

Was China under the Tang Dynasty really 'the greatest civilisation on earth'?

TASK: Read the story of the unit, to find out more about what we're going to study in the next eight lessons. Then, answer the questions at the bottom of the page (use a separate piece of paper).

The **Tang Dynasty** was established in 618, when **Emperor Gaozu** seized power, taking advantage of the collapse of the previous dynasty (the **Sui Dynasty**). Li did not rule for long - in fact, he was forced off the throne by his own son, **Emperor Taizong**. Taizong went on to become a good leader who listened to the advice of people around him. Under Taizong, the empire expanded: lots of distant lands became **protectorates** (places ruled over by Taizong and later Tang rulers).

The Chinese had traditionally been **Taoist** in their beliefs: this meant that they had huge respect for nature, believing that humans and animals should live in balance with each other and with the universe. However, the Tang emperors were keen to spread **Buddhism** across the empire. Buddhism originated in India. **Monks** like **Xuanzang** went on long **pilgrimages** to India to find out more about Buddhist ideas and teachings, and bring them back to China.

One of the reasons that the Tang Dynasty was so successful was that during this period, the Chinese were **trading with merchants** from across the world. New, 'exotic' goods were brought in to China, and goods made in China could be sold abroad. This was possible because of the **Silk Roads**, a network of routes that connected China with Europe, North Africa and other parts of Asia. The Chinese city of **Chang'an** was an important location on the Silk Roads (in fact, it

was known as the 'eastern terminus' of the Silk Roads). Under the Tang rulers, Chang'an became the capital city of the Chinese empire.

In Chinese society at the time, **women** had very few opportunities. However, a woman called **Wu Zetian** rose to become empress (the only woman to ever have this role in Chinese history). Some say that Wu was a ruthless murderer: there were rumours that she had killed her own daughter, so that she could blame her husband's first wife for the murder and take a more important position for herself. Nevertheless, Empress Wu's rule was a time of real success: the empire expanded further, and Wu took actions to promote **art** and **religion**.

The Tang Dynasty was hit by many problems, including the **An Lushan Rebellion** and a series of floods and famines. Despite overcoming these problems, the challenges of the 800s proved too much. In 907, the Tang Dynasty collapsed, with the final two Tang emperors (and their whole family) brutally murdered by rebels.

TASK: Answer the questions below:

- 1: Who was the first Tang emperor?
- 2: Which religion were the Tang emperors keen to promote?
- 3: How did the Silk Roads help the Tang Dynasty to develop?
- 4: Why do some people think Wu Zetian was a ruthless murderer?
- 5: What sort of problems did the Tang Dynasty manage to overcome?
- 6: What happened to the final two Tang emperors?