

History of China for Kids

Part 2



By Rachel Bubb

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This book (Part 2) goes through China's history from the Tang Dynasty to modern history (up to 2021). Part 1 goes from the beginnings of China (Xia Dynasty) to the Tang Dynasty. My goal is to make history come alive for students and to tell it through stories so that students want to keep reading and learning. Although there are some project ideas throughout this book, not every student loves projects and sometimes the parent or teacher ends up learning more by getting the project ready than the student doing the project themselves. There are also introductions to painters and poets throughout this book. I want to especially thank Katylin who helped me proofread this book.

Rachel (October 2021)

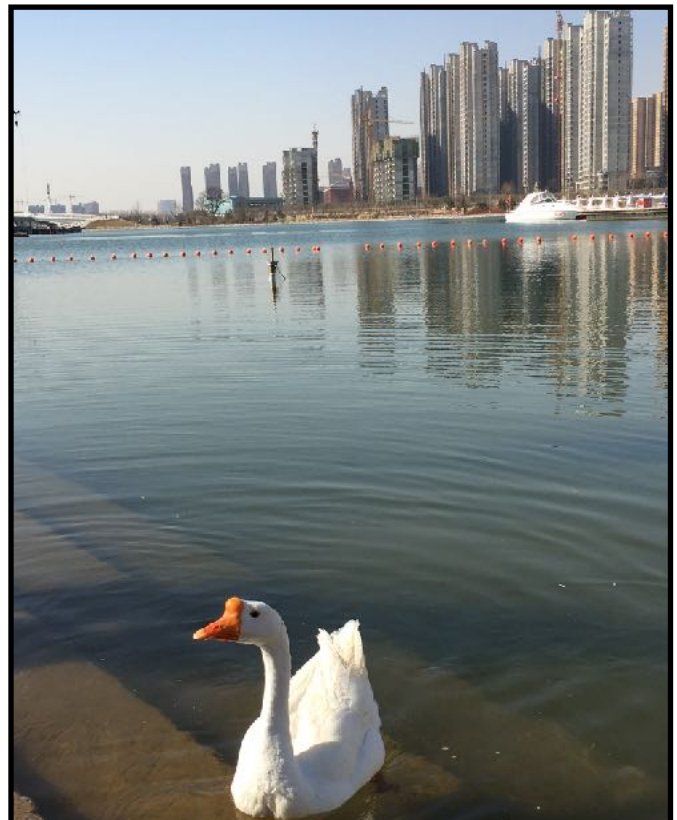


Table of Contents

1. The Period of Division (906-969 AD)
 1. A Story About Block Printing and Block Printing Project
 2. Painter: Jing Hao (855-915 AD) and Painter: Fan Kuan (950-1032 AD)
 3. Painter: Guo Xi (1020-1090 AD) and Painter: Zhang Zeduan (1085-1145 AD)
2. The Song Dynasty (969-1279 AD)
 1. The Life of Li Jie
3. The Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368 AD)
 1. Kubla Khan Excerpt (Samuel Taylor Coleridge)
 2. Marco Polo
 3. Where We Live: Living in Yurts
 4. Where We Live: Hongcun Water Village
 5. Food During The Yuan Dynasty
 6. Painter: Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322 AD)
 7. The Four Artists of the Yuan Dynasty: Huang Gongwang, Wu Zhen, Ni Zan, and Wang Meng
 8. Yuan Dynasty Plays: Guan Huanqing and Wang Shifu
4. The Ming Dynasty (1369-1644 AD)
 1. A Story About Zhenghe
 2. Where We Live: The Forbidden City
 3. Forbidden City Project
 4. Where We Live: Tulou Houses
 5. Food During The Ming Dynasty
 6. Painter: Dai Jin and Painter: Shen Zhou
 7. Ming Dynasty Novels
5. The Qing Dynasty (1644-1911 AD)
 1. A Story About Emperor Kangxi
 2. Where We Live: Yuan Ming Yuan
 3. The Life of Puyi
 4. Food During The Qing Dynasty
 5. Painter: Yuan Jiang and Painter: Gong Xi'an
 6. Qing Dynasty Novels
6. Extras

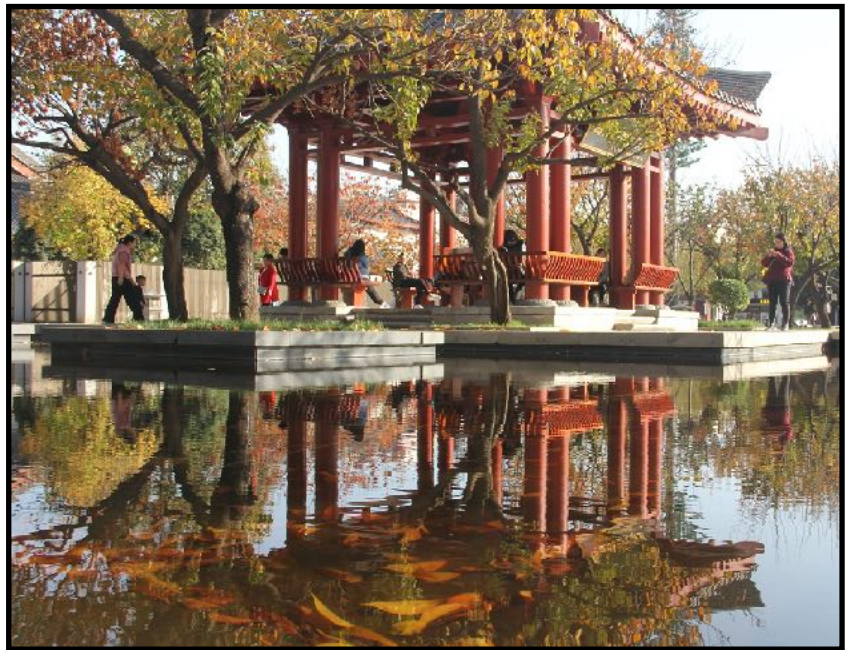
1. Map of China Today
 2. Historical Maps of China
 3. Hats
 4. Emperor's Clothes
 5. Notes
 6. Notes on The Photography in This Book
 7. Sources
 8. For Further Reading
- (After this is Modern Chinese History)



Chapter 1: The Period of Division (906-969 AD)

After the Tang Dynasty the country was split again into many smaller countries or states. As someone once said, “The empire, long divided, must unite; long united, must divide. Thus it has ever been.”¹ Some people say that this was a hard time to live because there were many famines, floods, and thieves. It’s said that these were some of the darkest years in Chinese history. “...the picture of facts and conditions of [living during] this time would move anyone to pity and terror.”²

At the end of the Tang Dynasty, Li Keyong was one of the kings that started to rule. After Li Keyong died, his son, Li Canxu, became king of that part of the country. At this time, one of the other kings said this about Li Canxu: “I see that Li Keyong is not dead, but lives in his son. If a man would have a son he should have one like Canxu. As for mine, they are like pigs or dogs, and are utterly useless.”³ As we’ve seen



before, this was a big problem throughout Chinese history: often if the father was a good king, the son would not be. Li Canxu made the taxes lower, helped take care of the orphans, and made good laws for the people.

There’s another story about a different king and his son. This son was very bad. His dad’s name was Tai Zu. He was old and about to die. Tai Zu had a few sons and chose the son that he adopted to be the king after him. However, Tai Zu’s fourth son wanted to be the next king instead. At night, he came into his father’s room with some soldiers who were on his side. His father woke up and was surprised to see his son with soldiers with him. He sat up and told his son that if he was going to kill his own father, “the vengeance of Heaven and earth will fall on you.”⁴ One of the soldiers killed

the old man and they dug a hole in the palace to bury the old king that night before everyone woke up in the morning.

Before the news got out that the king was dead, this bad son sent news to his other brother saying that their father wanted the brother (who was supposed to be king next) killed because of something he did. Of course it was all lies. This bad son became the king, but wasn't king for long. Everyone around him (including those who helped him become king) didn't like him because he was mean to those around him. They soon came to the palace to kill him and make his brother king instead. When he heard they were coming, he knew it was over for him so he killed himself before they came.⁵

There were some good kings during this time and one of them grew up not as a king at all. When he grew up he had the job of taking care of the horses. One day one of the horses walked out of the field so he went to find it. He eventually found the horse but it was eating grass in a field that belonged to a Buddhist monk. When this Buddhist monk saw the horse and the teenage boy running after it, he gave the boy a hard time for letting the horse loose. Later this young boy was made one of the leaders of his area and eventually king of that state. When he became king, he called for the Buddhist monk that gave him such a hard time when he was a teenager. The Buddhist monk was afraid and thought that he would be punished. Instead, the king was nice to him and sent him away with gifts.⁶

One of the most important inventions during this time was the printing press. Having the printing press meant that books were cheaper since they could be printed instead of being copied by hand. Of course it still took time to print books because they had to find each character in all of the stamps and put them together in the correct order to print. Chengdu, which is famous for its panda bears today, was famous at this time for the books that were printed



Period of Division (906-969 AD)



there. The first books to get printed were the teachings of Confucius.

One of the last kings to rule at this time was a seven-year-old boy. At first other people helped him rule until he was older, but even when he was old enough to rule, some people thought he wasn't going to be that good of a ruler. They decided to make the leader of the army, Zhao Kuangyin, king instead. When they came to make Zhao Kuangyin king, he was actually sleeping! He had been up late the night before and was sleeping in.

They came into his tent, woke him up, and told him that he was now the king. Zhao Kuangyin was the one who was to start the Song Dynasty.

Review Questions

1. Why was this such a bad time to live?
2. What happened with the king and the horses in this chapter?
3. Why was the printing press so important?
4. How did Zhao Kuangyin end up being king?

A Story about Block Printing

“Have you heard of this block printing that’s coming out? Have you seen it yet?” Fang Qing asked her friend.

“No, my mom was trying to explain it to me. She said that it’s where they take a piece of wood or clay, make an image on it, put ink on it, and then press it to the paper. The image is seen on the paper in ink afterward.”

“It sounds so cool. Maybe we should try to make our own. Hey, we can even make our own pictures this way and sell them! We can make a lot at one time. Do you think people would buy them?” Fang Qing asked.

“Maybe. We can try. Where would we get the paper for it? Paper’s expensive!”

“How about we dry some big leaves and use them as paper.”

The next day the two friends met up at the big walnut tree by Fang Qing’s home. They looked on the ground for walnut leaves that had fallen and tried to dry them out. Close by was a plane tree so they also picked some big leaves there and dried them out. Then they looked for small pieces of wood that they could use for their own block printing. Fang Qing took the wood to the kitchen and asked her mom for help.

“Mom, we need to make a picture on this piece of wood. Can you help us? I want to use a knife to do it, but I know you’d think that it’s too dangerous. So I’m asking you to do it for me instead.” Fang Qing explained what they were doing and how they wanted a rose made into the wood. Her mom told her that it would be too hard to do a rose.



Period of Division (906-969 AD)



Instead she made a very simple design for them to try out.

They had the wood and the leaves. Now all they needed was the ink. At first they thought about just using muddy water. However, they wanted color, not just brown on top of a brown leaf. They tried stepping on berries to get a blue-purple color. Then they tried stepping on

pomegranate seeds for a red color. Their feet got all yucky with the berries and pomegranate seeds. They left red and blue-purple footprints on the ground as they walked to the well to get some water to wash their feet with.

Finally, it was time to try out their print. Fang Qing did the first one and it was ok. After several tries, they liked the blue/purple color the best because it showed up the best on the walnut leaf. They decided to leave the leaves out to dry overnight and see how they were. The next morning Fang Qing woke up and rushed outside. To her dismay, the leaves were even more withered and brown than before! When she picked them up, they easily crumbled in her hand. She hoped one day she'd see a real block print! It turned out that she didn't have to wait long because the next month a block printing shop opened in her town.



Period of Division (906-969 AD)

Block Printing Project:

Make your own “stamps” for letters (or you could do designs) with the help of your parents. Draw out the letters on cardboard and cut them out. You could also use veggies (carrots and potatoes would probably work well), but they won’t last as long.

After you make your stamps, dip them in paint (or an ink pad) and start “printing.” If you can find letter stamps, you can use those instead of making your own if you want to do it that way instead. “Printing” with this method was slow, but much faster than just copying everything by hand! How long did it take you to make one full sentence? _____

Now write out this sentence five times. How long did it take you?

Now print out this sentence five times. How long did it take you?

