



◀ Gates in China's walled Forbidden City have been opened to welcome visitors.

# China's Contacts with the Outside World

## 19.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, you learned about Chinese scientific and technological advances. In this chapter, you will learn about China's **foreign contacts**. You'll focus on three dynasties: the Tang dynasty (618–907), the Mongol or Yuan dynasty (1279–1368), and the Ming dynasty (1368–1644).

At times, the Chinese welcomed foreign contacts. Great **cultural exchange** resulted as new ideas and products flowed into and out of China.

In the seventh century, for example, a Chinese monk named Xuan Zang traveled to India. He brought back thousands of Buddhist scriptures. The Chinese honored him for making Buddhism widely known. Although it was foreign in origin, Buddhism became very popular in China.

Many Chinese, however, resented foreign influence. Less than two centuries after Xuan Zang's trip to India, one scholar-official harshly criticized Buddhism. "Buddha," he said, "was a man of the barbarians who did not speak the language of China and wore clothes of a different fashion. His sayings did not concern the ways of our ancient kings, nor did his manner of dress conform to their laws." At times, such feelings led rulers to try to limit the influence of foreigners.

In this chapter, you will learn how the Chinese both welcomed and rejected foreign contacts. You'll find out how cultural exchange affected China. You will also discover how later Ming emperors tried to close China's doors to foreign influence.



Reject Foreign Contact

Welcome Foreign Contact

Use this spectrum as a graphic organizer to help you understand and analyze China's foreign policy during the Tang, Yuan, and Ming dynasties.

## 19.2 Foreign Contacts Under the Tang Dynasty

During the Tang dynasty (618–907), China welcomed contact with foreigners. Traders and visitors brought new ideas, goods, fashions, and religions to China.

**The Influence of Traders and Visitors** Beginning in the Han dynasty, traders and visitors came to China by a network of trade routes across Central Asia. From Chang'an, China's capital, camel caravans crossed the deserts of Central Asia through oases. The routes followed by the caravans are called the Silk Road, though many goods besides silk were traded.

For a time, travel along the Silk Road became unsafe because of fighting in Central Asia. The Tang made travel safe again by taking control of much of Central Asia. As a result, trade flourished with Central Asian kingdoms, Persia (modern-day Iran), and the Byzantine Empire. Traders also traveled by sea between China and Korea, Japan, Indonesia, and India.

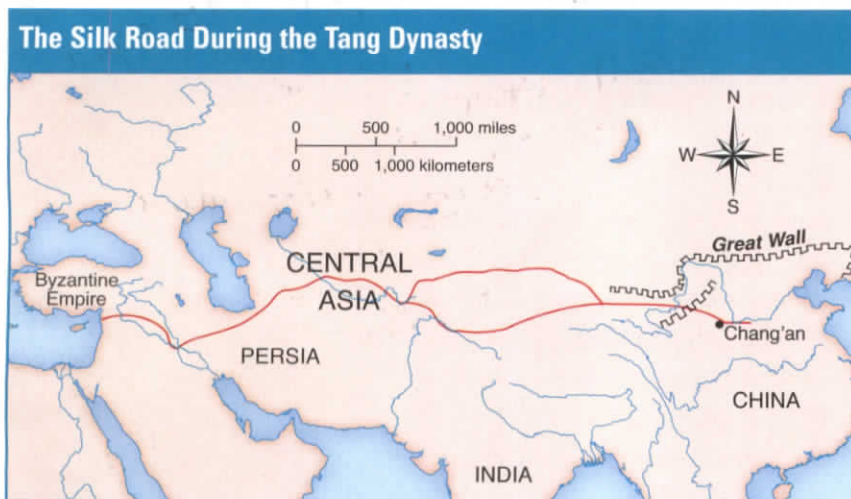
Merchants, missionaries, and other visitors also came to China. Thousands of Arabs, Turks, Persians, Tibetans, Indians, Jews, Koreans, Japanese, and other people lived in seaports and in Chang'an.

All these foreign contacts brought much cultural exchange. Chinese sent their silk, porcelain, paper, iron, and jade along the trade routes. In return, they received ivory, cotton, perfumes, spices, and horses. From India

the Chinese learned to make sugar from sugarcane and wine from grapes. New medicines also came from India.

The Tang Chinese, especially the upper classes, welcomed new products and ideas from foreign cultures. They wore rubies, pearls, and other jewels. They drank from goblets made of glass, a material that had been unknown in China. They ate new foods, such as spinach, garlic, mustard, and peas. They used cloves to treat toothaches. Sitting in chairs from Central Asia instead of on floor cushions became a status symbol. Polo, a Persian sport played on horseback, became the rage among upper-class women and men.

Chinese music was greatly influenced by melodies and musical instruments from India, Persia, and Central Asia. Artists and artisans also copied new foreign styles. Silversmiths, for example, began using



Persian designs. Not all Chinese, however, were happy about this imitation of foreigners.

New religions also entered China. The Tang tolerated foreign religions. Jews, Christians, and Muslims built houses of worship in Chang'an. They could even preach, although they converted few Chinese.

The Indian religion of Buddhism had come to China hundreds of years earlier. Under the Tang, it became a major part of Chinese life. Many Chinese became Buddhists. Buddhist monks came to teach in China, and Chinese pilgrims went to India to study. Buddhist monks and nuns paid no taxes. They ran schools, public baths, hospitals, and lodgings for travelers. Monasteries accumulated great wealth. Buddhism influenced Chinese art by providing new subjects for painting and sculpture. Buddhist festivals became popular holidays.

**Changing Attitudes** Toward the end of the Tang dynasty, foreigners and their beliefs became less welcome in China. The government placed restrictions on foreigners when a people called the Uighurs began attacking China from across the border. In cities, violence broke out against foreign merchants. Many Chinese resented their prosperity.

The wealth of Buddhist monasteries also brought resentment. Some people, it was said, became monks just to avoid paying taxes. In addition, influential Chinese began attacking Buddhism as a foreign religion.

In 843, the Tang government, which needed money, began seizing Buddhist property. Thousands of Buddhist monks and nuns were forced to give up their way of life. Monasteries, shrines, and temples were destroyed. Precious metals from statues were melted down and turned over to the treasury. The persecution of Buddhists lasted only a few years, but it greatly weakened the power of the monasteries.

Despite this distrust of foreigners, the Chinese continued to trade with other lands. By the end of the Tang dynasty, trade was shifting from the Silk Road. A flourishing sea trade developed between China, India, and the coasts of Southeast Asia. Thanks to the compass and improved shipbuilding techniques, overseas trade continued to thrive during the Song dynasty (960–1279).

Foreign visitors, such as those from the west and Korea, were always welcomed in the court.



## 19.3 Foreign Contacts Under the Mongols

As you learned in Chapter 17, the Song dynasty came to an end when the Mongols conquered China. Recall that the Mongol leader Kublai Khan became emperor of China in 1279. He called his dynasty the Yuan dynasty. Under the Mongols, foreigners ruled China for nearly 100 years.

The vast Mongol empire stretched clear across Asia. Travel along the Silk Road became very safe, since the entire region was now under one government's control. The Mongols also developed a far-reaching **maritime** trade. Travel and trade expanded as never before, and more and more foreigners came to China.

**Thriving Trade and Cultural Exchange** By welcoming traders and other foreigners, the Mongols encouraged cultural exchange. The Mongols respected merchants and actively promoted trade. They set up stations along the Silk Road every 20 miles, where traders could find food and a place to sleep. Muslim merchant associations managed the Silk Road trade. They traded Chinese silk and porcelain for medicines, perfumes, and ivory.

Some of the foreign visitors who traveled the Silk Road from Europe to China were Christian missionaries. They wanted to convert the Chinese to Christianity. They also wanted Kublai Khan to form an

alliance between Europeans and Mongols against the Muslims. Both goals failed. Still, Christian missionaries did make some converts, and they helped bring new ideas to China.

Sea trade also flourished under the Mongols. Ships from India brought diamonds and pearls. Ginger, cotton, and muslin came from Ceylon. From Java came black pepper, white walnuts, and cloves.

Many foreigners who came to China brought special skills. Muslim architects, for example, built the Mongol capital of Dadu, today's Beijing. Persians brought their advanced knowledge of astronomy, mathematics, medicine, and water management. Jamal al-Din, a Persian astronomer, introduced new and better astronomical

**maritime** relating to the sea

Kublai Khan and other Mongol officials enjoyed hunting.



instruments. He also helped to develop a new calendar and set up an **observatory**. Muslim and Persian doctors established new hospitals.

Foreign contacts also allowed skills and information from China to spread to other parts of the world. Europeans, for example, learned about the Chinese inventions of gunpowder and printing.

**The Role of Foreigners in China** Foreigners enjoyed high status under the Mongols. Foreign merchants were given special privileges. Unlike Chinese merchants, they could travel freely and didn't have to pay taxes. They also spoke foreign languages, which the Chinese were forbidden to learn.

Kublai Khan appointed many visiting foreigners to official positions in his government. The most famous was Marco Polo, the young Italian you met in Chapter 17.

Polo first traveled to China as a teenager with his father and uncle, who were merchants from Venice. Their route took them across Persia and along the southern branch of the Silk Road. All along the way, Marco Polo paid attention to the interesting new things he saw.

After three and a half years and over 5,000 miles, the Polos reached the court of Kublai Khan. The khan liked Marco and enjoyed his accounts of his travels. As emperor of China, he sent Marco on inspection tours around China.

Although Marco Polo didn't read or write Chinese, he observed carefully. He traveled around China for about 17 years before beginning his journey home. When he returned to Italy, he dictated an account of his experiences to a writer who wrote a book about him. The tale of Polo's travels gave Europeans firsthand knowledge of China and further stimulated interest in trade.

Under Kublai Khan, life was more pleasant for Mongols and foreigners like Marco Polo than it was for the native Chinese. The Chinese were at the bottom of the social order. They resented the restrictions placed on them. They also disliked being ruled by foreigners, especially since a few foreign government officials were harsh and dishonest. The Chinese hated a Muslim finance minister named Ahmed so much that they assassinated him. The resentment that built up under Mongol rule helped make the Chinese suspicious of further contact with foreigners.

**observatory** a building designed for observing the stars and planets

**Route of Marco Polo, 1271–1295**



Marco Polo followed a land route to reach China. He returned home by sea.

## 19.4 Foreign Contacts Under the Ming Dynasty

The Chinese eventually rebelled against the Mongols. From 1368 to 1644, the Ming dynasty ruled China. Although foreign contacts continued, later Ming rulers tried to isolate China from foreign influences.

**Tributaries and Maritime Expeditions** The Ming saw China as the oldest, largest, most civilized, and most important country in the world. Other nations, they felt, should acknowledge China's superiority by paying tribute.

Under the Ming, many other countries were China's **tributaries**. The Chinese emperors acknowledged their rulers, provided military help, and allowed them to trade with China. When ambassadors from the tributaries visited China, they had to *kowtow* before the emperor. This meant they had to kneel three times and touch their heads to the floor three times each time they knelt.

In return for bringing tribute, the ambassadors were given valuable gifts. They were also allowed to buy and sell goods at official markets. These exchanges benefited the foreigners even more than the Chinese.

Emperor Chengzu, who came into power in 1402, wanted more tributaries. He gave a trusted adviser, Zheng He, the title "Admiral of the Western Seas" and told him to sail to "the countries beyond the horizon...all the way to the end of the earth." Zheng He was to parade China's power, give gifts, and collect tribute.

In 1405, Zheng He set off with a fleet of more than 300 ships. The fleet was the greatest in the world. It carried more than 27,000 men. They included sailors, soldiers, officials, translators, merchants, and doctors. To feed this enormous force, ships carried huge loads of rice and other food. They had tubs of earth for growing vegetables and fruit on board. Large watertight compartments were converted into aquariums that held fresh fish for the crew.

The largest ships had 4 decks, 9 masts with 12 sails, and 12 watertight compartments. Cabins were provided so that merchants on long trading voyages could bring their wives.

Zheng He made seven expeditions between 1405 and 1433. At first, he traveled only as far as India. Later he reached the Persian Gulf and even sailed to ports along the east coast of Africa. Thirty or more of the places he visited became tributaries of China.

**tributary** a ruler or country that pays tribute to a conqueror

The Chinese had never seen a giraffe before Zheng He brought one back to China.



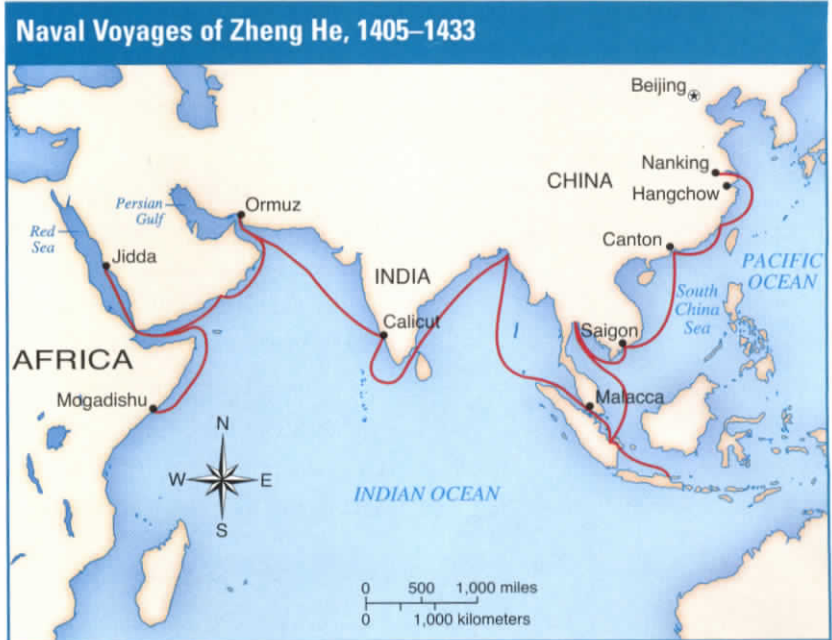
The admiral's ships returned laden with precious gifts. From India they brought sashes made of gold thread and decorated with pearls and gems. They also brought back medicinal herbs, dyes, spices, gems, pearls, and ivory. There were even exotic animals such as zebras, ostriches, lions, leopards, and giraffes.

**Turning Inward** When Zheng He died, in about 1434, a new emperor was on the throne. The government needed money to fight off attempted Mongol invasions. Scholar-officials persuaded the emperor to stop the expensive expeditions.

From that time on, the dynasty turned inward. Ming rulers wanted to protect their people from foreign influences, so they forbade travel outside China. All contact with foreigners had to be approved by the government.

The Ming and its scholar-officials wanted a strongly unified state based on a single ruler and traditional values. The huge and complex government bureaucracy was staffed by scholar-officials chosen by examinations. The outlook of the scholars dominated Chinese thought and government into the 20th century.

The Ming desire for uniformity made it difficult for the government to change in response to new conditions. In the end, the government became too rigid to adapt. Peasant rebellions helped to bring down the government in 1644, ending the Ming dynasty.



Zheng He made seven voyages of exploration. He eventually reached Africa.

## 19.5 Chapter Summary

At various times, China welcomed or rejected foreign contacts. During the Tang dynasty, ideas and goods from other places flowed into China. Buddhism became very popular. Eventually, however, many Chinese turned against Buddhism and other foreign influences.

China's Mongol rulers promoted trade and gave foreigners important positions in the government. Cultural exchange flourished. At the same time, the Chinese resented their foreign rulers. Their distrust lasted long after Mongol rule ended.

Under the early Ming, China collected tribute from other lands and undertook great maritime expeditions. Later Ming emperors, however, tried to close off China from foreign influence.

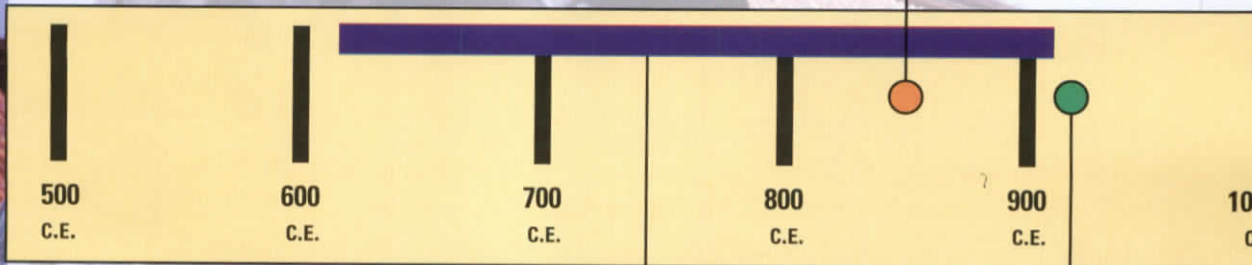
This chapter concludes your study of China. In the next unit, you will learn about China's neighbor to the east, Japan.



## Imperial China Timeline

**About 850**

Tang dynasty records a formula for gunpowder.



**618 – 907**

Buddhist religion expands under the Tang dynasty.



**920**

First written record of foot binding, which reduces the status of women.

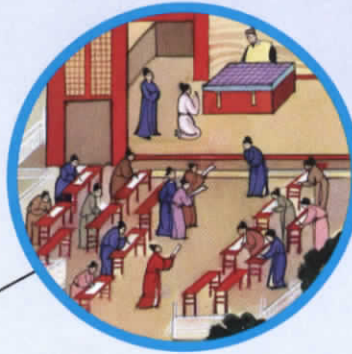
**About 1050**

Movable type is invented in China.



**1065**

Song dynasty begins regular civil service exams.



**1405 – 1433**

Zheng He's voyages gain new tributary states for China.