

The Tang and Sung Dynasties. The Yuan

In the seventh century A.D., China was reunited by the T'ang dynasty. The T'ang era (618 - 917) restored domestic unity to China and reinstated Chinese hegemony in Central Asia and Korea. Chang an (Sian), the capital, with its two million inhabitants, was the largest and most cosmopolitan city in the world. Buddhism flourished, and the era is known for its brilliant intellectual and artistic life.

The T'ang dynasty collapsed at the beginning of the 10th century, leaving China a prey to anarchy for nearly a century. Under the Sung dynasty (960 - 1279), China was surrounded by restless barbarians on all three sides; nevertheless the era saw the arts of ceramics and painting brought to new levels of beauty and refinement.

Early in the twelfth century the Sung emperor was driven south by a new incursion of nomad people, and in 1280 the Mongols under Kublai Khan swept from the north, crushed the last elements of Chinese resistance, and placed all of China under alien rule. This period is known as the Yuan dynasty (1280 - 1367).

The Ming and Ch'ing Dynasties

As the first fury of conquest faded, Chinese resistance grew. In 1360 the native Ming dynasty (1368 - 1643) regained the Empire. Although the Ming Empire was destroyed in 1644, the Ch'ing dynasty of the Manchus, which was proclaimed in its stead, preserved the unity of the Empire and extended Chinese power on the frontiers. The threat of barbarian invasion was finally removed at the end of the eighteenth century, when the armies of the great Emperor Ch'ien-lung destroyed the last remnants of Mongol military power, and the territories of Tibet and Central Asia were placed