

*"The Sui and T'ang Empires --
Compromise between the Barbarians and the Chinese"*

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After about three and a half centuries of political disunity and upheaval, China was reunified by the Sui (A.D. 580-618) and the succeeding T'ang (618-906) Dynasties. The ruling families, however, were of mixed blood and were not ethnically or spiritually fully Han Chinese. In fact, Turkish, Tibetan-Mongolian as well as Hsien-pi's influences were evident in these periods. In both their institutions and the composition of their ruling class, the Sui and T'ang Dynasties were a kind of Sino-barbarian synthesis.

Although China was invaded by the barbarians during the third to fifth centuries (A.D.), the Chinese absorbed the barbarians, reconstructed the unified empire, and revived the Chinese culture. By the middle of the sixth century, in the process of absorption, the northern Chinese had acquired something of the strong and forceful energy of the tribal nomads, while retaining their Chinese character, language, and culture. Throughout the whole period of disunity, there was much intermarriages between the Chinese with the barbarians; among them, Toba (a kind of Turkish people) in the northwest, and Hsien-pi in the North(east) were most powerful and influential. Yang Chien, who reunified China by his Sui Dynasty and thus became Sui Wen-ti, was a member of the northwestern Chinese aristocracy, and father-in-law of the last emperor of the preceding Northern Chou Dynasty. Sui Wen-ti, himself claimed to be of Chinese descent, yet, he may actually have been of Hsien-pi origin; and it was evident that his principal wife (the queen) was of barbarian blood, from the Duku family.

The Li-T'ang -- the royal family of T'ang China has been marrying members of the Toba families, or has been thoroughly intermarried with the great barbarian families of North China; and we can see, not surprisingly, that they enjoyed or won the confidence and support of the Toba party in the Northwest. Probably, the T'ang ruling family was a sinified Toba family. During the Chen-kuan reign (627-650), T'ang T'ai-tsung made himself "Heavenly Khan" of the Turks. It is obvious, too, that the "Heavenly Khan" had many victories which were supported by the Uighurs and other friendly or allied tribes. Later, the (Eastern) Turkish leaders were admitted into the Chinese army, and the sons of their nobles lived at the imperial court. Professor Wolfram Eberhard found that "more than a million Turks were settled in this way, and some of them actually became Chinese later and gained vital posts." (*A History of China*, p.177) Emperor Kao-Tsung (r.650-685) succeeded what T'ai-tsung had started -- the "internationalism" -- and continued the cosmopolitan feature as well as expressing China's prestige at its climax. The caravans streamed into China from western and central Asia bringing large quantities of great varieties of goods. There were trading centers and inland trading posts. The T'ang empire was nested with a commercial network; foreign merchants who had come to China by land might meet others who had come by sea in the trading centers. They brought with them their own religions, too: Buddhism, Manichaeism (a Nestorian branch of Christianity), Mazdaism (or Zoroastrianism -- the fire-worshipping religion of Persia), Judaism, and Islam. Culturally, this influx of foreigners enriched China, and the T'ang Dynasty became brighter and more colorful. The cultural influence of Buddhism found expression in new and improved translation of countless texts, too. Buddhism of this time also played a vital impact on the development of Taoism and neo-Confucianism in Chinese history, especially in T'ang and Sung China. There were also translations from Indian/Sanskrit or other languages into Chinese and from Chinese into the Uighur and other Turkish tongues, and into Tibetan.

The last but not least aspect of the "cosmopolitanism" of this period was the way in which neighboring people sought to imitate the early T'ang. Never before and never again in the traditional history of China did such a tremendous popularity of China acting as the obvious model for government, culture, and many other fields. The various tribes of peoples surrounding China imitated the T'ang, because of increased contacts, and another reason might have been that the peoples of these regions had in the meantime reached a cultural level at which the direct imitation of Chinese culture was now more possible than ever for them. In other words, the early T'ang (especially the ruling family) did have a great deal of similarities, such as the tribal background, the mixed-blood relations, and northwestern frontier customs with neighboring "barbarians." Certainly, the prestige and perfection of the T'ang system, and the cosmopolitan feature of the T'ang culture were the basic factors that attracted the frontier tribal peoples, too.

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