Week 3
History and Philosophy of China
The Shaman, I Ching & philosophers that followed and
introduction of Buddhism in China through Song Dynasty
up to Mongol victory

A Chinese funerary urn (hunping) in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Item no. 1992.165.21. According to the label, such urns were characteristic of the areas south of the Yangtze (south Jiangsu / northern Zhejiang) 250-300 AD. The row of seating Buddha's is one of the earliest Buddhist images in China.
The Qin and Unification of China

The Qin Dynasty was seen as the first imperial dynasty of China, lasting from 221 to 206 BC. The dynasty was formed after the conquest of the six other states by the state of Qin, and its founding emperor was known as Qin Shi Huang, the First Emperor of Qin. The Qin state derived its name from its heartland of Qin, in modern-day Gansu and Shaanxi. The strength of the Qin state was greatly increased by the legalist reforms of Shang Yang in the 4th century BC, during the Warring States period. In the mid and late third century BC, the Qin accomplished a series of swift conquests, first ending the powerless Zhou Dynasty, and eventually conquering the remaining six states of the major states to gain control over the whole of China, resulting in a unified China.

Despite its military strength, the Qin Dynasty did not last long. When the first emperor died in 210 BC, his son was placed on the throne by two of the previous emperor's advisers in an attempt to influence and control the administration of the entire dynasty through him. The advisors squabbled among themselves, however, which resulted in both their deaths and that of the second Qin emperor. Popular revolt broke out a few years later, and the weakened empire soon fell to a Chu lieutenant, who went on to found the Han Dynasty. Despite its rapid end, the Qin Dynasty influenced future Chinese empires, particularly the Han, and the name for China is thought to be derived from it.
Beginnings of a Central Government

During its reign over China, the Qin Dynasty achieved increased trade, improved agriculture, and military protection. This was due to the abolition of landowning lords, to whom peasants had formerly held allegiance. The central government now had direct control of the masses, giving it access to a much larger workforce. This allowed for the construction of ambitious projects, such as a wall on the northern border, now known as the Great Wall of China. The Qin Dynasty also introduced several reforms: currency, weights and measures were standardized, and a better system of writing was established. An attempt to purge all traces of the old dynasties led to the infamous burning of books and burying of scholars incident, which has been criticized greatly by subsequent scholars. The Qin's military was also revolutionary in that it used the most recently developed weaponry, transportation, and tactics, though the government was heavy-handed and bureaucratic.

The book burning and death of competing “scholars” was only the first attempt to control the Thoughts of the masses for generations to follow.
Qin Shi Huang – The First Emperor of China

Qin Shi Huang (260–210 BC) is the modern Chinese name of King Zheng of Qin (246–221 BC), who ended the Warring States period by completing the conquest of China in 221 BC. Rather than maintain the title of king borne by the Shang and Zhou rulers, he ruled as the First Emperor of the Qin dynasty from 220 to 210 BC. The title would continue to be borne by Chinese rulers for the next two millennia. During his reign, his generals greatly expanded the size of the Chinese state: campaigns south of Chu permanently added the Yue lands of Hunan and Guangdong to the Chinese cultural orbit; campaigns in Central Asia. Qin Shi Huang also worked with his minister Li Si to enact major economic and politic reforms aimed at the standardization of the diverse practices of the earlier Chinese states.

It was this process that also led to the banning and burning of many books and the execution of many scholars. His public works projects included the unification of diverse state walls into a single Great Wall of China and a massive new national road system, as well as the city-sized mausoleum guarded by the life-sized Terracotta Army. He ruled until his death, which occurred in 210 BC despite an infamous search for an elixir of immortality.
The Han  the beginnings of Imperial China

In many ways the Han period of China that followed the Chin, was similar to the Zhou that followed the Shang, in that it was responsible for bringing order out of chaos. In doing so, the Han decided what they should recover and keep following the book burning and legalist extremism of the Qin Dynasty. Restoring order was the rule of the day. .. and that’s what they did.

The **Han Dynasty** (206 BC – 220 AD) was an imperial dynasty of China, preceded by the Qin Dynasty (221–207 BC) and succeeded by the Three Kingdoms (220–280 AD). It was founded by the rebel leader Liu Bang, known posthumously as Emperor Gaozu of Han. It was briefly interrupted by the Xin Dynasty (9–23 AD) of the former regent Wang Mang. This division separates the Han into two periods: the Western Han (206 BC – 9 AD) and Eastern Han (25–220 AD).

Spanning over four centuries, the period of the Han Dynasty is considered a golden age in Chinese history. To this day, China's majority ethnic group refers to itself as the "Han people" and the Chinese script is referred to as "Han characters. The Han Empire was divided into areas directly controlled by the central government and semi-autonomous kingdoms.
Beginning of the Imperial Examinations in Han Dynasty

From the time of the Han Dynasty (206 BC to AD 220) until the implementation of the imperial examination system, most appointments in the imperial bureaucracy were based on recommendations from prominent aristocrats and local officials and recommended individuals of predominantly aristocratic rank. Emperor Wu of Han (141 - 87 BC) started an early form of the imperial examinations in which local officials would select candidates to take part in an examination of the Confucian classics, from which he would select officials to serve by his side.

While connections and recommendations remained much more meaningful than the exams in terms of advancing people to higher positions, the initiation of the examination system by emperor Wu had a cultural significance, as the state determined what the most important Confucianist and Taoist texts were, while at the same time homogenizing, or combining all other philosophy into one manageable entity.

From the beginning of the Han there were two parallel tracts. First, was the status quo, or governing class, who wanted the Imperial Examination process to continue to guide the upper class they would need to control and rule China, second was the lessening influence of shamanism and the rising dominance of religious Taoism and the fangshi.
*Records of the Grand Historian* was written from 109 to 91 BC, was the magnum opus of Sima Qian, in which he recounted Chinese history from the time of the Yellow Emperor until his own time. (The Yellow Emperor, traditionally dated around 2600 BC, is the first ruler whom Sima Qian considered sufficiently established as historical to appear in the Records.) The Annals of Sima Qian are 12 volumes. They are Royal biographies in strict annalistic form that offer an overview of the most important events, especially from the time of the Zhou dynasty to that of the emperor of the Han dynasty.

The Chinese historical form of Chinese dynastic history was codified by Ban Gu's *Book of Han*, but historians regard Sima Qian's work as their model, which stands as the "official format" of the history of China. He more than anyone turned myth into reality. In doing so he became as or more important than many he documented.
The shaman, I Ching, Tao, and Chuang Tzu’s Perfected Man

It would be during this time of the early Han that the first major commentaries of the *I Ching* were written with an emphasis being that change is the order of reality, nature and the universe. The culmination of shamanistic beliefs tied to Taoism met a great need for assurance of individual continuation after death. It became important that each person should be assured of his relationship with the gods, or God, both in this world and the afterlife.

What had historically been the responsibility of the shaman became the amalgamation of the *I Ching*, what was considered Taoism through writings of Lao Tzu, and especially Chuang Tzu and his Perfected Man, and thousands of years of shamanistic teachings all coalescing at this time. Whereas before the shaman was responsible and functioned as the “go between” between the individual, communities and the spiritual world, it was now during the early Han period that it became clear that each person, the individual, should have some means of control or ability to ward off the more malignant, or negative, spiritual forces. This led to the philosophers being deified as examples of godlike attributes that all should follow.
The veneration of personalities and the Great Unity

This idea that divination and of geomancy (the art or practice of making predictions based on patterns) which reflects and epitomizes the *I Ching*, led to the focus on what would later become feng shui. This fed a deep need and longing to know and be in touch with the spiritual world. This is why Chuang Tzu’s role was so important. His *Perfected Man* illustrated man as the connection point between heaven and earth and represented an achievable goal for ordinary people. It was at this time that notions of the divine, of natural forces, became prevalent throughout China and overreaching personalities like Lao and Chuang Tzu, and especially Confucius, became personified and venerated.

By the end of the 1st century BC Confucius was being worshipped with the reverence of a God with sacrifices being made to him – Kung. At the same time Lao Tzu and the Yellow Emperor were being worshipped as the manifestation of Tao. Taoism at this time was known as Huang-Lao. Important at this time is noting that three cosmic entities were being worshipped. Lao Tzu, the Yellow Emperor and a deity known as T’ai I – meaning the *Great Unity* were closely followed.

The Great Unity was the philosophers’ term for the ultimate understanding of the Tao as the foundation, origin and pre-origin of all existence.
The Traditional Shaman becomes the Taoist Fangshi

Fangshi represented the combining of a new Taoist religious practice that transformed it from philosophy to religion with a belief in a hierarchy of spirits and the practice of honoring them with offerings that were similar to those promoted under Confucianism.

Historical texts document that during the late Warring States period (475-221 BC), fangshi originated in northeastern China and specialized in xian "immortality and transcendence" techniques of the shaman. During the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC) and Han Dynasty(206 BC-220 AD) they were patronized by emperors who sought the elixir of immortality. By the middle of the Six Dynasties Period (220-569 AD), their role had declined and their techniques had been adapted into Taoist religion and traditional Chinese medicine and culture.

The fangshi were a class of traveling Taoist healers/magicians who emerged from the previous Warring States period. Once China was unified, they took their various skills - in herbal medicine, acupuncture, Taoist qigong, divination and shamanistic rituals - on the road, traveling from place to place, to earn a living. In this sense, we might think of the fangshi as being something akin to a country doctor - taking his/her bag of medicines and wide range of skills from house to house - the difference being that the fengshi often were in possession also of esoteric skills: they were "magicians" as well as healers.
The Han Dynasty and the Yellow Turban Rebellion

The Han Dynasty (206 B.C. – 220 A.D.) was an imperial dynasty of China, preceded by the Qin Dynasty (221–207 B.C.) and succeeded by the Three Kingdoms (220–280 A.D.). It was founded by the rebel leader Liu Bang, known posthumously as Emperor Gaozu of Han. It was briefly interrupted by the Xin Dynasty (9–23) A.D. by the former regent Wang Mang. This interruption separated the Han into two periods: the Western Han (206 B.C. – 9 A.D.) and Eastern Han (25–220 A.D.). Spanning over four centuries, the period of the Han Dynasty is considered a golden age in Chinese history.

However, it was during this time that the Yellow Turban Rebellion, erupted as a peasant revolt that broke out in 184 AD during the reign of Emperor Ling of the Han Dynasty. The rebellion, which got its name from the color of the scarves that the rebels wore on their heads, marked an important point in the history of Taoism due to the rebels’ association with secret Taoist societies. The rebels wore yellow headdresses to signify their association with the “earth” element, which they believed would succeed the red “fire” element that represented Han rule. To suppress the uprising, which erupted in eastern and central China, the Han conscripted huge armies at great cost, but their efforts were hampered by inefficiency and corruption in the imperial government. The revolt was also used as the opening event in Luo Guanzhong's historical novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. 
Introduction of what would be called Chan, or Zen Buddhism in China

Generations of scholars have debated whether Buddhist missionaries first reached Han China via the maritime or overland routes of the Silk Road. The maritime route hypothesis, favored by Liang Qichao and Paul Pelliot, proposed that Buddhism was originally practiced in southern China, the Yangtze River and Huai River region, where prince Ying of Chu (present day Jiangsu) was jointly worshipping the Yellow Emperor, Lao Tzu, and Buddha in 65 AD.

The overland route hypothesis, favored by Tang Yongtong, proposed that Buddhism disseminated eastward through Yuezhi and was originally practiced in western China, at the Han capital Luoyang (present day Henan), where Emperor Ming of Han established the White Horse Temple in 68 BC.
The White Horse Temple, the oldest temple in China, is located about 6 miles from the city of Luoyang in eastern China’s Henan Province. It is a place that disciples of the Buddha school recognize as the palace of Buddhist ancestors and the place where Buddhist theory was taught.

It was built by Emperor Ming of the Eastern Han Dynasty (29 A.D.–75 A.D.), and there is a legend about its establishment. According to the historical book of records, Emperor Ming dreamed of a pleasant scene in which a shining golden god flew into his palace. Emperor Ming called his ministers to inquire about his dream. Minister Fuyi said: “On April 8 of the 24th year of King Zhou in the Zhou Dynasty (971 B.C.), the landscapes rocked and the rivers flooded. At night the splendid light beams of five colors flashed in the western sky.”
Early History of the White Horse Temple

The two senior monks She Moteng and Zhu Falan, preached at White Horse Temple and jointly completed the translation of the 42-Chapter Sutra, the first Chinese version of Buddhist scriptures. After She Moteng passed away, Zhu Falan continued to translate a number of scriptures. Their translations of the scriptures were all treasured in the Main Hall for the monks to worship. It was said that in the Northern Wei Dynasty (386 A.D.–534 A.D.), when the Buddhist monks worshiped the scriptures, the scripture suddenly glowed with colored lights and lit up the Main Hall.

During the reign of Tang Dynasty Empress Wu Ze Tian (624 A.D.–705 A.D.), the White Horse Temple was very popular, and there were more than 1,000 monks living there. However, the Temple was greatly damaged during the An Si Rebellion (755 A.D.–763 A.D.) and the Huichang Suppression of Buddhism (840 A.D.–846 A.D.). The damaged White Horse Temple was only found later through broken pieces of inscriptions on the stones and ruins. Repairs to the temple were later conducted by Sung Dynasty Emperor Taizong (939–997), Ming Dynasty Emperor Jiajing (1507–1567), and Qing Dynasty Emperor Kangxi (1662–1722).
It may have been the Chin who unified China into one central structure and government, albeit for a short time. However, it was the Han who followed them that unified the religious and philosophical beginnings of what we know today. Several things were occurring simultaneously during the late Han and Three Kingdoms that brought together the pieces of later Chinese philosophical thought.

• First was the orthodoxy of the Confucian school that was central to the Emperor and political structure. This focused attention not only on the central figure of Confucius, but the Classics and what would be taught in the examination system.
• Second was the recognition of Lao Tzu and his *Tao Te Ching*, as it served as the connecting point between what could be seen and unseen and legitimatized the connection between order, nature, and those in authority. Lao Tzu was given a shrine identifying him as a “sacred person” by the Han Emperor in 150AD which contributed to the explosion in religious Taoism throughout China during this time,
• Third, was the writing of Wang Pi and his updating/commentary of the *I Ching* and Lao Tzu’s *Tao Te Ching*. He illustrated to the political structure at the time how the two ancient texts complimented the classics, and the works of Confucius, and how it should all fit together.
Buddhism’s Initial entry from India to China

When Buddhism came to China from India, it was initially adapted to the Chinese culture and understanding. Buddhism was exposed to Confucian and Taoist influences. Chán became a "natural evolution of Buddhism under Taoist conditions. Buddhism was first identified to be "a barbarian variant of Taoism".

Judging from the reception by the Han of the Hinayana works and from the early commentaries, it appears that Buddhism was being perceived and digested through the medium of religious Taoism. Buddha was seen as a foreign immortal who had achieved some form of Taoist non death. The Buddhists’ mindfulness of the breath was regarded as an extension of Taoist breathing exercises.

Taoist terminology was used to express Buddhist doctrines in the oldest translations of Buddhist texts, a practice termed ko-i, "matching the concepts", while the emerging Chinese Buddhism had to compete with Taoism and Confucianism.
Early marriage of Taoist and Buddhist thought

The first Buddhist recruits in China were the traditional shaman and Taoists. They developed high esteem for the newly introduced Buddhist meditational techniques, and blended them with Taoist meditation. Representatives of early Chinese Buddhism like Sengzhao and Tao Sheng were deeply influenced by the Taoist keystone works of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu. Against this background, especially the Taoist concept of naturalness was inherited by the early Chán disciples: they equated - to some extent - the ineffable Tao and Buddha-nature, and thus, rather than feeling bound to the abstract "wisdom of the sūtras", emphasized Buddha-nature to be found in "everyday" human life, just as the Tao.

In addition to Taoist ideas, also Neo-Taoist concepts were taken over in Chinese Buddhism. Concepts such as "T’i -yung" (Essence and Function) and "Li-shih“ Noumenon (a thing in itself, as distinguished from a thing as it appears), and Phenomenon (a fact, occurrence, or circumstance observed or observable in nature) were first taken over by Hua-yen Buddhism, which consequently influenced Chán deeply. On the other hand, Taoists at first misunderstood sunyata to be akin to the Taoist non-being and wu wei.
Wang Pi – The Great Mediator of Competing Philosophies

The disappearance of the great Han state thus created an intellectual vacuum that thinkers hastened to fill; it also left a period of comparative liberty, very rare in China, that was to allow them to present new and bold formulations.

If Wang Pi accomplished so much in so short a space of time, it was perhaps in part due to the fact that he was born into a family active in the most progressive philosophical circles at the end of the Han period and had at his disposition close to 1,000 chapters (chüan) of books, the important library of Ts'ai Yung, given to his father by the first emperor of the Wei dynasty.

Wang Pi's biography tells us that, when he was being interviewed for an important post by the regent Ts'ao Shuang, Wang Pi spoke with the busy head of state on nothing but metaphysics. He did not get the job and caused Ts'ao Shuang to "snicker at him," but the incident is revealing: Wang Pi's metaphysics, which at first seems gratuitous and disembodied, was for its author a vital, "committed" philosophy, something essential for the good administration of the empire. He truly intended to replace the worn-out philosophies of the Han with something new and all-encompassing with his works and philosophy.
Wang Pi and the *Tao Te Ching* and *I Ching* Commentaries

In his commentary to the *Tao Te Ching*, Wang Pi brilliantly shows that the *Tao* is in fact *wu*. *Wu* is a term difficult to translate; it is a negation but definitely does not mean "nothing" or "nothingness," as it is often translated. It is "without" meaning, that it is "undefined," "undetermined"—a true absolute in the Western philosophical meaning of the word. All of creation, all of the diversified universe, all *yu* (the opposite of *wu*) — "having" or "with" determination or definition—ultimately depends upon the undefined and undefinable *wu* for its existence. We must thus model ourselves upon this absolute if we wish to "develop our natures to their fullest" and live out our lives to their limits under the best conditions.

The ancient Taoists did not give much concrete information on just how this was to be done. Wang Pi says we can find this information in the *I Ching*, which for him, contains in its 64 hexagrams all the possible combinations of conditions that a man can encounter in life. His commentary brilliantly exploits the methods and terminology of the *I Ching*, showing the subtle and changing relations between the six lines of each hexagram and explaining in abstract terms just what the obscure remarks of the ancient explanations really mean for us in our moral life.
It was Wang Pi’s commentary during the Han dynasty (200AD) that served as the guiding influence as to what would define the true essence of the meaning of wu wei. His commentaries on both the I Ching and Tao Te Ching would become standard reading for those that followed him. However, there are various interpretations of wu wei. Generally speaking wu wei means to be without purpose and to act spontaneously as a way of becoming one with the universe. That the universe, or Tao, moves effortlessly following the natural flow of things without purpose or goal. To be in the natural flow of your eternal essence is living in wu wei. This generally translates into the “art of doing nothing”, i.e., that you achieve things by doing nothing.

Wang Pi took it a step further saying that wu wei is to be considered as a “mode or way of being”. That non-action is neither total inaction nor any type of action. Instead it is an expression signifying the Taoist way of life. This way of life, or the Tao, describes the manner in which it manifests in nature through and as you. Wu wei can be expressed both positively and negatively. Again, thinking of opposites, it can both be characterized by the sage having no thought of self and having no desires, conversely, it can be equated with emptiness and tranquility one discovers in following your true nature... by following the Tao.
Wang Pi's most important works are two commentaries: one on the *Tao Te Ching* and the other on the *I Ching*. On both these works he has left his indelible mark, but his work on the *I Ching* completely reorganized the book and made it much as it is today; of the extremely numerous early commentaries, moreover, his is the only one to survive in its entirety. It is, of course, very difficult to study a man's philosophy solely by studying his commentaries on other works, but that is what we have to do in Wang Pi's case; for aside from these commentaries, all that remains of his work are fragments of a commentary on the Analects of Confucius, a fragmentary short work on the *Tao Te Ching*, the *Lao Tzu*, and the slightly longer, complete *I Ching*.

Putting it succinctly but without too much distortion, Wang Pi's philosophy is a combination of Confucian ethics and Taoist metaphysics. He suggests that the Taoist absolute, or ontological substratum of the universe (the *Tao*), is indeed the metaphysical basis of the Confucian social organization, with a single ruler and a hierarchical society harmoniously cooperating according to ritual and the traditional Confucian virtues.
The map above shows the route of the Silk Road at about 100AD, when the Roman Empire extended into Asia Minor and the Han Empire had conquered much of modern China (except for Fujian). Initial Chinese interest was for the import of horses to improve the effectiveness of Han cavalry. Many of the towns along the route are ancient trading posts: Bakhara; Kashgar; Tashkent; Kunduz; Samarkand Turpan; Tehran.

The Han dynasty name for Rome was Da Qin 'Great Qin' named after the Qin dynasty itself. The Romans had a voracious appetite for silk leading to Emperor Tiberius introducing a ban on silk import. The Jiayuguan Gate on the end of the Great Wall marked the grand entrance into China. The Great Wall gave some protection of from attacks by tribes to the north on the passage deep into China.
Times of disunity - the end of Han to the beginning of Sui Dynasty

This period of China between the end of Chin Dynasty in 206AD and the beginning of Sui Dynasty in 581AD is often referred to as the Six Dynasty Period, i.e., the Three Kingdoms (Wei, Shu, and Wu), the Jin Dynasty, and the Northern and Southern Dynasties.

Throughout the Three Kingdoms Period, battles between the three countries were countless. Among those, battles between Shu and Wu fighting for Jingzhou, Shu and Wei fighting for Hanzhong as well as Wei defeating Shu. Finally, the end of the Three Kingdoms Period started from Sima Yan (son of Sima Yi) and chancellor of Wei’s usurpation of Wei and the establishment of the Jin Dynasty (265 - 420). In 282 when the Jin army conquered the last kingdom - Wu's capital, the Three Kingdoms Period was ended.

The Jin Dynasty comprises two distinct phases—the Xi (Western) Jin, ruling China from AD 265 to 316/317, and the Dong (Eastern) Jin, which ruled China from AD 317 to 420. In AD 265 a Sima prince, Sima Yan, deposed the last of the Cao emperors and established the Xi Jin dynasty. It was at this time Buddhist philosophy, art, and architecture influenced this dynasty’s culture and grew dramatically. During the Northern and Southern Dynasties the empire was fragmented. The North was dominated by invaders from the borderland and the steppes. The South was ruled by successive "Chinese" dynasties. The Yellow River was considered the dividing line between the two.
Cao Cao of the Three Kingdoms

Cao Cao was an accomplished poet, as were his sons Cao Pi and Cao Zhi. He was also a patron of poets such as Xu Gan. Of Cao Cao's works, only a remnant remain today. His verses, unpretentious yet profound, helped to reshape the poetic style of his time and beyond, eventually contributing to the poetry styles associated with Tang Dynasty poetry. Cao Cao, Cao Pi and Cao Zhi are known collectively as the "Three Caos". The Three Caos' poetry, together with additional poets, became known as the Jian'an style, which contributed eventually to Tang and later poetry. Cao Cao also wrote verse in the older four-character per line style characteristic of the *Classic of Poetry*. Burton Watson describes Cao Cao as: "the only writer of the period who succeeded in infusing the old four-character metre with any vitality, mainly because he discarded the archaic diction associated with it and employed the ordinary poetic language of his time. Cao Cao is also known for his early contributions to the Shanshui poetry genre, with his four character per line, fourteen line poem "View of the Blue Sea".

Cao Cao cites a poem before the Battle of Red Cliffs, portrait at the Long Corridor of the Summer Palace, Beijing
The Three Kingdoms – the Wei, Wu and Shu

Upon the founding of the three kingdoms, rulers of each kingdom all committed to improve the way of ruling and develop their national economy. In the Kingdom of Wei, Cao Cao made many reforms to discard old policies inform previous dynasties. The Tun Tian (farming done by soldiers) System was also carried out, which greatly promoted the national productivity. In the Kingdom of Shu, Zhuge Liang set up strict social order and tried to govern the kingdom by law. In the Kingdom of Wu, the shipbuilding industry was much more prosperous. As for the national strength, Wei ranked first, Wu second and Shu third.

In 220 when Cao Cao died, his eldest son Cao Pi proclaimed himself emperor, with Wei as his National Title and Luoyang as his capital city. In 221, Liu Bei proclaimed himself emperor, with Shu his national title and Chengdu the capital city. And in 229, Sun Quan proclaimed himself emperor in Wuchang (currently Wuhan), and later moved the capital to Jiankang (currently Nanjing), with the national title Wu. On the whole, Wei occupied the north, Shu occupied the southwest and Wu occupied the southeast. Romance of the Three Kingdoms, a historical novel by Luo Guanzhong, was a romanticisation of the events that occurred in the late Han Dynasty and the Three Kingdoms period.
The beginnings of Chan or Zen Buddhism in China

Buddhism appealed to Chinese intellectuals and elites and the development of gentry Buddhism was sought as an alternative to Confucianism and Daoism, since Buddhism's emphasis on morality and ritual appealed to Confucians and the desire to cultivate inner wisdom appealed to Taoists. Gentry Buddhism was a medium of introduction for the beginning of Buddhism in China and gained imperial and courtly support. By the early 5th century Buddhism was established in south China. During this time, Indian monks continued to travel along the Silk Road to teach Buddhism, and translation work was primarily done by foreign monks rather than Chinese.

In the 5th century, the Chán (Zen) teachings began in China, traditionally attributed to the Buddhist monk Bodhidharma, a legendary figure. The school heavily utilized the principles found in the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra, a sūtra utilizing the teachings of Yogācāra and those of Tathāgatagarbha, and which teaches the One Vehicle to buddhahood.
The Principle teachings of Chan (ZEN)

The principle teachings of Chán were later often known for the use of so-called *encounter stories* and koans, and the teaching methods used in them. A *kōan* is a story, dialogue, question, or statement, which is used in Zen-practice to provoke the "great doubt", and test a student's progress in Zen practice.

Nan Huai-Chin identifies the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* and the *Diamond Sūtra* (Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra) as the principle texts of the Chán school, and summarizes the principles succinctly:

The Zen teaching was a separate transmission outside the scriptural teachings that did not posit any written texts as sacred. Zen pointed directly to the human mind to enable people to see their real nature and become buddhas.
The Tarim Basin during the 3rd century, connecting the territory of China with that of the Kushan Empire: Kashgar, Mogao Caves, Dunhuang, Kucha, Khotan, Karasahr, Shanshan, Turfan.
The Wild Goose Pagoda is a Buddhist pagoda located in southern Xi'an, Shaanxi province, China. It was built in 652 during the Tang Dynasty and originally had five stories, although the structure was rebuilt in 704 during the reign of Empress Wu Zetian and its exterior brick facade was renovated during the Ming Dynasty. One of the pagoda's many functions was to hold sutras and figurines of the Buddha that were brought to China from India by the Buddhist translator and traveler Xuanzang.

The Giant Wild Goose Pagoda of Xi'an, built in the year 652 AD during the Tang Dynasty, when the city was named Chang'an.
The popularization of Buddhism in this period is evident in the many scripture-filled caves and structures surviving from this period. The Mogao Caves near Dunhuang in Gansu province, the Longmen Grottoes near Luoyang in Henan and the Yungang Grottoes near Datong in Shanxi are the most renowned examples from the Northern Han, Sui and Tang Dynasties. The Leshan Giant Buddha, carved out of a hillside in the 8th century during the Tang Dynasty and looking down on the confluence of three rivers, is still the largest stone Buddha statue in the world.

The Mogao Caves or Mogao Grottoes, also known as the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, form a system of 492 temples southeast of the center of Dunhuang, an oasis strategically located at a religious and cultural crossroads on the Silk Road, in Gansu province.

The Longmen Grottoes near Luoyang in Henan

Housing tens of thousands of statues of Buddha and his disciples, they are located south of present day Luòyáng in Hénán province.

The Yungang Grottoes

Site located southwest of the city of Datong is composed of 252 grottoes with more than 51,000 Buddha and bodhisattva statues.
Thirty seven Year Reign of the Sui Dynasty

The Sui Dynasty (581-618 AD) followed the Southern and Northern Dynasties and preceded the Tang Dynasty in China. It ended nearly four centuries of division between rival regimes. Founded by Emperor Wen, or Yang Jian, held its capital at Chang An (present-day Xi an). It was marked by the reunification of Southern and Northern China and the construction of the Grand Canal. It saw various reforms by Emperors Wen and Yang: the land equalization system resulting in enhanced agricultural productivity; governmental power was centralized, coinage was standardized; defense was improved, and the Great Wall was expanded. Buddhism was also encouraged throughout the empire, unifying the varied people and cultures of China.
Completion of Grand Canal during Sui Dynasty

This dynasty has often been compared to the earlier Qin Dynasty in tenure and the ruthlessness of its accomplishments. The Sui dynasty's early demise was attributed to the government's tyrannical demands on the people, who bore the crushing burden of taxes and compulsory labor. These resources were overstrained in the completion of the Grand Canal -- a monumental engineering feat -- and in the undertaking of other construction projects, including the reconstruction of the Great Wall. Weakened by costly and disastrous military campaigns against Goguryeo, which ended with defeat of Sui in the early seventh century, the dynasty disintegrated through a combination of popular revolts, disloyalty, and assassination.

Yang Ti was the second and last emperor of the Sui dynasty. Under Yang Ti the Grand Canal was built joining northern China with the Yangtze river which by then had become a major grain growing area. Yang Ti spent lavish amounts of money on palace construction and reinforcing the Great Wall. About half of the six million men recruited for the building projects died at their work.

Picture of boat on Grand Canal. The only thing that is uniquely Sui is the construction of Grand Canal, connecting Yellow and Yangtze two major eastward waterways by starting from Beijing all the way down to Hangzhou, thus make nation wide commerce possible for the next prosperous Tang Dynasty.
China’s ancient official selection system

For 1300 years, from the Sui dynasty to the latter years of the Qing, the imperial examination system determined who could enter the imperial bureaucracy and become an official - the first step towards influence and power. Candidates were tested for their proficiency in fields such as music, arithmetic, literary composition, and command of the rites (both public and private rituals). Archery and horsemanship were also tested, and later curricula also included the “Five Studies”: military strategy, civil law, revenue and taxation, agriculture and geography, and the Confucian classics.
End of Sui and beginnings of Tang Dynasty

A Confucian revival began during the Tang dynasty. In the late Tang, Confucianism absorbed some aspects of Buddhism and Daoism and was reformulated (Neo-Confucianism). This reinvigorated form was adopted as the basis of the imperial exams and the core philosophy of the scholar official class in the Song dynasty. Neo-Confucianism turned into sometimes rigid orthodoxy over the following centuries. In popular practice, however, the three doctrines of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism were often melded together.

These maps tell a story. In the first map, you can see how during a period of war, China was split in half into a southern and northern dynasty. When the Sui dynasty comes into power, you can see from the second map that the Sui unified China into a whole. Lastly, by the 3rd map, you can see that from the Sui’s unification of China, the Tang dynasty was able to expand and flourish.
Tang Dynasty 618-907 C.E.
Early Tang Dynasty Taoist and Buddhist Influences

From the outset, religion played a role in Tang politics. In his bid for power, Li Yuan had attracted a following by claiming descent from the Taoist sage Lao Tzu (5th century BC). People bidding for office would have monks from Buddhist temples pray for them in public in return for cash donations or gifts. Before the persecution of Buddhism in the 9th century, Buddhism and Taoism were accepted side by side and Emperors invited monks and clerics of both religions to his court.

At the same time Xuanzong exalted the ancient Lao Tzu by granting him grand titles, wrote commentary on the Taoist Lao Tzu and set up a school to prepare candidates for examinations on Taoist scriptures.

In the year 714, Emperor Xuanzong forbade shops and vendors in the city of Chang'an (Xian) from selling Buddhist sutras, instead giving the Buddhist clergy of monasteries the sole right to distribute sutras to the laity. In the previous year of 713, Emperor Xuanzong had liquidated the highly lucrative Inexhaustible Treasury, which was run by a prominent Buddhist monastery in Chang'an.
The Re-emergence of the Silk Road

The Silk Road was a series of trade routes connecting China to central Asia and the Middle East, first opened during the Han dynasty. The Silk Road was of great importance from the Qin (200BC); Tang and Yuan dynasties. It fell into decline during the Ming dynasty when trade by sea from southern ports became more profitable than by the overland route. It is more correct to think of it as a series of routes and not a single road; as the road had several branches, starting in the Middle East and ending at the Chinese capital at the time - Luoyang. The name ‘Silk Road’ is relatively modern, coined by a German geographer in the 19th century.
The capital cities of the Tang dynasty, Ch'ang-an and Loyang, became melting pots to many cultures and a large number of beliefs such as Zoroastrianism and Islam. Buddhist missionaries had begun the difficult journey from northern India to China as early as the first century AD, but it was not until the Tang dynasty that Buddhism reached its height of popularity in China. By the mid-7th century, new Buddhist schools of thought had developed a distinctly Chinese flavor, including the Ch'an school, which later evolved into Zen Buddhism.
The Tang Imperial Examinations – Following the Sui Dynasty's example, the Tang favored a service system favoring students of Confucian studies who were potential candidates for the imperial examinations. The graduates of which could be appointed as state bureaucrats in the local, provincial, and central government. There were two types of exams that were given, *mingjing* ('illuminating the classics examination') and *jinshi* ('presented scholar examination'). The *mingjing* was based upon the Confucian classics and tested the student's knowledge of a broad variety of texts.

By the Tang Dynasty, most of the recruitment into central government bureaucrat offices was being performed by the bureaucracy itself, at least nominally by the reigning emperor. However, the historical dynamics of the official recruitment system involved changes in the balances of the various means used for appointments (all theoretically under the direction of the emperor); including, the civil service examinations, direct appointments (especially of members of the ruling dynastic family), nominations by quotas allotted to favored important families, and special induction procedures for eunuchs.

![Chinese Examination Cells at the South River School (Nanjiangxue) Nanjing (China)](image-url)
The Height of the Tang Dynasty

During the 8th century, the city of Ch'ang-an, the capital of the Tang dynasty, was the largest, richest, and most advanced city in the world. Its National Academy brought students from throughout Asia to learn religion, art and architecture. Foreigners attained high positions in the Chinese government. Trade flourished, and cultural exchange brought new ways of thinking to China. Tai-tsung maintained many of the political policies already in place. He shrank the government at both the central and state levels. The money saved by using a smaller government enabled Tai-tsung to save food as surplus in case of famine and to provide economic relief for farmers in case of flooding or other disasters. Civil exams based on merit were used once again and resulted in wise court officials.

China became even larger during the Tang dynasty than it had been during the Han. The Chinese regularly communicated with lands as far west as Persia, present-day Afghanistan, and the Byzantine Empire. Goods and, more importantly, ideas continued to be exchanged on the Silk Road.

Emperor Tang Taizong commissioned this portrait of himself with 12 previous emperors tracing back to the Han dynasty as a warning to his son, the prince, to learn from the mistakes of his ancestors.
The Tang Dynasty that existed from 18th June 618 to 1st June 907 could be said to have been built with its poets. The ability to write good poetry that expounded social and ethical issues was the passport to entering the government. Some Tang Dynasty poets also wrote poetry of a more personal nature.

Tang dynasty poetry covered three major areas: special occasions, nature, and like most other poetry, philosophy. The most famed poets of this period were Wan Wei, Li Po, and Tu Fu who lived between the years 699 and 770. Wang Wei was quite austere in his approach to poetry, while Li Po was a romantically inclined eccentric, and Tu Fu, a Confucian moralist. Tu Fu was the most popular and was considered the greatest poet of the times. His poetry covered politics, social problems, and even his own personal family life.

Wang Wei’s poems were quite simple and short and were mostly about nature. Li Po too loved nature and his work reflected that extensively. His poetry also carried a leaning towards Taoism, and several of his poems revealed his deep love for people. Tang dynasty poetry essentially captures people’s deepest emotions and talks about matters of everyday life: the losing of friends, remembering the good times of the past, voicing innermost feelings, and crying out against social injustice. This reveals the wide range of interests of the people of the Tang Dynasty.
The re-emergence of Mencius in Tang and Song Dynasties

During the Tang dynasty the School of Mencius came to be regarded as the orthodox school in the line of Confucius and one of the key links in the chain transmitting the Way of the Sages. With the emergence of Neo-Confucianism during the Sung dynasty both the Doctrine of the Mean and the Book of Mencius came to be ranked, along with the Analects and the Great Learning, as the Four Book's. Subsequently, Mencius himself came to be revered as the orthodox transmitter of the Confucian tradition after Confucius and the Second Sage next to Confucius, receiving for eight hundred years, till the beginning of twentieth century, sacrifices both in the Temple of Confucius and in the temples devoted to him.

The Mencius home and temple in Zoucheng were built more than a thousand years after his death. The *Doctrine of the Mean*, is a doctrine of Confucianism and also the title of one of the Four Books of Confucian philosophy. The text is attributed to Zisi (also Kong Ji), the only grandson of Confucius. It was published as a chapter in the *Classic of Rites*. He is traditionally accredited with transmitting Confucian teaching to Mencius.
China’s Golden Age of Art and Literature

A great contribution of the Tang dynasty came years after the death of Tai-tsung, when the dynasty was at its political and economic height. The Tang dynasty was a golden age of art and literature for the Chinese. Li Po, Tu Fu, and Wang Wei were poets renowned for the simplicity and naturalism of their writings. The poetry and art of the times however were deeply affected by the rebellion of northeastern troops against court officials in the capital city of Ch'ang-an in 756 AD. Named after the leader of the rebel troops, the An Lushan Rebellion caused the deaths of countless people, including members of the royal family, and marked the beginning of the end for the Tang dynasty.

The decline of the dynasty increased during the second half of the 9th century as factions within the central government began feuding. These feuds led to political plots and scandals with assassinations not uncommon. The dynasty split into ten separate kingdoms as the central government weakened. After a series of collapses beginning around 880 A.D., northern invaders finally destroyed the Tang dynasty. The Golden Age was over.
Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms was an era of political upheaval in China from 907–960/979 AD, between the fall of the Tang Dynasty and the founding of the Song Dynasty. During this period, five dynasties quickly succeeded one another in the north, and more than twelve independent states were established, mainly in the south. Only ten are traditionally listed, hence the era's name, "Ten Kingdoms"; some historians, such as Bo Yang, count eleven, including Yan and Qi but not Northern Han, viewing it as simply a continuation of Later Han. This era also led to the founding of the Liao Dynasty in the north.

Towards the end of the Tang Dynasty, the imperial government granted increased powers to the jiedushi, the regional military governors. The Huang Chao Rebellion weakened the imperial government, and by the early 10th century the jiedushi commanded de facto independence from its authority. Thus ensued the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period.

The Five Dynasties were:
- Later Liang (907–923)
- Later Tang Dynasty (923–936)
- Later Jin Dynasty (936–947)
- Later Han Dynasty (947–951)

The Ten Kingdoms were:
- Wu (907–937)
- Wuyue (907–978)
- Min (909–945)

The Ten Kingdoms continued:
- Chu (907–951)
- Southern Han (917–971)
- Former Shu (907–925)
- Later Shu (934–965)
- Jingnan (924–963)
- Southern Tang (937–975)
- Northern Han (951–979).
The **Later Liang** (June 1, 907–923) was one of the Five Dynasties during the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period in China. It was founded by Zhu Wen, posthumously known as Taizu of Later Liang, after he forced the last emperor of the Tang dynasty to abdicate in his favor (and then murdered him). The Later Liang dynasty would last until 923 when it was destroyed by the Later Tang Dynasty. The Later Liang Dynasty controlled most of northern China, though much of Shaanxi (controlled by the Qi) as well as Hebei (controlled by the Yan state) and Shanxi (controlled by Shatuo Turks) remained largely outside Later Liang control. The Later Liang maintained a tense relationship with the Shatuo Turks, due to the rivalry between Zhu Quanzong and Li Keyong, a relationship that began back in the time of the Tang Dynasty. After Li Keyong’s death, his son, Li Cunxu, continued to expand his State of Jin. Li was able to destroy the Later Liang in 923 and found the Later Tang Dynasty.

Generally through Chinese history, it was historians of later kingdoms whose histories bestowed the Mandate of Heaven posthumously on preceding dynasties.

**Stone relief from the tomb of Wang Chuzhi. National Museum, Beijing**
Five Dynasties – Later Tang

The Later Tang was a short-lived regime, lasting only thirteen years. Li Cunxu himself lived only three years after the founding of the dynasty. During the Tang Dynasty, rival warlords declared independence in their governing provinces—not all of whom recognized the emperor's authority. Li Cunxu and Liu Shouguang fiercely fought the regime forces to conquer northern China; Li Cunxu succeeded. He defeated Liu Shouguang (who had proclaimed a Yan Empire in 911) in 915 and declared himself emperor in 923. Within a few months, he brought down the Later Liang regime. Thus began the Later Tang Dynasty—the first in a long line of conquest dynasties. After reuniting much of northern China, Cunxu conquered Former Shu in 925, a regime that had been set up in Sichuan. The Later Tang Dynasty lasted from 923 to 936 during the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms Period in China, the first in a series of three dynasties ruled by the Shatuo Turks. At its height, it controlled most of northern China.

The Later Tang was a short-lived regime, lasting only thirteen years. Li Cunxu himself lived only three years after the founding of the dynasty, having been killed during an officer’s rebellion in 926.

Painting by Chinese artist Li Cheng (919–967)
The Later Tang Dynasty had a few years of relative calm, followed by unrest. In 934, Sichuan again asserted independence. In 936, Shi Jingtang, a Shatuo Turk jiedushi from Taiyuan, was aided by the Manchurian Khitan Empire in a rebellion against the dynasty. In return for their aid, Shi Jingtang promised annual tribute and 16 prefectures in the Youyun area (modern northern Hebei province and Beijing) to the Khitans. The rebellion succeeded; Shi Jingtang became emperor in this same year.

The Later Jin Dynasty held essentially the same territories as the Later Tang Dynasty, except for Sichuan in the southwest, which was lost by Later Tang in its waning years (as the region became independent as Later Shu. The other major exception was a region known as the Sixteen Prefectures. By this time in history, the Khitan had formed the Liao Empire out of their steppe base. They had also become a major power broker in northern China. They forced the Later Jin to cede the strategic “Sixteen Prefectures” to the Liao.
To fill the power vacuum, the *jiedushi* Liu Zhiyuan entered the imperial capital in 947 and proclaimed the advent of the Later Han Dynasty, establishing a third successive Shatuo Turk reign. This was the shortest of the five dynasties. Following a coup in 951, General Guo Wei, a Han Chinese, was enthroned, thus beginning the Later Zhou Dynasty. However, Liu Chong, a member of the Later Han imperial family, established a rival Northern Han regime in Taiyuan and requested Khitan aid to defeat the Later Zhou. The Later Han dynasty was among the shortest-lived regimes in the long history of China. Liu Zhiyuan died the year following the founding of the dynasty, to be succeeded by his teenage son. The dynasty was overthrown two years later when Guo Wei, a Han Chinese led a military coup and declared himself emperor of the Later Zhou dynasty.

The remnants of the Later Han returned to the traditional Shatuo Turk stronghold of Shanxi and established the Northern Han kingdom, sometimes referred to the Eastern Han. Under Liao dynasty protection, it was able to remain independent of the Later Zhou dynasty. The Song Dynasty emerged from the ashes of the Later Zhou dynasty in 960 and emerged as a strong, stabilizing presence in northern China.
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Five Dynasties – Later Zhou Dynasty

After the death of Guo Wei in 951, his adopted son Chai Rong succeeded the throne and began a policy of expansion and reunification. In 954, his army defeated combined Khitan and Northern Han forces, ending their ambition of toppling the Later Zhou dynasty. Between 956 and 958, forces of Later Zhou conquered much of Southern Tang, the most powerful regime in southern China, which ceded all the territory north of the Yangtze River in defeat. In 959, Chai Rong attacked the Khitan Empire in an attempt to recover territories ceded during the Later Jin Dynasty. After many victories, he succumbed to illness. In 960, the general Zhao Kuangyin staged a coup and took the throne for himself, founding the Northern Song Dynasty.

This is the official end of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period. During the next two decades, Zhao Kuangyin and his successor Zhao Kuangyi defeated the other remaining regimes in China proper, conquering Northern Han in 979, and reunifying China completely in 982. Under Liao dynasty protection it was able to remain independent of the Later Zhou Dynasty. The Song dynasty emerged from the ashes of the Later Zhou dynasty in 960 and emerged as a strong, stabilizing presence in northern China.

*Archer and Horse (Lee Zan-Hua)*
Song Dynasty

Northern Song: Zhao Shanyuan Kuangyin Treaty (Tai Zu)

Wang Anshi: Reforms of New Policies

Jingkang Incident
Southern Song: Gao Zong

Allied with Mongols to destroy Jin

Battle of Xiangyang - Mongol victory

1135 -1141 1161 1279

960 1005 1024 1069 1127 1233 1267 1273

Hundred Families Surnames

Bi Sheng: movable type printing

Shen Kuo: Dream Pool Essays

Allied with Jin to topple Liao

Yue Fei battles the Jins

Explosives first used in battle

Battle of Yamen; Song fell

Su Song: Clock Tower
Summary of Chan (Zen) in Chinese history

The history of Chán in China can be divided in several periods. Zen as we know it today is the result of a long history, with many changes and contingent factors. Each period had different types of Zen, some of which remained influential while others vanished. The three distinguishable periods from the 5th century into the 13th century were:

- **The Legendary period**, from Bodhidharma in the late 5th century to the end An Lushan Rebellion around 765 AD in the middle of the Tang Dynasty. Little written information is left from this period. It's the time of the Six Patriarchs, including Bodhidharma and Huineng, and the legendary "split" between the Northern and the Southern School of Chán.

- **The Classical period**, from the end An Lushan Rebellion around 765 CE to the beginning of the Song Dynasty around 950 AD. This is the time of the great masters of Chán, such as Mazu Daoyi and Linji Yixuan, and the creation of the yū-lü genre, the recordings of the sayings and teachings of these great masters.
The **Literary period**, from around 950 to 1250, which spans the era of the Song Dynasty (960-1279). In this time the gongan-collections were compiled, collections of sayings and deeds by the famous masters, appended with poetry and commentary. This genre reflects the influence of *literati* on the development of Chán. This period idealized the previous period as the "golden age" of Chán, producing the literature in which the spontaneity of the celebrated masters was portrayed.

**Another take on the Development of early Zen**

**Proto-Chán** (500-600AD) Southern and Northern Dynasties (420 to 589) and Sui Dynasty (589–618AD). In this phase, Chán developed in multiple locations in northern China. It was based on the practice of *dhyana*, and is connected to the figures of Bodhidharma and Huike. Its principal text is the Two Entrances and Four Practices, attributed to Bodhidharma.
Another take on the Development of early Zen, con’t

- **Early Chán (600-900)** during the Tang Dynasty 618–907 AD. In this phase Chán took its first clear contours. Prime figures are the fifth patriarch Daman Hongren (601–674), his dharma-heir Yuquan Shenxiu (606?-706), the sixth patriarch Huineng (638–713), antagonist of the quintessential Platform Sutra, and Shenhui (670-762), whose propaganda elevated Huineng to the status of sixth patriarch. Prime factions are the Northern School, Southern School and Oxhead School.

- **Middle Chán (750-1000)** (from the An Lushan Rebellion (755-763) until the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period (907–960/979). In this phase developed the well-known Chán of the iconoclastic zen-masters. Prime figures are Mazu Daoyi (709–788), Shitou Xiqian (710-790), Linji Yixuan (died 867), and Xuefeng Yicun (822-908). Prime factions are the Hongzhou school and the Hubei faction. An important text is the Anthology of the Patriarchal Hall (952), which gives a great amount of "encounter-stories", and the well-known genealogy of the Chán-school.
Another take on the Development of early Zen, con’t

- **Song Dynasty** Chán (950-1300). In this phase Chán took its definitive shape, including the picture of the "golden age" of the Chán of the Tang-Dynasty, and the use of koans for individual study and meditation. Prime figures are Dahui Zonggao (1089–1163), who introduced the Hua Tou practice, and Hongzh Zhengjue (1091-1157), who emphasized Shikantaza.

- Prime factions are the Linji school and the Caodong school. The classic koan-collections, such as the Blue Cliff Record were assembled in this period, which reflect the influence of the "literati" on the development of Chán.

- In this phase Chán is transported to Japan and exerts a great influence on Korean Seon via Jinul.