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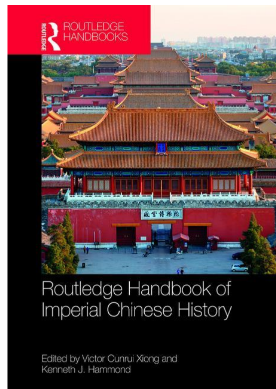

Routledge Handbook of Imperial Chinese History

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Publication details
https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315726878-9
Andrew Chittick
Published online on: 02 Oct 2018

How to cite :- Andrew Chittick. 02 Oct 2018, *The Southern and Northern Dynasties from:* Routledge Handbook of Imperial Chinese History Routledge
Accessed on: 05 Dec 2023
https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315726878-9

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6
THE SOUTHERN AND NORTHERN DYNASTIES

Andrew Chittick

During the Southern and Northern Period (420–589), the East Asian mainland was dominated by two powerful empires. The Jiankang 建康 Empire, with its capital at the city of Jiankang (Nanjing, Jiangsu) in the Yangzi delta area, ruled over the regions south of the Huai River and the Qinling Mountains, extending all the way to what is now central Vietnam. The Sino-Xianbei Empire under the Tuoba Wei 拓跋魏 regime (386–534) ruled the area north of the Huai-Qinling frontier as far north as Inner Mongolia, with its first major capital on the northern steppe frontier, at Pingcheng 平城 (at Datong, Shanxi), and then at the traditional Han imperial capital of Luoyang 洛陽 (494–534). The Tuoba Wei regime fell into an east-west civil war in the mid-sixth century between Eastern and Western Wei regimes, which were succeeded by the Northern Qi (550–577) and Northern Zhou (557–581) regimes, respectively. The South meanwhile suffered a more catastrophic collapse during and after the Hou Jing 侯景 crisis (548–552), losing all of its territory north of the Yangzi River and west of the Three Gorges. The political and territorial instability created the opportunity for new leadership to reunite the Sino-Xianbei Empire, found the Sui dynasty (581–618), conquer the South, and create the largest East Asian empire since the Jin (Map 6.1).

The literate ruling classes of these empires all used Sinitic script and saw themselves as succeeding in some faashion to the legacy of the Han Empire. However, they were culturally, ethnically, and politically quite different. Linguistically, subjects of the Jiankang Empire spoke languages from at least four different major families (Sinitic, Austro-Asiatic, Tai, and Miao-Yao), with much cross-blending; subjects of the Sino-Xianbei Empires spoke both Sinitic and Altaic tongues, with the latter dominating within the military and ruling class for most of the fifth century. The two empires had equally remarkable differences in agricultural systems, diet, social habits, and political culture among their ruling classes, and even greater diversity in their outlying regions. And they understood these differences to have deep historical and even ecological roots.

In traditional Chinese and modern Western historiography, the period has been framed as a North-South rivalry between two dynasties that each sought to reunify "China," meaning the empire originally founded by the Qin and Han. The "reunification" by the northern-based Sui dynasty in 589 CE is described as putting an end to this incessant warfare and ushering in centuries of peace and prosperity. The two empires are also seen as culturally complementary; for example, the North is characterized as "martial" (*wu* 武) but

Map 6.1 The Jiankang Empire under the Chen, Northern Zhou, and Northern Qi. (See Tan Qixiang, vol. 4, 23–24.)

lacking in cultural sophistication, while the South is described as more "literary" (*wen* 文) but lacking in military strength and assertiveness. This symmetrical North-South binary has pleasing parallels to similar binaries of yang and yin, or masculine and feminine, and the reunification into one whole thereby appears to be a desirable, natural, and even inevitable development.

In fact, the idea of the two empires' complementarity and their inevitable reunification was heavily influenced by the ideology of the subsequent Sui-Tang period. It masked the legacy of the violent conquest and destruction of the city of Jiankang and ongoing northern prejudice against the South (which the southerners often reciprocated), and thereby helped to facilitate the integration of the southern elite into the Sui-Tang empire. In later dynasties, and in modern times, the idea has continued to serve as a means to highlight the inviolable unity of the "Chinese nation" as one political entity, and contrast it with the

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partial, divided, chaotic, and weakened nature of the polities that existed between the Han and the Sui.

This chapter takes a different perspective, one which relies on ample written evidence from the period that educated people did not necessarily believe it was inevitable, for the two regimes to be ruled as a single people or a single state, nor that they were "complementary." The two empires often shared ideas and texts and were sometimes pitted against one another, but they primarily developed their own separate political and cultural trajectories. Their governance will therefore be discussed in two separate sections. Economic and cultural developments will be discussed together, but with a continual effort to compare and contrast the differences in the two regime's developments.

Jiankang Empire: court and governance

The empire based at Jiankang had persisted since the founding of the Three Kingdoms state of Wu in the early third century, with only a brief 37-year interregnum (280–317) of rule by the North under the Western Jin dynasty. The relocation of the Jin dynastic house to Jiankang, as the Eastern Jin dynasty (317–420), had brought with it a large population of émigrés from the northern court, and a wealth of expertise, resources, and legitimacy. However, it was only with the rise of the southern general Liu Yu 劉裕 (363–422) that the empire was consolidated into a strong, assertive regime.

Liu Yu was an illiterate military man from Pengcheng 彭城 (Xuzhou), in what is now northern Jiangsu province. The area was in the heart of the eastern Chu cultural region (also known as Huai-Chu), which straddled the frontier zone between the Jiankang regime and the various regimes of the central and northern plains. Men from eastern Chu had long been valued for their fighting prowess, and they formed the backbone of the Northern Command (*beifu bing* 北府兵) in the run-up to its pivotal victory against the northern-based Former Qin ruler Fu Jian 苻堅 at the battle of the Fei River in 383 CE. Liu Yu joined this force in the following generation, and he and his compatriots fought valiantly in the wars against the rebel Sun En 孫恩 (399–403). Liu Yu subsequently led the overthrow of the usurper Huan Xuan 桓玄 in 404 and became the power behind the weak, young Eastern Jin monarch (Emperor An 安, r. 396–419). Over the following 16 years, he extended his power within the military and political system of the Jiankang court until he could take the throne in his own name (posthumously known as Song Emperor Wu 武, r. 420–422), thereby displacing the Jin dynastic house with a new one based both on a native southern lineage and with deep roots in the southern military. A period of uncertainty and a short civil war followed his death in 422, leading to the further consolidation of the new regime under the long reign of his third son, Liu Yilong 劉義隆 (Song Emperor Wen 文, r. 424–453), which is considered the Jiankang Empire's first golden age.

Several administrative reforms helped to secure the dominance of the military and its control over the key frontier garrisons. The system of prefectural administration was reorganized, making the prefectures (*zhou* 州) (the highest-order territorial administrative unit) smaller and more numerous, and creating a series of new ones with their headquarters along the Huai river, the key line of defense and resupply for the frontier garrisons further to the north. The civilian Inspectors (*cishi* 刺史) of each prefecture served simultaneously as military field commanders, and the governors of lower-tier administrative districts were their subordinate generals, so that the entire system of civilian administration was effectively subordinated to a more explicitly hierarchical military administration. The key prefectural commands were then allotted to imperial princes or to a trusted member of a collateral

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family. This secured control by the Liu household and its close allies over the military and civilian infrastructure of the core regions of the empire in the lower and central Yangzi and the Huai frontier.

However, the system also had considerable weakness. Most importantly, it was highly reliant on personal ties between the emperor, his clan members, and their military clients. Census registers were very unreliable and captured for the court the tax and labor resources of only a small proportion (in some regions perhaps as little as ten percent) of the empire's population. Despite numerous efforts to reform the system, the registers remained inadequate throughout the remainder of the empire. Meanwhile, most subordinate generals had considerable numbers (hundreds or even thousands) of their own personal troops whom they brought with them into service, but whom they also took with them in times of rupture. As a result, the Jiankang Empire's military system tended to be brittle and quick to fracture due to personal and political disputes, especially at times of imperial succession.

Another important development during this first golden age was the avid court sponsorship of Buddhism. This followed from trends already present in the later years of the Eastern Jin, and was to some extent modeled on the court sponsorship of Buddhism of northern regimes such as the Later Qin (384–417), which Liu Yu had conquered. Emperor Wen (Liu Yilong) styled himself as a latter-day *cakravartin* (the wheel-turning emperor), or Buddhist universal ruler in the manner of the ancient Indian monarch Aśoka (Ayuwang 阿育王; r. 268–232 BCE). He supported major translation projects under monks from India such as Buddhajiva (Fotuoshi 佛陀什), Gunavarman (Qiunabamo 求那跋摩), and Guṇabhadra (Qiunabatuoluo 求那跋陀羅), and instituted a system of closer court control over the sangha. He also hosted numerous diplomatic missions from fellow Buddhist monarchs in South and Southeast Asia.

The empire engaged in only modest military campaigns, primarily targeting marginalized peoples (the "Man" 蠻) in the interior hill country and one major attack in 446–447 on the Cham, in central Vietnam. These efforts were about gaining war captives, land for expansion of cultivation, and (in the case of the Cham) gold, silver, and other valuable materials. Skirmishes along the northern frontier were common, but offensive efforts were primarily targeted at securing the garrisons that made up the extended defensive line along the Yellow River. The fallback defensive line along the Huai River was also strengthened and regularized, and proved able to withstand a massive invasion by the Northern Wei in 450–451 CE. Despite deep penetration by northern forces, several strategic garrisons held out to harass the enemy's rear, and the North withdrew with little gain. The decades of relative peace saw considerable achievements in literary fields, especially historiography and poetry, which are detailed later.

Succession problems arose soon after the end of the 450 war, as Emperor Wen was assassinated in 453 in a plot by his two eldest sons. They were in turn overthrown by the third son, Liu Jun 劉駿 (Song Emperor Xiaowu 孝武, r. 454–465), who staged a short, fierce military campaign down the Yangzi River to seize control of the court. While formal policies did not change greatly, Emperor Xiaowu trusted his family members less, and began to rely on powerful military clients from other clans more, a pattern that eventually brought ruin to the dynasty. Upon his death in 465, a much more destructive succession battle broke out. Called the "War of Uncles and Nephews," it pitted a cluster of forces at the capital allied with several of Xiaowu's brothers against a wide scattering of prefectural commanders who raised the standard of one of Xiaowu's minor-age sons. The eventual victor, Xiaowu's younger brother Liu Yu 劉彧 (Song Emperor Ming 明, r. 466–472), purged many of the military men who had opposed him, as well as most of his own family members, thereby greatly

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weakening both the ruling house and the empire's defensive system. The Northern Wei took advantage by seizing the wide swath of territory between the Yellow and Huai Rivers, which the Jiankang Empire had controlled since Liu Yu's time.

The weakened imperial house was now ripe for a dynastic challenger. The eventual victor, Xiao Daocheng 蕭道成, was from a family with marital ties to the ruling Liu clan and had been raised in similar military-administrative circles. He had emerged as a leading figure during the 466–467 civil war and went on to manipulate the court, place weak minor children on the throne, and consolidate the allegiance of the military. He took the throne himself in 479 (Qi Emperor Gao 高, r. 479–482), founding the Qi dynasty, and was succeeded peacefully by his eldest son Xiao Ze 蕭賾 (Qi Emperor Wu 武, r. 483–493), who had assisted him throughout the process of usurpation. This ushered in a second, much briefer "golden age," known as the Yongming 永明 decade. Emperor Wu signed a peace treaty with the Northern Wei, and he and several of his sons sponsored literary salons, which engaged in innovative and lasting experiments with poetry.

Two major challenges, one internal and one external, led to a severe crisis of the Qi regime. Internally, the death of Xiao Ze with a minor grandchild as heir opened up the opportunity for a distant cousin, Xiao Luan 蕭鸞, to manipulate and eventually assassinate all of the more legitimate heirs and take the throne himself (Qi Emperor Ming 明, r. 494–498). Part of Xiao Luan's appeal was his substantial support among the military rank and file, who were faced with a serious external threat: the Northern Wei, which had just relocated its capital to Luoyang, was gearing up for a major invasion, which came first in 495 CE, and then again, more seriously, in 497–498. Only the death of the ambitious Tuoba Wei Emperor Xiaowen 孝文 ended the threat, by which time the Jiankang Empire had entered into yet another sustained succession crisis of its own. This was once again resolved by a military campaign sweeping down the Yangzi and forcefully dominating the court. The new emperor, Xiao Yan 蕭衍, also a distant cousin of the current ruling house, chose to found a new dynasty and is known as Liang Emperor Wu 武 (r. 502–548).

The near half-century of Liang Emperor Wu's reign is widely considered the pinnacle of the Jiankang Empire, the final extended "golden age" of relative peace and prosperity. Emperor Wu engaged in numerous substantial political innovations. He reaffirmed and greatly expanded the Buddhist aspects of court ritual and policy, sponsoring powerful monks and important translation and scholarly projects. At the same time, he developed the evolving tradition of lay persons taking bodhisattva precepts, including taking them himself, thereby circumventing the traditional monastic order while also asserting primacy over it. He appealed directly to the bourgeoning lay Buddhist community at the capital and in the extended network of merchants in peripheral urban centers and abroad. He and his sons were strong sponsors of scholastic work in both Buddhist and Confucian materials (which were widely seen as complementary), and they were also active patrons of poetry. Emperor Wu engaged in major administrative reforms, greatly increasing the number of administrative districts and enlarging the imperial training academy in order to bring more lower-status prefectural men into central administration and undercut the sinecures of the Jiankang elite. In military affairs, while he claimed to rule as a universal *cakravartin* in the mold of Aśoka, he proved much more willing than his predecessors to back up the claim with aggressive campaigns against the North, seeking to take advantage of their civil war. However, these were of little avail, and in 537 CE, he signed a peace treaty with the Eastern Wei regime that lasted a decade.

Emperor's Wu's prosperous and confident regime was rapidly brought to its knees, however, by the rebellion of Hou Jing, a renegade general from the North who led an extended

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assault on the city of Jiankang in 548–549. Once he had conquered the inner palace, he imprisoned the elderly emperor and his heir apparent and eventually eliminated them in favor of his own direct rule. The remaining Liang imperial princes who held prefectural military commands were unable to work together on a counter-strategy, and instead warred with one another, jockeying for position in a widening and increasingly bitter civil war. Hou Jing was killed in 552, and Xiao Yan's seventh son, Xiao Yi 蕭繹, claimed the throne (Emperor Yuan 元, r. 552–554) from his base Jiangling 江陵 (Jingzhouqu, Hubei) in the central Yangzi. However, his claim was contested, and his hold on the city of Jiankang was never secure. After only two years, he was killed by the forces of the Western Wei regime, which sacked Jiangling and seized control over the upper and much of the central Yangzi regions.

The civil war left Jiankang and its imperial administrative system in ruins, and the wider empire fragmented into militarized prefectures. Eventually, Chen Baxian 陳霸先, a military commander from the southern reaches of the empire, succeeded in eliminating his rivals and took the much-diminished imperial throne at Jiankang (Emperor Wu of Chen, r. 557–559). Territorially, he controlled little more than the lower Yangzi region; it was left to his heirs, notably Emperors Wen 文 (r. 560–566) and Xuan 宣 (r. 569–582), to re-assert military control over part of the central Yangzi and all of the South (the regions of modern Fujian, Guangdong, and northern Vietnam). The empire had nonetheless lost all of the critical Huai frontier garrisons to the Northern Qi regime, and it remained greatly shrunken in size and weakened in structure. It proved unable to defend itself against the massive and well-planned invasion by the Sui Empire in 588–589. Sui Emperor Wen (r. 581–604) ordered Jiankang leveled and returned to farm fields, thereby bringing an end to one of the world's great cities.

Sino-Xianbei Empires: court and governance

Like the Liu-Song regime of the Jiankang Empire, the Sino-Xianbei Empires had their dynastic origins in the rise of a military leader during the very fluid political situation following the death of Fu Jian in 385 CE and the breakup of the Former Qin Empire. In the following year, Tuoba Gui 拓拔珪 (posthumously known as Wei Emperor Daowu 道武. r. 386–409) seized control of the northern steppe borderland domain of Dai, an early Tuoba state, which had been crushed by the Former Qin in 376, and changed its name to Wei. (The surname "Tuoba" or "Toba" is also written as "Tabgatch," to approximate the Xianbei pronunciation.) Over the following two decades, Tuoba Gui succeeded in subduing numerous other steppe tribes, absorbing their armies into a hereditary military caste, and completed the conquest of all of the Central Plains down to the Yellow River. He also relocated the capital of his domain to Pingcheng (at Datong, Shanxi), located in a high valley well situated both to rule the neighboring steppe lands and to dominate the northern Yellow River plains below. Compared to Jiankang, Pingcheng was a very raw new city, and indeed the entire Northern Wei was a new creation that at first did not seem any more likely to survive than its many ambitious but short-lived predecessors.

Emperor Daowu's legacy was consolidated and expanded upon by his grandson, Tuoba Tao 拓拔燾 (Emperor Taiwu 太武, r. 424–452), whose long reign closely tallied that of Emperor Wen of Song in the South. Taiwu personally engaged in aggressive campaigns of expansion, beginning with a major one against the Xia regime that controlled Guanzhong 關中 (the Wei River valley in south Shaanxi) and the Ordos Loop (in modern Shaanxi, Ningxia, and part of Inner Mongolia). He subdued the Avars (Rouran 柔然), a rival steppe confederation, and resettled many of their members along the steppe frontier east and west of Pingcheng; these settlements would form the nucleus of the "Six Garrisons" (Liuzhen 六鎮) that

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defended the Wei court but also eventually contributed to its downfall. In 436, he routed the last of the Murong (another branch of the Xianbei) regimes in Manchuria, and three years later completed the conquest of the northwest frontier by seizing the state of the Northern Liang (in modern Gansu). The urban elite of each of these regimes was transported to Pingcheng, swelling its population and straining its resources. Because the Guanzhong region and the Northern Liang regime had both been strongly Buddhist, the transport of their urban populations also brought significant new Buddhist influence into the capital.

Late in his reign, in 450–451 CE, Emperor Taiwu undertook his only major invasion of the Jiankang Empire, at least in part in response to Jiankang's own efforts to contest their frontier along the south banks of the Yellow River. As in his other campaigns, Taiwu sought to move rapidly to the enemy's capital and defeat their imperial army and their ruler in one swift campaign. The Wei troops' advance in the open field went almost entirely unchecked; however, the Jiankang regime maintained an extensive network of fortified garrisons throughout the frontier, and the Wei troops were unable or unwilling to slow down and besiege each of them. They advanced all the way to the north bank of the Yangzi River, but were unable to muster the naval strength to cross it. Endangered by harassing attacks from the rear and beset by diseases endemic to the subtropical southern climate, they soon withdrew, taking many captives and leaving much destruction in their wake, but making no substantive territorial gains. The campaign was the largest sustained effort to conquer the South in this period prior to the Sui conquest in 589 CE.

Under Emperor Taiwu's long reign, the Wei regime proved highly eclectic in its adoption and adaptation of rituals for legitimating its rule. The ruling group was of Xianbei descent and spoke an Altaic language quite different from the Sinitic tongues that dominated the Central Plains and highlands of the Yellow river. The court and its officials routinely communicated orally in the Xianbei language, deployed Xianbei traditions like the worship of the steppe god Tengri (Tianshen 天神), and sometimes used the title of *qaghan*. However, the ruler also aligned himself with Han imperial precedents by calling himself "emperor" (*huangdi*), conducting the ceremonial worship of Tian (heaven) and other rituals, and using literary Sinitic for all written business. For a period in the 440s, the court experimented with an innovative (but ultimately short-lived) effort to develop a Daoist utopian model of empire under Kou Qianzhi 寇謙之 (365–448), a Daoist prophet. Taiwu was generally distrustful of Buddhism, and actively purged monastic institutions in the years 444–452, which is remembered as the first proscription campaign against the religion.

Under the subsequent two emperors, Wencheng 文成 (r. 452–465) and Xianwen 獻文 (r. 465–471), Buddhism came back into favor, at least partly due to the influence of transported peoples from the northwestern conquests. Various court officials and imperial family members began to sponsor the building of cave temples at Yungang 雲崗, just outside of Pingcheng. While both rulers were much less inclined toward military expansion than their vigorous predecessor, the Tuoba forces did take advantage of civil war in the South to seize the territory between the Yellow and Huai Rivers in 466–469, their single most successful advance against the southern frontier.

One noteworthy political development in this period was the rise of palace women as an important force at court. The founding emperor had established the practice of executing the mother of the heir-apparent, precisely in order to prevent the prospect of powerful women manipulating the throne. However, Wencheng elevated his wet-nurse as empress dowager, and she in turn arranged to have his first wife (and the mother of Xianwen) executed and a confidant of her own, Madame Feng 馮 (known in history as Empress Dowager Feng), installed as empress. Though only an imperial stepmother, and a step-grandmother to Tuoba

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Hong 拓拔宏 (Emperor Xiaowen 孝文, r. 471–499), Empress Dowager Feng would go on to dominate the court for several decades until her death in 490 CE.

Under Empress Dowager Feng's regency, Xiaowen was placed on the throne when he was not yet four, and received a thorough education in the traditional Chinese classics. The Empress Dowager then oversaw an initial wave of decisive reforms focused on improving rural administration, agricultural productivity, and land tax revenues. Most important and innovative was the "equal fields system" (*juntian zhi* 均田制) in which the court claimed ownership of all agricultural land and allotted it to households based on head count. One intent was to guarantee land to every farm household, thereby bringing them out from under the control of powerful estates and into the state's household registration, tax, and corvée labor system. In theory, the system was also supposed to limit the size of estates, but this was much less successful.

Following the death of Empress Dowager Feng, the 22-year-old emperor completed two full years of mourning and then proceeded with a far more radical reorganization. Inspired by Han imperial history and textual traditions, he sought to remake the empire more closely in line with the illustrious Han legacy. The centerpiece of the reforms was the relocation of the capital from Pingcheng, which had outgrown its limited agricultural base and constricted transport network, to Luoyang, the site of the old Han imperial capital. Court ritual was altered to more scrupulously follow Han precedents, eliminating the eclectic mix of steppe practices. Sweeping military reforms drafted the sons of farm families into new infantry units, shifting away from reliance on professional cavalry forces. The imperial lineage was reorganized to sharply restrict its membership, and the family-ranking system was reformed to reduce the dominant rule of older lineages of steppe-based military origins, and make rank more closely tied to recent service to the court. Numerous cultural reforms required changes such as the use of Sinitic rather than Xianbei speech and dress at court. Finally, the Emperor engaged in several, ultimately unsuccessful campaigns against the South prior to his death in 499 CE, partly to secure the greater hinterland of Luoyang, but also as a way of demonstrating his ambition to reconquer all of the lands of the Han Empire.

Not surprisingly, many of the older Xianbei lineages and active fighting men on the northern frontier were deeply unhappy with Xiaowen's reforms and resisted them from the start. The city of Luoyang prospered greatly for the next three decades and saw a remarkable efflorescence of Buddhist piety and temple construction. But the internal tensions that had been wrought by Xiaowen's reforms increasingly began to overwhelm the functioning of imperial administration and, more importantly, the imperial army.

In 523 CE, the "Six Garrisons" along the northern steppe frontier began to actively revolt. The rebellious frontier inflamed the bitter court struggles between the factions of Empress Dowager Hu 胡 (aka Ling 靈) and her husband Emperor Xuanwu 宣武 (r. 499–515) and son, Emperor Xiaoming 孝明 (r. 515–528). When Empress Dowager Hu had Emperor Xiaoming poisoned in 528, a frontier commander named Erzhu Rong 爾朱榮 moved on the capital to "save the dynasty," execute the Empress Dowager, and install his own puppet on the throne. This led to a complex, multi-sided civil war which wholly undermined the Tuoba dynasty and eventually led to the military division of the Sino-Xianbei Empire into two halves.

In the eastern Yellow River plains, the dominant commander was Gao Huan 高歡, while the Guanzhong region to the west was controlled by Yuwen Tai 宇文泰. When the Wei emperor fled to Guanzhong in 534, Gao Huan installed a rival scion of the ruling house, leading to a full-blown schism between east and west and the creation of two rival regimes: the Eastern Wei and Western Wei. Both Wei rulers were puppets, and were eventually displaced by their military masters: the Gao clan began ruling in its own right as the Northern Qi

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in 550, while Yuwen Tai's heir declared himself Emperor of the Northern Zhou regime in 557. The civil war continued, with regular fighting between the two regimes for two more decades. During this period, the Jiankang Empire had also fallen into disarray as a result of the Hou Jing rebellion, leaving the military and political situation in East Asia far more fluid and violent than at any time since the fourth century.

The eastern regime under the Gao clan was larger and more populous than the western; however, the western regime proved more innovative, developing a new military organization which drew in local strongmen from the Guanzhong region and gave them Xianbei-styled names, titles, and equipment. In some ways, this was the reverse of Emperor Xiaowen's effort to "Sinicize" the military; instead, fighting men of any and all ethnic backgrounds were "Xianbei-ized." Equally important, they were directly recruited by the court and then parceled out to 24 top military commanders, thereby avoiding some of the problems of personalized military commands which had plagued both the Tuoba Wei and the Jiankang Empires.

Building on this strong base of recruitment and command, and the stable and competent rule of Yuwen Yong 宇文邕 (Emperor Wu of Northern Zhou, r. 560–578), the Northern Zhou armies defeated the Northern Qi regime and seized all of its territories in 577 CE, thereby refounding a regime on the scale of the Sino-Xianbei Empire. Within a few years, however, the throne fell under the sway of Yang Jian 楊堅, father of the empress, who took over as regent in 580. He went on to seize the throne as Emperor Wen of the Sui dynasty (r. 581–604). After several years of further preparation, the Sui armies staged a massive campaign against the weakened Jiankang Empire in 588–589 that ended the Chen regime, leveled the once-great city of Jiankang, and established Emperor Wen of Sui as the unquestioned ruler of the largest empire East Asia had seen since the fall of the Western Jin more than two and a half centuries earlier.

Economy and agriculture

In 420, the Jiankang Empire was at its greatest extent, and probably had a significantly greater population than the Sino-Xianbei Empire, though census data for the entire period from the Han to the Sui are notoriously poor. At this time the frontier zone between the two empires lay just south of the Yellow River, so Jiankang controlled an area which, in the second century (the last reliable census), had contained 25–30 million persons, about half the population of the Han Empire. Since that time, the North had suffered grievous warfare, pestilence, and emigration, while the South had been relatively peaceful and taken in a considerable number of northern migrants; it probably had at least as high a population, while the territory under the Northern Wei regime had considerably less. However, territorial gains and brisk population growth would have made the united Sino-Xianbei Empire considerably larger than its southern rival by the late sixth century.

Southern urban development was especially spectacular. Jiankang was already an impressive city in the fourth century, but it probably grew to be one of the world's largest in the fifth and sixth centuries. It formed the nexus for an extensive long-distance trade network that reached across the empire, driven by the concentration of wealth among its upper classes and the low transport costs along the Yangzi River and its major tributaries. Overland trade from Central Asia along the "Silk Road" was able to drop south into Sichuan or the valley of the upper Han River (a northern tributary of the Yangzi) and link up to the Yangzi River network. In the far south, the port of Guangzhou 廣州 replaced Jiaozhou 交州 (in north Vietnam) as the primary hub of a long-distance maritime trade network that brought

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in goods from all over Southeast Asia, India, and the Persian Gulf. These goods were then transported overland, with a portage over one of the Nanling passes to gain access to the southern tributaries of the Yangzi River network. As a result, river towns throughout the empire flourished as gathering points for commodities from the hinterland, and as transshipment points for longer-distance exchange. Jiankang itself was also an important port of call for sea-going ships, serving as the primary entry point to the continent for vessels coming from the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese islands.

The North in the early fifth century was by comparison much less commercially vibrant. The centrally-located Han capitals of Chang'an and Luoyang had been badly damaged and depopulated; the new Tuoba Wei capital of Pingcheng rose to become a major urban center, but it had very weak transport links to the Central Plains, and the North in general lacked the easy availability of river transport that drove commercial prosperity in the South. However, as the empire grew to encompass the eastern terminus of the "Silk Road" route to Central Asia (in modern eastern Gansu province), it also expanded its overland transport links. Its territorial gains from the South in 466–469 included fertile regions between the Yellow and Huai Rivers which had once supported considerable population (though by this time they would have been considerably diminished by warfare). They also gained the empire's first decent seaports in the Shandong peninsula. The equal fields system encouraged farmers to settle on uncultivated lands and bring them back into production, helping to swell population and tax revenue.

By the early sixth century, the Sino-Xianbei Empire was substantially more prosperous, as evidenced by the phenomenally rapid rebirth of the city of Luoyang following its designation as an imperial capital in 493. In little more than three decades, it swelled to a population of perhaps 700,000 and covered an area of 75 km^2, rivaling the size of Jiankang in both measures. The city became a magnet for commodity trade stretching to Central Asia and India. It was home to over a thousand Buddhist monasteries, including the tallest pagoda in the world, at Yongning si 永寧寺, which was visible for over 30 miles; it was reputed to be 136 meters high, though this is surely an exaggeration. The extensive Buddhist carvings and sculptures at Longmen, just south of the modern city of Luoyang, remain as a testament to the wealth and vigor of the era.

In agriculture the Jiankang Empire likewise saw a smooth and consistent path of expansion compared to the crisis-ridden North. The South was able to rely on the warm climate, long growing season, and ample rainfall to grow relatively dense amounts of crop. Rice had long been the predominant grain, though winter wheat was also widely planted in the northern reaches of the Yangzi drainage. Some new crops rose to prominence as tradable commodities in the fifth and sixth centuries, notably citrus and most especially tea, which came into widespread fashion during this period due to the influence of Buddhism, where it was initially prized as an aid to meditation. Grown and sold for profit, the successful spread of these commodity crops relied on access to good transport links and a vibrant commercial economy.

The southern regimes also emphasized the internal colonization of new lands. The Eastern Jin period had already seen considerable effort to subdue the peoples living in the hilly regions of the lower Yangzi delta (in modern south Jiangsu and northern Zhejiang) and bring those areas into denser settlement and cultivation. Under the Liu-Song emperors, the policy was extended into the middle Yangzi, with campaigns against the "Man" peoples in the Dabie Mountains that divide off the Yangzi drainage from the upper Huai River drainage. There was also considerable settlement in the Nanling Range that divided the far

southern reaches of the Yangzi drainage (along the upper Xiang and Gan Rivers in modern south Hunan and Jiangxi) from the West River drainage (in modern Guangdong). These developments brought new land under cultivation and led to a tradable surplus in some areas.

The northern agricultural economy relied on grains such as wheat and millet, and was generally less productive than the South per acre due to shorter growing season and less abundant rainfall. Stockbreeding of cattle, sheep, goats, and horses was widespread, however, and formed an important part of the agricultural economy. Some new crops were introduced from Central Asia, such as apricots, almonds, and sesame. An excellent record of mostly northern agricultural practices has survived in the *Essential Techniques for the Common People* (Qimin yaoshu 齊民要術) by Jia Sixie 賈思勰 (fl. c. 530–544), an agricultural treatise based on conditions in southern Shandong. In general, however, agricultural progress came more from re-expansion than from innovation, as the North had been severely depopulated during the fourth century. The equal fields system encouraged landless farmers to bring formerly productive land back to the tiller, which eventually brought both the economy and the imperial treasury to a much more stable and prosperous footing. The Tuoba Wei regime also gained considerable new lands through military conquest at the expense of the South.

Religious literature and practice

The most important developments in religious thought continued to be driven by the ongoing translation of Sanskrit literature into literary Sinitic. The work of Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 (334–413) and his collaborators at Chang'an had set a new standard for the linguistic quality of translations. This legacy was carried forward initially at Jiankang, where the court actively sponsored Buddhist monastic institutions and projects. Monks from South and Southeast Asia settled at Jiankang beginning in the early fifth century and undertook further translations of important texts, such as the *Flower Garland* (Huayan 華嚴) sutra, the Aśoka sutra, and a variety of texts on monastic regulations (*vinaya* or *lü* 律), meditation practices (*dhyāna* or *chan* 禪), and the lay adoption of bodhisattva precepts. They also officially ordained East Asia's first order of Buddhist nuns. During the Luoyang period (494–534), the Tuoba Wei court undertook the vigorous sponsorship of sutra translation by Indian monks such as Bodhiruci 菩提留支, which had substantial influence on the development of the Pure Land and Chan schools. In addition, despite two brief periods of general suppression, the Sino-Xianbei regimes did not seek to supervise private Buddhist textual and ideological production, allowing for the spread of "indigenous" scriptures, such as the *Sutra of Trapuṣa and Bhallika* (Tiwei boli jing 提謂波利經), which were not translated from Sanskrit, and which reflected a more popular approach to Buddhist religious practice.

The late fifth and sixth centuries saw considerable efforts at textual consolidation and standardization. The first efforts to unify and standardize Daoist literature and practice came in 471 CE with the presentation to the Jiankang court of the *Catalog of the Scriptures and Writings of the Three Caverns* (Sandong jingshu mulu 三洞經書目錄) by Lu Xiujing 陸修靜 (406–477). This and other work by Lu sought to systematize the various schools of Daoism, placing the relatively new Lingbao tradition as the highest and relegating the older Celestial Masters school to the lowest category. In the following generation, Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536), an especially powerful and politically well-connected proponent of the Shangqing tradition, consolidated the records of the mid-fourth-century revelations to the adept Yang Xi 楊羲 into the *Declarations of the Perfected* (Zhengao 真誥).

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The first catalog of Buddhist translations had been completed by the fourth-century monk Dao'an 道安, but the most lasting influence in this field came from the monk Sengyou 僧祐 (445–518), a close advisor to the Jiankang monarch, Emperor Wu of Liang. He authored the first collection of Buddhist apologetic literature, the *Hongming ji* 弘明集, in 513, as well as the earliest surviving annotated catalog of Buddhist scriptures, the *Collected Notes on the Translation of the Tripitaka* (Chu sanzang jiji 出三藏記集). The latter work included the first known collection of monk's lives written as formal biographies in the style of traditional Sinitic historiography, though some individual accounts, such as that of Faxian 法顯 (c. 337–422), are known to have been based on earlier materials which are still extant. The genre of monks' biographies was greatly expanded with the publication of two further biographical collections, the *Accounts (Biographies) of Famous Monks* (Mingseng zhuan 名僧傳) by Baochang 寶唱 (fl. 495–529) and the *Accounts (Biographies) of Eminent Monks* (Gaoseng zhuan 高僧傳) by Huijiao 慧皎 (497–554). Efforts at making a complete catalog of scriptures were also undertaken under the Sino-Xianbei regimes in the sixth century, but none of them has survived.

Creative approaches to religious and philosophical literature flourished throughout the period. Collections of "anomaly accounts" (*zhiguai* 志怪) explored the realm of supernatural encounters, sometimes eclectically but often with Buddhist themes, as in the late fifth-century *Records of Miraculous Omens* (Mingxiang ji 冥祥記) by Wang Yan 王琰 (fl. 450–500). The traditions of "dark learning" (*xuanxue* 玄學) and "pure conversation" (*qingtan* 清談) continued, with much of their energy occupied by dealing with the still somewhat exotic and challenging notions from Buddhist materials. One example of the evolution of such philosophical debates is the extended discussion of the *Discourse on the Perishability of the Soul* (Shenmie lun 神滅論), written by Fan Zhen 范縝 (c. 450–515) in 507 CE. In response, Emperor Wu of Liang sponsored the composition of over 70 philosophical essays in opposition to Fan's argument, mostly from a Buddhist perspective. These sorts of philosophical treatises and debates, often conducted as a result of court sponsorship and with a clear religious agenda, were common throughout the era.

The fifth and sixth centuries were also a high point for religiously inspired construction. The *Record of the Monasteries of Luoyang* (Luoyang qielanji 洛陽伽藍記), written in 547 by Yang Xuanzhi 楊衒之, indicates that there were 1,367 Buddhist establishments in Luoyang, more than twice as many as in Jiankang. While all of these edifices have succumbed to time, the major cave temple complexes built outside of the northern capitals, at Yungang (near Pingcheng) and Longmen 龍門 (just south of Luoyang), survive and are a major source for research on early medieval art and piety.

The realm of religious practice stretched far beyond the written accounts left to us in scriptures and philosophical essays, or the grand architecture of imperial cities. One of the most influential religious movements of the medieval period was the Celestial Masters, a hierarchical millenarian sect, which formed relatively tight local communities. It had its origins in Sichuan in the late second century but was initially propagated in the North. By the fifth century, it was well established throughout the South and had many practitioners among the lower-level military and the ruling class of the Jiankang Empire. The aforementioned Shangqing and Lingbao traditions grew out of these communities and were an effort to rejuvenate and systematize their teachings on a new footing. Much of this was a response to the inroads made by Buddhism, which appealed particularly to local merchants and those who sought patronage relations with the court. However, the Jiankang court sought to exercise considerable control over religious orthodoxy by prohibiting the erection of stelae, repressing heterodox writings and movements, and limiting the development of local religious associations. By the sixth century, the Jiankang court began to actively suppress

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most Daoist sects and some "unorthodox" Buddhist ones in preference for its own preferred interpretations of Buddhism. As a result, there is little evidence of popular religiosity from the South.

By comparison, there is rich evidence for the development of popular Buddhist piety under the Sino-Xianbei empires. Local Buddhist societies (*yishe* 邑社) sponsored small local monasteries (estimates suggest there were 30,000 of these, more than ten times as many as in the South) and financed the production of stelae, statues, inscriptions, and entire cave temples. The major cave temple complexes at Yungang and Longmen are well-known, but the North is also dotted with many smaller, humbler, but no less interesting evidences of these religious associations.

Historiography and poetry

The greatest output of non-religious prose writing during the northern and southern period was unquestionably in the genre loosely understood as "history." The golden age of Emperor Wen of Song saw an especially sustained output of traditional imperial historiography, including the now-standard *Book of the Later Han* (Hou Han shu 後漢書) by Fan Ye 范曄 (398–445); the copiously annotated version of the *Accounts of the Three Kingdoms* (Sanguo zhi 三國志) by Pei Songzhi 裴松之 (372–451); the compilation of early versions of the *Book of the Jin* (Jinshu 晉書) and various other titles; and the documents which would contribute to the *Book of the Song* (Songshu 宋書). This body of imperially sponsored work sought to establish an orthodox interpretation of the major political events of the preceding 400 years.

Later products of the Jiankang imperial history office followed these precedents. Shen Yue 沈約 (441–513), though more famous for his poetry (see later in the chapter), also compiled the official account of the *Book of the Song* in 488, and he continued to work on its comprehensive and detailed monographs (treatises or *zhi* 志) right up to his death. The *Book of the Southern Qi* (Nan Qi shu 南齊書) was compiled by Xiao Zixian 蕭子顯 (489–537), grandson of the dynastic founder Xiao Daocheng.

The Sino-Xianbei Empire also had an imperial history office, but its only important surviving product is the *Book of the Wei* (Weishu 魏書) by Wei Shou 魏收 (506–572), who was working under the auspices of the Northern Qi court. The official histories of the Jin, Liang, Chen, Northern Qi, and Northern Zhou dynasties were not compiled in their extant official versions until the Tang period.

A good deal more historical work was produced outside the court's immediate purview. One very popular genre of quasi-historical writing was anecdote collections, which reflected the aristocratic interest in pure conversation, character assessment, and witty repartee. The classic in this genre, *A New Account of the Tales of the World* (Shishuo xinyu 世說新語), was compiled and edited by Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 (403–444), a prince of the Song imperial house, in the early fifth century.

Local history writing, already a vigorous genre in the fourth century, saw continued output in the fifth and sixth centuries, with an emphasis on locality stories (historical and contemporary tales tied to a particular place) and tales of the supernatural. They were usually organized around imperial administrative districts, though accounts of important mountain regions, often with religious objectives, also gained importance. One of the most substantial local accounts, the aforementioned *Record of the Monasteries of Luoyang*, was less a Buddhist tract than a lengthy, nostalgic memoir for the built environment and lively society of Luoyang in its glory years from 494 to 535.

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By the sixth century, there was an increasing effort to compile disparate materials into more comprehensive, encyclopedic collections, paralleling trends in religious literature. This is evidenced especially in Jiankang, where several universal compendia of biographical and geographical materials (now no longer extant) were published early in the Liang period. However, the best extant example comes from a northern author, Li Daoyuan 酈道元 (d. 527), whose *Annotated Classic of Waterways* (Shuijing zhu 水經注), a classic of geography, compiled a vast number of locality stories and descriptive passages, using river systems as its universal organizing framework.

Two other important and original late sixth-century works from the North shared this comprehensive focus: the aforementioned *Essential Techniques for the Common People* (Qimin yaoshu) and the *Family Instructions for the Yan Clan* (Yanshi jiaxun 顏氏家訓) by Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (c. 531–591). Both books are generically similar to the treatises of the official histories, but with a greatly expanded level of detail.

The early fifth century was a major watershed in the Chinese poetic tradition due to the works of two southern poets in particular: Tao Qian and Xie Lingyun. Tao Qian 陶潛 (c. 365–427), styled Yuanming 淵明, was noted for retiring from public life and living on his private farm in a state of penury. His poems, which combine pastoral detail with reflections on personal, familial, and philosophical themes, are some of the most widely read and appreciated poems in the entire Chinese corpus. Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433), from a prominent aristocratic family, is considered the father of landscape poetry, and wrote in a more formal style with many Buddhist elements.

Another important development during the fifth and sixth centuries was the widespread popularity of *yuefu* 樂府 or "Music Bureau" poems. These purported to be the lyrics to popular ballads, though most were written by court officials and have considerable literary embellishments. Bao Zhao 鮑照 (414–466), a contemporary of Xie Lingyun, was especially noted for his poetic adaptations of popular southern songs, though he wrote in many other genres. Southern *yuefu* poetry, often categorized into Wu songs (from the Yangzi delta region) and Western songs (from the central Yangzi), remained a highly influential genre into the Liang dynasty; they were often performed at court accompanied by dancing ladies. Northern *yuefu* poetry, frequently emphasizing martial themes, is rougher and generally less well regarded as well as less plentiful. However, the northern tradition produced the single most well-known poem in the genre, the "Ballad of Mulan" (Mulan shi 木蘭詩).

The late fifth century saw another groundbreaking development with the introduction of tonal prosody. During the Yongming reign period (483–493) of Emperor Wu of Qi, the imperial prince Xiao Ziliang 蕭子良 sponsored an influential literary salon that included several famous poets, among them Shen Yue, Xie Tiao 謝朓 (464–499), and Wang Rong 王融 (467–493). Having been sensitized to comparative linguistics due to the influx of Sanskrit literature and the challenges of translation, they began to analyze the tonal structure of spoken Sinitic, primarily the Jiankang vernacular. From this they developed tonal rules for poetry composition that were much more sophisticated and formal than anything prior. Tonal prosody was controversial at the time, and some criticized the movement, but most poets were strongly influenced by the new style, and it guided poetic composition throughout poetry's golden age under the Tang Empire.

A final major development in poetry was the rise of the "palace style" in the sixth century, under the auspices of several princes of the Liang ruling house. Lushly sensual and descriptive, often with a focus on love and court ladies, the palace style was frequently criticized as decadent by later commentators. However, it also carried a strong Buddhist undercurrent emphasizing the ephemerality of sense impressions. The most representative anthology is the *New Songs from the Jade Terrace* (Yutai xinyong 玉臺新詠), compiled by Xu Ling 徐陵

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(507–583) at the behest of his patron, Xiao Gang 蕭綱, an imperial prince who would go on to serve briefly as the puppet Liang Emperor Jianwen 簡文 (r. 550–551) during the Hou Jing crisis.

As in other scholarly fields, the Jiankang elite in the sixth century made substantial efforts at anthologizing and critiquing the entire poetic tradition up to that time. Of surviving works, the earliest is the *Ranking of Poets* (Shipin 詩品) by Zhong Rong 鍾嶸 (469–518), which assessed 123 poets from Han times to the present and assigned them into three grades, with commentary. Still more influential is the *Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (Wenxin diaolong 文心雕龍) by Liu Xie 劉勰 (fl. early sixth century), an extensive series of essays on literary theory that has been highly regarded up to the present day. Finally, the anthology *Selections of Refined Literature* (Wenxuan 文選), compiled under the auspices of the Liang prince Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501–531), assembled what his literary coterie considered the very best and most representative writings in 37 prose and verse genres, including 761 different pieces from 130 different writers. Though certainly not the first such anthology, it is the earliest one to have survived intact, and remains the single most important source for the study of pre-Tang literature.

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SECTION 3

The Sui-Tang Empire and the Five Dynasties

In 581, a leading member of the Northern Zhou aristocracy usurped power in the capital Chang'an and founded the Sui dynasty, which went on to annex the South in 589, and evolve into a prosperous empire. Under the Sui, major reform measures were introduced to improve the political institutions and restructure the central and local governments. Two world-class cities (Daxingcheng 大興城 [Chang'an under the Tang] and Luoyang) were constructed, and a nationwide waterway network (the Grand Canal) linking North and South was set up. The registered population stood at 46 million in 609, the largest since the Han. But, not long afterward, the Sui dynasty collapsed in consequence of excessive construction projects, reckless and costly foreign wars (against Koguryŏ in the northeast), and the wanton abuse of the labor force during the second reign.

The Tang that succeeded to the Sui managed to restore peace, while inheriting the institutions, government structures, and infrastructure of the previous age, in a way that was analogous to the post-Qin situation, where the Han kept the Qin government structures essentially intact. A major point of difference was the conspicuous presence of people of non-Han (especially of Xianbei) and of mixed descent in the upper echelon of the central and local governments in the Sui-Tang empire even though the empire itself was essentially Sinitic in culture.

Traditionally, the Tang dynasty comprised two subperiods, with the start of the An Lushan 安祿山 rebellion (755–763) as the demarcation line. The two (pre-rebellion and post-rebellion) subperiods are in turn divided into four phases: Early Tang (618–712), High Tang (712–756), Middle Tang (756–820), and Late Tang (820–907). Looked upon from a different angle, the rise of the Zhou dynasty (690–705) under Wu Zetian 武則天 that briefly replaced the Tang can be regarded as the interregnum that cuts the Tang into two halves.

In the pre-rebellion subperiod, the Tang had a dominant presence in East, North, and Central Asia and was noted for its openness to outside, especially "Western," cultural influence.

In the Early Tang, the first two reigns, those of Gaozu 高祖 (Li Yuan 李淵) and Taizong 太宗 (Li Shimin 李世民), founded and consolidated the empire, laying a solid foundation for its growth in future generations. Although the third sovereign Gaozong 高宗 was weak in personality, and the reign of his wife Wu Zetian that followed did much harm to the Li royal house, the empire continued to function remarkably smoothly. In the High Tang phase under Xuanzong 玄宗, widespread prosperity arrived that marked the apogee of the dynasty.

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In the post-rebellion subperiod, foreign influence, generally speaking, was receding, as China turned increasingly inward and the extent of her territory shrank.

At the start of the Middle Tang (Mid-Tang) phase, the An Lushan rebellion came close to destroying the dynasty for good. A restored Tang court thereafter lost control of the northwest and had a hard time reining in the recalcitrant military commissioners (in their defense commands) in Hebei and the Huai valley.

In the Late Tang phase, members of the eunuch group, who had been gaining power since the Middle Tang, came to dominate the court and to play the role of emperor-makers, especially in the latter half of the ninth century. The most popular religion, Buddhism, was proscribed, together with other foreign religions (such as Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism).

Toward the end of the Tang, China drifted into another chaotic period, that of the Five Dynasties and Ten States (Kingdoms) in 907. The Five Dynasties were five consecutive, short-lived northern regimes based in the Central Plains (with four based in Kaifeng 開封 and one in Luoyang). Of these, except for the first and last ones, all were founded by non-Han (especially Shatuo 沙陀 Turk) generals. However, in this period, ethnicity was never a major issue.

The Ten States were less powerful regimes mostly in the South and southwest. The only exception was the Northern Han based in Shanxi in the North.

This transitional period ended in 979 when the state of Northern Han was brought into the fold by the Northern Song, the successor state of the Later Zhou, the last of the Five Dynasties.

Chronology 3: The Sui-Tang Empire and Five Dynasties

578–579	Northern Zhou: Xuandi's 宣帝 reign.
579–581	Northern Zhou: Jingdi's 靜帝 reign.
580	Northern Zhou: Yang Jian 楊堅 the *de facto* holder of power in the Northern Zhou.
581–618	**Sui dynasty**
581–604	Emperor Wen's 文帝 (Yang Jian) reign.
581–600	Kaihuang 開皇 reign period.
581	The Five Departments (*wusheng* 五省) and 11 Courts (*si* 寺) introduced.
582–589	Chen: Houzhu's 後主 reign.
582–583	Building of Daxingcheng 大興城 (Xi'an, Shaanxi).
584	The Guangtong Canal 廣通渠 dug.
587	The Later Liang (Xiao) annexed.
588–589	The Southern Expedition against the Chen in the South.
590	Rebellions in former Chen territory crushed by Yang Su 楊素.
592	The equal-field system carried out nationwide.
598	Emperor Wen's unsuccessful campaign against Koguryŏ.
599	Tujue civil war; Tuli 突利 (Qimin 啟民) qaghan's flight to the Sui.
600	Yang Guang 楊廣 named crown prince, replacing Yang Yong 楊勇.
601–604	Emperor Wen's Renshou 仁壽 reign period.
604–618	Emperor Yang's 煬 (Yang Guang) reign.
605–618	The Daye 大業 reign period.
605–606	The building of Sui Luoyang.
605	Work on the Grand Canal begins.
607	Gao Jiong 高熲 and others executed for libel against the court.

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609	Poet Xue Daoheng 薛道衡 killed by Emperor Yang.
611	The first major, anti-Sui rebellion in Shandong by Wang Bo 王薄.
612	Emperor Yang's first campaign against Koguryŏ.
613	Emperor Yang's second campaign against Koguryŏ; the Yang Xuangan 楊玄感 rebellion; widespread turmoil.
614	Emperor Yang's third campaign against Koguryŏ.
616	Emperor Yang's move to Jiangdu for good.
617–618	Reign of Yang You 楊侑 (set up by Li Yuan).
617	Li Mi 李密 with the largest rebel force (the Wagang Army 瓦崗軍) active near Luoyang. Daxingcheng taken by Li Yuan 李淵 who rebelled in Jinyang 晉陽 (southwest of Taiyuan, Shanxi). Wang Shichong 王世充 sent by Emperor Yang from Jiangdu to Luoyang.
618–619	Reign of Yang Tong 楊侗 (set up by the warlord Wang Shichong 王世充) in Luoyang.
618	Emperor Yang killed. The Sui falls.
618–907	**Tang dynasty** at Chang'an
618	Li Yuan (Gaozu 高祖; r. 618–626) founds the Tang dynasty.
618–624	The war of unification, in which the Tang forces under Prince Li Shimin 李世民 and others defeat a number of warlords in North and South.
624	The *zu yong diao* 租庸調 tax system is implemented.
626	The Xuanwumen 玄武門 incident, in which Li Shimin (Taizong 太宗; r. 626–649) seizes power.
627–649	The Zhenguan 貞觀 reign, a period of prosperity.
630	Eastern Tujue conquered.
640	Gaochang 高昌 (Turfan, Xinjiang) conquered.
641	Princess Wencheng 文成 married to King Srong-brtsan-sgam-po of Tubo.
645	Taizong leads an unsuccessful campaign against Koguryŏ.
648	Wang Xuance 王玄策 captures the king of Kanauj in India.
649	Taizong dies, succeeded by Gaozong 高宗.
658	Western Tujue (early 658) defeated.
663	Paekche vanquished.
665	Wu Zetian becomes the *de facto* ruler (early 665).
668	Koguryŏ conquered.
682	Later Tujue arises.
683–684	Gaozong dies, succeeded first by Zhongzong 中宗, Ruizong 睿宗 (684), then by Wu Zetian who starts ruling in her own right.
690–705	**Zhou dynasty under Wu Zetian** at Luoyang.
690	Wu Zetian declared herself "emperor" (empress regnant) of the Zhou dynasty.
705	Wu Zetian is dethroned, and dies (706) not long afterward; Tang rule restored.
712	Ruizong's son and Gaozong's grandson Li Longji 李隆基 (Xuanzong 玄宗; r. 712–756) assumes the throne.
713–741	The Kaiyuan 開元 reign period, the height of the Tang dynasty.
742–756	The Tianbao 天寶 reign period, in which prosperity continues but things go wrong eventually.
751	Tang forces defeated by the Arabs at Talas and Tang influence in Central Asia wanes.
755–763	The An Lushan 安祿山 rebellion.

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756	Luoyang and Chang'an fall to rebels.
757	An Lushan assassinated, but rebellion continues under subordinates.
763	An Lushan rebellion ends. Sack of Chang'an by Tubo forces.
780	Double Tax System implemented under Dezong 德宗 (779–805).
780–785	Military governors (commissioners) rise against Tang Dezong.
806–819	Tang Xianzong 憲 宗 (r. 805–820) restores authority over most of the North China Plain.
821	The origins of the factional struggle between Li Deyu 李德裕 and Niu Sengru 牛僧儒 that plagues the court until the late 840s.
823	The *Tang-Bo huimeng bei* 唐蕃會盟碑 (Stele of the Tang-Tubo alliance) set up in Lhasa.
835	The Sweet Dew (Ganlu 甘露) incident, in which a failed attempt is made to eliminate the eunuchs by Wenzong 文宗 (r. 826–840).
840	Wuzong 武宗 (r. 840–846) placed on the throne by the eunuchs. Uighur goes into decline in the aftermath of a civil war.
842	Tubo begins to decline after the death of Dharma 達磨.
842–846	Suppression of Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, and especially Buddhism under Wuzong.
848–861	Zhang Yichao 張義潮 rebels against the Tubo and expels them from Gansu, east Xinjiang, and Qinghai (mostly in 651).
868–869	The Pang Xun 龐勛 rebellion.
874	The Wang Xianzhi 王仙芝 rebellion.
878	Wang Xianzhi dies, and Huang Chao 黃巢 takes over his forces.
878–884	Huang Chao rebellion rages across the empire.
883–912	Zhu Wen 朱溫 (military commissioner in 883), an increasingly important force, but challenged by other military commissioners, especially Li Keyong 李克用, a Shatuo Turk.
886–903	The eunuchs exercise a great influence on the throne, but are challenged by the military commissioners.
902–937	Wu 吳 (one of the Ten States)
903	The court eunuchs are killed off by Zhu Wen.
904	Zhaozong 昭宗 (r. 888–904) killed in Luoyang by Zhu Wen.
907	Zhu Wen forces Tang abdication, declaring himself emperor of the Later Liang.
907–979	**Five Dynasties and Ten States**
907–923	**Later Liang** at Kaifeng 開封 (in Henan)
907–925	Former Shu 前蜀
907–951	Chu 楚
907–978	Wuyue 吳越
909–945	Min 閩
917–971	Southern Han 南漢
923–936	**Later Tang** with capital at Luoyang (from 924)
924–963	Jingnan 荊南
925	Later Tang conquers Former Shu (in Sichuan).
934–965	Later Shu
936–947	**Later Jin** dynasty with Khitan-supported Shi Jingtang 石敬瑭 as emperor. Shi and Khitan conquer Later Tang.
937–975	Southern Tang

945	Southern Tang conquers Min.
947–951	**Later Han** at Kaifeng. Founder Liu Zhiyuan 劉知遠 assumed the throne at Taiyuan first.
947	Later Jin falls under attack by Khitan (early 947). Khitan renamed Liao. Liao troops plunder Central Plains cities.
951–960	**Later Zhou** dynasty at Kaifeng. Southern Tang annexes Chu.
951–979	Northern Han
954	Battle of Gaoping 高平 at which the Later Zhou trounced the joint forces of the Northern Han and Liao (Khitan).
960	**Northern Song** replaces Later Zhou
963	Jingnan conquered by Song.
965	Later Shu conquered by Song.
971	Southern Han conquered by Song.
975	Southern Tang conquered by Song.
978	Wuyue conquered by Song.
979	Northern Han conquered by Song.

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