

## The Song Dynasty: Technology, Commerce, and Prosperity

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Song dynasty founder, Emperor Taizu. Source: *Wikipedia* at <https://tinyurl.com/y8fl8gvo>.

This module was developed and utilized for a seventh-grade world history and geography class. It is designed to teach the Tennessee state social studies standard 7.03—"Summarize agricultural, commercial, and technological developments during the Song dynasties, and describe the role of Confucianism during the Song." However, the module is suitable elsewhere for a variety of social studies classes (grades sixth through ninth) that include Chinese history.

**Estimated module length:** Approximately three fifty-five-minute classes

### Overview

The reorganization of China under the Song dynasty (960–1279 CE) set the stage for economic growth that propelled Song China into becoming the richest country in the world during the early part of the eleventh century. Despite the fact that the dynasty lost northern China to non-Chinese invaders, prosperity continued during the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279 CE). Technological advancements were significant and helped change China and the world. Just a few of these advancements included improvements in agriculture, development of moveable type, uses for gunpowder, invention of a mechanical clock, superior shipbuilding, the use of paper money, compass navigation, and porcelain production. Technological advancements, domestic and international trade, and effective government influenced and advanced Chinese society, resulting in a population explosion during the Song dynasty.

This module is designed to be implemented during the teaching of an imperial China or East Asia unit.

### **Objectives**

Students will:

Develop contextual understanding of the Song dynasty through contrasting the Song with the Tang, another earlier great earlier dynasty.

Demonstrate an understanding of the influences of Song dynasty technologies, commerce, and trade on Chinese and world history in the tenth through thirteenth centuries.

Investigate individual technological innovations during the Song dynasty.

Design and present multimedia presentations describing the influence and importance of technologies created during the Song dynasty.

Interpret and explain the cumulative effects and influences Song dynasty advancements made on China and the world we live in today.

### **Prerequisite knowledge**

Before beginning this module, students should be able to locate China on a map and know the two major rivers (the Yellow River in northern China and the Yangtze in the south), along with the location of the Grand Canal. They should be able to define the following terms: emperor, dynasty, technology, and commerce. Because Confucius's ideas were particularly important in Song government, an understanding of some of Confucius's ideas would be helpful, but are not required.

### **Module introduction**

*The worksheets and other materials for this module appear in both the module narrative and at the end of the module for the convenience of teachers wishing to use all or part of these digital materials.*

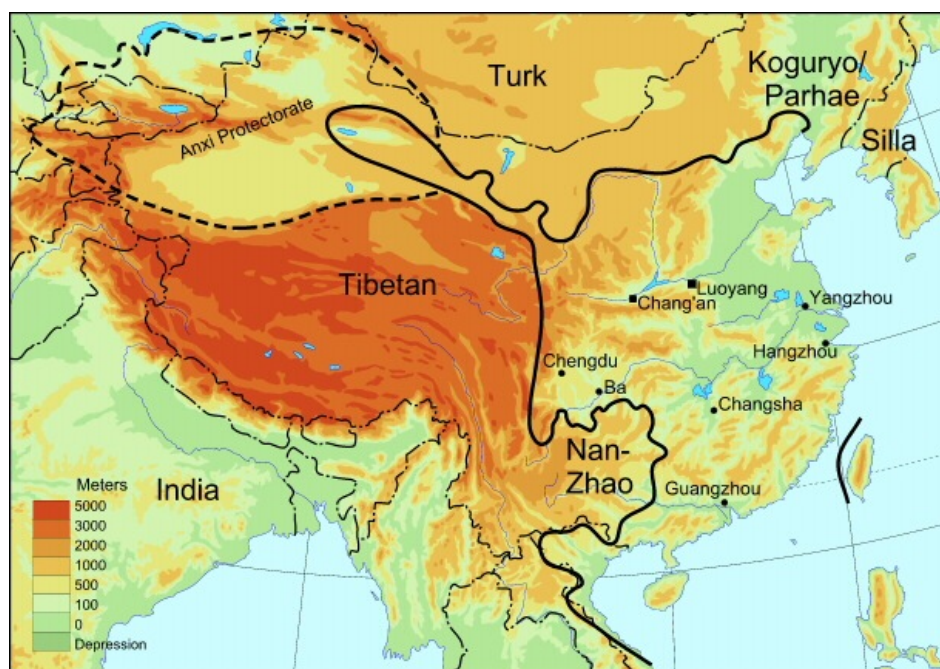
Lesson strategies

Introduction: Song dynasty technologies

Emperor Taizu (Zhao Kuangyin) was a military general who conquered numerous Chinese territories, in effect reunifying China. This resulted in ending the unstable Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms periods, bringing about the Song dynasty. The Song dynasty's land area was significantly smaller than the previous Tang dynasty due to outside influences, such as the Manchurians and Liao. The Song military was weak compared to other dynasties, thus their focus became securing areas of central China. Leaders decided to establish Kaifeng as their capital rather than Chang'an. This decision was a reflection of the dynasty's circumstances and goals. The Grand Canal made Kaifeng and later Hangzhou as northern, and later southern, Song capitals the perfect match for these goals. The Song's focus was building wealth and social solidarity. Whereas

Buddhism was a religious focus during the Tang and early Song dynasties, a resurgence of Confucian ideas in the form of neo-Confucianism occurred during the Song dynasty.

The first reading in this module reviews the power and influence the Tang dynasty had during its existence. Students are asked to make connections with the Tang dynasty's legacy and the Song dynasty's goals. The warmup reading may be given as a homework assignment prior to Class No. 1.



Tang dynasty China. Source: *University of Washington* at <https://tinyurl.com/y722wefj>.

*Class No. 1*

Estimated time: fifty minutes

*Warmup*

Students should read or should have already read as a homework assignment [the following short reading](#). This reading (also below), [based upon a longer article by University of Wisconsin Professor Craig Lockard](#), has been abridged and modified for middle school students.

Tang civilization and the Chinese centuries

Recently, a few nations have been nicknamed superpowers because the countries' governments, militaries, and economic powers affect not just the lives of people who live in the superpower, but many people in other parts of the world. Often, artists, authors, and performers in superpowers also touch the lives of many people throughout the world. Today, the U.S. is a superpower, and China is considered a rising superpower. Even though the nickname is new, powerful empires early in world history could have been named superpowers. China was the world's leading superpower well over 1,000 years ago. Although there were periods of time where civil war weakened China, from approximately 600 to 1500 CE, China was the largest, strongest, and most

populated country in Europe or Asia. China's success during the Tang dynasty (618–907) was particularly impressive. In fact, many historians regard the Tang as the most famous time in China's long history. The years of the Tang dynasty contained China's greatest successes and helped create a pattern that China would continue throughout the Song and Ming dynasties, and into early modern times. During the Tang period, several cultures, especially Korea and Japan, learned from the more advanced Tang dynasty. During Tang rule, China had its greatest influence on eastern Asia and carried out active trade with cultures of Europe and Asia. For more than 100 years, the Tang Empire stretched deep into Central Asia, and many parts of Chinese culture spread to Korea and Japan. Buddhism grew, linking China to an increasing religious community. Tang China was open and welcoming to people and ideas from many cultures.

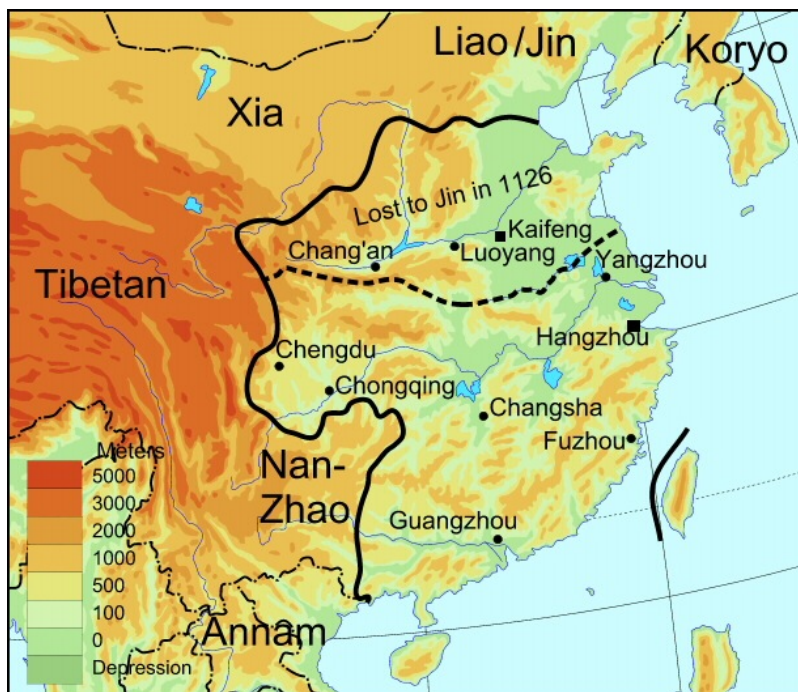
Teachers might also want to use this *BBC* website selection with students who find the level of the first short reading too difficult or who want to learn more about the Tang dynasty: <http://china.mrdonn.org/tang.html>.

After students read the modified article introduction, pose the question: How did the Tang dynasty set the stage for advancements made during the Song dynasties? (estimated time, ten minutes)

Next, show students the following six minute, twenty second long *NTD*-produced video, "[Discovering China: The Song Dynasty](#)." Make sure your students understand the following vocabulary and historical terms that appear in the video: prosperity, commercial, Jin dynasty, agricultural, influential.

While students view the video, tell them to list any technological advancements made during the dynasty and discussed in the video. After viewing the video, list the discussed advancements on the board. (estimated time, ten minutes)

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A map of Song dynasty China, showing the approximate borders of the Northern Song in 1100 and indicating the area lost to the non-Han Jin dynasty in 1127. Source: *University of Washington's "A Visual Sourcebook of Chinese Civilization"* project at <https://tinyurl.com/y7jb5t9b>.

This activity will lead the class discussion into the next step of introducing the research media project that is the capstone activity of the module. Students will be responsible for researching and making multimedia presentations on significant Song dynasty technological and commercial innovations:

Pass out [project parameters and rubric worksheets](#). Discuss and explain project instructions and expectations. Answer student questions and then assign or allow random choosing of project topics. It might be beneficial to have students work in pairs. (estimated time, fifteen minutes)

At this point, students should review and begin research on their project topics. The remainder of the class time should be used for research. Student pairs should divide up jobs needed to complete the project. For example, one student might conduct topic research while the other student reviews websites for usable photos and maps. Please refer to the [topic research links](#) to find possible websites for information on topics. These are suggested resource links, but research should not be limited to only these suggested sites. A minimum of two resources should be used in student research and must be noted in the slide presentation at the end. (estimated time, thirty minutes)

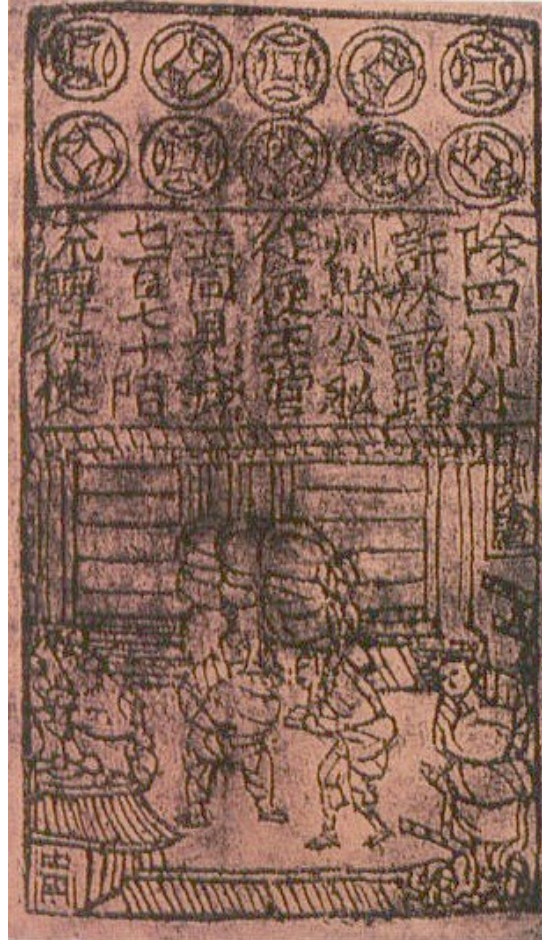
Suggested research topics:

Government printing of paper money  
Agriculture improvements and advancements  
Gunpowder uses  
International land and maritime trade  
Moveable type printing  
Civil service exam use  
Compass use for ship navigation  
Mechanical clock  
Porcelain production  
Architectural advancements  
Technical considerations for students

The individual student's knowledge and experience using the slide presentation program plays a large role in the student's ability to create a proper slide presentation. It also influences the amount of time needed for completion of the activity. Because of the technical nature of the assignment, it might be a good idea to review and discuss proper use of the chosen slide program. It also helps to show a slide example so students can mentally formulate an idea of what is expected. In the field test, a Google Classroom page was set up for students to add to their Google accounts. It was a very efficient way for students to receive the assignment information and forms. It was also a very efficient way for students to turn in their slide presentations, and for the teacher to view and grade the assignments.

If computers are not available, the project can be modified to a nontechnical method such as a poster display presentation rather than a computer slide presentation.

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*Jiaozi*, the world's first paper-printed currency, a Song innovation. Source: *Wikipedia* at <https://tinyurl.com/ytsyqzsa>.

### *Class No. 2*

Estimated time: fifty-five minutes

Begin the second day of research and slide creation by reviewing the main objectives of the project. Discuss expectations and any questions or concerns students may have at this point in the research and slide preparation. Give students the option to use a [graphic organizer](#) to prep research information into slides on a written format. Sometimes, it helps to transfer research information prior to typing and preparing the slides for presentation. (estimated time, five minutes).

All of Class No. 2 should be utilized by students for continued research and project preparation. Slide projects should be completed by the end of Class No. 2. Student groups that finish their projects early should be encouraged to review and proof their presentations. If time allows, they may begin practicing their group presentations. If needed, students may continue work at home if they have access to the internet. (estimated time, fifty minutes).

*Class No. 3*

Estimated time: twenty minutes plus five minute presentations for all students

Project presentation day: Student pairs should present their projects to the class. Presentations should be limited to around five minutes each. As students present their projects, other class members should take notes on each topic.

*Extension activity*

Students will take notes during their classmates' presentations and then prepare an expository written response to the following prompt: In what way did technological advancements made during the Song dynasty influence today's society?

*Culminating activity*

Introduce the following quote from the PowerPoint slide through language similar to this:

Technological developments can make some people poorer. For example, many blacksmiths lost their jobs when automobiles became widely available, and many travel agencies reduced their staffs or went out of business when computers made it cheaper for individuals to book their own airplane flights. However, thus far in world history, most people in societies that rapidly improve technology are much wealthier than societies where this does not happen.

Then, have the entire class read the following quotation from Philip D. Curtin, a historian on the Song dynasty:

*“A Period of Unprecedented Growth”*

*Between ... 960 and ... 1127, China passed through a phase of economic growth that was unprecedented in earlier Chinese history, perhaps in world history up to this time. It depended on a combination of commercialization, urbanization, and industrialization that has led some authorities to compare this period in Chinese history with the development of early modern Europe six centuries later.*

Have students explain the meaning of commercialization, urbanization, and industrialization. Then, ask for a volunteer or volunteers to use part of the last sentence to identify and explain in their own words the evidence in this short quotation that supports the argument that Song China was the richest society in the world.

**References and resources**

[http://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/services/dropoff/china\\_civ\\_temp/week06/pdfs/tangci.pdf](http://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/services/dropoff/china_civ_temp/week06/pdfs/tangci.pdf): Craig Lockard, professor of history at the University of Wisconsin, provides this article, titled “Tang Civilization and the Chinese Centuries.” Teachers are encouraged to read this longer version of the first handout.

<http://www.indiana.edu/~e232/15-Song.pdf>: This is a link to a research paper written by R. Eno from Indiana University's East Asian Languages and Cultures Department, titled “Song Dynasty Culture: Political Crisis and the Great Turn.”

<http://education.asianart.org/explore-resources/background-information/neo-confucianism-tang-618%E2%80%93906-and-song-960%E2%80%931279-dynasties>: This is a link to an educational page from the education section of the Asian Art Museum found in San Francisco,



California. It discusses the neo-Confucian views from the Tang and Song dynasties. The educational section of this museum website has excellent potential resource information.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QO7NHZJ-eE4>: “Discovering China—The Song Dynasty” is a six-minute, twenty-second-long video by New Tang Dynasty (NTD) TV on *YouTube*. Students view this video during Class No. 1 of the module to introduce and summarize the Song dynasty and some of the dynasty’s technological advancements.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/ancient/song-dynasty.html>: The *Public Broadcasting Service* (PBS) website section on the Song dynasty is an excellent site for researching all aspects of the dynasty. It is an excellent site for students to use while researching Song technologies.

<http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/songdynasty-module/index.html>: This site is the best overall resource for students and teachers, as it covers all aspects of the Song dynasty.

<https://www.bcps.org/offices/lis/models/chinahist/song.html>: This web page from the Baltimore County Public School System in Maryland is a resource page with an organized number of links to other websites, including information specifically about just the Song dynasty.

<http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/songdynasty-module/cities-new.html>: This is a GIF that shows maps of both the Northern and Southern Song dynasties, along with the grand canal and major cities. It is an excellent visual comparison.

Source of Class No. 3 “A Period of Unprecedented Growth” quote: *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 109, as quoted in David Northrup, “Globalization and the Great Convergence: Rethinking World History in the Long Term,” *Journal of World History* 16, no. 3 (2005): 258.

Digital Materials for the Module “The Song Dynasty: Technology, Commerce, and Prosperity”

Slide Presentation Graphic Organizer

<https://www.utc.edu/asia-program/docs/modules1/hill/slidepresentationgraphicorganizer.docx>

Song Dynasty Technological & Economic Advancements—Media Presentation Project

<https://www.utc.edu/asia-program/docs/modules1/hill/songdynastyproject.docx>

Tang Civilization and the Chinese Centuries

<https://www.utc.edu/asia-program/docs/modules1/hill/tangcivilizationandthechinese centuries.docx>

Technology List with Resource Information Links

<https://www.utc.edu/asia-program/docs/modules1/hill/technologylistwithresourceinformationlinks.docx>