**

- **630s** Muhammad unifies Arabian Peninsula under Islam.
- **794** Heian period begins in Japan.
- **800** Charlemagne crowned Holy Roman Emperor by pope.
- **900s** Maya civilization goes into decline.
- **960** Song Dynasty established in China.
- **1054** Christianity splits into Roman Catholic and Orthodox branches.
- **1192** Kamakura Shogunate rules Japan.
- **1279** Kublai Khan conquers China.
- **1324** Mali king Mansa Musa makes hajj to Mecca.
- **1347** Bubonic plague strikes Europe.
The Big Idea
During the Tang and Song dynasties, China experienced an era of prosperity and technological innovation.

Why It Matters Now
Chinese inventions from this period, such as printing, gunpowder, and the compass, changed history.

Key Terms and People
Tang Taizong
Wu Zhao
movable type
gentry

Setting the Stage
After the Han Dynasty collapsed in AD 220, no emperor was strong enough to hold China together. Over the next 350 years, more than 30 local dynasties rose and fell. Finally, by 589, an emperor named Wendi had united northern and southern China once again. He restored a strong central government. Under the next two dynasties, the Tang and the Song, China experienced a prolonged golden age. It became the richest, most powerful, and most advanced country in the world.

The Tang Dynasty Expands China
Wendi declared himself the first emperor of the Sui (sway) Dynasty. The dynasty lasted through only two emperors, from 581 to 618. The Sui emperors’ greatest accomplishment was the completion of the Grand Canal. This waterway connected the Huang He and the Chang Jiang. The canal provided a vital route for trade between the northern cities and the southern rice-producing region of the Chang delta.
About a million peasant men and women toiled five years to dig the more than 1,000-mile waterway. Perhaps as many as half of the workers died on this project. Thousands more toiled and died rebuilding the Great Wall. The endless labor on state projects turned the people against the Sui Dynasty. Overworked and overtaxed, they finally revolted. In 618, a member of the imperial court assassinated the second Sui emperor.

**Tang Rulers Create a Powerful Empire** While short-lived, the Sui Dynasty built a strong foundation for the great achievements of the next dynasty, the Tang (tahng). The Tang Dynasty ruled for nearly 300 years (618–907). The Tang emperor who began these achievements was **Tang Taizong**. His brilliant reign lasted from 626 to 649.

Under the Tang rulers, the empire expanded. Taizong’s armies reconquered the northern and western lands that China had lost since the decline of the Han Dynasty. By 668, China had extended its influence over Korea as well. The ruler during the campaign in Korea was the empress **Wu Zhao** (woo-jow). From about 660 on, she held the real power while weak emperors sat on the throne. Finally, in 690, Empress Wu assumed the title of emperor for herself—the only woman ever to do so in China.

Tang rulers further strengthened the central government of China. They expanded the network of roads and canals begun by the Sui. This helped to pull the empire together. They also promoted foreign trade and improvements in agriculture.

**Scholar-Officials** To manage their large empire, the Tang rulers needed to restore China’s vast bureaucracy. They did this by reviving and expanding the civil service examination system begun by the Han Dynasty. The relatively few candidates who passed the tough exams became part of an elite group of scholar-officials.

In theory, the exams were open to all men, even commoners. However, only the wealthy could afford the necessary education. Also, men with political connections could obtain high positions without taking the exams. Despite these flaws, the system created a remarkably intelligent and capable governing class. Before the Tang Dynasty, a few noble families dominated. As the examination system grew in importance, talent and education became more important than noble birth in winning power. As a result, many moderately wealthy families shared in China’s government.

**The Tang Lose Power** To meet the rising costs of government, Tang rulers imposed crushing taxes in the mid-700s. These brought hardship to the people but failed to cover the costs of military expansion and new building programs.

Moreover, the Tang struggled to control the vast empire they had built. In 751, Muslim armies soundly defeated the Chinese at the Battle of Talas. As a result, Central Asia passed out of Chinese control and into foreign hands. After this time, border attacks and internal rebellions steadily chipped away at the power of the imperial government. Finally, in 907, Chinese rebels sacked and burned the Tang capital at Ch’ang-an and murdered the last Tang emperor, a child.
The Song Dynasty Restores China

After the fall of the Tang Dynasty, rival warlords divided China into separate kingdoms. Then, in 960, an able general named Taizu reunited China and proclaimed himself the first Song (sung) emperor. The Song Dynasty, like the Tang, lasted about three centuries (960–1279). Although the Song ruled a smaller empire than either the Han or the Tang, China remained stable, powerful, and prosperous.

Song armies never regained the western lands lost after 751. Nor did they regain northern lands that had been lost to nomadic tribes during the Tang decline. For a time, Song emperors tried to buy peace with their northern enemies. They paid hefty annual tributes of silver, silk, and tea. This policy, however, ultimately failed to stop the threat from the north. In the early 1100s, a Manchurian people called the Jurchen conquered northern China and established the Jin Empire. The Jurchen forced the Song to retreat south across the Huang He. After 1127, the Song emperors ruled only southern China.

The Song rulers established a grand new capital at Hangzhou, a coastal city south of the Chang Jiang. Despite its military troubles, the dynasty of the Southern Song (1127–1279) saw rapid economic growth. The south had become the economic heartland of China. Merchants in southern cities grew rich from trade with Chinese in the north, nomads of Central Asia, and people of western Asia and Europe.
An Era of Prosperity and Innovation

During the Tang and Song dynasties, China’s population nearly doubled, soaring to 100 million. By the Song era, China had at least ten cities with a population of 1 million each. China had become the most populous country in the world. It also had become the most advanced.

Science and Technology  Artisans and scholars made important technological advances during the Tang and Song eras. Among the most important inventions were movable type and gunpowder. With movable type, a printer could arrange blocks of individual characters in a frame to make up a page for printing. Previously, printers had carved the words of a whole page into one large block. The development of gunpowder, in time, led to the creation of explosive weapons such as bombs, grenades, small rockets, and cannons. Other important inventions of this period include porcelain, the mechanical clock, paper money, and the use of the magnetic compass for sailing. (See the Social History feature Tang and Song China: People and Technology.)

The 1000s to the 1200s was a rich period for Chinese mathematics. The Chinese made advances in arithmetic and algebra. Many mathematical ideas, such as using negative numbers, spread from China southward and westward.

Agriculture  The rapid growth of China resulted in part from advances in farming. Farmers especially improved the cultivation of rice. In about the year 1000, China imported a new variety of fast-ripening rice from Vietnam. This allowed the farmers to harvest two rice crops each year.

Now and Then

Acupuncture

During the Song Dynasty, the Chinese carefully studied human anatomy and created charts and models of the body. These helped to improve the practice of acupuncture, a system of treatment that involves inserting slender needles into the body at specific points, depending on the nature of the problem.

In recent years, this ancient practice has gained some acceptance in mainstream Western medicine. More and more practicing doctors are seeking training in acupuncture methods. And mainstream doctors are increasing their referrals to acupuncture specialists. In 2012, about 3.5 million people in the United States sought treatment from an acupuncturist for medical problems such as migraine headaches and drug dependency.
rather than one. To make sure that farmers knew about this improved variety, Chinese officials distributed seedlings throughout the country. The agricultural improvements enabled China’s farmers to produce more food. This was necessary to feed the rapidly expanding population in the cities.

Another development that improved rice production was the use of terraced fields, which are level platforms that farmers cut into sloping land to allow them to grow crops. During the Song Dynasty, farmers greatly expanded the number of terraced rice fields, transforming the landscape of hilly and mountainous regions. Terraced farming allowed Chinese farmers to move into sparsely populated areas that had produced little food before. But it also sometimes brought them into conflict with local people who practiced more traditional farming methods.

Trade and Foreign Contacts Under the Tang and Song emperors, foreign trade flourished. Tang imperial armies guarded the great Silk Roads, which linked China to the West. Eventually, however, China lost control over these routes during the long Tang decline. After this time, Chinese merchants relied increasingly on ocean trade. Chinese advances in sailing technology, including use of the magnetic compass, made it possible for

Rice farming probably began in China around 5000 BC. It was first practiced in southern China, where the warm, wet climate is perfect for growing rice.
sea trade to expand. Up and down China’s long coastline, the largest port cities in the world bustled with international trade. Merchant ships carried trade goods to Korea and Japan. They sailed across the Indian Ocean to India, the Persian Gulf, and even the coast of Africa. Chinese merchants established trading colonies around Southeast Asia. Many foreign traders, mostly Arabs, resided in Chinese cities. Through trade and travel, Chinese culture spread throughout East Asia. One major cultural export was Buddhism. This religion spread from China to Vietnam, Korea, and Japan. The exchange of goods and ideas was two-way. For example, foreign religions, including Islam and some Eastern sects of Christianity, spread to China and won followers.

**Revival of Confucianism** Confucianism is a philosophy based on the teachings of the Chinese scholar Confucius (551–479 BC), who stressed the importance of social and civic responsibility. After the fall of the Han Dynasty, Confucianism fell into decline and Buddhism became China’s most important belief system. During the late Tang and Song dynasties, scholars responded to this challenge by reinterpreting Confucian texts to address new intellectual and spiritual concerns. Their movement is known as Neo-Confucianism.

The Song Dynasty used an elaborate examination system to award government positions. This system helped promote Confucian beliefs because it required applicants to master classical texts. As trade expanded under the dynasty, Neo-Confucianism spread to Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, which developed their own distinct forms of the philosophy.

**A Golden Age of Poetry and Art** The prosperity of the Tang and Song dynasties nourished an age of artistic brilliance. The Tang period produced great poetry. Two of its most celebrated poets were Li Bo, who wrote about life’s pleasures, and Tu Fu, who praised orderliness and Confucian virtues. Tu Fu also wrote critically about war and the hardships of soldiers. Once he himself was captured by rebels and taken to Ch’ang-an, the capital city. He had sent his family to the village of Fuzhou for safety. Here he describes their separation:

“The same moon is above Fuzhou tonight; From the open window she will be watching it alone, The poor children are too little to be able to remember Ch’ang-an. Her perfumed hair will be dampened by the dew, the air may be too chilly on her delicate arms. When can we both lean by the wind-blown curtains and see the tears dry on each other’s face?” —Tu Fu, “Moonlight Night”
Chinese painting reached new heights of beauty during the Song Dynasty. Painting of this era shows the influence of Daoism, a philosophy that urges people to live simply and in harmony with nature. Artists emphasized the beauty of natural landscapes and objects such as a single branch or flower. The artists did not use bright colors. Black ink was their favorite paint. Said one Song artist, "Black is ten colors."

**Changes in Chinese Society**

China’s prosperity produced many social changes during the Tang and Song periods. Chinese society became increasingly mobile. People moved to the cities in growing numbers. The Chinese also experienced greater social mobility than ever before. The most important avenue for social advancement was the civil service system.

**Levels of Society** During Tang and Song times, the power of the old aristocratic families began to fade. A new, much larger upper class emerged, made up of scholar-officials and their families. Such a class of powerful, well-to-do people is called the *gentry*. The gentry attained their status through education and civil service positions rather than through
land ownership. Below the gentry was an urban middle class. It included merchants, shopkeepers, skilled artisans, minor officials, and others. At the bottom of urban society were laborers, soldiers, and servants. In the countryside lived the largest class by far, the peasants. They toiled for wealthy landowners as they had for centuries.

**The Status of Women** Women had always been subservient to men in Chinese society. Their status further declined during the Tang and Song periods. This was especially true among the upper classes in cities. There a woman’s work was deemed less important to the family’s prosperity and status. Changing attitudes affected peasant families less, however. Peasant women worked in the fields and helped produce their family’s food and income.

One sign of the changing status of women was the new custom of binding the feet of upper-class girls. When a girl was very young, her feet were bound tightly with cloth, which eventually broke the arch and curled all but the big toe under. This produced what was admiringly called a “lily-foot.” Women with bound feet were crippled for life. To others in society, such a woman reflected the wealth and prestige of her husband, who could afford such a beautiful but impractical wife.

The social, economic, and technological transformations of the Tang and Song periods permanently shaped Chinese civilization. They endured even as China fell to a group of nomadic outsiders, the Mongols, whom you will learn about in Lesson 2.

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**Lesson 1 Assessment**

1. **Organize Information** Compare and contrast the Tang and Song dynasties.

   - **Tang only**
   - **Both**
   - **Song only**

2. **Key Terms and People** For each key term or person in the lesson, write a sentence explaining its significance.

3. **Analyze Causes** What practices allowed China to feed its growing population?

4. **Analyze Effects** What impact did improvements in transportation have on Tang and Song China?

5. **Form Opinions** “Gaining power depends on merit, not birth.” Do you agree with this view of China under the Tang and Song? Explain.
Lesson 2

The Mongols

The Big Idea
The Mongols, a nomadic people from the steppe, conquered settled societies across much of Asia and established the Yuan Dynasty to rule China.

Why It Matters Now
The Mongols built the largest unified land empire in world history and helped spread Chinese ideas to the West by encouraging trade.

Key Terms and People
pastoralist
clan
Genghis Khan
Pax Mongolica
Kublai Khan
Marco Polo

Setting the Stage
While the Chinese prospered during the Song Dynasty, a great people far to the north were also gaining strength. The Mongols of the Asian steppe lived their lives on the move. They prided themselves on their skill on horseback, their discipline, their ruthlessness, and their courage in battle. They also wanted the wealth and glory that came with conquering mighty empires. This desire soon exploded into violent conflict that transformed Asia and Europe forever.

Nomads of the Asian Steppe
A vast belt of dry grassland, called the steppe, stretches across the landmass of Eurasia. The significance of the steppe to neighboring civilizations was twofold. First, it served as a land trade route connecting the East and the West. Second, it was home to nomadic peoples who frequently swept down on their neighbors to plunder, loot, and conquer.

Geography of the Steppe There are two main expanses of the Eurasian steppe. The western steppe runs from Central Asia to eastern Europe. It was the original home of some ancient invaders you may have read about, including the Hittites. The eastern steppe, covering the area of present-day Mongolia, was the first home of the Huns, the Turks, and the Mongols.

Very little rain falls on the steppe, but the dry, windswept plain supports short, hardy grasses. Seasonal temperature changes can be dramatic. Temperatures in Mongolia, for example, range from –57°F in winter to 96°F in the summer. Rainfall is somewhat more plentiful and the
climate milder in the west than in the east. For this reason, movements of people have historically tended to be toward the west and the south.

**The Nomadic Way of Life**  Nomadic peoples were **pastoralists**—that is, they herded domesticated animals. They were constantly on the move, searching for good pasture to feed their herds. But they did not wander. Rather, they followed a familiar seasonal pattern and returned on a regular basis to the same campsites. Keeping claim to land that was not permanently occupied was difficult. Battles frequently arose among nomadic groups over grassland and water rights.

Asian nomads practically lived on horseback as they followed their huge herds over the steppe. They depended on their animals for food, clothing, and housing. Their diet consisted of meat and mare's milk. They wore clothing made of skins and wool, and they lived in portable felt tents called **yurts**.

Steppe nomads traveled together in kinship groups called **clans**. The members of each clan claimed to be descended from a common ancestor. Different clans sometimes came together when they needed a large force to attack a common enemy or raid their settled neighbors.

**Steppe Nomads and Settled Societies**  The differing ways of life of nomadic and settled peoples resulted in constant interaction between them. Often, they engaged in peaceful trade. The nomads exchanged horses, for example, for basic items they lacked, such as grain, metal, cloth, and tea. Nomads were accustomed to scarcity and hardship. They prided themselves on their toughness. However, they were sometimes tempted by the rich land and relative wealth of townspeople and took what they wanted by force. As a result, settled peoples lived in constant fear of raids.

Time and again in history, nomadic peoples rode out of the steppe to invade border towns and villages. When a state or empire was strong and organized, it could protect its frontier. If the state or empire became divided and weak, the nomads could increase their attacks and gain more plunder. Occasionally, a powerful nomadic group was able to conquer a whole empire and become its rulers. Over generations, these nomadic rulers often became part of the civilization they conquered.

**The Rise of the Mongols**

For centuries, the Mongol people had roamed the eastern steppe in loosely organized clans. It took a military and political genius to unite the Mongols into a force with a single purpose—conquest.

**Genghis Khan Unites the Mongols**  Around 1200, a Mongol clan leader named Temujin sought to unify the Mongols under his leadership. He fought and defeated his rivals one by one. In 1206, Temujin accepted the title **Genghis Khan**, (JEHNG-gihs-KAHN), or “universal ruler” of the Mongol clans.

Over the next 21 years, Genghis led the Mongols in conquering much of Asia. His first goal was China. After invading the northern Jin Empire
in 1211, however, his attention turned to the Islamic region west of Mongolia. Angered by the murder of Mongol traders and an ambassador at the hands of the Muslims, Genghis launched a campaign of terror across Central Asia. The Mongols destroyed one city after another—Utrar, Samar-kand, Bukhara—and slaughtered many inhabitants. By 1225, Central Asia was under Mongol control.

**Genghis the Conqueror** Several characteristics lay behind Genghis Khan’s stunning success as a conqueror. First, he was a brilliant organizer. He assembled his Mongol warriors into a mighty fighting force. Following the model of the Chinese military, Genghis grouped his warriors in armies of 10,000. These in turn were organized into 1,000-man brigades, 100-man companies, and 10-man squads. He put his most battle-proven and loyal men in command of these units.

Second, Genghis was a gifted strategist. He used various tricks to confuse his enemy. Sometimes, a small Mongol cavalry unit would attack, then pretend to gallop away in flight. The enemy usually gave chase. Then the rest of the Mongol army would appear suddenly and slaughter the surprised enemy forces.

Finally, Genghis Khan used cruelty as a weapon. He believed in terrifying his enemies into surrender. If a city refused to open its gates to him, he might kill the entire population when he finally captured the place. The terror the Mongols inspired spread ahead of their armies, which led many towns to surrender without a fight. As one Arab historian wrote, “In the countries that have not yet been overrun by them, everyone spends the night afraid that they may appear there too.”

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**Reading Check**
Summarize
What were some of the tactics Genghis Khan used in war?

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**BIOGRAPHY**

-*Genghis Khan*
1162?–1227

Temujin, according to legend, was born with a blood clot in his fist. In his lifetime, his hands were often covered with the blood of others.

When Temujin was about nine, the Tatars, a rival people, poisoned his father. For a time, he and his family lived in extreme poverty, abandoned by their clan. When in manhood he fought and defeated the Tatars, he slaughtered every male taller than a cart axle.

While driven by revenge, Genghis also loved conquest. He once remarked to his personal historian:

*Man’s greatest good fortune is to chase and defeat his enemy, seize his total possessions, leave his married women weeping and wailing, [and] ride his [horse].*
The Mongol Empire

Genghis Khan died in 1227—not from violence, but from illness. His successors continued to expand his empire. In less than 50 years, the Mongols conquered territory from China to Poland. In so doing, they created the largest unified land empire in history.

The Khanates After Genghis’s death, his sons and grandsons continued the campaign of conquest. Armies under their leadership drove south, east, and west out of inner Asia. They completed their conquest of northern China and invaded Korea. They leveled the Russian city of Kiev and reached the banks of the Adriatic Sea. The cities of Venice and Vienna were within their grasp. However, in the 1250s the Mongols halted their westward campaign and turned their attention to Persia. By 1260, the Mongols had divided their huge empire into four regions, or khanates. These were the Khanate of the Great Khan (Mongolia and China), the Khanate of Chagatai (Central Asia), the Ilkhanate (Persia), and the Khanate of the Golden Horde (Russia). A descendant of Genghis ruled each khanate.
A Mighty Fighting Force

Mongol soldiers were superb horsemen, having spent all their lives in the saddle. Annual game roundups gave young men the chance to practice skills they would use in battle and gave their leaders the opportunity to spot promising warriors. When on the move, each soldier was accompanied by three extra horses. By changing mounts, soldiers could stay in the saddle for up to ten days and nights at a time. When charging toward a target, they covered as much as 120 miles a day. If food was scarce, a Mongol soldier might make a small gash in the neck of one of his horses and sustain himself by drinking the blood.

Under his armor, each cavalry warrior wore silk underwear, which arrows often did not pierce. The warriors could use the silk to help pull the arrow cleanly out of a wound.

A Mongol army was like a moving city. The cavalry of 10,000 was accompanied by an even greater number of family members and by tens of thousands of horses and livestock. When attacking, however, the warriors would leave the caravan, separate into different groups, and attack their enemy on multiple fronts.

The khan and other leaders had great mobile yurts pulled by teams of oxen.

A key to Mongol horsemanship was the stirrup, which was invented on the steppe in the second century BC. Stirrups enabled a mounted warrior to stand, turn, and shoot arrows behind him.

The cavalry warrior’s weapons included leather armor, a lance, a dagger, a bow and arrows, and his stout, sturdy horse.

Mongol women took primary responsibility for the needs of the camp, milked the livestock, and treated the wounded. Some also fought as warriors.

Analyze Visuals
Name at least three things that allowed the Mongol army to be self-sufficient.

The Mongols as Rulers

Many of the areas invaded by the Mongols never recovered. The populations of some cities were wiped out. In addition, the Mongols destroyed ancient irrigation systems in areas such as the Tigris and Euphrates valleys. Thus, the land could no longer support resettlement. While ferocious in war, the Mongols were quite tolerant in peace. They rarely imposed their beliefs or way of life on those they conquered. Over time, some Mongol rulers even adopted aspects of the culture of the people they ruled. The Ilkhans and the Golden Horde, for example, became Muslims. Growing cultural differences among the khanates contributed to the eventual splitting up of the empire.
The Mongol Peace  From the mid-1200s to the mid-1300s, the Mongols imposed stability and law and order across much of Eurasia. This period is sometimes called the **Pax Mongolica**, or Mongol Peace. The Mongols guaranteed safe passage for trade caravans, travelers, and missionaries from one end of the empire to another.

Trade between Europe and Asia had never been more active. Ideas and inventions traveled along with the trade goods. Many Chinese innovations, such as gunpowder, reached Europe during this period.

Other things spread along with the goods and the ideas. Some historians speculate that the epidemic of bubonic plague that devastated Europe during the 1300s was first spread by the Mongols. The disease might have traveled along trade routes or have been passed to others by infected Mongol troops.

For a brief period of history, the nomadic Mongols were the lords of city-based civilizations across Asia, including China.

**Kublai Khan Becomes Emperor**

**Kublai Khan**, the grandson of Genghis Khan, assumed the title Great Khan in 1260. In theory, the Great Khan ruled the entire Mongol Empire. In reality, the empire had split into four khanates. Other descendants of Genghis ruled Central Asia, Persia, and Russia as semi-independent states. So, Kublai focused instead on extending the power and range of his own khanate, which already included Mongolia, Korea, Tibet, and northern China. To begin, however, he had to fulfill the goal of his grandfather to conquer all of China.

The Chinese held off Kublai’s attacks for several years. However, his armies finally overwhelmed them in 1279. Throughout China’s long history, the Chinese feared and fought off invasions by northern nomads. China sometimes lost territory to nomadic groups, but no foreigner had ever ruled the whole country. With Kublai’s victory, that changed.

**Beginning a New Dynasty**  As China’s new emperor, Kublai Khan founded a new dynasty called the Yuan (**yu•AHN**) Dynasty. It lasted less than a century, until 1368, when it was overthrown. However, the Yuan era was an important period in Chinese history for several reasons. First, Kublai Khan united China for the first time in more than 300 years. For this he is considered one of China’s great emperors. Second, the control imposed by the Mongols across all of Asia opened China to greater foreign contacts and trade. Finally, Kublai and his successors tolerated Chinese culture and made few changes to the system of government.

Unlike his Mongol ancestors, Kublai abandoned the Mongolian steppes for China. He did not share his ancestors’ dislike of the settled life. On the contrary, he rather enjoyed living in the luxurious manner of a Chinese emperor. He maintained a beautiful summer palace at Shangdu, on the border between Mongolia and China. He also built a new square-walled capital at the site of modern Beijing. Kublai built this palace to enhance his
prestige, but his new capital meant something more. Previously, the Great Khans had ruled their empire from Mongolia. Moving the capital from Mongolia to China was a sign that Kublai intended to make his mark as emperor of China.

**Failure to Conquer Japan** After conquering China, Kublai Khan tried to extend his rule to Japan. In 1274 and again in 1281, the Great Khan sent huge fleets against Japan. The Mongols forced Koreans to build, sail, and provide provisions for the boats, a costly task that almost ruined Korea. Both times the Japanese turned back the Mongol fleets.

The second fleet carried 150,000 Mongol, Chinese, and Korean warriors—the largest seaborne invasion force in history until World War II. After 53 days, Japanese warriors had fought the invaders to a standstill. Then, on the following day, the sky darkened and a typhoon swept furiously across the Sea of Japan. Mongol ships were upended, swamped, and dashed to bits against the rocky shore, despite their sailors’ attempts to escape onto the open sea. For centuries afterward, the Japanese spoke reverently of the *kamikaze*, or “divine wind,” that had saved Japan.

**Mongol Rule in China**

Early in Kublai Khan’s reign, one of his Chinese advisers told him, “I have heard that one can conquer the empire on horseback, but one cannot govern it on horseback.” This advice illustrates the problems Kublai faced as emperor. Mongol ways would not work in a sophisticated civilization like China’s. Besides, the number of Mongols in China was small compared to the huge native population. Kublai would need to make use of non-Mongol officials to help him rule successfully.

**The Mongols and the Chinese** The Mongol rulers had little in common with their Chinese subjects. Because of their differences, the Mongols kept a separate identity. Mongols lived apart from the Chinese and obeyed different laws. They kept the Chinese out of high government offices, although they retained as many Chinese officials as possible to serve on the local level. Most of the highest government posts went to Mongols or to foreigners. The Mongols believed that foreigners were more trustworthy since they had no local loyalties.

Despite his differences with the Chinese, Kublai Khan was an able leader. He restored the Grand Canal and extended it 135 miles north to Beijing. Along its banks he built a paved highway that ran some 1,100 miles, from Hangzhou to Beijing. These land and water routes ensured the north a steady supply of grain and other goods from the southern heartland.

**Foreign Trade** Foreign trade increased under Kublai Khan. This was largely due to the Mongol Peace, which made the caravan routes across Central Asia safe for trade and travel. Traders transported Chinese silk and porcelain, which were greatly valued in Europe and western Asia, over
the Silk Roads and other routes. These traders also carried with them such Chinese products and inventions as printing, gunpowder, the compass, paper currency, and playing cards.

Kublai further encouraged trade by inviting foreign merchants to visit China. Most of them were Muslims from India, Central Asia, and Persia. Many European traders and travelers, including Christian missionaries, also reached China.

**Marco Polo at the Mongol Court** The most famous European to visit China in these years was a young Venetian trader, Marco Polo. He traveled by caravan on the Silk Roads with his father and uncle, arriving at Kublai Khan's court around 1275. Polo had learned several Asian languages in his travels, and Kublai Khan sent him to various Chinese cities on government missions. Polo served the Great Khan well for 17 years. In 1292, the Polos left China and made the long journey back to Venice.

Later, during a war against Venice's rival city, Genoa, Marco Polo was captured and imprisoned. In prison he had time to tell the full story of his travels and adventures. To his awed listeners, he spoke of China's fabulous cities, its fantastic wealth, and the strange things he had seen there.
He mentioned the burning of “black stones” (coal) in Chinese homes. (Coal as a fuel was little known in Europe.) He also recorded the practical workings of Kublai’s government and aspects of Chinese life. Here is his description of trade in Beijing:

“[M]ore precious and costly wares are imported into Khan-balik [Beijing] than into any other city in the world. . . . All the treasures that come from India—precious stones, pearls, and other rarities—are brought here. So too are the choicest and costliest products of Cathay [China] itself and every other province.”

—Marco Polo, The Travels of Marco Polo

A fellow prisoner gathered Polo’s stories into a book. It was an instant success in Europe, but most readers did not believe a word of it. They thought Polo’s account was a marvelous collection of tall tales. It was clear to Marco Polo, however, that the civilization he had visited was the greatest in the world.

The End of Mongol Rule

During the last years of Kublai Khan’s reign, weaknesses began to appear in Mongol rule. In an attempt to further expand his empire, Kublai sent several expeditions into Southeast Asia. His armies and navies suffered many humiliating defeats at a huge expense of lives and equipment. Heavy spending on fruitless wars, on public works, and on the luxuries of the Yuan court burdened the treasury and created resentment among the overtaxed Chinese. This presented problems that Kublai’s less able successors could not resolve.

Yuan Dynasty Overthrown Kublai Khan died in 1294. After his death, the Yuan Dynasty began to fade. Family members continually argued over who would rule. In one eight-year period, four different khans took the throne.
Rebellions broke out in many parts of China in the 1300s. The Chinese had long resented their Mongol rulers, and the Mongol humiliation of the Chinese only increased under Kublai Khan’s successors. The rebellions were also fueled by years of famine, flood, and disease, along with growing economic problems and official corruption. In 1368, Chinese rebels finally overthrew the Mongols. The rebel leader founded a new dynasty, the Ming, which lasted until 1644.

**Decline of the Mongol Empire**  By the time of the collapse of the Yuan Dynasty, the entire Mongol Empire had disintegrated. The government of the Ilkhanate in Persia fell apart in the 1330s. The Chagatai khans ruled Central Asia until the 1370s. Only the Golden Horde in Russia stayed in power. The Golden Horde ruled Russia for 250 years. Ivan III finally led Russia to independence from Mongol rule in 1480.

The rise and fall of Mongol rule affected civilizations from eastern Europe to China. In East Asia, the Mongols failed to conquer Japan, but they did gain control of Korea. Although Korea’s ruling dynasty was not overthrown, it made peace with the Mongols under very harsh terms. You will read about this event and Korea’s earlier relations with China in Lesson 3.

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**Lesson 2 Assessment**

1. **Organize Information**  Create a word web that shows key events in the life of Kublai Khan.

   ![Kublai Khan Word Web]

Which of the listed events do you think is the most important? Write a paragraph that explains why.

2. **Key Terms and People**  For each key term or person in the lesson, write a sentence explaining its significance.

3. **Make Inferences**  What characteristics of their culture do you think contributed to the Mongols’ military success? Explain your response.

4. **Analyze Motives**  What do you think drove Genghis Khan to conquer a great empire? Explain your answer.

5. **Evaluate Decisions**  Judging from the events of the Yuan Dynasty, do you think the Mongol policies toward the Chinese were effective? Explain your answer.

6. **Analyze Effects**  What impact did the Mongol Peace have on interaction between East and West?

7. **Form Opinions**  Do you think that Kublai Khan was a successful ruler? Why or why not?
Korean Dynasties

The Big Idea
The Koreans adapted Chinese culture to fit their own needs but maintained a distinct way of life.

Why It Matters Now
Korea’s interactions with China and Japan helped spread Buddhism and Confucianism, which remain important beliefs in East Asia today.

Key Terms and People
Silla Dynasty
Koryo Dynasty

Setting the Stage
According to a Korean legend, the first Korean state was founded by the hero Tan’gun, whose father was a god and whose mother was a bear. Another legend relates that it was founded by a royal descendant of the Chinese Shang Dynasty. These legends reflect two sides of Korean culture. On one hand, the Koreans were a distinct people who developed their own native traditions. On the other hand, their culture was shaped by Chinese influences from early dynastic times.

The Korean Peninsula
Korea lies between China and Japan. Because of its central location, Korea has been a bridge for the passage of people, culture, and ideas. Yet this location has also left Korea vulnerable to invasion, and both China and Japan have dominated it for periods of time.

Geography
Korea is located on a peninsula that juts out from the Asian mainland toward Japan. It is about the same size as the state of Utah. Much of the peninsula is covered by mountains, which limits the amount of land for agriculture. The mountain ranges run north to south along the east coast. As a result, Korea’s main population centers are in the west, where the land flattens into plains. Korea’s climate is
hot in the summer and very cold in the winter. The peninsula has a coastline more than 5,000 miles long, which helped the Koreans develop a long tradition of shipbuilding.

**Early History** The first Koreans were nomadic peoples from Northeast Asia. They formed clans or tribes that controlled different areas of the peninsula. China’s Han Dynasty invaded the northern peninsula in 108 BC and established several colonies, one of which lasted four centuries. During this period, the Koreans adopted Confucianism and Buddhism as well as Chinese writing, political institutions, and agricultural methods. Korean travelers later spread Chinese culture and technology into Japan.

**Silla and Koryo**

During the period of Chinese colonization, Korean tribes began to gather together into federations. Eventually, these federations developed into three rival kingdoms: Koguryo in the north, Paekche in the southwest, and Silla in the southeast.

**Interpret Maps**

1. **Place** What physical features help separate Korea from China?
2. **Movement** Did the Tang Chinese invade Korea by land or by water during the 660s?
Two Koreas

Since the end of World War II, Korea has been arbitrarily divided into two countries—communist North Korea and democratic South Korea. For years, many Koreans longed for their country to be reunited. Hopes for such a day rose in 2000 when the presidents of the two nations sat down to discuss reunification. In 2002, however, North Korea announced that it was developing nuclear weapons and would use them against South Korea if necessary. This greatly dimmed people’s hopes for one Korea.

Silla’s Unification of Korea  In the mid-600s, the Silla defeated the other kingdoms with the help of China and then drove out the Chinese. For the first time, most of the Korean peninsula was unified as one state. The capital of the Silla Dynasty was Kyongju. Kyongju grew into a prosperous city with more than 175,000 households. Under the Silla, Koreans built impressive monasteries and royal tombs and created elegant stone and bronze sculptures. The economy was mainly agricultural, but Korean merchants conducted extensive trade with China and Japan.

Despite their conflict around the time of unification, the Silla established close ties with China, which was then ruled by the Tang Dynasty. The Silla made moderate payments of tribute in return for peaceful relations. Silla rulers adopted Buddhism as the official religion and also supported Confucian studies. Faced with the challenge of controlling a large territory, they tried to make some reforms modeled after the Tang government. In addition, Silla scholars developed a standard system for writing the Korean language with Chinese characters, though it was still difficult to use because the two languages are so different.

Rise and Fall of the Koryo Dynasty  The Silla began to decline in the ninth century, mainly due to strife within the royal family and revolts over high taxes. In 918 a rebel officer named Wang Kon took over a region of Korea and founded the Koryo Dynasty. He gained control of the whole country around 935. The Koryo Dynasty, which is the origin of the name Korea, lasted until 1392.

Koryo’s rulers continued to adopt Chinese ideas but worked to maintain distinct Korean features. For example, the dynasty modeled its central government after China’s and established a civil service system. However, this system did not provide the social mobility for Koreans that it did for the Chinese. Koryo society was sharply divided between a landed aristocracy and the rest of the population, including the military, commoners, and slaves. Despite the examination system, the sons of nobles received the best positions, and these positions became hereditary.
The Koryo Dynasty faced a major threat in 1231, when the Mongols swept into Korea. The Korean government retreated to an island fortress in the Han River, where it held out for several decades before suing for peace. The Mongols demanded a crushing tribute, including 20,000 horses, clothing for a million soldiers, and many children and artisans, who were to be taken away as slaves. The harsh period of Mongol occupation lasted until the 1360s, when the Mongol Empire collapsed.

In 1392, a group of scholar-officials and military leaders overthrew the Koryo Dynasty and instituted land reforms. They established a new dynasty, called the Choson (or Yi) Dynasty, which would rule for 518 years.

Koryo Culture  The Koryo period produced great achievements in Korean culture. Inspired by Song ceramic artists, Korean potters produced the much-admired celadon pottery, famous for its milky green glaze. Korean artisans produced one of the great treasures of the Buddhist world—many thousands of large wooden blocks for printing all the Buddhist scriptures. This set of blocks was destroyed by the Mongols, but the disaster sparked a national effort to re-create them. The more than 80,000 blocks in the new set remain in Korea today. In addition to wood-block printing, the Koreans experimented with movable type, creating the first printing system to use metal type.

Lesson 3 Assessment

1. **Organize Information**  Create a timeline of the major events in Korea’s early history.

   ![Timeline](image)

   Which event was most important for the country’s development? Explain.

2. **Key Terms and People**  For each key term or person in the lesson, write a sentence explaining its significance.

3. **Analyze Effects**  How did geography influence the history and culture of Korea? Illustrate your answer with examples.

4. **Form Opinions**  How would you characterize the Tang Dynasty’s behavior toward Korea?

5. **Compare and Contrast**  What were some similarities and differences between the Silla and Koryo dynasties?