

TANG DYNASTY

The Tang Dynasty experienced a long Golden Age and saw China at perhaps its height in terms of political power. It experienced only minor wars from its neighbors—who mostly looked to China as leadership. The Tang army was also massive—numbering over a million soldiers for most of its existence.

The Tang's collapse came from inside and took over a century. It began with the rebellion of one of its most prominent Generals, An Lushan. The Rebellion, called the An Lushan or An-Shi Rebellion lasted for 7 years and may have resulted in millions of deaths. Although the Tang were victorious against the rebellion, they had to sacrifice much to prevail. They had to promote corrupt but powerful warlords and they had to pardon rebels. They had to abandon their western provinces.

The government that survived was a shadow of its former self. Often, the emperor was little more than a puppet of the corrupt generals that had been placed into power as a result of the war. The people knew this and so the prestige of the emperor and the central government declined. People increasingly ignored the emperor and a new phrase gained prominence “Heaven is high and the Emperor is far away.”

Economic struggles further weakened the Empire. Massive debts from the rebellion led to heavy taxes, which in turn led to desperate times for the poor while the rich found ways to avoid paying taxes. A series of natural disasters in the 9th century—an earthquake and several draught and flood-induced famine years—increased these woes even more. The puppet emperors did not respond well and numerous rebellions sprung up against the tyranny of the emperor.

The largest—the Huang Chao Rebellion of 864—took 10 years to bring to an end. Like the An Lushan Rebellion, the Huang Chao Rebellion was beaten but the central government never recovered from the strain. Crippled by debt and a loss of faith amongst its people, the Tang Dynasty's final decades were marked by an almost total loss of central authority.

The dynasty ended in 907 when a former bandit who had been made a general poisoned the emperor and announced a new dynasty called the Later Liang Dynasty. This new dynasty did not have the faith of the people and so rather than creating a new empire, the provinces mostly denounced the emperor and formed their own kingdoms. The Later Liang would be replaced by 4 more dynasties in 55 years. This became the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period.

Why did the Tang not have problems from their neighbors?

What did the empire do to solve the An Lushan Rebellion that would be a problem later?

What other problems faced the Tang Dynasty?

Describe the process by which the dynasty finally ended?

What was the moment that the Tang was doomed to fail? Why?

SONG DYNASTY

The Song Dynasty reunited most of China after the 5 Dynasties and 10 Kingdoms period and restored the people's faith in the emperor. However, the Song Dynasty never experienced the same dominance as the Tang had. The Song were constantly being challenged by its non-Chinese neighbors as well as the last remnants of Non-Song Chinese kingdoms that had formed into the competing Liao Dynasty.

The Song ruled over 3 centuries of economic development and population explosion. However, these centuries were marred by war after war. What is worse—the Song Dynasty intentionally kept its army far from power. As a result, the army was always fairly weak compared to previous dynasties. This became a problem when the Song Dynasty attempted to reconquer the Liao Dynasty of the north. They had to ally with a tribe of “barbarians” called the Jurchens. The Song performed very poorly in the war and the Jurchens did most of the actual work.

The Liao were conquered but that very same year, 1125, the Jurchens turned against the Song. The Song were taken by surprise and their army again failed to impress. The Song capital city was conquered and most of the imperial family taken as slaves. A distant relative declared himself the new emperor and retreated to the south. He was able to rebuild the army and keep the Jurchens from conquering the South of China but the northern provinces were lost.

However, the Jurchens would not be the fall of the Song. The Song Emperors vastly increased the strength of their army after the wars. The end would come from yet another group of northern “Barbarians” called the Mongols. Under Genghis Khan, the Mongols were transformed from a loose collaboration of tribes into the most powerful army in the world. The Mongols forged an Empire that stretched across all of Asia, the second largest empire in history. The Mongols hated the Chinese and wanted to put them under Mongol Control.

To the Song Dynasty's credit, they were able to fight off the Mongols for 40 years—mostly because of their large army and innovative use of gunpowder weapons. They outlasted Genghis Khans—history's greatest conqueror. However, they eventually succumbed to Genghis's successors—who mostly hired Northern Chinese armies to fight the Song's Southern Chinese armies. The Mongol conquest of China was brutal—tens of millions are believed to have been murdered. After this, the Mongol Yuan Dynasty would rule China.

How was the Song Dynasty different from the Tang?

Why did the Song allow their army to grow weak?

What happened between the Song and Jurchen armies?

Who were the Mongols?

Describe how the Song managed to resist the Mongols.

Why didn't the resistance work?

How successful was the Song Dynasty? Why?