



08 China and the World East Asian Connections, 500–1300

Introduction

- Many believe that China will be the next superpower.
 - this is nothing new in Chinese history
- China was a major player among the third-wave civilizations.
 - a China-centered “world order” encompassed most of eastern Asia
 - China’s borders reached far into Central Asia
 - its wealthy and cosmopolitan culture attracted visitors from afar
 - all of China’s neighbors felt its gravitational pull
 - China’s economy and technological innovation had effects throughout Eurasia
- China was also changed by its interactions with non-Chinese peoples.
 - nomadic military threat
 - international trade as catalyst of change

Timeline

39	Trung sisters rebellion against China in Vietnam
4 th -6 th centuries	Early state building in Korea
300-800	Buddhism takes root in China
589-618	Sui dynasty and the reunification of China
604	Seventeen Article Constitution in Japan
618-907	Tang dynasty in China
688	Withdrawal of Chinese military forces from Korea
794-1192	Heian period in Japanese history
845	Suppression of Buddhism in China
868	First printed book in China
939	Vietnam establishes independence from China
960-1279	Song dynasty in China
c. 1000	Invention of gunpowder in China; beginning of foot binding
1000	Tale of Genji (Japan)
1279-1369	Mongol rule in China

The Reemergence of a Unified China





- The Han dynasty collapsed around 220 c.e.
 - led to 300 years of political fragmentation
 - nomadic incursion from the north
 - conditions discredited Confucianism in many eyes
 - Chinese migration southward to Yangzi River valley began
 - beginning of vast environmental change

- A “Golden Age” of Chinese Achievement
 - the Sui dynasty (589–618) reunified China
 - Sui rulers vastly extended the canal system
 - but their ruthlessness and failure to conquer Korea alienated people, exhausted state’s resources
 - dynasty was overthrown, but state didn’t disintegrate
 - Tang (618–907) and Song (960–1279) dynasties built on Sui foundations
 - established patterns of Chinese life that lasted into twentieth century
 - regarded as a “golden age” of arts and literature
 - » poetry, landscape painting, ceramics of high order
 - » birth of Neo-Confucianism (Confucian revival with added elements of Buddhism and Daoism)

- Tang and Song politics
 - six major ministries were created, along with the Censorate for surveillance over government
 - examination system revived to staff the bureaucracy
 - » encouraged by first printing of books
 - proliferation of schools and colleges
 - a large share of official positions went to sons of the elite
 - large landowners continued to be powerful, despite state efforts to redistribute land to the peasants

- “economic revolution” under the Song
 - great prosperity
 - rapid population growth (from 50 million–60 million people during Tang dynasty to 120 million by 1200)
 - great improvement in agricultural production
 - China was the most urbanized region in the world
 - » dozens of cities with population over 100,000
 - » capital Hangzhou had more than a million people
 - great network of internal waterways (canals, rivers, lakes)
 - » provided a cheap transport system that bound China together
 - great improvements in industrial production
 - » iron industry greatly increased output
 - invention of print (both woodblock and movable type)
 - best navigational and shipbuilding technology in the world
 - » invention of gunpowder
- production for the market rather than for local consumption was widespread
 - cheap transportation allowed peasants to grow specialized crops
 - government demanded payment of taxes in cash, not in kind
 - growing use of paper money and financial instruments

Chinese Technological Achievements

Innovation	1 st used in China	Time lag in years for Adoption in the West
Iron plow	6 th -4 th centuriy BCE	2000+
Cast iron	4 th century BCE	1000-2000
Efficient horse collar	3 rd -1 st century BCE	1000
Paper	2 nd century BCE	1000
Wheelbarrow	1 st century BCE	900-1000
Rudder for steering ships	1 st century CE	1100
Iron chain suspension bridge	1 st century CE	1000-1300
Porcelain	3 rd century CE	1500
Magnetic compass for navigation	9 th -11 th century CE	400
Gunpowder	9 th century CE	400
Chain drive for transmission of power	976 CE	800
Moveable type printing	1045 CE	400

– Women in the Song Dynasty

- the era wasn't very “golden” for women
- during the Tang dynasty, elite women in the north had had greater freedom (influence of steppe nomads)
- Song: tightening of patriarchal restrictions on women
- literature highlighted the subjection of women
- foot binding started in tenth or eleventh century c.e.
 - was associated with images of female beauty and eroticism
 - kept women restricted to the house

Footbinding



- textile production became larger scale, displacing women from their traditional role in the industry
 - women found other roles in cities
 - prosperity of the elite created demand for concubines, entertainers, courtesans, prostitutes
- in some ways the position of women improved
 - property rights expanded
 - more women were educated, in order to raise sons better

Key Moments in the History of Postclassical China

Collapse of the Han; end of classical China	220
Political fragmentation of China; incursion of nomads in the north; Buddhism takes root	220-581
Sui dynasty; reunification of China	589-618
Reign of Emperor Wendi; state support for Buddhism	581-604
Tang dynasty; golden age of Chinese culture; expansion into Central Asia; high point of Chinese influence in Japan	618-907
Withdrawal of Chinese military forces from Korea	688
Reign of Empress Wu, China's only female emperor	690-705
State action against Buddhism	9 th century
Political breakdown between dynasties	907-960
Vietnam establishes independence from China	939
Song dynasty; China's economic revolution; northern China ruled by peoples of nomadic background (Khitan, Jurchen)	960-1279
Yuan dynasty; Mongol rule of China	1271-1368
Ming dynasty; Chinese rule resumed	1368-1644
Maritime expeditions in the Indian Ocean	1405-1433

China and the Northern Nomads: A Chinese World Order in the Making



- There have been two enduring misconceptions of Chinese history:
 1. the idea that Chinese civilization was impressive but largely static
 2. the idea that China was a self-contained civilization
- For most of its history, China's most enduring interaction with foreigners was in the north, with the peoples of the steppes.
 - northern nomads typically lived in small kinship-based groups
 - occasional creation of powerful states or confederations
 - pastoral societies needed grain and other farm products from China
 - leaders wanted Chinese manufactured and luxury goods
 - steppe pressure and intrusion was a constant factor in Chinese history for 2,000 years

- nomads often felt threatened by the Chinese
 - Chinese military attacks on the steppes
 - Great Wall
- China needed the nomads
 - steppes provided horses and other goods
 - nomads controlled much of the Silk Roads

– The Tribute System in Theory

- the Chinese understood themselves as the center of the world (“middle kingdom”), far superior to the “barbarian” outsiders
 - believed that barbarians could become civilized Chinese
- establishment of “tribute system” to manage relations with non-Chinese peoples
 - non-Chinese authorities must acknowledge Chinese superiority
 - present tribute to the emperor
 - would receive trading privileges and “bestowals” in return (often worth more than the tribute)
- the system apparently worked for centuries

– The Tribute System in Practice

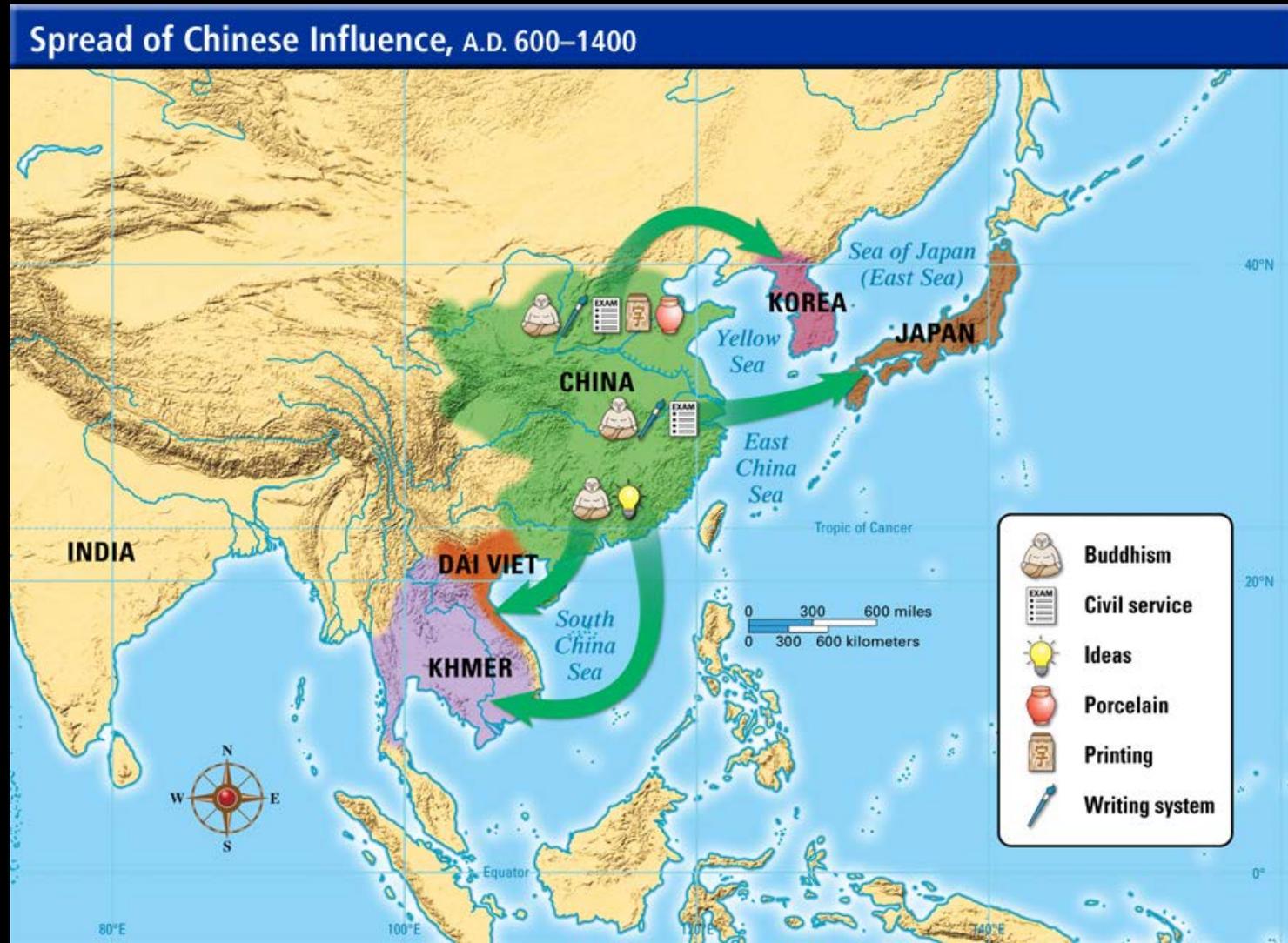
- but the system disguised contradictory realities
- some nomadic empires could deal with China on at least equal terms
 - Xiongnu confederacy (established around 200 b.c.e.)
 - » Chinese emperor had to recognize political equality of the Xiongnu
 - » had to pay Xiongnu what amounted to tribute
 - Turkic empires of Mongolia were similar
 - » Uighurs rescued Tang dynasty from an internal revolt in the 750s
 - steppe nomads usually did not want to conquer and rule China
 - » preferred extortion
 - » but nomads moved in when the Chinese state broke down
 - » several steppe states took over parts of northern China
 - Khitan (907–1125)
 - Jurchen (1115–1234)

- Cultural Influence across an Ecological Frontier
 - nomads who ruled parts of China often adopted Chinese ways
 - especially the Jurchen
 - but Chinese culture did not have great impact on steppe nomads
 - pastoral societies retained their own cultural patterns
 - most lived where Chinese-style agriculture was impossible
 - interaction took the form of trade, military conflict, negotiations, extortion, and some cultural influence
 - steppe culture influenced the parts of northern China that were ruled frequently by nomads
 - founders of Sui and Tang dynasties were of mixed blood
 - Tang dynasty: fad among northern Chinese elites for anything connected to “western barbarians”
 - » growing backlash against foreign influence

Ever since the Western horsemen began raising smut and dust, Fur and fleece, rank and rancid, have filled Hsien and Lo [two Chinese cities]. Women make themselves Western matrons by the study of Western makeup. Entertainers present Western tunes, in their devotion to Western music.



Coping with China: Comparing Korea, Vietnam, and Japan



- The emerging states and civilizations of Korea, Vietnam, and Japan also had tributary relationships with China.
 - agricultural, sedentary societies
 - their civilizations were shaped by proximity to China but did not *become* Chinese
 - similar to twentieth-century Afro-Asian societies that accepted elements of Western culture while maintaining political/cultural independence



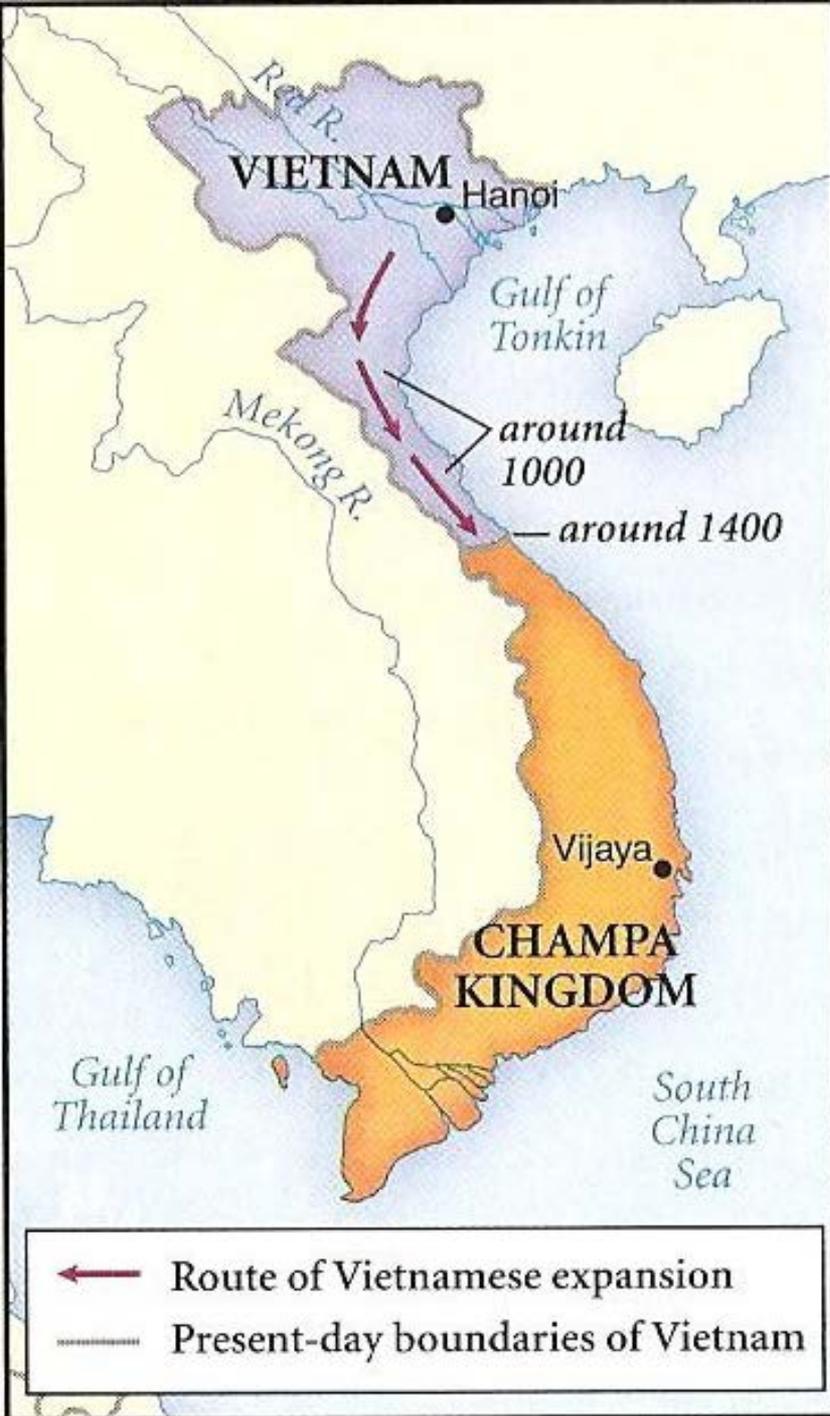
Korea and China

– Korea and China

- interaction with China started with temporary Chinese conquest of northern Korea during the Han dynasty, with some colonization
- Korean states emerged in fourth–seventh centuries c.e.
 - the states were rivals; also resisted Chinese political control
 - seventh century: the Silla kingdom allied with Tang dynasty China to bring some political unity
 - » but Chinese interference provoked military resistance
 - » China made do with a tributary relationship after 688
 - Korea generally maintained political independence under the Silla (688–900), Koryo ((918–1392), and Yi (1392–1910) dynasties
 - » but China provided legitimacy for Korean rulers
 - » efforts to replicate Chinese court life and administration
 - » capital city Kumsong modeled on Chinese capital Chang’an

- acceptance of much Chinese culture
 - » Chinese luxury goods, scholarship, and religious influence
 - » Confucianism had negative impact on Korean women, especially after 1300
 - ended “free choice” marriages
 - discouraged practice of a woman raising her children in her parents’ home, often joined by husband
 - ended practice of plural marriage for men—so some wives were reduced in rank to concubinage
- Korea maintained its Korean culture
 - » Chinese cultural influence had little effect on Korea’s serflike peasants or large slave population
 - » only Buddhism moved beyond the Korean elite
 - » examination system for bureaucrats never won prominence
 - » in 1400s, Korea developed a phonetic alphabet (*hangul*)

Vietnam and China



- the experience of Vietnam was broadly similar to that of Korea
- but Vietnam's cultural heartland in the Red River valley was part of the Chinese state from 111 b.c.e. to 939 c.e.
 - real effort at cultural assimilation of elite
 - provoked rebellions
 - » great rebellion of Trung sisters (39–43 c.e.)
 - » rebellion in early tenth century c.e. established Vietnam as separate state
 - » remained tributary to China
- Vietnamese rulers adopted the Chinese approach to government
 - examination system helped undermine established aristocrats
 - elite remained deeply committed to Chinese culture
- much of distinctive Vietnamese culture remained in place
 - language, cockfighting, betel nuts, greater roles for women
 - kept nature goddesses and a “female Buddha” in popular belief
 - developed a variation of Chinese writing, *chu nom* (“southern script”)



Japan and China

- Japan was never invaded or conquered by China, so borrowing of Chinese culture was voluntary
- main period of cultural borrowing was seventh–ninth centuries c.e., when first unified Japanese state began to emerge
 - creation of Japanese bureaucratic state modeled on China began with Shotoku Taishi (572–622)
 - large-scale missions to China to learn
 - Seventeen Article Constitution:
 - » proclaimed Japanese ruler as Chinese-style emperor
 - » encouraged Buddhism and Confucianism
 - » identified moral rulers as foundation for social harmony
 - two capital cities (Nara and then Heian) were founded, both modeled on Chinese capital (Chang’an)

- elements of Chinese culture took root in Japan
 - several schools of Chinese Buddhism
 - art, architecture, education, medicine, religious views
 - Chinese writing system
- Japanese borrowings were selective
 - deliberate borrowings stopped after tenth century
- Japan never created an effective centralized and bureaucratic state
 - political power became decentralized
 - local authorities developed their own military forces (*samurai*)
 - » *bushido*: samurai set of values
 - » celebration of military values, unlike China

- religious distinctiveness
 - Buddhism never replaced native belief system
 - the way of the *kami* (sacred spirits), later called Shinto
- distinctive literary and artistic culture
 - unique writing system mixed Chinese characters with phonetic symbols
 - early development of *tanka* (highly stylized poetry)
 - highly refined aesthetic court culture, especially in Heian period (794–1192)
 - » much is known from women writers who used vernacular script
 - » Murasaki Shikibu's *Tale of Genji* (ca. 1000) shows court life particularly well
- elite women escaped most of Confucian oppression
 - only began to lose status in the twelfth century, with rise of warrior culture

Feudal Europe

- Christianity
- Religious themes in art and literature

- Feudal government
- Royalty (kings and queens, emperor)
- Nobles (lords, daimyo)
- Warriors (knights, samurai)
- Warrior codes of honor (chivalry, Bushido)
- Peasants worked land

Feudal Japan

- Buddhism, Shinto, Confucianism
- Nature themes in art and literature

China and the Eurasian World Economy



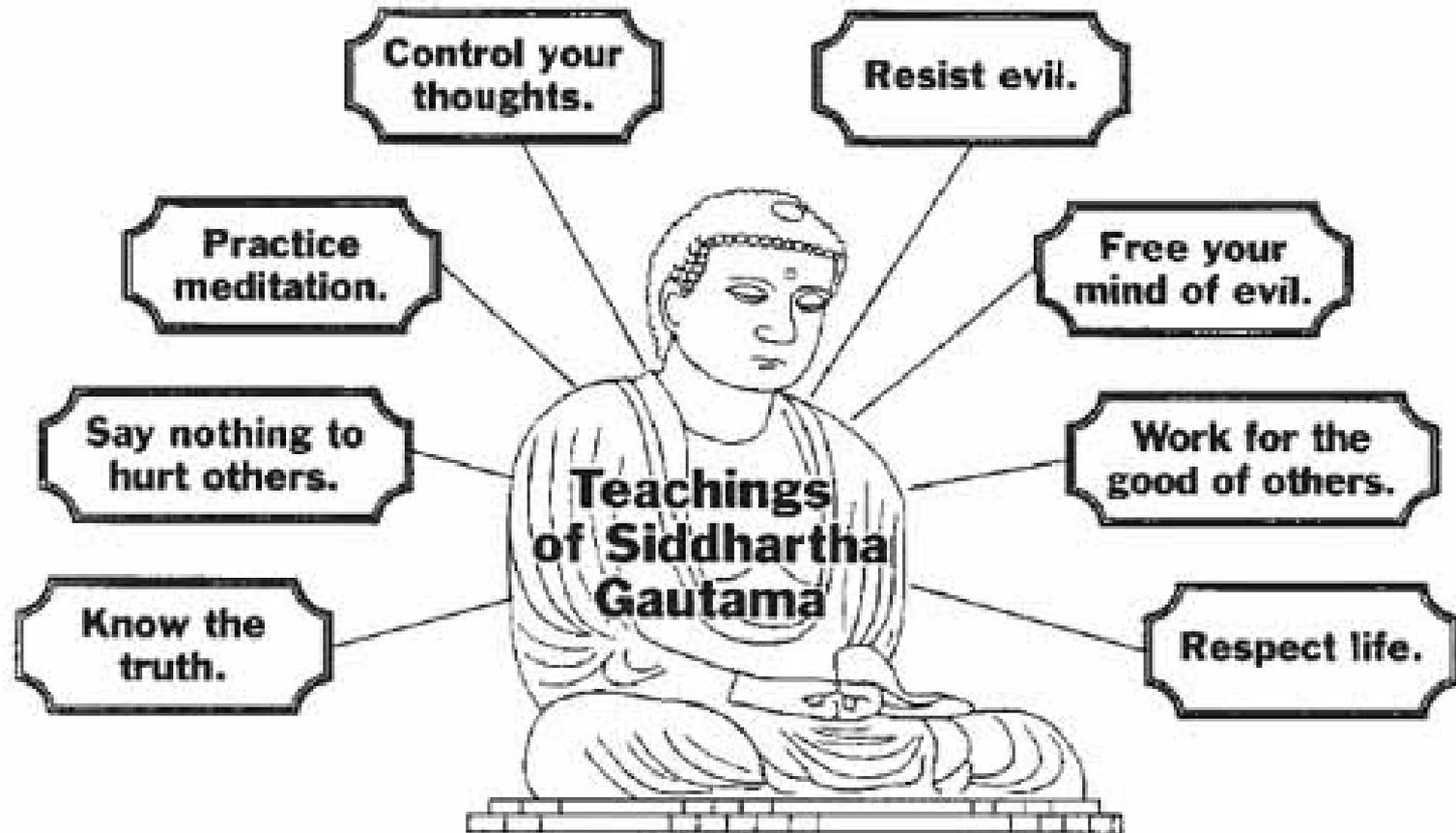
– Spillovers: China's Impact on Eurasia

- many of China's technological innovations spread beyond its borders
 - salt production through solar evaporation
 - papermaking
 - printing (though resisted by the Islamic world)
 - gunpowder invented ca. 1000, but used differently after it reached Europe
 - Chinese textile, metallurgical, and naval technologies also stimulated imitation and innovation (e.g., magnetic compass)
- Chinese prosperity stimulated commercial life all over Eurasia

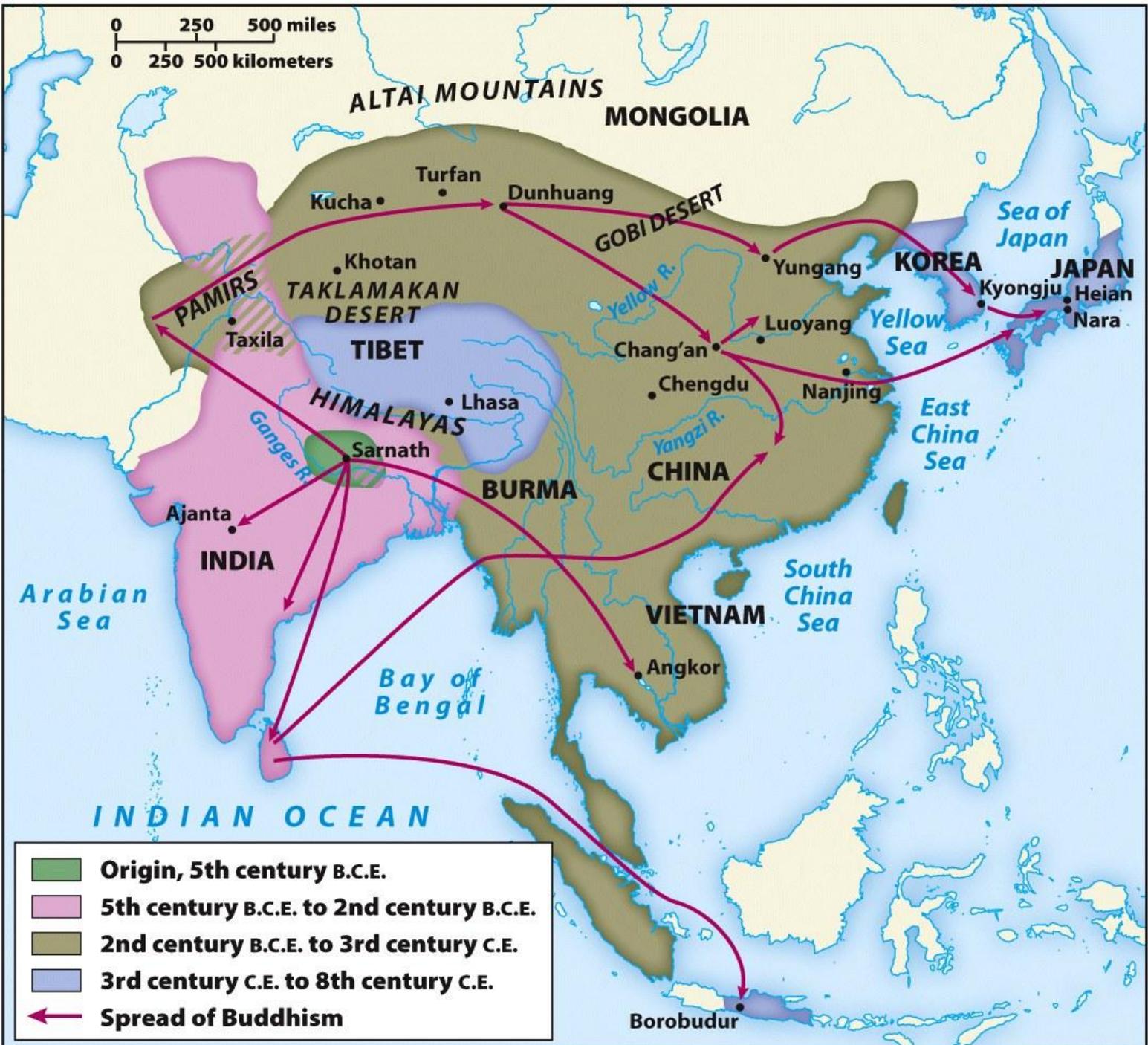
– On the Receiving End: China as Economic Beneficiary

- China learned cotton and sugar cultivation and processing from India
- China was transformed around 1000 by introduction of new rice strains from Vietnam
- technological creativity was spurred by cross-cultural contact
 - e.g., printing was stimulated by Buddhism (first printed book, in 868 c.e., was the Diamond Sutra, a Buddhist text)
- growing participation in Indian Ocean trade
 - foreign merchant settlements in southern Chinese ports by Tang era
 - sometimes brought violence, e.g., massive massacre of foreigners in Canton in the 870s
 - transformation of southern China to production for export instead of subsistence

China and Buddhism



The Eightfold Path



0 250 500 miles
0 250 500 kilometers

ALTAI MOUNTAINS MONGOLIA

Turfan Dunhuang Kucha
Gobi Desert

Khotan Taxila
TAKLAMAKAN DESERT

TIBET

Lhasa
HIMALAYAS

BURMA

CHINA

Yungang
KOREA
JAPAN
Kyongju Heian Nara

Chang'an Luoyang

Chengdu Nanjing

Ajanta

INDIA

VIETNAM

Angkor

Borobudur

Arabian Sea

Bay of Bengal

INDIAN OCEAN

Sea of Japan

Yellow Sea

East China Sea

South China Sea

Yellow R.

Yangzi R.

Ganges R.

Sarnath

- Buddhism was India’s most important gift to China
 - China’s only large-scale cultural borrowing until Marxism
 - China was the base for Buddhism’s spread to Korea and Japan
- Making Buddhism Chinese
 - Buddhism entered China via Silk Roads in first–second centuries c.e.
 - had little appeal at first
 - Indian culture was too different from Chinese
 - » Buddhist monasticism seemed to dishonor Chinese family values
 - » concern for individual salvation seemed selfish
 - » China’s philosophy was “this-worldly”

- Buddhism took root 300–800 c.e.
 - collapse of the Han dynasty ca. 200 c.e. brought chaos and discrediting of Confucianism
 - nomadic rulers in northern China favored Buddhism
 - Buddhism was comforting
 - monasteries provided increasing array of social services
 - Buddhists appeared to have access to magical powers
 - serious effort to present Buddhism in a form accessible to the Chinese
 - » *dharma* was translated as *dao*
 - » “morality” was translated as filial submission
 - it was Mahayana form of Buddhism that became popular
 - » Pure Land School was especially popular

- Sui and early Tang dynasties gave state support to Buddhism
 - Sui emperor Wendi (r. 581–604) had monasteries built at base of China's five sacred mountains
 - » used Buddhism to justify his military campaigns
 - » monasteries became very wealthy
 - » Buddhism was never independent from state authorities

– Losing State Support: The Crisis of Chinese Buddhism

- growth of Chinese Buddhism provoked resistance and criticism
 - deepening resentment of the Buddhist establishment's wealth
 - it was *foreign*, thus offensive
 - monastic celibacy and withdrawal undermined the Confucian-based family system
- new xenophobia perhaps started with An Lushan rebellion (755–763), led by foreign general
- Chinese state began direct action against foreign religions in 841–845
 - 260,000 monks and nuns forced to return to secular life
 - thousands of monasteries, temples, and shrines confiscated or destroyed
 - Buddhists forbidden to use precious metals or gems for their images
- Buddhism did not vanish from China; it remained an important element of popular religion

Reflections: Why Do Things Change?

- Change and transformation are constants in human history.
 - explaining why and how societies change is historians' most central issue
 - there is often disagreement about what is the most important catalyst of change
- The case of China illustrates the range of factors that drive change.
 - world historians tend to find contact with strangers to be the primary source of change
 - the history of China and East Asia helps illustrate this view
 - but perhaps it's misleading to distinguish between internal and external sources of change