Contextualize

During the Tang (618–906) and Song (960–1279) Dynasties, China was one of the most technologically advanced civilizations in the world. Innovation in art, science, philosophy, and technology gave the people in these societies an understanding of the world around them that other civilizations and even later dynasties in China would not accomplish for hundreds of years.

Like other golden ages in history, the Tang and Song Dynasties unified the region, created a strong central government, and ruled over a time of peace that was reinforced by the government’s actions. The Tang expanded China’s territories and influence to include Korea and Vietnam, as well as portions of northeast, central, and southeast Asia.

The peace that the Tang and Song governments created encouraged trade throughout the empire and abroad through the Silk Roads. Chinese cities during the Tang and Song dynasties became prosperous cultural centers of an international age where religious, academic, and artistic life and cultural exchange flourished. Scholars and merchants from as far as Persia and India came to Tang China to participate in its golden age.

While the government was strong, it was not oppressive. Some became very rich, but the Tang rulers redistributed land to give the less fortunate an opportunity to grow in wealth. In addition this was a time when education and achievement were rewarded and women attained a higher status in the government and more freedom than they had in previous dynasties.

1. Based on the reading passage, why were Tang and Song cities considered “cultural centers of an international age?”

2. Based on the passage and your knowledge of golden ages, why was China during the Tang and Song dynasties a likely place for golden age to occur?

UNIT 4 | Political Powers and Achievements | SQ 9. What led to the Tang and Song Golden Ages? How did the Tang and Song Dynasties impact China, other regions, and later periods in history?
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How did the Tang and Song Dynasties affect China, other regions, and later periods in history?

Connect Cause and Effect

NTD on China, Discovering China: The Song Dynasty

Directions:

● Preview the questions listed in the right-hand column.
● Watch the video one time through, without stopping and try to answer the questions.
● Read the excerpts from the transcript of the video below and answer those questions that you could not by watching the film.

Transcript provided by New Visions for Public Schools (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 International license). Original video can be found here and has a standard Youtube license.

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**Excerpts from Discovering China: The Song Dynasty**

1:17

...the Southern Song period was one of prosperity with flourishing art and culture as well as technological advancements. During the Song, the government started to grant farmers ownership of land which led to a huge increase in rice production. The economy started to change from a purely agricultural economy to a commercial one with peasants selling their surpluses to buy a wide range of goods such as tea, coal, oil, and wine. With the growth in the economy, so grew the population, hitting 100 million by the year 1100.

1. What evidence from this section suggests that the Song dynasty was prosperous?

1:50

Three of China’s four great inventions originate from the Song Dynasty namely, printing, the magnetic compass, and gunpowder. The Song government used its printing techniques for currency production and in the 12th century, became the first government in the world to print paper money. The Song was also the first Chinese dynasty to establish a permanent standing navy to safeguard foreign trade and guard against invasions from the north. The ships used the newly invented compass to navigate and used gunpowder in their weaponry. Gunpowder was first employed in bombs delivered from ships via catapult. The Song used these tactics to successfully defend their territory against a Jurchen invasion on the Yangtze River in the year 1161 AD. A Song force of only three thousand men on 120 ships defeated a Jurchen force of seventy thousand on over six hundred ships.

2. Describe how each of the following innovations affected the Song Dynasty.
   2a. Printing
   2b. gunpowder
   2c. the compass
Southern Song scholars gave a lot of attention to how Confucian principles could be applied to society rather than to politics. They proposed ways to build a better society focusing on families and communities. The most famous of the Song Dynasty scholars was a man named Zhu Xi who would go on to leave a legacy lasting seven hundred years.

...Song painters also mimicked the mood of the time their artworks. Northern Song painters like Fan Quan painted huge grand landscape scenes. Whereas after the loss of the North, paintings became more intimate, focusing on family or village scenes within the natural environment. Scenes would often be in one corner with a large empty expanse occupying much of the painting.

Example of a Song Dynasty landscape painting by Ma Lin.  
_Bamboo and Rocks_ a painting by Li Kan, late Song Dynasty artist.  
*Images are courtesy of Wikimedia and are in the public domain.*

3. What philosophy was important to Song society?

4. Based on this excerpt from the video, describe Song Dynasty painting.
Poetry in the Tang (618-906) and Song (960-1279) Dynasties

During the Tang (618-906) and Song (960-1279) Dynasties, literature, and especially poetry flourished. One of the reasons that literature from this period is celebrated is because it was one of the subjects emphasized in the **civil service exams**. Civil service exams were used to identify people who were qualified for government positions and were an important way for people to move up the social ladder and to positions of power in the government. For example, if a child from a low class or poor family did well on the civil service exam, they could get a job with good pay and prestige that would help their families move up socially and economically.

During the Tang Dynasty, poetry was viewed as one of the most sophisticated forms of expression and was important to success in government positions because a good poet showed strength in communication, philosophy, and reasoning. On the civil service exams during the Tang Dynasty, students had to compose poems, which meant that if he wanted a good job, he needed to study poetry and be able to write it. During the Song Dynasty the poetry section of the exam was replaced by essays which also required high level literacy skills.

As a result of the emphasis on literature on the civil service exams, students studied poetry and writing and worked to become accomplished writers themselves. In addition, the invention of printing technology during these golden ages made it easier for poetry and literature to be published, purchased, and circulated which made it easier for students to study and for poets and writers to make a living at their art.


http://education.asianart.org/explore-resources/background-information/flourishing-poetry-tang-618-906-and-song-960-1279-dynasties

1. Based on the passage above, what were “civil service exams?” What were they used for?

2. Based on the passage, what tasks did students need to complete on the civil service exams during the Tang and Song Dynasties?

3. Why was there a flourishing of literature during the Tang and Song Dynasties?
## Technological Beginnings

The westward flow of Chinese technology occurred throughout the existence of the Silk Road. Historian Joseph Needham created a list of new inventions that reached Europe between the first and eighteenth centuries, often after a time lapse of several hundred years. There are many other examples not listed in the chart below, such as the use of paper money, the abacus, and the use of coal for fuel, but the table gives a good illustration of how technologically advanced the Chinese were from the Europeans.

Excerpt from *Journeys Along the Silk Road - Unit 1 - Middle School* which is published by Indiana University Bloomington.

### Summary of the Transmission of Mechanical and Other Techniques From China To the West

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Device</th>
<th>Approximate Time-lag in Centuries</th>
<th>Type of Device</th>
<th>Approximate Time-lag in Centuries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Silk-Manufacturing Machinery</td>
<td>3-13</td>
<td>Deep Drilling for Natural Gas</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheelbarrow</td>
<td>9-10</td>
<td>Gunpowder</td>
<td>5-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficient Harness For Draught-Animals: Breast Strap (Postilion)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Magnetic Compass</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crossbow (as an individual arm)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Paper</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printing (Block)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Shipbuilding Methods (including watertight compartments, efficient sails, and the rudder)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 (Movable Type)</td>
<td>1 (Metal Movable Type)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Excerpt from *Journeys Along the Silk Road - Unit 1 - Middle School* which is published by Indiana University Bloomington.

### See

When you read this chart, what do you see? Trends?

### Think

What do you think about the information in this chart?

What does it mean?

### Wonder

What do you wonder about this chart? What questions do you have?

UNIT 4 | Political Powers and Achievements | SQ 9. What led to the Tang and Song Golden Ages? How did the Tang and Song Dynasties impact China, other regions, and later periods in history?
Chinese Innovation and Culture Spreads East to Korea and Japan

Korean and Japanese cultures have been greatly influenced by Chinese culture because of their geographic location close to China. Korea acted as a “cultural bridge” between China and Japan. The Japanese and Koreans were in contact with one another early on in the history of their civilizations. They traded and warred against one another. In the process, Koreans introduced Chinese writing and culture, and Buddhism to the Japanese. This exchange sparked Japanese interest in China.

In the 600s, a Japanese ruler named Prince Shotoku of the Yamato clan sent nobles to China to study with government officials, scholars, and monks during the Tang Dynasty. Over the next 200 years, more Japanese students, monks, traders, and officials visited the Tang court. The Japanese absorbed Chinese technological innovations, agricultural techniques, philosophies, arts, and architecture, but they did not become Chinese. Instead, the Japanese practiced **selective borrowing**, by accepting some Chinese practices into their culture and modifying them to meet their needs, but choosing not to adopt other practices like the Chinese civil service system.

**Question:**
1. Based on the reading above and graphic to the left, what was the impact of Japan’s location near Korea and China on its history?
SQ 9. What led to the Tang and Song Golden Ages? How did the Tang and Song Dynasties impact China, other regions, and later periods in history?