

Outline Lecture Fourteen—The Tang Bureaucracy

General Chronology:

Official end of the Han—220 CE

Three Kingdoms—3rd century

Period of Division or Six Dynasties—4th to 6th centuries

Northern Wei—4th to 6th centuries

Sui Unification—589-618

Tang Dynasty—7th to 10th

I) The Process Towards Unification

a) Northern Wei

- i) Momentum for political integration from the Tabi Huns
- ii) Gradual process of unifying the north
 - (1) Capital at Luoyang
- iii) Domestic Management Patterns
 - (1) Strengthening central authority, undermining local power
 - (a) Rule of Avoidance
 - (2) “Nationalization of agricultural land”—*Juntian* or Equal-field system
 - (a) Edict of 485
 - (b) Edict of 486 on rural reorganization

b) Sui Unification 589

- i) The Sino-Turkic founder of the Sui, Wendi (Yang Jian)
- ii) Integrated commerce of north and south, facilitated by the Grand Canal
- iii) Required heavy taxes and conscript labor

II) Tang Dynasty 618-906

a) Social Organization

- i) Tang elaboration of the *Juntian* system
- ii) Confiscated land from large estates to redistribute to peasants

b) Centralized Bureaucracy

- i) Establishment of a highly structured and professional meritocracy
 - (1) Introduction of the rigorous *Jinshi* exam
 - (2) Well-defined bureaucratic structure with different branches
- ii) Absolutism of the emperor

c) Two examples

- i) Taizong (626-649)
 - (1) Focused on the practical imperatives of ruling, not empty symbols
 - (2) Conscientious pursuit of good government
- ii) Xuanzong (713-756)
 - (1) Life in Xuanzong’s palace
 - (2) Obsession with Yang Guifei
 - (3) An Lushan Rebellion 755

III) China’s Greatest Anomaly—Empress Wu (626-706)

a) Wu Zetian’s or Empress Wu’s background

- i) Entered the palace as one of the “talented women”
- ii) Rise to Power
 - (1) From 652 on, Wu Zetian began to challenge aristocratic factions
 - (a) Empress Wang vs. Wu Zetian
 - (b) “Let those witches get drunk to the bone!”
 - (2) Purges of princes—her own son
- iii) Symbolic assertion of female power
 - (1) *Feng-shan* ritual
 - (2) “Precious Chart”
- b) Excesses of Power
 - i) Founder of a new Zhou Dynasty (690-705)
 - ii) Indulgence towards Xue Huaiyi
 - iii) Network of informants and spies—reign of terror
 - iv) Her final demise in her 70s
- c) Her complex legacy
 - i) The “cloud” of male prejudice in history
 - ii) Her personal struggle for power may have also strengthened central authority
 - (1) Aspirations of the “Twelve-point Memorial”
 - (2) Cultivate able officials and scholars
 - iii) Scant evidence of opposition from ministers and common people during her reign