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China's Golden Age

The In 609 CE, China completed the Grand Canal, a waterway that helped transform the empire into the largest and most advanced civilization of its time. Over the centuries that followed, the population soared, great cities blossomed, and Chinese inventions changed the world. Historians call this period China's Golden Age.

China Divided

For more than three centuries after the fall of the Han Dynasty, China remained divided during the Age of Disunity. Military leaders fought for control while many people were forced to flee their farms. Trade declined, travel became dangerous, and a series of small kingdoms rose and fell. None could match the stability and prosperity of the Han Dynasty, which remained a symbol of unity and good government.

The Sui Reunify China

A military leader named Yang Jian reunified China and founded the Sui Dynasty. Like the Qin rulers centuries earlier, the Sui restored order but demanded enormous labor from the people. Their greatest achievement was the vast waterway that connected the great cities and wheat-growing regions of northern China with the fertile rice fields of the south.

The Tang Dynasty

The burden placed on millions of workers contributed to rebellions that toppled the dynasty. The emperor abandoned the capital and retreated to his floating palace on the Grand Canal. In 618 CE, he was assassinated in his bed by his own advisors. Out of the chaos, a military governor named Li Yuan seized control and founded the Tang Dynasty.

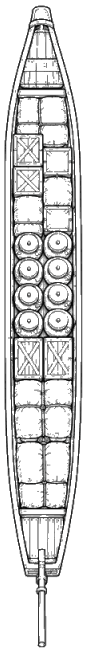
The Song Dynasty

The Tang Dynasty maintained stability for nearly three centuries, but high taxes and military revolts led to its collapse in 907. After a brief period of fragmentation, the Song Dynasty arose fifty years later.

Prosperity

The Grand Canal united China in a way that armies never could. Merchants moved goods more easily, trade expanded, and prosperity spread across the empire. China's population soared as food became more plentiful. By the time of the Golden Age, China was home to more people than any country on Earth.

Crowded cities such as Kaifeng (pronounced (kai-FUNG) and Hangzhou (pronounced hahng-JOH) became centers of innovation. As demand for books grew, Chinese craftsmen carved entire pages into wooden blocks and used them to print thousands of copies. Centuries before Gutenberg's printing press appeared in Europe, printed books were already common in China.



Inventors developed furnaces that could melt iron and pour it into molds. Cast iron produced stronger plows, better tools, and durable cooking pots. Chinese craftsmen perfected porcelain, a hard, beautiful ceramic that became prized throughout the world. Gunpowder and the compass were also developed during China's Golden Age.

A Self-Sufficient Economy

While China traded with Central Asian peoples and neighboring kingdoms, most of its wealth came from within. Its farms fed growing cities, its craftsmen produced valuable goods, and its merchants connected markets across the empire. During the Golden Age, China became one of the most prosperous and self-sufficient civilizations in the world.

Threats from the North

While China had the resources to prosper, much of the land to the north and west was less productive. As China's wealth grew, nomadic

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herders along the frontier sometimes raided its farms, towns, and villages. Chinese rulers became increasingly concerned with protecting their people and resources. In time, China would build its Great Wall to keep these intruders at bay, but not before the Mongols ended a Golden Age that had lasted nearly 700 years.

Fill in the Blanks

After the fall of the Han D__n__s__y, China remained d__v__d__d for more than three c__n__u__i__s in a period known as the A__e of D__s__n__ty. In 581 CE, Yang Jian restored unity to China and founded the S__i Dynasty. The Sui built the G__a__d C__n__l, linking the w__e__t-growing north with the r__ce-producing south. Although the project helped transform China, the heavy labor b__r__en led to r__b__l__i__ns that toppled the dynasty. Under the T__ng and later the S__ng Dynasty, China entered a G__ld__n Age. T__a__e expanded, c__t__es grew, and China's p__p__l__ti__n soared. Innovations included woodblock p__i__t__ng, cast i__on, porcelain, g__n__o__d__r, and the c__m__a__s. China's *w__a__th attracted the n__m__d__c peoples along the *fr__nt__er that raided its borders. One group, the M__n__o__s, eventually ended China's Golden Age after nearly ____ years.

Answer in Complete Sentences

1. What was the significance of the Grand Canal?

*2. According to the article, was the Sui Dynasty popular with the Chinese people? Defend your answer.

3. Why were Chinese cities among the largest in the world during the Golden Age?

*4. In your opinion, what was China's most significant accomplishment or inventions during the Golden Era? Defend your answer.

*Higher order learning question. Any reasonable answer will be accepted.

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