



Empress Wu. Mistress of Emperor Gaozong, Wu Zetian declared herself empress dowager after his death in 684 and founded the Zhou dynasty in 690. She is the only woman in Chinese history until Empress Dowager Cixi at the turn of the twentieth century to exercise so much power.

Empress dowager: In monarchical or imperial systems in which succession is normally through the male line, the widow of the ruler.

"I will not spoil it [life] by any labor or care. / so saying, I was drunk all the day, / lying helpless at the porch in front of my door."

—Li Bo

more modest sensibilities of later centuries. Indeed, the period saw a number of controversial trends regarding the role and deportment of women. As exemplified in the person of the famous Empress Wu (r. 690–705), China's first **empress dowager**, women occasionally exercised considerable authority in political affairs during this period (see "Against the Grain," p. 370).

Tang Poetry Tang poetry, especially the compressed "regulated verse" of eight five-character lines and the terse four-line "cut-off line" poems, attempts to suggest powerful emotions or themes in minimalist fashion. For example, the deep Confucian sensibilities of the Tang poet Du Fu (ca. 721–770) are often detectable in his emotionally charged poems such as "Mourning Chen Tao." Li Bai (or Li Bo, 701–762), his friend, was in many ways his opposite in both the way he lived his life and the emotions he sought to stir. Carefree, witty, a lover of wine and women—according to legend, Li Bai drowned after a drunken challenge to "embrace the moon" reflected in the water—his poetry evokes happier moments but frequently conveys them as fleeting and bittersweet. Wang Wei [wahng way] (ca. 699–759) was a third renowned Tang poet. Of him it was later said that "in every one of his poems is a painting, and in every painting a poem."

For all the accomplishments of the Tang, however, the role of Buddhism as a privileged religion left the dynasty open to severe criticism. With the coming of the Song, China would become a religious civilization in which its people reemphasized the indigenous traditions of Confucianism and Daoism, with elements of Buddhism on a more reduced level.

The Song and Yuan Dynasties, 960–1368

During the Song dynasty, China achieved in many ways its greatest degree of sophistication in terms of material culture, technology, ideas, economics, and the amenities of urban living. Its short-lived incorporation into the huge empire of the Mongols opened the country to renewed influence from neighboring peoples and helped to spread Chinese influence westward, most famously through the accounts of the travelers Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta. Finally, the new synthesis of Neo-Confucianism would carry China as a religious civilization into the twentieth century.

Reforms of Wang Anshi Like the Tang, the Song instituted a strong central government based on merit rather than heredity. The Song, however, broadened the eligibility of those seeking to take the civil service exams, and with increased opportunities to join the government service, a huge and increasingly unwieldy bureaucratic system emerged.

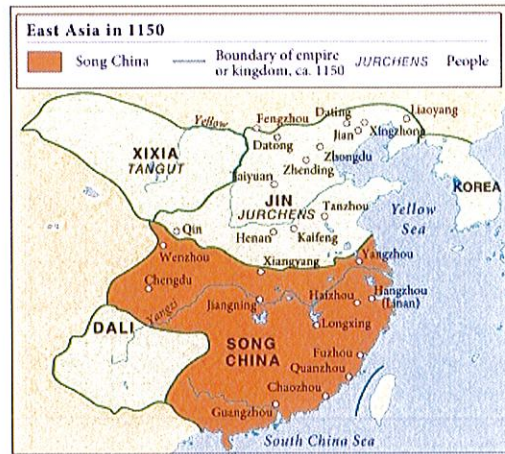
The need for administrative reform spurred the official Wang Anshi ([wahng ahn-SHR] 1021–1086) to propose a series of initiatives designed to increase state control over the economy and reduce the power of local interests. Wang proposed state licensing of both agricultural and commercial enterprises, the abolition of

forced labor, and the creation of government pawnshops to loan money at reduced rates. He also urged cutting the number of bureaucratic positions in order to lessen the power of local officials and clan heads. Opposition to these proposed reforms, however, forced Wang from office in 1076.

In addition to internal problems, such as the financial strain of maintaining a huge bureaucracy, the Song faced external problems. Because the Tang had lost much of northern China, including the Silk Road, to nomadic groups, Song lands from the start were substantially smaller than those of the Tang. Although the Song spent a great deal of treasure and energy to maintain a professional army of more than 1.5 million as well as a formidable navy, this massive but ponderous force ultimately proved ineffective against the expert militaries of invading nomadic groups using swiftness to their advantage. The Song also tried careful diplomacy and bribery to maintain China's dominance. Such efforts, however, were unable to keep the northern part of the empire from falling to the nomadic Jurchens in 1127. Forced to abandon their capital at Kaifeng on the Grand Canal just south of the Yellow River, the Song created a new capital at Linan, the modern city of Hangzhou (see Map 12.5).

The decreased size of the Song Empire resulted in a more southern-oriented and urbanized economy. The new capital at Hangzhou [hahng jo], described by Marco Polo as the most beautiful city in the world, may also have been the largest, with a population estimated at 1.5 million. Despite the bureaucracy's disdain for the merchant and artisan classes, the state had always recognized the potential of commerce to generate revenue through import, export, tariffs, and taxes. Thus, while attempting to bring the largest enterprises under state control, the government pursued measures to facilitate trade, such as printing the world's first paper notes, minting coins, and curbing usury. These practices, combined with an excellent system of roads and canals, fostered the development of an internal Chinese market. The Song conducted a lively overseas trade, and Chinese merchants established colonies in major ports throughout southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean.

The Mongol Conquest Commercial success, however, could not save the Song from invasion by neighboring nomadic peoples. For centuries, disparate groups of nomadic Mongols had lived in tribes and clans in eastern central Asia. There was no real push to unite these groups until the rise to power of the Mongol leader Temujin (ca. 1162–1227). Combining military prowess with diplomatic strategy, Temujin united the various Mongol groups into one confederation in 1206. Temujin gave himself the title Genghis Khan ("Universal Ruler") of the united Mongol confederation.



MAP 12.5 East Asia in 1150.

Patterns Up Close | Gunpowder



Korean Rocket Launcher.
Adapting Mongol and Chinese military technology, the Koreans repelled a Japanese invasion in 1592 with *hwacha*, mobile rocket launchers that were used with great effect against both enemy land forces and ships.

If fine porcelain, lacquerware, landscape painting, poetry, and calligraphy marked the refined side of Song life, the most momentous invention to emerge from the era was gunpowder. The substance was originally used as a medicine for skin irritations until its propensity to burn rapidly was established. The early Chinese term for gunpowder, *huoyao* (火药) "fire medicine," preserves this sense of its use.

Though it was long packed into bamboo tubes to create fireworks ignited during religious festivals, it is unclear when the first weapons employing gunpowder were used. By the Southern Song, however, the Chinese army and navy had a wide array of weapons that utilized gunpowder either as a propellant or as an explosive. The use of "fire arrows"—rockets mounted to arrow shafts—was recorded during a battle with the Mongols in 1232. The Song navy launched missiles and even employed ships with detachable sections filled with explosives with which to ram other ships. By the end of the century, primitive cannon were also employed as well as gunpowder satchels to blow open city gates and fortifications.

The widespread use of gunpowder weapons by the Song against the Mongols was a powerful inducement to the invaders to adopt them for themselves. Indeed, toward the end of the war, the Mongols increasingly employed explosives in their siege operations against Chinese walled cities. They also used them in the 1270s and 1290s during their failed invasions of Japan. The need for these weapons pushed their dispersion throughout the Mongol holdings and beyond.

Following confederation, the Mongols launched a half-century of steady encroachment on northern China. The Mongols had several enormous advantages over the infantry-based armies of their opponents:

- their skill at horsemanship and archery
- their unsurpassed ability to fire arrows at pursuers while galloping away from them at full speed
- their repeatedly successful tactics of feigned retreat.

Genghis Khan's grandson Khubilai Khan [KOO-bleh con] (1215–1294) resumed the Mongol offensive in southern China after the Song unwisely attempted to enlist Mongol aid against the Jurchens. In 1267 he moved his capital from Karakorum to Khanbaligh, called by the Chinese "Dadu"—the future city of Beijing—and steadily ground down the Song remnant. Hangzhou fell to the Mongols in 1276; the death of the young Song emperor in 1279 as he attempted to flee by sea brought the dynasty to an end.

The Yuan Dynasty In 1280 Khubilai Khan proclaimed the Yuan dynasty. This short-lived dynasty pulled China into an empire spanning all of Eurasia from Korea to the interior of Poland and probing as far as Hungary, Java, and Japan. Like their predecessors in the Northern Wei and Sui dynasties, however, the Mongols found themselves adapting to Chinese culture in order to administer the

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of gunpowder in human affairs. The next round of empires, the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals, made its use in warfare so central to their efforts that historians often refer to them as “the gunpowder empires.” Its use in sixteenth-century Japan was so important in battle that the Tokugawa Shogunate banned it for two centuries once peace had been established. But it was among the states of Europe that these weapons achieved their highest levels of development over the following centuries. Incessant warfare among the European states and against the Ottomans fueled the development of bigger and deadlier cannon and lighter and more accurate small arms. The use of these weapons helped speed the decline of the heavily armed and armored mounted knight and brought on the age of the infantry armed with muskets as “the queen of battles.” By the end of the eighteenth century, even though muskets and artillery were technologically more or less the same the world over, a high degree of drill among bayonet-equipped grenadiers gave European armies an edge against the Ottomans, Mughals, and Africans.

Questions

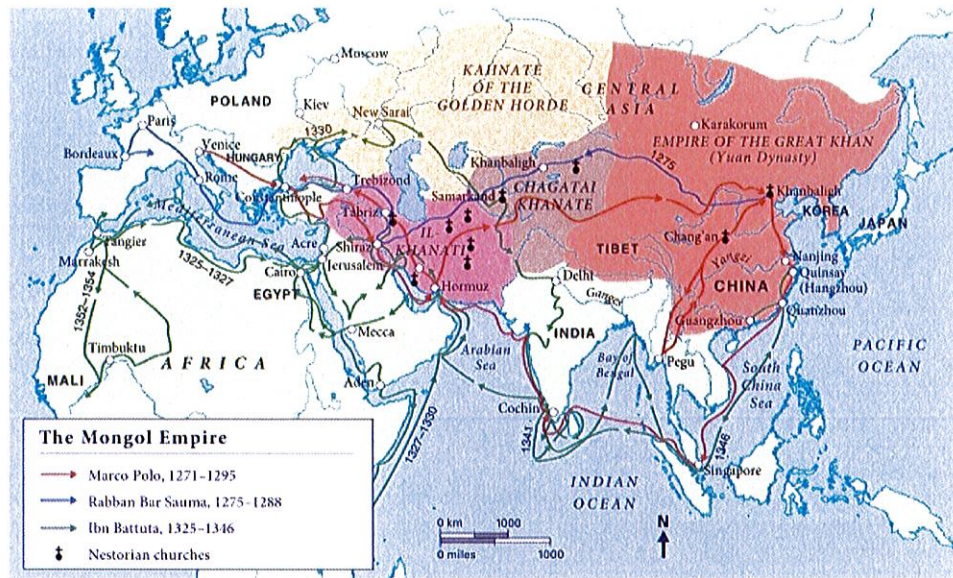
- How do gunpowder’s origins as a medicine complicate the way we typically view technological and cultural adaptations?
- What would have been the consequence for world history if the military uses of gunpowder had never been discovered?

densely populated and complex society they had wrested from the Song. Thus, while some senior Song bureaucrats resigned from the new Mongol government in protest, most carried on with their posts, and the examination system begun under the Han dynasty was finally reinstated in 1315.

Now that China was part of a much larger empire, its culture was widely diffused throughout Eurasia. In addition, China was open to a variety of foreign goods, ideas, and travelers. Paper money, gunpowder, coal, the compass, and dozens of other important Chinese innovations circulated more widely than ever, while emissaries and missionaries from the developing states of Europe traveled east to the Chinese capital city of Khanbaligh [con-beh-LYE]. The two most famous travel accounts of the era, those of the Venetian Marco Polo (1254–1324) and Ibn Battuta of Tangier (1304–1369), who lived and traveled throughout the Mongol Empire, are testaments to the powerful impact of Mongol rule in facilitating travel over such a vast area. Indeed, it was during the brief rule of the Mongols that the European image of China as a fairyland of exotica, fabulous wealth, and wondrous inventions was firmly set (see Map 12.6).



Khubilai Khan as the First Yuan Emperor, Shizu (Shih-tzu).



MAP 12.6 The Mongol Empire.

For Chinese historians, however, the Yuan period is almost universally regarded as one of imperial China's darkest times. Although the Mongols quickly restored order, administered the empire effectively, and allowed a relative tolerance of religious practice and expression, the Yuan period was seen as an oppressive time of large standing armies, withdrawal from service of many Chinese officials, forced labor, and heavy taxes. Compounding the intensity of these conditions was perhaps the single worst disaster of the fourteenth century, the bubonic plague, as we saw in Chapter 11.

By mid-century, all of these factors contributed to outbreaks of rebellion in China. Moreover, the Mongol Empire spanning Eurasia had now begun to dissolve into a series of increasingly squabbling regional states. By 1368, a coalition led by the soldier-Buddhist monk Zhu Yuanzhang [JOO yuwen-JAHNG] (1328–1398) had driven the Mongols from the capital at Khanbaligh and proclaimed a new dynastic line, the Ming. A final measure of revenge came when the last Mongol pretender to the throne was driven into the sea—just as the last Song emperor had been by the Mongols.

The Ming to 1450: The Quest for Stability

The “Pig Emperor,” as Zhu was sometimes derisively called because of his ungainly features, took the reign name of “Hongwu” and spent much of his rule driving the remaining Mongols out of his empire. Under Hongwu’s leadership, Chinese politics and customs were restored and a powerful centralized government was put into place. This new imperial state that Hongwu and his successors created would, with minor modifications, see China into the twentieth century.