

LINKS TO ART

Art and Meditation

Traditionally, most Chinese paintings are landscapes painted on silk. Often the painter includes water, rocks, and plants. Usually, there are few signs of human life. The Chinese believed that such scenes, painted well, helped the painter and the viewer meditate, or focus, on important forces in the natural world. These forces—light and darkness, wind and water—were believed to hold the natural world together.

▼ Most goods carried along the Silk Road were small, costly items. These included tea, pepper, jade, ivory, and porcelain—like the goose shown below.



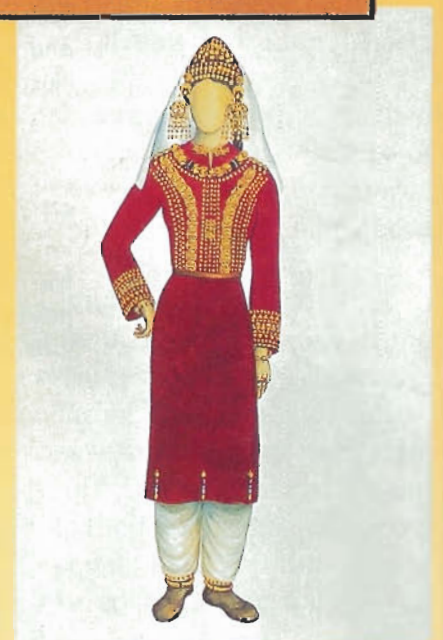
The Chinese also discovered the use of tea. At first, tea was used as a medicine. Later, during the Tang dynasty, it became the custom to drink tea as a beverage. The custom spread from China to Japan and other countries. Soon tea became a major crop. Every year, much of it was shipped out of the country for sale.

Trade Routes: The Silk Road and the Grand Canal

Chinese silk, porcelain, tea, and other products traveled across roads and waterways to other countries in Asia and Europe. One important trade route was the Silk Road, which stretched all the way from China to the Mediterranean Sea. Camels, horses, and donkeys carried goods along the 4,000-mile (6,436-km) Silk Road. The Silk Road was not one long road. It was really many roads that connected with one another. Long stretches of the route crossed mountains and deserts. Travel was often difficult and dangerous, even though rest stations were built along the road. A Chinese historian described a trip through the huge Gobi Desert:

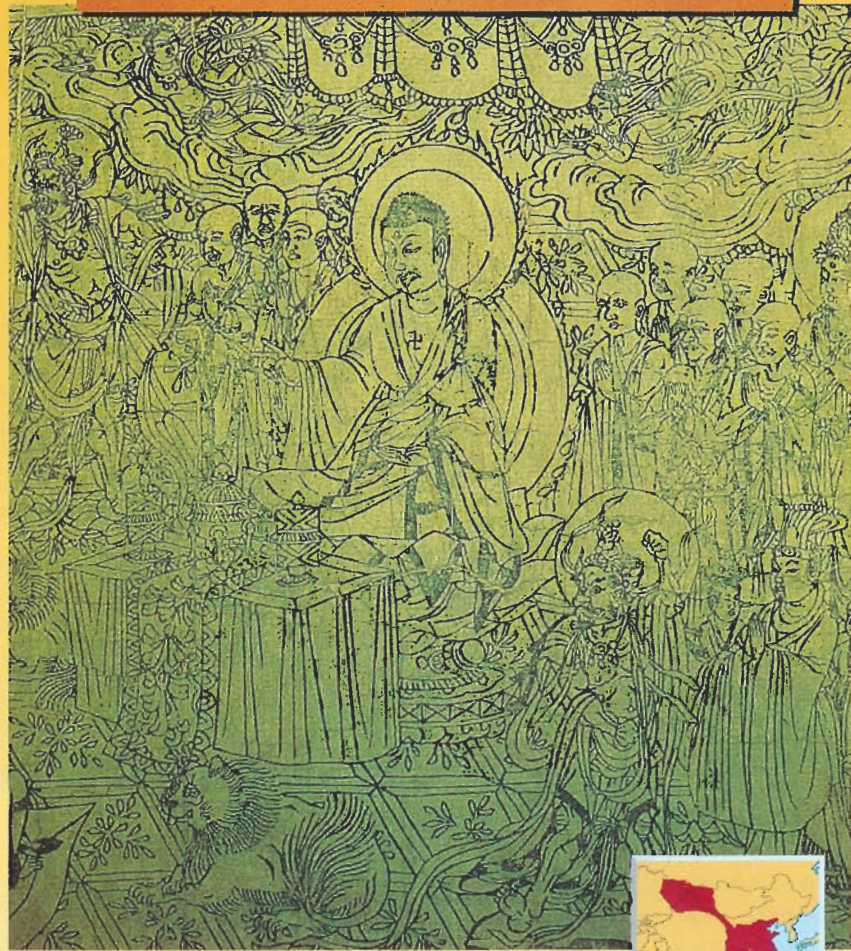
“You see nothing in any direction but the sky and the sands, without the slightest trace of a road; and travelers find nothing to guide them but the bones of men and beasts.”

Travelers on the Silk Road



What might travelers on the Silk Road have worn? These paintings are reconstructions of clothing found in graves along the Silk Road in Central Asia. The outfits are of fine cloth decorated with gold.

The World's Oldest Book



This illustration is found in the *Diamond Sutra*, the world's oldest surviving book. It was printed in A.D. 868 from six carved wooden blocks. The book discusses various features of the Buddhist religion.

Critical Thinking What impact did the development of printing have on life in China?

Large amounts of grain and manufactured goods were also moved along a great network of rivers and canals in China. The Grand Canal connected the Huang He (HWAHNG huh) and Chang Jiang (chahng jee AHNG). Work on the canal began in the 500s B.C. and continued for hundreds of years. The canal helped join northern and southern China. Stretching for more than 1,000 miles, the Grand Canal is still the longest canal ever built.

Printing Spreads Knowledge

During the golden ages, the Chinese developed trade products and trade routes that helped make their country rich. Chinese inventions of the period also had a great impact on their culture. The most important invention was a method of printing.

Before the invention of printing, all books were copied by hand. As a result, the number of books available was very small. The Chinese began printing in the A.D. 500s. They used blocks of wood on which they carved the characters of an entire page. Then they brushed ink over the wooden page. Finally, they laid a piece of paper over the block to make a print. Carving the pages of a book took a long time. But after the woodblocks were made, printers could make many copies of the book.

Around 1045, a Chinese printer named Bi Sheng (bee shehng) developed another method of printing using **movable type**. In this kind of printing, each character or piece of type is a separate piece. The pieces can be moved and reused. Bi Sheng made many separate characters out of clay. Then he put together the characters he needed to make the pages of a book. But the Chinese language has thousands of different characters. Most printers found woodblock printing easier and faster than the use of movable type.



Visualize Visualize yourself copying a whole book by hand. How long do you think it would take you?

Inventions of the Tang and Song Dynasties

The Tang and Song dynasties were a golden age for science and technology. Some developments took hundreds of years to spread to other parts of the world. The use of gunpowder and fireworks (below), for example, did not reach Europe until the late 1300s.



Invention	Date	Description
Block Printing	750	Printers carved words onto a large wooden block. They inked the block, then pressed paper onto it to transfer the print. Many copies of the same page could be made quickly.
Gunpowder	850	The Chinese first used gunpowder to make fireworks. By about 1,000, however, they were making explosives to be used in warfare.
Smallpox Vaccine	900s	To stop the spread of smallpox, healthy people were given tiny doses of the disease. This helped them build an immunity to smallpox.
Compass	990	Sailors used the magnetic compass to navigate.
Movable Type	1030	Printers carved individual characters on small blocks. They combined the blocks to form a page. The same blocks could be reused to produce different pieces of writing.

The invention of printing helped spread knowledge throughout China. Books were sold in marketplaces. Many people learned how to read and write. One Song emperor wrote a poem telling about the importance of books:

“**T**o enrich your family, no need to buy good land: Books hold a thousand measures of grain. For an easy life, no need to build a mansion: In books are found houses of gold.”

SECTION 1 REVIEW

- 1. Define** (a) dynasty, (b) merit system, (c) porcelain, (d) movable type.
- 2. Identify** (a) Tang Taizong, (b) Confucius, (c) Silk Road, (d) Grand Canal.

- 3.** What impact did the ideas of Confucius have on society during China’s golden ages?
- 4.** Identify the important accomplishments of the Tang and Song dynasties.

Critical Thinking

- 5. Making Comparisons**
In what ways were China’s golden ages like the present times in the United States?

Activity

- 6. Writing to Learn** The invention of printing made books available to many people. What would your life be like without books? Write a journal entry expressing your thoughts.