

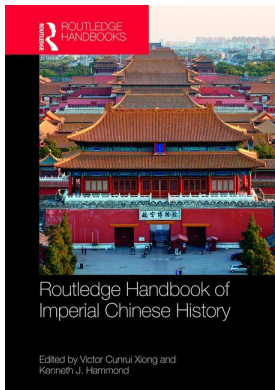
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8

THE TANG DYNASTY I (618–756)

SEO Tatsihiko

Translated by Victor Cunrui Xiong

The political character of “Tang”

The first thing we should notice about the Tang dynasty that arose in North China and lasted from the early seventh to the early 10th centuries is the political character of its name. By adopting the designation “Tang,” its rulers purported to make its existence orthodox and permanent. “Tang” (or Li-Tang) as a dynastic name derived from the noble title of Li Yuan 李淵 (r. 618–626), who had been named the “state duke of Tang” during the Sui. The name gave a sense of orthodoxy to the new dynasty on the basis of the Confucian concept of dynastic change. While subjected to enormous internal and external pressure, the self-styled Tang regime continually enhanced this aura of orthodoxy, which dissipated with the founding of the Zhou dynasty (690–705) under Wu Zetian 武則天, which broke the continuity of the Tang regime.

The founding of the Tang by Li Yuan took place amidst a large-scale war that broke out at the end of the Sui and embroiled all of China. In 618, the territory directly under Tang control was confined to the Guanzhong area with Chang’an at its center. It was a period when more than 40 separatist regimes existed. In 17 of them, the leader adopted his own reign title and declared himself emperor. Under these circumstances, the Lis, the creators of the Tang, owed their eventual success not so much to inevitability as to good fortune.

One key factor for success was their bloodless conquest of the Sui capital Daxingcheng 大興城 (Xi’an, Shaanxi; later called Chang’an) ahead of all others. By setting up their capital in this city built by Emperor Wen of the Sui, the Tang would have an easier time laying claim to the legitimacy of their dynasty than their rivals based in Luoyang and other cities, and would become direct inheritors to Sui civilization and its institutions.

Notable among the key factors for the successful founding of the Tang was the support by a group of Sino-Xianbei noble warlords to which Li Yuan belonged and by the powerful Daoist and Buddhist churches. In addition, there was cooperation with non-Han peoples, such as the Tujue, the mightiest military power, and the Sogdians with their control of trade in the Hexi Corridor.

The unification of China proper under the Tang had to be achieved with the help of the military forces positioned in various bases in the pastoral and agro-pastoral zones. As a result, the military forces instrumental in the founding of the Tang continued to exercise a

strong influence on the regime, as the diplomatic policy of the Tang evolved with a focus on relations with Tujue and other powers in the pastoral zone.

Soon the court was plagued by a power struggle involving succession, often fueled by opposing views on diplomacy, which led to the Xuanwu Gate 玄武門 Incident of 626 as well as other incidents in the Early Tang.

Power struggle among top leaders in the Early Tang also made it possible for Wu Zetian to depose her sons Zhongzong 中宗 and Ruizong 睿宗 and found the Zhou dynasty (690–750), which interrupted Tang rule. Just as the Han dynasty was divided into the Western Han (to 2 BCE) and Eastern Han (25–220 CE) by Wang Mang's 王莽 Xin dynasty, the Tang dynasty was divided into two parts, "the former Tang" (618–690) and "the latter Tang" (705–907), with Wu Zetian's Zhou between them. Thanks to the continued existence of the old Tang forces that asserted Tang orthodoxy, Zhongzong and Ruizong were restored to power. Based on the Confucian concept of royal authority, the forces that negated the interruption of the Tang rejected the Zhou dynasty ruled by a female emperor. However, this cannot deny the historical fact that the Tang was divided into two parts with the founding of the Zhou.

Until 755, Tang China was the largest country in East Asia in both area and population. It was rivaled only by the Umayyad Caliphate (to 750). However, nomadic powers such as Eastern Tujue (Turkic) (the First Tujue Qaghanate [552–630] and the Second Tujue Qaghanate [682–744]), Huihe (Uighur) (744–840), and Tubo (Tibet) (early seventh century–842), with military power that could pose a threat, challenged the Tang continually. Meanwhile, neighboring states such as Koguryō (37 BCE–668 CE), Paekche (18 BCE–660 CE), Silla (57 BCE–935 CE), Japan (seventh century–), Nanzhao (mid-eighth century–902), and others, while coming under the cultural influence of the Tang, asserted their independence and existence.

After China proper was unified in 628 and Eastern Tujue was conquered in 630, both under Taizong, and after Western Tujue was placed under the "loose-rein" system in 657, and Paekche and Koguryō were conquered, respectively, in 660 and 668, the Tang became an unprecedented great empire in Chinese history that took up both the pastoral and agricultural zones of Eastern Eurasia. However, just about half a century after the Tang had emerged as a colorful, international empire, the revival of Eastern Tujue in 680 began to encroach upon its territory. Following the An Lushan Rebellion (755–763), it was reduced almost by half, and essentially only the agricultural zone remained. Consequently, the post-rebellion Tang was quite different from the pre-rebellion Tang in territory, government, and culture, undergoing unthinkable, fundamental changes, even though the dynastic name and the ruling house remained the same.

In the post-rebellion period, the capital cities were time and again sacked by hostile forces, and the orthodoxy of the dynasty was called into question by the state of Yan (756–763) set up during the An Lushan Rebellion, the regime set up by Tubo (763) (which had taken advantage of the much weakened western defenses because of the rebellion and sacked Chang'an), the Qin-Han regime (783–784) set up by Military Commissioner of Jingyuan 涇源 Zhu Ci 朱泚, and the Qi regime (881–884) set up by Huang Chao 黃巢. They rejected the legitimacy of the Chang'an- or Luoyang-based Tang dynasty.

In the ninth century, the international relations in East Asia were dominated by the Tang, Tubo, and Huihe. The relative diplomatic advantage the Tang had enjoyed in the seventh to eighth centuries had disappeared. It is true that international relations in seventh to ninth-century East Asia cannot be dealt with without taking China into consideration. But we also have to bear in mind that international relations in East Asia were often in flux and at times served as a key factor for constant changes in domestic politics.

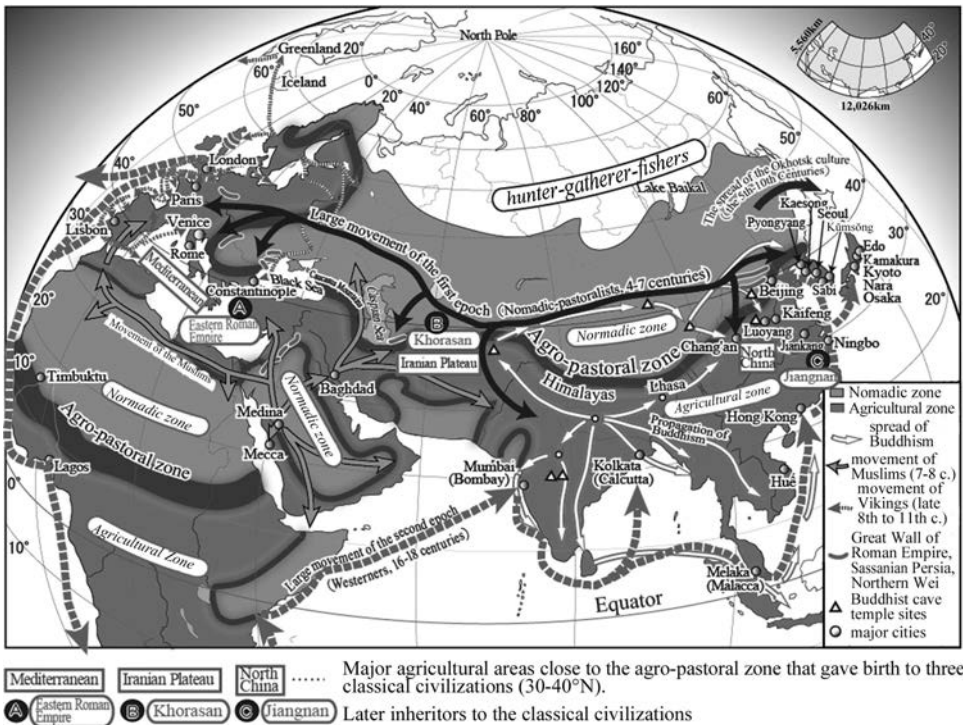
The birth of a “world power” during the first half of the Tang

The Tang as an agro-pastoral state and its local administration system

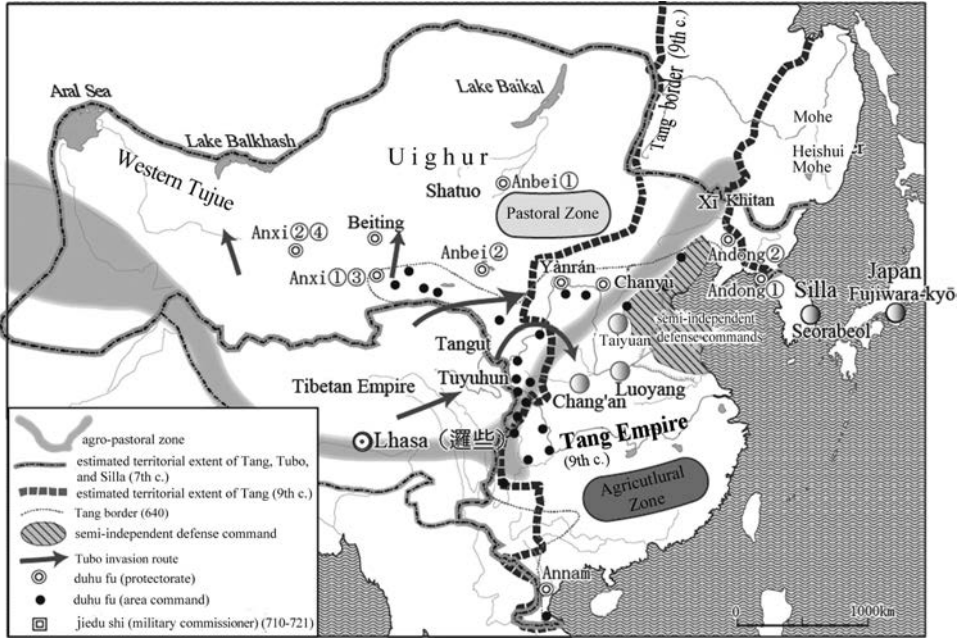
From the fourth to the seventh centuries, major shifts occurred in land under cultivation by nomads across the Eurasian continent (Map 8.1). Under the influence of these shifts, in various regions on the Eurasian continent, agro-pastoral states, which were in control of vast pastoral and agricultural land, were born. Here the agro-pastoral state refers to a state, founded by a small number of equestrian leaders with great military skills; it had under its control a population the majority of which were farmers, set up political and military centers in the agro-pastoral border area, and exercised systematic control over both the agricultural and pastoral zones. The prototypical agro-pastoral state in East Eurasia was the Northern Wei, which unified North China as it went through important political changes in the fourth to the sixth centuries. After the Sui, it reemerged under the Tang, Liao, Jin, Yuan, and Qing.

The Tang, inheriting the nomadic heritage of the Northern Wei and later regimes, in a space of half a century starting in 630, evolved into the first agro-pastoral state that not only encompassed the pastoral zone on the Mongolian Plateau but also the agricultural zone in North China and the South. In the agricultural zone, the prefecture-county local administrative system was adopted, which coexisted with a parallel “loose-rein” system in the pastoral zone. This was a unique characteristic of the Tang government system.

Tang civilization exerted a strong influence on contemporary neighboring states and later dynasties. The most important reason for this was that the Tang comprehended a vast space



Map 8.1 Migrations in the Old World, Fourth to Eighteenth Centuries. (By Seo Tatsuhiko.)



Map 8.2 The Tang Empire and Its Neighbors. (By Seo Tatsuhiko.)

with both the pastoral and agricultural forms of living, where, for the purpose of reuniting a China which had been divided into rival regimes in North and South for almost 300 years, universal institutions that transcended history, race (ethnicity), language, and culture were created.

Map 8.2 shows Tang territory at its largest extent. The process of territorial expansion started with the conquest of Eastern Tujue in 630. As a result, the “loose-rein” administrative system was implemented on the Mongolian Plateau. This was followed by expeditions against Tuyuhun and Tubo and the conquest of the state of Gaochang in 640, where Xizhou or Western Prefecture was set up at its former capital. A distant area that extended from the east slopes of the Tianshan ranges to the Hexi Corridor was now incorporated into the prefecture–county administrative system, with Chang’an at its center.

In 657, with the conquest of Western Tujue and the capture of its qaghan Ashina Helu 阿史那賀魯 (–659), the former territory of Western Tujue was now included in the “loose-rein” system. With the subsequent conquest of Paekche in 660 and Koguryō in 668, the Tang became the strongest country in East Asia. To govern its vast territory more effectively, the Tang set out to build a transportation network with Chang’an as its hub, while making use of both the prefecture–county system of direct governance and the loose-rein system of indirect governance. The system was challenged by the revival of Eastern Tujue (the Second Tujue Qaghanate) in 682. After the An Lushan Rebellion, there was a shift toward a different system of indirect governance, where local (oftentimes hereditary) warlords were appointed as military commissioners (*jiedu shi* 節度使). This would become the basis for Tang local administration.

Tang Taizong, who was called “Heavenly Qaghan” by tribal chieftains under Tiele 鐵勒 in the pastoral zone and was called emperor in the agricultural zone in China proper, ruled over a composite agro–pastoral country with the prefecture–county and loose-rein systems. In agricultural areas and the oasis cities in Xizhou, prefectures and counties were set up to be governed by officials sent by the central court. In the agro–pastoral border and pastoral

areas, mainly loose-rein prefectures and area commands (*dudu fu* 都督府) were set up and local hereditary magnates were entrusted with its governance. Above loose-rein prefectures and area commands were six protectorates (*duhu fu* 都護府) (Map 8.2), with officers and men sent by the court. Through the prefecture-county system and loose-rein prefectures, area commands, and protectorates, the composite ruling system was implemented, which conformed to the agro-pastoral state that the Tang was. The agro-pastoral border area and the middle and lower valleys of the Yellow River where main granaries were located were two vital sources the government relied upon. The steady stream of income from the agricultural zone and the fast horses raised on grazing land in the agro-pastoral border area were both indispensable for the maintenance and security of the regime.

Chang'an: the capital of a world empire

Among countries that lay outside the Tang prefecture-county and loose-rein systems were those that expected to establish tributary relations; with them the Tang formed lord-subject ties through granting investiture. In other words, the world order from Tang perspective had as its center the Son of Heaven/emperor, surrounded by prefectures, counties, loose-rein prefectures, countries with Tang investiture, and countries without regular diplomatic relations (those in “inaccessible areas”) in a political space resembling a concentric circle.

The capital Chang'an (Sui Daxingcheng) occupied the central point of this Tang world order and served as the stage for the visualized Tang concept of the world. In the first part of the Tang, conspicuous cultural diversity and ethnic amalgamation were concentrated in the urban space of Sui-Tang Chang'an.

In various aspects, including military defense, urban security and fire-prevention enhanced by a network of ward walls, the symbolism of the city layout, religious establishments, and cultural and religious diversity, Chang'an was a metropolis that absorbed many changes in the Eurasia continent since the fourth century.

Some of the major changes in urban space that had taken place between Han and Tang become apparent when Han Chang'an and Tang Chang'an are compared. In terms of functionality and symbolism, the two cities were completely different. Seen from the perspective of the history of the entire Eurasian continent, the differences between Han and Tang were greater than between Tang and Song.

Compared to Han Chang'an, Sui-Tang Chang'an was a much more fortified city, with the Palace City (the emperor's residence) as the focus of defense. The basilicas (*dian*) inside the Palace were protected by two lines of defense: the Palace Guard troops stationed in the Forbidden Park to the north and in the Imperial City to the south. This kind of deployment derived from a defense concept prompted by massive Tujue cavalry attacks in the late sixth century.

In terms of symbolism, Sui-Tang Chang'an was, based on traditional yin-yang theory, penetrated by a north-south axis, which corresponded to the celestial meridian. Centered alongside the axis were key structures of the palace and the city at large that mirrored the order of heaven. Above all, Chang'an was an expression of great pride in the Tang as the orthodox dynasty that reunified China after a period of division that had lasted for almost 300 years.

In the area of the history of thought and culture, Buddhism occupied a unique place. It was the main reason why the Tang was so different from the Han. In urban Sui-Tang Chang'an, there were more than 100 Buddhist monasteries, whereas in Han Chang'an, there was none. Sui-Tang Chang'an played host to establishments for other religions as well, including Nestorianism, Manichaeism, and Zoroastrianism. It was the capital city that represented the eastern part of those world-religion realms that had taken shape on the Eurasian

continent in the sixth and seventh centuries, and the multi-racial and multi-cultural metropolises that had absorbed many cultural elements from abroad.

In the context of Chinese urban history, Sui-Tang Chang'an was an early city in a China where the agro-pastoral borderland played a vital role.

Over time, China's capital system evolved from one of the two metropolises of the west and east (Chang'an and Luoyang) to one of the two metropolises of the North and South (Beijing and Nanjing), with Kaifeng as a transitional capital. Among the possible factors for this change were the following: (a) nomadic powers moved their bases from the northwest to the northeast (for military and diplomatic reasons); (b) main granaries were moved from North China to the South (the economic reason); and (c) the main mode of transportation on the African-Eurasian continent shifted from land transportation to transportation along coastal lines (the transportation reason).

International relations and the birth of the age of capital cities in East Asia (seventh–eighth centuries)

The birth of Tang China, which was a result of a political transformation in the eastern part of the Eurasian continent, exerted a strong political, military, and economic impact on the same area. In the face of the rise of China, in present-day Northeast Asia and the Korean Peninsula, the Japanese archipelago, Tibet, southwest China, and Southeast Asia, traditionally scattered tribes joined forces and a number of countries were founded. East Asia international relations that took shape in the eighth and ninth centuries have continued to this day.

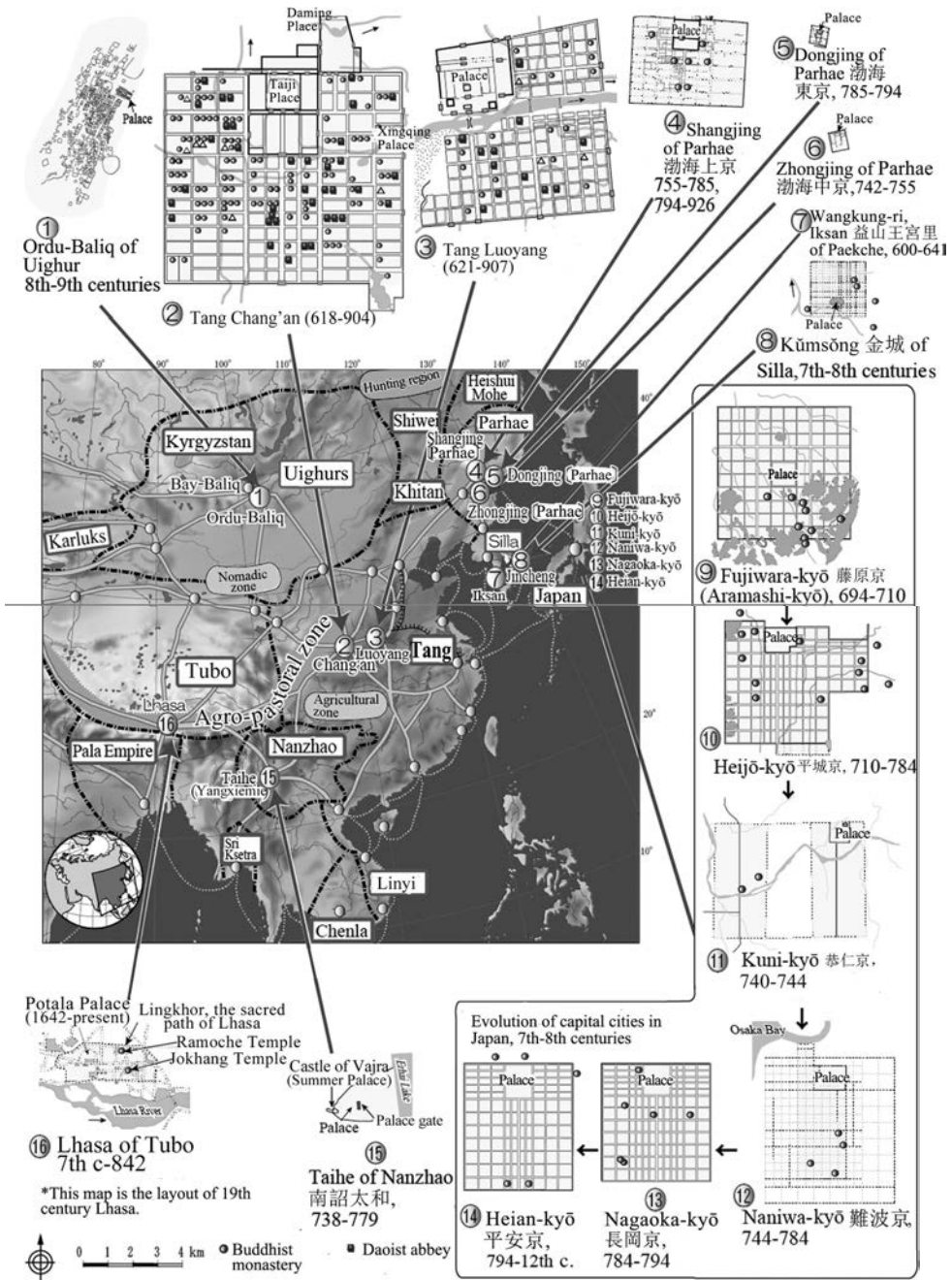
In the late sixth century, the Sui unified a China that had been divided for a long time, and following the Sui, the Tang began to form an extensive empire in 630 that comprehended both the pastoral and agricultural areas. Subsequently, a new age dawned, an age in which a number of countries with their walled capitals came into being in succession.

Specifically, in 583, the Sui built Daxingcheng, a new city southeast of Han Chang'an, which marked the beginning of a new wave of capitals, including Luoyang (605), Lhasa (early seventh century) in Tubo (618–842), Ōmi-kyō 近江京 (667), Fujiwara-kyō 藤原京 (Aramashinomiya 新益京) (694), Heijō-kyō 平城京 (710), Kuni-kyō 恭仁京 (740), (Later) Naniwa-kyō 難波京 (744), Nagaoka-kyō 長岡京 (784), and Heian-kyō 平安京 (794) in Japan (seventh century–). Taihecheng 太和城 (738) and Yangxiemiecheng 陽苴咩城 (Dali) (779) in Nanzhao 南詔 (738–937); Ordu-Baliq (Karabalghasun) in 744 by the Uighurs (Huihe 回紇 or Huihu 回鶻; 744–840); Jiuguo 舊國 (in Jilin) in the late seventh century; and the Five Metropolises (*wujing* 五京: Shangjing 上京, Zhongjing 中京, Dongjing 東京, Nanjing 南京, and Xijing 西京) in eighth-century Bohai (Parhae) (698–926).

On the Korean Peninsula, Paekche (18 BCE–660 CE) built a new capital with a Palace City with a gridiron layout (the Iksan Wanggung-ri 益山王宮里 site) in North Jeolla Province in 600. After the unification of the peninsula in 676, Silla (57 BCE–935 CE), following Tang Chang'an's model, remade the capital Kūmsōng 金城 (Sōrabōl王京).

Based on Map 8.3, some of the features of capitals in seventh- to eighth-century East Asia are identified:

- 1 Most of them were set up in the interior as part of its transportation network.
- 2 Most were multiethnic, international cities with rich cultural diversity.
- 3 All were home to Buddhist monasteries.



Map 8.3 Capital Cities in East Asia, 7th-8th Centuries. (By Seo Tatsuhiko.)

- 4 Most of the cities located in the agricultural zone had a gridiron pattern. However, the Tubo and Nanzhao capitals were different; they were built in accordance with the terrain.
- 5 These walled cities can be further divided into two types: those with a walled outer city (Chang'an and Luoyang of the Tang; Lhasa of Tubo; Shangjing, Zhongjing, and Dongjing of Bohai; and Taihecheng and Yangxiemiecheng of Nanzhao), and those without a walled outer city (Ordu-Baliq, with an inner city wall); Kūmsōng of Silla; and the Japanese capitals [although both Heijō-kyō and Hei'an-kyō 平安京 had a Rajōmon 羅城門 (Outer City Gate)].

The spatial designs of these diverse capital cities embodied the visualization of the concept of royal authority in different countries. Take, for example, the Japanese capitals. Under the strong influence of Tang Chang'an and Luoyang, they were created as the capitals of an emperor whose lineage would allegedly continue for 10,000 generations; yet their internal structures were fundamentally different from those Chinese capitals predicated on the concept of regime-change and dynastic cycles. At the Japanese capitals, the Southern Suburban Altar based on the Five Phases Cyclical Theory did not exist, nor did the Ancestral Temple in the urban area. At the Silla capital, another city subjected to the influence of Chang'an when it was built, it was the Moon City, based on a long-standing local tradition, that housed the ritual centers. Based on the Confucian concept of royal authority, China had to be the center. And yet the capitals elsewhere in East Asia all aimed to become Buddhist cities; to blend Buddhism, a religion that came from outside China and was to become a world religion, with the concept of royal authority, probably suggested an effort at rivaling the power of the Tang.

Thus, as China proper was unified by military force under the Tang and as the Tang administrative city network with the capital Chang'an at its center and the Tang territorial extent expanded, tensions were on the rise in neighboring areas, where rival states with administrative and diplomatic functions were founded. They set up their capitals in imitation of Chang'an and established diplomatic relations with Tang China, which helped maintain peace and order. In view of the fact that before the seventh century, East Asian countries, except for those in China and the Korean Peninsula, did not have walled capital cities, the previously cited developments signified a major change in East Asia. Following the setup of capital cities, transportation networks came into being, with the capital cities as their hubs. That gave birth to the East Asian transportation system.

The setup and maintenance of the capital made it necessary for the setup and maintenance of an administrative city network for the purpose of receiving tribute and foreign envoys. Countries with capitals and a network of administrative cities occurred simultaneously in East Asia while a tributary system that funneled tribute to the capital was maintained; thus began diplomatic relations between various countries, with their capitals as the main stage of diplomacy.

After the ninth century, the main mode of transportation gradually began to shift from land to sea while the political bases of the main nomadic peoples moved from northwest China to the northeast, and North China yielded its role as the country's grain basket to the South. Consequently, in China, the interior city network with Chang'an as its hub was replaced by the coastal city network with Beijing as its hub. This shift from the interior to the coastal region was also linked to changes in city networks in Southeast Asia, the Korean Peninsula, and the Japanese Archipelago. In the Japanese Archipelago, there was the move of the power base from the aristocratic government's Heian-kyō to the warrior regime's Kamakura to Tokugawa Ieyasu's Edo.

The political institutions

A periodization of political history

Traditionally, the Tang dynasty is broken up into four periods: Early Tang (618–712), High Tang (712–756), Middle Tang (756–820), and Late Tang (820–907).

Here I will divide the first two periods (Early Tang and High Tang) into three phases: Phase 1: from Gaozu 高宗 to Ruizong 睿宗 (I) (681–684); Phase 2: Wu Zetian 武則天 (684–705); and Phase 3: from Zhongzong 中宗 (II) to Xuanzong 玄宗 (705–756). In the 20th century, the Chinese historian Chen Yinke 陳寅恪 put forward the influential thesis of the “primacy of the Guanlong 關隴 clique.” It argues that, from the Western Wei, Northern Zhou, and Sui through the Early Tang, the central government was continuously dominated by a group of upper-class people with choronyms in Guanzhong and Long (Gansu). The thesis still has much currency, but it is controversial.

During Phase I, in government, the various Sui institutions were inherited and continued; in foreign relations, from Taizong to Gaozong, the Tang conquered Eastern Tujue, Western Tujue, Paekche, and Koguryō, and greatly expanded its territorial extent.

During Phase II, under the Zhou, Luoyang was declared the Divine Capital, and a Buddhist-based sacred state was created.

During Phase III, the Tang was revived. Under Xuanzong, a policy was introduced to negate the Zhou’s heritage, and, in line with that policy, an attempt was made to restore the political system of the Early Tang.

Phase I (618–690): The Initial Stage: Gaozu, Taizong, Gaozong, Zhongzong (I), and Ruizong (I). The initial aim of the Tang government was to establish the orthodox position of the dynasty, which was of symbolic importance, and, as the territorial extent expanded, set up an agro-pastoral synthetic system in the area of financial administration. The Tang made Chang’an the imperial capital where all sorts of ritual ceremonies were held, created a Chang’an-centered financial system, and developed a transportation network. Having witnessed the great turmoil in the late Sui and the collapse of the Sui, the Early Tang rulers strove to create a lenient governing system that recruited various magnates and literati active in the Sui, and men of influence from the South and the Northern Qi. The Tang inherited most of the Sui administrative and financial agencies—such as the Three Departments and Six Boards and the prefecture-county system—and the examination-based official recruitment system. It continued to use Sui Daxingcheng (now renamed Chang’an) as its capital and enhanced its claim to orthodoxy by going through the ritual of accepting the abdication of the Sui sovereign.

In the initial phase, the Tang sovereigns were all members of the Li royal house, including Gaozu 高祖 (r. 618–626), Taizong 太宗 (r. 626–649), Gaozong 高宗 (r. 649–683), Zhongzong 中宗 (r. Jan. 3–Feb. 26, 684), and Ruizong 睿宗 (r. Feb. 27, 684–Oct. 16, 690). However, during Gaozong’s reign, after Wu Zetian was appointed empress, she became the *de facto* power-holder.

The Lis had been key members in the Hu-Han group that consisted of warlords of Xianbei, Han, or mixed descent from the Western Wei and Northern Zhou to the Sui dynasties. The powerful members of the Tang leadership were participants in the Taiyuan uprising in 617 started by the Lis. Dominated by these officers, the Tang, from Taizong to Gaozong, as it became an agro-pastoral state of unprecedented size, conquered Eastern and Western Tujue, Paekche, and Koguryō, and implemented the prefecture-county system in the agricultural zone and the loose-rein system in the pastoral zone.

At the Xuanwu Gate Incident of 626, where two of his brothers were killed, Taizong ascended the imperial throne. By 628, he had put an end to the kind of warlord separatism that had started in late Sui times and continued under the Tang for 15 years, and succeeded in bringing North and South China together. Taizong went on to conquer Eastern Tujue in 630 before advancing into Central Asia, greatly expanding the Tang's territory.

Emperor Taizong ruled wisely, and his reign came to be known as the “good government of Zhenguan” 貞觀 (his reign title). His words and deeds are recorded in a Tang book entitled the *Zhenguan zhengyao* 貞觀政要 (Essentials for government during the Zhenguan reign). After his conquest of Eastern Tujue, Taizong was offered another title, that of “Heavenly Qaghan,” by the tribal chieftains of the various Tiele tribes, which was of great significance. It signified the Tang's rise as a “world empire.”

Under Gaozong, Taizong's successor, Taizong's diplomatic policy continued. Allied with Silla, the Tang conquered Paekche in 660, and Koguryō in 668, eventually solving the Koguryō problem that had plagued the court since Sui times.

Phase II (690–705): The Reign of Wu Zetian. The only sovereign in this phase was Wu Zetian (624–705), who was also the only female emperor in Chinese history. After she was appointed empress of Gaozong in 655, she became the decision-maker at court. After Gaozong's death in 683, she became the real holder of political power. She forced her sons Zhongzhong and Ruizong off the throne, one after another, and ascended the throne herself as emperor in 690. She gave herself the title of “sage and divine emperor” (*shengshen huangdi* 聖神皇帝) and changed the dynastic name to Zhou. She reigned continuously as emperor for 15 years. Having failed to set up a crown prince of the Wu lineage, the Zhou dynasty lasted only one generation. Nevertheless, it was of great significance, because it cut the continuity of the Tang.

Wu Zetian had taken political measures that eventually helped her to power. After becoming empress, she gradually moved the capital function of Chang'an, a militarized city where the old forces were entrenched, to Luoyang, an economically focused city, successfully seized military power through employing newer but capable people, and mercilessly eliminated or elbowed aside Chang'an-based, powerful men of the old regime.

She also made some moves that were of great ideological importance. In the seventh century, East Asian society was permeated with the Buddhist concept of royal authority. Under Wu, the concept of the female sovereign was also afoot. It was based on the claim that Wu Zetian was identified as the Maitreya Bodhisattva reincarnate who would bring salvation to all creatures; and on the concept of the Chakravartin (the wheel-turning king) that the dharma-promoting lay sovereign was the ideal ruler. Probably, this type of Buddhist concept then surpassed the Confucian idea of royal authority to become the widely accepted basis for political power. Among the Chakravartin kings, Wu Zetian was the last one and occupied the highest position, that of the Sage King with the gold wheel. Different from the Confucian concept of the Son of Heaven-emperor that focused only on males, this concept did not discriminate based on gender, class, choronym, and history. Luoyang, Wu Zetian's Divine Capital, became one of the holy sites of Buddhism in East Asia. In the seventh and eighth centuries, the Buddhist concept of royal authority could be used to justify the rule of female sovereigns in Silla and Japan. On coming to power, Wu Zetian also changed the religious policy of the state from “Daoism first, Buddhism second” to “Buddhism first, Daoism second,” which was indispensable for justifying rule by a female sovereign. Had it not been for the spread of Buddhism in East Asia, the dynastic change from Tang to Zhou by Wu Zetian would have been impossible.

Phase III (705–756): Zhongzong (II), Ruizong (II), and Xuanzong. This phase began with the restoration of the Tang. After a brief period of chaos, following Wu Zetian's

death in 706, the High Tang arrived during the reign of Xuanzong (r. 712–756). With the revival of the Tang, Zongzong (r. February 23, 705–July 3, 710) and Ruizong (r. July 25, 710–September 8, 712) were restored to power, and political measures were taken to negate Wu Zetian's heritage. Nevertheless, the Wu lineage continued to hold on to power, and Zhongzong's empress Wei even made another attempt to overthrow the Tang dynasty once again. Politics at court continued to be unstable. Then, out of a dizzying power struggle, Xuanzong emerged as the victor and ascended the throne in 712.

Under the restored Tang, the policy-makers did their utmost to erase the existence of the Zhou from history, which had cut the continuity of the Tang. They stressed the point that Wu Zetian was merely the empress of Gaozong and the mother of Zhongzong and Ruizong. Emperor Xuanzong, grandson of Wu Zetian, supported this undertaking, shifted the religious focus from Buddhism to Daoism, and promoted various cultural enterprises.

However, Xuanzong actually continued some of the reforms started by Wu Zetian, actively employing capable personages through the examination system à la Wu, which paved the way for the prosperous age of High Tang. Our impression of brilliant Tang culture often derives from the creative ages of Kaiyuan 開元 (713–741) and Tianbo 天寶 (742–756) under Xuanzong. In this sense, the Zhou founded by Wu Zetian paved the way for the “good government of Kaiyuan” and Tang cultural effervescence.

Prior to and after the transfer of the capital from the Wu-Zhou's Luoyang back to Chang'an, some major political developments took place in East Asia—the revival of Eastern Tujue as Later Tujue, the ascendancy of Uighur, the rise of Tubo, and advances by Parhae (Bohai 渤海) and Khitan in Manchuria. Chang'an soon found itself on the frontline of national defense against the nomadic forces in the northwest and the west. To beef up national defense, Xuanzong adopted a policy of placing nomadic non-Han officers (non-Han generals) in commanding posts, eventually giving rise to the practice of replacing protector-general (*duhu* 都護; heads of protectorates) sent by the court with military commissioners (*jiedu shi* 節度使) as heads of defense commands (*fanzhen* 藩鎮). One of them was An Lushan 安祿山, a Turko-Sogdian who would start a devastating rebellion.

The formulation of laws, statutes, and ritual

Law (*lü* 律) and statutes (*ling* 令) were key components of the legal system of pre-modern China that served as the foundation for governance by the state. Law refers to the law code that served as the universal basic law centered on penal law. Statutes were general administrative rules that lay outside the laws. There were also regulations (*ge* 格) (law supplements and amendments and provisional laws) and ordinances (*shi* 式) provisions concerning the enforcement of laws. In addition, there was ritual, which served as the moral norms that constituted the foundation of Tang society.

On the basis of the law code and statutes, the land tenure system in the form of the equal-field law (*juntian fa* 均田法); the taxation system in the form of grain tax (*zu* 租), labor corvée (*yong* 庸), and cloth tax (*diao* 調) or tax and corvée; the military system centered on the garrison-militia (*fubing* 府兵) system; and the township-ward system based on the village network were formulated. So the law and statutes were the fundamental laws that governed the military, finance, administration, and taxation of the state.

The *Code Subcommentary* (Lüshu 律疏) in 30 *juan* (initially released in 653 as the *Yonghui lüshu* 永徽律疏 (Subcommentary to the Yonghui Code), revised in 737, and later known as *Tanglü shuyi* 唐律疏議 (Subcommentary and explications of the Tang Code)); the *Yonghui ling* 永徽令 (Yonghui statutes) in 30 *juan* released in 651; the *Datang Kaiyuan li* 大唐開元禮

(Rites of the Great Tang during the Kaiyuan period) in 150 *juan* completed in 732; and the *Tang liudian* 唐六典 (Tang institutions of six administrative divisions), which was the standard book on the Tang bureaucratic system, were model works on institutions for later dynasties and were accepted by various East Asian states in the Chinese-language sphere. Japan, Korea, Parhae, and Dai Viet 大越 all compiled their law codes based on the Tang law and statutes. However, whereas the Tang law and statutes were a legal system that underpinned the order of the imperial system predicated on dynastic change, the Japanese code based on the law and statutes provided the basis for the one-lineage-for-ten-thousand-generations *tennō* (heavenly emperor or emperor) system that did not recognize dynastic change. The ways different states adopted the law and statutes varied because these states differed from one another in terms of historical development and tradition. Because the Tang statutes are no longer extant in China, efforts have been made to reconstitute them based on the articles in the Yōrō Statutes 養老令 of Japan. Moreover, the 1999 discovery of the Tiansheng Statutes 天聖令 (completed in Tiansheng 7 or 1029), which were based on the Tang statutes, heralded a new age in the studies of Tang statutes.

The power of cultural guidance: the compilation of the standard histories and the Wujing zhengyi (Righteous explications of the Five Classics)

A focus of Early Tang politics was on how to establish the power of cultural guidance. Like various dynasties in the past, the Tang too, at the time of its founding, implemented the law and statutes, set up state-run schools, compiled the standard histories, edited the classics, and promulgated and adopted calendars, weights and measures, and standard music scale. Particularly worthy of attention is the fact that the Early Tang saw the compilation of the largest number of the standard histories. In addition to the histories of the five dynasties completed in 636—the *Liangshu* 梁書 (Book of the Liang), *Chenshu* 陳書 (Book of the Chen), *Bei Qi shu* 北齊書 (Book of the Northern Qi), *Zhoushu* 周書 (Book of the Northern Zhou), and *Suishu* 隋書 (Book of the Sui), there are the *Jinshu* 晉書 (Book of the Jin) completed in 648, and the *Nanshi* 南史 (History of the Southern Dynasties) and *Beishi* 北史 (History of the Northern Dynasties) completed in 659. Very importantly, these works, written from the standpoint of the Tang, which had arisen after the short-lived Sui dynasty, clearly indicate which dynasties were orthodox in the period from the Jin to the age of division, and are suggestive of the role of unification and continuity by the Tang.

The *Wujing zhengyi* 五經正義 (Rectified interpretation of the Five Classics), the compilation of which began in Taizong's time, was released under Gaozong in 653. This collection of previous explanations of the classics would serve as the fundamental work for the civil service examinations and help to popularize the scholarship of the intelligentsia. The *Tangyun* 唐韻 (Tang rhymes), completed under Xuanzong, is the revised version of the *Qieyun* 切韻 (Cut rhymes) by the Sui scholar Lu Fayān 陸法言 in 5 *juan* (completed in 601), which includes pronunciations of different regions dating back to the age of division. As such, it would become a model for later books on rhymes.

The economy and society

Early Tang transportation network and the Grand Canal

In the first half of the Tang, with the revival of the Grand Canal, a land and water transportation network was at work. That stimulated the two-way trade, with tribute from the

provinces and foreign countries coming into Chang'an and Luoyang and with presents from the court going in the opposite direction. The economy of China proper was thus integrated into the economic sphere of Eurasia. The expansion of the territorial extent that encompassed the agricultural and pastoral zones and the completion of a communication/transportation system both contributed greatly to the expansion of the city network, the recovery of productivity, population increase, and the diversification of production, distribution, and consumption, resulting in the thriving of various industries inside China.

Of special importance was the digging of the Grand Canal. It was the unprecedented transportation trunk line in China proper that penetrated both North and South; as such it transformed the spatial structure of not only China but also Eurasia. Because of the construction of the Grand Canal, the transportation trunk line in Eurasian shifted its focus from land to coastal sea, to become the carrier of business and intelligence between east and west on the continent. Meanwhile, the Sogdians from the hinterland of Central Asia in the fourth to the seventh centuries gave way to Arab merchants from the Persian Gulf in the eighth century and later.

The construction and operation of the Grand Canal stimulated the exploration of the Yangzi delta area, connecting various key cities of the South into a city network. Southern cities such as Jiankang 建康 (Nanjing), Yangzhou 揚州, Runzhou 潤州 (Zhenjiang), Changzhou 常州, and Suzhou 蘇州 in Jiangsu; and Huzhou 湖州, Hangzhou 杭州, Yuezhou 越州 (Shaoxing), and Mingzhou 明州 (Ningbo) in Zhejiang, were linked with the Chang'an- and Luoyang-centered city network of the North. Thanks to this linkage between cities North and South, the sophisticated urban culture of the South, noted for its art of garden design and literary tradition, began to exert a strong influence on its northern counterparts, starting in the seventh century. Meanwhile, northern migrants moved by the Grand Canal to the South in large numbers, as a new episode in the migration history of China had begun in earnest.

Land tenure and taxation

The equal-field system (*juntian zhi* 均田制) was used in the first half of the Tang. It was a land tenure system that served the purpose of producing grain and cloth taxes and levying corvée duty. It strove to equalize the distribution of state-owned land based on status. It started under the Northern Wei and continued under the Sui and Tang. The Tang inherited the Sui system, and stopped making land grants for wives, bondsmen and bondswomen, and oxen. An adult male (aged 20–59) was entitled to 80 *mu* (1 *mu* = 580 m²) of uninheritable land (*koufen tian* 口分田) and 20 *mu* of inheritable land (*yongye tian* 永業田). Uninheritable land had to be returned to the state when the recipient lost his status because of age. Inheritable land was not returnable and could be passed down in the family. There has been much research on the equal-field system. In spite of its purported aim of making equitable land grants by the state to its subjects, it served the purpose of systematically taking control of land.

The Tang tax and corvée system (*zu yong diao* 租庸調) required an adult male to pay 2 *shi* (1 *shi* ≈ 59.4 L) of grain as grain tax (*zu*), and 2 *zhang* (1 *zhang* ≈ 3.11 m) of silk cloth of 1.8 *chi* width (1 *chi* ≈ 3.11 cm) and 3 *liang* (1 *liang* ≈ 37.3 g) of silk floss as cloth tax (*diao*) (alternatively, 2.5 *zhang* of hempen cloth and 3 *jin* [1 *jin* ≈ 597 g] of hemp). In addition, he had to perform 20 days of corvée duty as *yong*, which could be converted to additional cloth tax at the rate of 3 *chi* of silk cloth or 3.75 *chi* of hempen cloth per day. In addition to corvée duty levied by the court (*yong*, aka *zhengyi* 正役 or regular corvée), there was miscellaneous corvée levied by

local governments that involved public works and the storage and transportation of tax grain. Miscellaneous corvée targeted adult males; its length was limited to 40 (or 50) days per year.

The equal-field system and the tax and corvée system such as the *zu yong diao* system were operative when extensive surplus lands were available and labor as a human resource was greatly valued. Meanwhile, the expansion of the Tang city network led to exploration of lands and population increase. According to statistics, the number of households in the Early Tang was just shy of 3 million, which contrasts with the number at the end of the Tianbao reign period (mid-eighth century)—8,914,709 when the national population was 52,919,309. However, as the registered population increased, per-capita arable land gradually shrank, as did per-capita yield. Consequently, within the tax system, there was a shift of focus from man to land. Corvée duty, which had been levied directly on people, was converted to payment in silk and hempen cloth; in the procurement of labor, the emphasis shifted to employment. Attention shifted from compulsory labor to land tax as was instantiated by the dual tax system introduced at the end of the eighth century. Meanwhile, the tax system was increasingly relying upon direct taxes such as those on salt monopoly and commerce, which rivaled the directly imposed dual taxes in revenue.

Money

The first part of the Tang was a period of commodity money. In the second part, a kind of promissory note known as *feiqian* 飛錢 was in circulation, which is considered the prototype of paper money. For large sums of money, silk and gold and silver were used; bronze coins (translated as “cash”) were used in daily transactions. The Tang in 621 issued the Kaiyuan tongbao 開元通寶 coin to replace existing coins, bringing an end to the monetary chaos that had started in the last years of the Sui. The circulation of the Kaiyuan tongbao impacted various states in East Asia. The Japanese coins Fuhosen 富本錢 and Wadō kaihō 和同開珎 were modeled on the Kaiyuan tongbao. In the third–sixth centuries, the economy in China proper contracted due to political fragmentation and warfare; it was revived under the Sui and Tang dynasties when China was again unified. In the eighth century under Xuanzong, large cities connected by the transportation trunk lines became commercial centers where the money economy permeated society.

Religion, thought, and literature

Buddhism

From the chaotic fourth–seventh centuries to the eighth century, in the temperate and tropical zones of the northern latitudes, there arose three world religion spheres: Christianity in the west part of Eurasia, Islam in the west and central part of Eurasia, and Buddhism in the east part of Eurasia. The birth of these world religion spheres coincided with the rise of agro-pastoral states in Eurasia. These world religions acted as a kind of guarantee for the existence of the agro-pastoral states, which, fundamentally different for classical states, had a complex ethnic/racial composition and diverse languages and cultures; they also gave rise to transportation zones and commercial zones that spread east-west across the Afro-Eurasian continent. Thanks to the formation of the world religion spheres, world history entered a new era.

Christianity and Islam, with their belief that everyone is equal before God, and Buddhism, with its concept of dharma as truth, created such supramundane values as godhead

and dharma, which, as universal theories, brought people of different backgrounds together. In the east part of Eurasia, a cultural sphere was slowly taking shape for the first time in history, under the influence of the imported ecumenical religion, Buddhism. The teaching of Buddhism with its focus on the supramundane nature of dharma believes in the universality of humanity, which is independent of blood relations, geography, gender, modes of production (agricultural, nomadic, wheat-growing, rice-growing, etc.), family background, and race. Confucianism, by contrast, aimed at the salvation of a limited group of people, and it was encroached upon by a Buddhism that had never existed in China proper before and that taught a kind of systematic personal salvation.

In the fourth to the seventh centuries, Buddhism spread in China and eventually conquered the Chinese world of thought. While rivaling the thought system of Buddhism, the conventional belief system was reorganized, which gave birth to the modern world of thought in East Asia today. With the spread of Buddhism, the so-called Three Teachings—Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism—that dominated the Chinese world of thought, having taken definite shape, coexisted. Consequently, in China, both the breadth and width of thought expanded and the variety increased. The Sui-Tang emperors, different from their Han predecessors who relied on the Confucian concept of royal authority, turned to Buddhism, which came from outside China, for support. After the Tang, the Liao, Jin, Yuan, and Qing regimes (which were founded by the nomadic non-Han), to relativize the Confucian-based cultural tradition of the agricultural zone, consistently placed Buddhism at the center of the concept of royal authority; under these regimes, Buddhist monasteries were important venues for ritual ceremonies for royal authority.

Confucianism

Amid the disintegration of consanguineous and geographical communities as a result of political chaos and war since the late Eastern Han, the authority of Confucianism collapsed. With the reunification of China under the Sui and Tang, as the political philosophy royal authority relied upon, Confucianism came back to life. Confucianism stresses that the essence of a ruler is to use intellectuals to criticize the abuse of power. For the ruler no political theory is more powerful than Confucianism, a statecraft for rationally managing society. Under Confucianism, political management in accordance with the Mandate of Heaven brings peace to people, while the power of capable Sons of Heaven or emperors is limited to that of sovereigns. It argues that politics can bring salvation to groups of people. However, under the influence of Buddhism with its aim of personal salvation, in the ninth century, there was a gradual shift away from group salvation to personal salvation, and to a trend toward exploring the ideal way of the world, paving the way for the rise of Neo-Confucianism in the Song dynasty. The utilitarian-based examination system finalized under Wu Zetian also played a role in bringing about change in Confucianism.

Daoism

Faced with the strong impact of Buddhism, Daoism took definite form in the fifth century as a religion, which was founded on a centuries-old popular religion and preached the universality of the Dao (the way). The Tang paid particular homage to Daoism because the imperial Li house identified Laozi 老子 (Li Er 李耳, the founder of Daoism) as its progenitor. However, although the legitimacy of Daoist activities, subject to the court's management and regulation, were recognized, in society at large, Buddhism far surpassed Daoism in

popularity and influence. The strong political power of Daoism was rejected by Wu Zetian, whose rule was based on the Buddhist concept of royal authority, before it was revived and promoted by Xuanzong. Daoism criticized Buddhism as the religion of the “barbarians,” and asserted that Daoism was the only “Sinitic” religion, which gave rise to Buddho-Daoist debate. In the wake of the An Lushan Rebellion, isolationism in international relations and Sinocentrism were on the rise; in the ninth century when Buddhism had reached its peak, the Daoists were instrumental in persuading Emperor Wuzong 武宗 to launch the Huichang 會昌 proscription against Buddhism. However, thereafter, Buddhism and Daoism merged into a popularly practiced, highly eclectic religion.

Nestorianism, Zoroastrianism, and Manichaeism

Nestorianism was a Christian sect. Officially, it began to spread in China in 638, when Emperor Taizong gave permission to Abraham (Aluoben 阿羅本), leader of a missionary group from Sassanid Persia, to build a Persian Monastery (later renamed “Daqin Monastery”) in Chang’an. In 781, followers erected the *Monument to the Spread of Nestorianism in China* (Daqin jingjiao liuxing Zhongguo bei 大秦景教流行中國碑). The inscription is in Chinese and Syriac. The Chinese part gives an account of how Nestorianism arrived and spread in China.

Zoroastrianism was the state religion of Sassanid Persia. Many Sogdians who came to China were believers. In Tang times, as they broadened their range of activity, Zoroastrian monasteries were set up in Chang’an and elsewhere.

Manichaeism was founded by Mani in Sassanid Persia. It was a dualist religion that borrowed extensively from other religions such as Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Toward the end of the seventh century, it spread to China and set up its monasteries in Chang’an and elsewhere. Through the Sogdians, it spread to the Uighurs. After their qaghan was converted, it became their state religion.

These three foreign religions (known as the “three barbarian religions”), together with Buddhism, were subjected to persecution in the Huichang proscription campaign, which reached its peak in 845.

However, the followers of these foreign religions were not many compared with their Buddhist counterparts. Their influence on society was rather small. Believers tended to live in designated areas in cities in their own religious communities. Their contact with local Tang subjects was limited.

Literature

When talking about literature, the Ming literatus Li Panlong 李攀龍 says, “The prose of the Qin and Han and the poetry of the High Tang [are the best].” Indeed, Tang literature, known especially for its poetry, was highly developed. The fact that the *jinshi* 進士-degree examination required composition of *shi* 詩-poetry and *fu* 賦-rhapsodies contributed to this phenomenon. In Early Tang times, poetry, under the influence of the South, tended to be delicate and brilliant in style. The best-known poets of the day were the Four Eminences of the Early Tang—Wang Bo 王勃, Luo Binwang 駱賓王, Lu Zhaolin 盧照鄰, and Yang Jiong 楊炯。 They attempted to break away from that mold. Under Wu Zetian, Shen Quanqi 沈佺期, Song Zhiwen 宋之問, Chen Zi’ang 陳子昂, and others criticized the brilliant style of the South in vogue and promoted the simple style of the Han and Cao-Wei period. Their work was the forerunner to the poetry of the High Tang and Middle Tang.

The height of Tang literature arrived during the reign of Xuanzong. It was the time when the poet-immortal Li Bai 李白 and the poet-sage Du Fu 杜甫 were at the peak of their creativity. The literary achievement of this age epitomized the past traditions going back centuries and laid the groundwork for a new literature in the future. The poetic greats Li Bai and Du Fu both had gone through the vicissitudes of life. By contrast, the poets of the Middle Tang were oftentimes *jinshi*-degree holders and elite courtiers. The poetry of Li Bai and Du Fu attests to the principle for artistic creation that only those talented men of letters who faced difficulties in life were able to produce great original work that will live forever.

Conclusion: the significance of Tang historical research

To understand today's world, knowledge of Tang history is indispensable, because much of the East Asia of today is rooted in the Tang period. In the fourth through the seventh centuries, the Eurasian continent experienced massive migration of nomadic people. In the seventh century, at the east end of Eurasia, there arose a unified China under the Sui and Tang. In the face of this, various tribes in East Asia formed confederations and founded states. The international relations in East Asia that arose as a consequence in the eighth and ninth centuries have continued down to this day.

The civilization of various regions in East Asia today, including institutions and lifestyle habits such as dress, food, residence, and others, derives directly from this period. In today's East Asia, a gigantic economic zone has taken shape, and various countries have entered into exchange relations with one another. All this was adumbrated by the gradual formation of the cultural zone through Buddhism in the seventh and eighth centuries, which will in turn continue to impact future developments in the world. Doubtless, that adds another level of significance to Tang history.

In the first part of the Tang, the Tang state belonged with the same type of agro-pastoral states one found elsewhere in Eurasia. After the An Lushan Rebellion, however, the Tang lost its pastoral zone; government control was now limited to the agricultural zone. Meanwhile, various institutions were developed that would pass down to posterity. Changes that started both in the government and private sectors during Xuanzong's reign in the eighth century became interconnected in the ninth century to bring about major transformations, including:

- 1 in politics, the agro-pastoral state evolved into an agrarian state.
- 2 in government, the loose-rein and prefecture-county systems of the agro-pastoral state gave way to the defense command and prefecture-county systems based in the agricultural zone.
- 3 in military affairs, non-Han generals and militia garrisons were replaced with eunuch commanders and conscript armies; the cavalry-based tactic evolved into the tactic of using both cavalry and infantry.
- 4 in finance, the North-focused tax-and-corr vee system (*zu yong diao*) was replaced with the South-focused dual-tax system and a number of indirect taxes (on salt, tea, wine, commerce, etc.).
- 5 in economy, there was a move from the luxury trade by land routes through the agro-pastoral borderlands to the general trade; and from local markets to the national market.

- 6 in society and culture, cosmopolitanism gave way to Sinocentrism; a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society gave way to a utilitarian society under the influence of the civil service examination with an increasingly discriminatory view on gender.

The contraction of territory that occurred as the Tang was transformed from an agro-pastoral state in the seventh century to an essentially agricultural state became a pattern for territorial shrinkage. To some extent that pattern would be followed repeatedly by later dynasties.