

Teacher: Gintaras Valiulis  
Grade: 7  
Subject: World History

## Lesson Plan on the Age of Division: One China or Many Chinas?

**Objectives:** Students will be able to:

1. Explain the collapse of the Han into the Age of Division
2. Describe the cultural changes during the Age of Division
3. Identify key personalities in politics and art during the Age of Division
4. Describe the process of transformation from a divided China to a united one once more.
5. Locate the important states of the Age of Division on a Map.
6. Identify the multicultural elements of the Age of Division
7. Argue a case for or against the inevitability of a united China from the perspective of the Age of Division.

**Opening Comments:** This lesson plan is presented in the form of a lecture with Socratic segues in points. Because much of the material is not found in 7<sup>th</sup> grade history books I could not rely on any particular reading assignments and would then present these sections as reading assignments with lecture and explicative support. As this lesson becomes more refined, some of the academic language may disappear but some would remain and become highlighted to help students build a more effective technical vocabulary for history and the social sciences. Much of my assignments in class build note-taking skills and ask students to create their own graphic organizers, illustrations, and such to help the students build more meaning. Several segues could lead to debates depending upon student interest and instructional time. The following is arranged in a series of questions which are explored in the lecture. Upon completing any particular lecture students could be asked to write a paragraph summary of the particular segment which could be graded on content, or given a comprehensive test on the unit with the student being allowed to select several questions to answer as appropriate for the test time.

### What happened to the Age of Division?

Three hundred fifty years of Chinese history just fell out of your history book and yet it is full of characters so well known in Japan, Korea and China that they have been made into popular video game characters!

Historians call the period between 220 and 589, the Age of Division. This is a period between two great imperial periods the Qin-Han dynastic period and the Sui-Tang dynastic period. (It is useful to consider the Qin and Han as one period because there was a very short break in unity between these two dynasties. As well between the Sui and the Tang dynasties there is no break or discontinuity.) Even though this period of history lasts over 350 years and includes the growth of art forms and religious practice that become iconic of Chinese civilization, most textbooks ignore this period. In part, this may be because the political history of this period is very complicated. However, this complicated history at the beginning of this period became the setting for one of China's most influential novels, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. If this is such an important era, why is it left out of our textbooks? [It is always useful to get the students to question their textbook and why things are chosen or left out of the book. This is good training for students to understand the nature of institutions and to question authority. It is

much better for this questioning of authority to occur within the context of school rather than in opposition to the school institutions] Prof. Yang Ye, from the China Seminar I took, suggested it was due to a famous Harvard Professor John K. Fairbank. Fairbank did great things to popularize interest in China just before World War II and was probably the most educated American on Chinese history into the 1970's. Fairbank however favored periods of Chinese unity in his studies and tended to gloss over and stay away from periods of disunity. The answer why he did this we can't answer now, however, realize that his decisions are reflected in your textbook. Fairbank's China: A New History, has two pages on the Age of Division out of a 500 page book. However among Chinese historians this period is more commonly studied. I had one student who took a Chinese history class in Beijing and spend the entire time on the Age of Division. Even though this period is not in your history book, it is helpful in understanding Chinese history and understanding the success of Koei's Romance of Three Kingdoms video game series now in its 12<sup>th</sup> iteration and its companion fighting game Dynasty Warriors.

[This can be a good time show a brief clip of Dynasty Warriors to wake everyone up. Kids ask questions like could the really do that and such and of course the answer is no, however these characters are based on real historical figures who are romanticized in the Romance of the Three Kingdoms]

<http://www.koei.com/dw6/>  
<http://www.koei.com/dw7/>

Red Cliff Trailers:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3qIXQCHf94>

### **How did power groups interrelate in the late Han Dynasty?**

The first thing we need to understand are the power groups at the end of the Han Dynasty. Rarely do large governments collapse simply except perhaps in the case of overwhelming invasion. In the case of the Fall of the Han Dynasty, most of the causes are internal, from within the country rather than external, from outside as would be the case of an invasion. An emperor cannot rule alone. He is one person ruling a country of millions. He needs people he can trust. Within the Han Dynasty the emperor hoped to trust:

- \*Wealthy Aristocrats: Some families were more successful than others and had acquired large land holdings and enough money so that they could influence groups of people.
- \*Scholar officials: people chosen through the examination system for their knowledge. Many of these people were from wealthy families because wealthy families could afford the education required to do well on the exams, however, this class was not exclusive to those families.
- \*Military officers: An empire needs a military and these military leaders were needed to put down rebellions or defend the borders.
- \*Wives: An emperor had many wives. They worked as clerks within the palace and they were a close connection to the aristocratic families of China. At times this meant that the emperor knew more about the wealthy and powerful families but this also meant they knew more about him.
- \*Eunuchs: The wives and eunuchs made up the inner court, or the court within the palace that had the most direct contact with the emperor. The eunuchs became very close to the emperor because he saw them every day. Since the eunuchs did not come from aristocratic families, emperors felt they could trust them more than their wives who might be trying to get more for their relatives.

These groups are common to other Chinese dynasties as well to varying degrees with any group gaining or losing power over time.

## **How did regional differences reflect in late Han China?**

The cultural and political center of Han China was along the Yellow River. We can refer to the Yellow River region as Northern China. Today's capital of Beijing or Northern Capital is farther north than the region we would zero in on as Northern China or the Yellow River valley. Southern China is defined by the Yangtze River valley. Of course China extends well South of the Yangtze today and it did during Han times however those regions were recently conquered and were not well integrated into Han culture and society. Even though the Han Dynasty extended as far south as Vietnam [I can tell you later about the Trung sisters who fought against the Han] for the most part the populations of those regions South of the Yangtze were not Chinese. Indeed in today's ethnic divisions within China, the dominant Chinese ethnicity is called Han as representations of this empire. So while the borders of the empire extend far south, much of the empire south of the Yangtze was not particularly Chinese. This changes profoundly during the Age of Division.

Think for a moment how it is best rule over a people you have conquered. If you were a Han governor would you attempt to make the people become like the Han Chinese in the North or would you simply let them be as they were and collect taxes from them?  
[Discuss]

Most Han officials decided to let local elites continue to rule as long as they supported the Han and paid taxes. The officials who tried to exert the will of the emperor down to the people were considered harsh and sometimes their actions led to revolt. A rather famous revolt that is remembered in Vietnam to today is that of Trung Trac and Trung Nhi two sisters who using rallied the Vietnamese around a tiger skin banner and drove the Han out of Vietnam for a short time. Even though the Han defeated them later, it was clearly expensive for the empire and created a story of resistance against the Chinese the Vietnamese hold dear even today.

## **How did the Han Dynasty fall?**

Imagine you are the emperor. Your word is law. But also remember you are still one human being. Sometimes emperors were your age (12-13). How would you know what to do? Your dad was pretty busy being emperor and you are not the only prince. You could ask your mom and her family but maybe your uncle is just trying to boss you around? You could ask the eunuchs? These are men in the inner palace who have been castrated so they can be trusted with all of the emperor's wives. What about all of those other princes from other moms? Do you think you can trust them? Remember too there are many princes and if enough people don't like you something might happen to you and one of those other princes will become emperor. While you are thinking about all of that are you really thinking about the people in your country; if the military is effective; or if the dykes keeping the Yellow River from flooding are actually getting enough repairs? This is the imperial system when it is working. The Emperor, hopes to trust his eunuchs, is worried that certain families among his wives are getting too powerful, yet must appoint governors and military officers from important families to keep them happy. For this system to work it is finely balanced between the different power groups. Once it goes off balance it is hard to fix it.

At age 12, An found himself emperor. He was one of several princes but chosen by the Empress Dowager (wife of the dead emperor) Deng to rule. Soon afterward between 107 and 109, conquered tribes like the Qiang begin to rebel. Do you give them freedom or do you crush them? Can you crush them? Also floods and droughts both affect the empire. Even the nomadic Xiongu (Huns) decided to attack the empire. How to you respond? An however had the Empress to handle all of these problems for him and she did a good job until she died in 121. Now who to trust? An's wet nurse and his favorite eunuchs told him that Deng's family planned to have him killed and another made emperor. Would you

trust them? An didn't and destroyed Deng's family by taking away all of their government positions which forced many to commit suicide. An did not care for ruling himself and let his relative and the eunuchs do much of the work. In 125, at age 31, An died. This sudden death created a civil war within the palace between the consort factions and the eunuchs. The eunuchs won and put a child emperor on the throne. Anyone from the outer court (the military and scholar officials both connected to the aristocratic families) who protested the acts of the eunuchs might find themselves killed.

If you were an official, what do you think of the imperial government now? Do you trust it? Now add in that the government is running out of money and by 143 your salary is cut and taxes are due a year in advance.

If you are not one of the aristocrats or officials much of this might not matter, however in 153 swarms of locusts and flooding of the Yellow River forces many poor off their land or into starvation. The government used to help but now it isn't. What would you think of the emperor?

One group of people starts helping the poor. They are called the Way of Great Peace and promote Daoist mysticism and healing as well as calling for revolution in 184. They wear yellow scarves to show their support. If you were one of the poor and hungry, would you join the Yellow Turban Revolt? The rebellion grows and they kill many officials.

Now back to being an official. What would you do about this? As the emperor what would you do? -- Yes, this is the time to call out the army. Remember that this will give more power to the army. Do the commanders trust the emperor and his eunuch court? In a short time the rebellion is put down only to have another in its place until in 189 one general takes his army to the imperial court and kills his 2000 eunuchs and makes the emperor his own puppet. The capital of Luoyang was sacked and burned destroying government libraries and records.

How much of an empire is there now in 189? Technically the dynasty won't be over until a general decides he does need a Han emperor as a puppet anymore and can rule alone. That happens in 220. So to an extent the Han dynasty has fallen by 189. But who is in charge? Would you trust a general who just burned down the capital? Who should the officials trust? Who should the other generals trust? That is the big problem for nearly 400 years.

The period soon after 189 is chaotic as alliances between generals are made and broken and armies fight massive battles. Cao Cao manages to control the north and holds the emperor, but the generals in the South do not support him. When Cao Cao makes his move to conquer the South, the Southern generals push him back at Red Cliff. This is a battle that includes large naval operations as well as armies fighting on land. Cao Cao's loss at Red Cliff establishes the Three Kingdoms period. When Cao Cao's son Cao Pei forced the last Han emperor out of office and established his own Wei dynasty, the Han Dynasty officially ended in 220. This Three Kingdoms period is the setting for the Romance of the Three Kingdoms. To get an idea of the complexity of the stories in this period, the game Dynasty Warriors has 60 playable characters most of which are based on historical figures from this period.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Dynasty\\_Warriors\\_characters](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Dynasty_Warriors_characters)

See the map of the Three Kingdoms.



Cao Pei's kingdom is the one in the North labeled Wei. It is on the Yellow River or Northern China. The kingdoms of Shu and Wu are centered on the Yangtze Valley and therefore in Southern China. Even though the territory of Shu and Wu is large the Southern regions had not been as developed as the North and much of the population was not tightly tied into the Chinese style government. Also on the map note the other non-Chinese people on the map: Qiang mentioned earlier, Di, Wuhuan, and Xianbei. The Xiongnu remain as a tribe but were closely tied to the Han court. Their leader was kept hostage by the Han but when he called on his tribesmen to join the fighting in China they killed him. In this way the Xiongnu and indeed the other nomads did not invade China taking advantage of its weakness but instead decided not to become entangled in a Chinese civil war. Cao Cao was able to subjugate enough Xiongnu that he used them as troops in his army but these troops did not maintain power in the way Roman federated tribes did. This was not the source for the eventual nomadic invasions of the Yellow River valley.

The Kingdom of Wei had the most population and the largest army. In 263 Wei defeated Shu under the General Sima Zhao who used the victory to turn on Wei emperor and make his own son the emperor of a new dynasty called Jin. This Jin Dynasty defeated the last of the three kingdoms in 280. China was reunified less than 100 years after it fell apart, but this Jin dynasty could not hold the empire together. The first Jin emperor gave power to many different families and spread power to different members of his own family and then went to enjoy himself as emperor [it is said he had 5000 concubines]. When he died the empire fell apart in the War of the Eight Princes which led to the 16 Kingdoms period.

**How did the Xiongnu and Xianbei take over Northern China?**



The Xiongnu and the Xianbei had constant contact with China during the Han Dynasty. The Chinese dealt with the Xiongnu by settling them on the frontier to guard against other tribes like the Xianbei and holding their leaders in the capital as hostage. The Xianbei united for a short time but Cao Cao had killed their leader and they remained divided. While Han emperors were aloof from combat, the warlords of the Age of Division fought with their armies more like the nomadic Xiongnu and Xianbei. The Han model of an emperor was largely civilian, while during the Age of Division, the model of an emperor was a military man. This new expectation for a leader made the nomadic leaders appear nearly as legitimate as the Chinese warlords. As the War of the Eight princes started, the leader of the Xiongnu, Liu Yuan had the closest direct ties to the old Han dynasty than did any of the other contenders for the throne. Liu Yuan was the descendant of hostage leaders who had lived in the Chinese courts of the Han and taken a Chinese name connected to the Han. Was Liu Yuan Chinese or Xiongnu? [discuss]

The Xiongnu considered Liu Yuan their leader even though most of them had not become as Chinese as he was. He used his command of the Xiongnu to play his part as another Chinese warlord not so much as an external invader. Liu Yuan had to bridge two worlds: the Chinese court and the Xiongnu. With the military power of the Xiongnu loyal to him and his family continuity going back to the Han Dynasty, Liu Yuan felt he could control Jin aristocrats and had some success until he died and his less charismatic son, Liu Cong failed to hold onto the Xiongnu.

Liu Yuan's general, Shi Le fought as a Xiongnu. The Xiongnu had little interest in holding conquered land but rather raiding it and taking everything they could. The Xiongnu grew loyal to Shi Le as he ravaged the Chinese countryside between 310 and 315, killing over 100,000 Chinese, burning down Louyang and murdering 48 Jin princes who had surrendered to him. The Xiongnu centered their government near Chang'an and the state of Xia on the map was a Xiongnu state with an exploitive nomad ruling class.

### **How did the northern aristocrats respond to nomad invasions?**

The ravaging of the Yellow River region by the Xiongnu sent many Chinese fleeing the region. Some went North into Manchuria which had become a Xianbei kingdom and many capable Chinese administrators then helped the Xianbei run their state. Many Chinese fled South to the Yangtze area. The wealthy were able to flee with great wealth and set themselves up as powerful aristocratic lords over the vanquished refugees and the native peoples of Southern China who had not become fully incorporated into the Han Dynasty. This created a system of powerful elite families over a largely impoverished

population. These Southern aristocrats continued to support a Jin Dynasty for some time while holding much power for themselves as well. While the Southern Dynasties were able to hold onto their territory for some time, they did not expand to the North. It is also apparent that some Chinese families remained in the Yellow River Valley and were able to work with the nomad conquerors.

### How did art and culture develop during the Age of Division?

Many different dynasties and many different courts meant that many different artistic styles became fashionable and favored in one court or another. Aristocrats in the South built their own courts based at first upon Han traditions but the aristocrats had more power than in the Han so there were many different courts creating many traditions in the South. As well in the North Chinese and nomadic cultures combined into cosmopolitan courts. For much of the time, the North was divided into different states which meant different courts and styles. This made the Age of Division a time of artistic innovation which became the basis for later developments. Cao Cao and Cao Pei were poets and developed new poetry styles. [Many of you don't think of tough generals as being poets.]

Mo Shang Sang (Mulberry on the Fields) (陌上桑) (6)

Author: Cao Cao

Translated by: Lady Wu

駕虹霓，乘赤云，登彼九疑歷玉門。  
濟天漢，至昆侖，見西王母謁東君。  
交赤松，及羨門，受要秘道愛精神。  
食芝英，飲醴泉，柱杖桂枝佩秋蘭。  
絕人事，游渾元，若疾風游欵翩翩。  
景未移，行數千，壽如南山不忘愆。

Driving a rainbow,  
Riding crimson clouds,  
I ascend the Nine Peaks to the Gates of Jade.

Crossing Heaven's River,  
Reaching Mount Kunlun,  
I meet the Western Goddess, pay my respects to the Sun.

Chisong's my companion,  
With Xianmen I am friends –  
I learn to nurture my spirit with the Tao that transcends.

My food's the immortal's lingzhi,  
My drink's from fragrant springs,  
My staff is made of laurel, and on my head an orchid ring.

No mortal affairs or troubles,  
No limits to where I go,  
As swift as the wind blows in the universe I travel.

Though the shadow has moved not,  
A thousand miles I've passed –

Ageless as the mountains but forgetting not the past.

From: <http://kongming.net/poetry/caocao/>

Poetry continued to be an important part of the courts in the Age of Division and talented poets became famous even if they challenged traditional Confucian ideals. For example the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove became icons of Daoist rebellion against Confucian conformity. [Perhaps the hippies of the time.] They played music, got drunk, one ran around naked. Poets represented expressions of individuality who challenged tradition and established ritual. During the Han they would have been shamed but during the Age of Division they were famous even though some were executed. One of the Sages, Ji Kang was executed for speaking up for a friend who was framed for a crime. Even though 3000 students signed a petition to free Ji Kang, the emperor did not release him but Ji Kang was allowed to play his Guqin one last time and reminded his executioners that with his death the music would be lost forever. Who appears to be in the right in this story, the emperor or the poet? What does this tell you about holding onto power during this time?

Play: Chinese musical instrument Guqin cue up: Red Cliff min 26:26

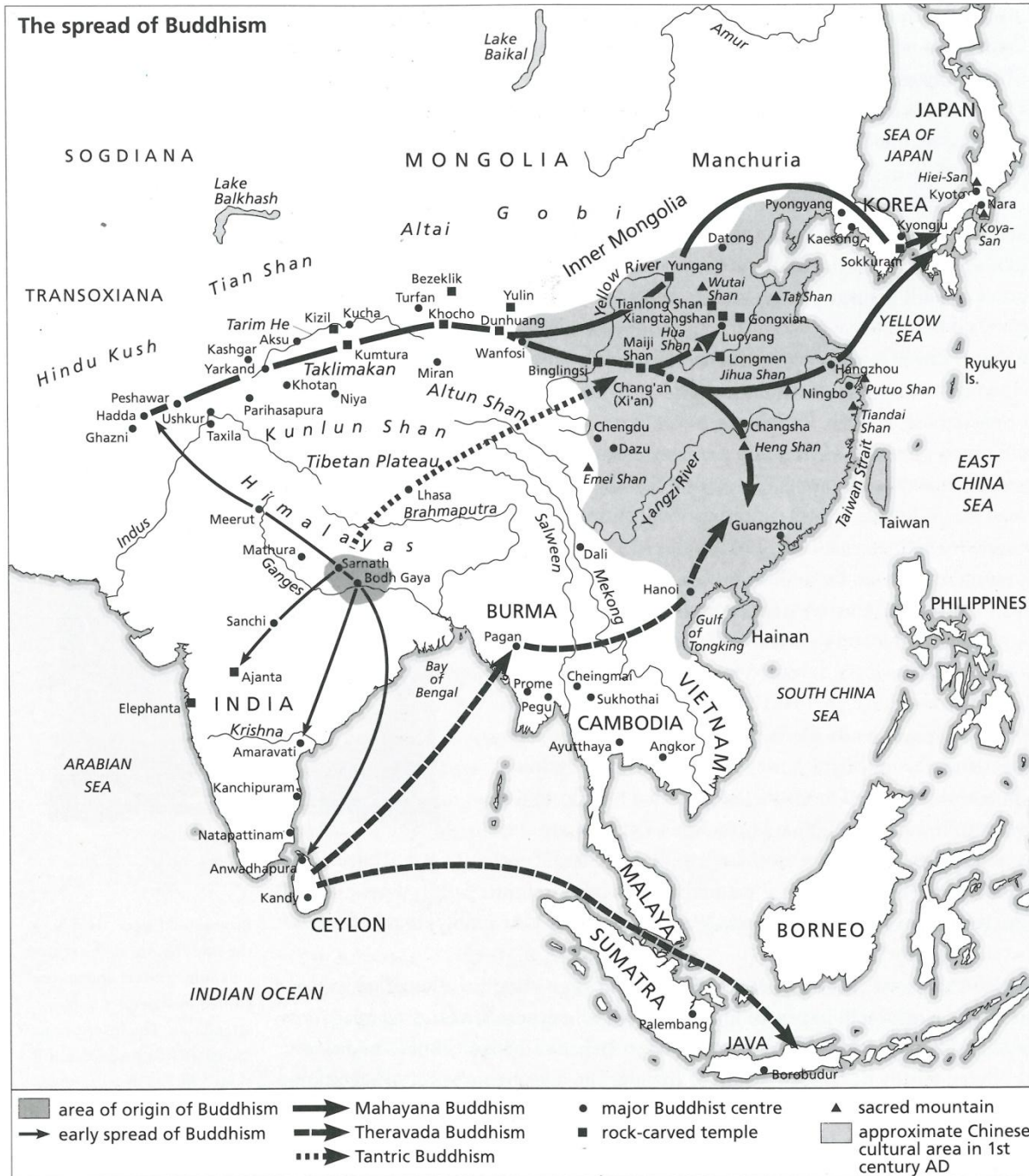
Cao Cao's poem above connects to Chinese religion and Daoist ideas. The practicalities of Confucian thought grew less popular during the chaotic Age of Division than the fantastic worlds of Daoism. Remember that a popular form of Daoism was central to the Yellow Turban Revolt that led to the fall of the Han. Daoism became more organized during the Age of Division and Daoist texts became more extensive. As well Daoism found itself in competition with another mystical religion that had extensive literature: Buddhism.

Buddhism began in India during the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE. The Chinese learned about Buddhism from foreign traders during the Han Dynasty and the earliest Chinese Buddhist texts are from the last days of the Han. However Buddhism did not become popular until the Age of Division. Why people choose a religion is difficult to confirm but the most common explanations are:

1. Buddhism had a clearer concept of life after death than Chinese traditional religion did. This was important during a time of chaos and unexpected death.
2. Buddhism's mysticism appealed to Chinese Daoists.
3. Buddhism's stress of on moral behavior appealed to Chinese Confucianists.
4. Buddhism's Universalist ideals appealed to the nomad rulers of the North because the nomadic shamanism and Chinese Confucianism and Daoism accentuated the differences within the coalition of ethnic groups that maintained their rule.

The following map shows the spread of Buddhism. The narrow arrows in India show Buddhism's early expansion while the other arrows show different Buddhist traditions going out from India. While there has been a debate about whether Chinese Buddhism came through the Silk Road in the North or by sea or overland from the South, most scholars agree that most ideas came through the North with probable influence from other forms. The form of Buddhism that is most important during the Age of Division was Mahayana. Mahayana stresses the idea that monks may become Bodhisattvas who help others attain Enlightenment. The earliest Mahayana texts are from about 180 in India, at the same time the Han Dynasty was falling. Essentially as this form of Buddhism was being developed the Chinese began to learn of it. The other forms of Buddhism on the map developed in later centuries after the Age of Division.





Regardless of which reasons were most important by 477, Northern China had 6,478 temples 77,258 monks while Southern China 2,846 temples and 82,700 monks in the same century. Some of the grandest examples of Buddhist art are the cave temples of Dunhuang and Yungang built during this period.

The Dunhuang Mogao caves were begun in 400 AD and are documented in the following web sites:

- <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2010/06/dunhuang-caves/larmer-text>
- [http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2008/07/06/arts/0706-COTT\\_index.html](http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2008/07/06/arts/0706-COTT_index.html)

The Yungang caves were started in 460 by the Northern Wei court and includes a 45 foot Buddha inspired by the Afghan Bamiyan Buddhas.

This article connects those Afghan Buddhas to current events.

<http://www.npr.org/2011/07/27/137304363/bit-by-bit-afghanistan-rebuilds-buddhist-statues>

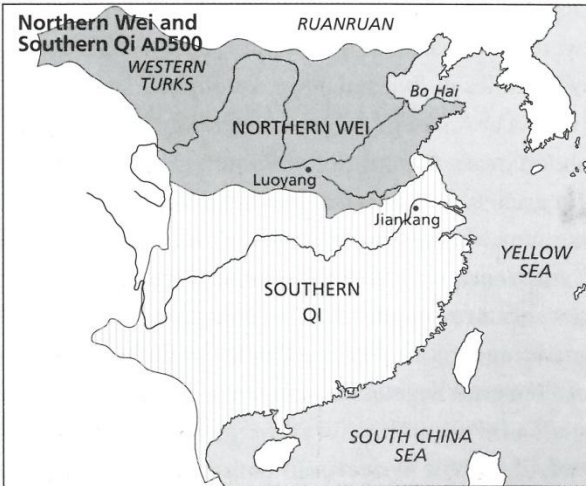
While Buddhism was popular in both the North and the South, it received more support in the North and maintained independence while appearing non-threatening to government. Huiyan's *On Why Monks Do Not Bow Down Before Kings* says that while the church is not involved with politics the moral teachings of Buddhism make them good subject.

### **How did the nomads influence Chinese culture?**

The Xiongnu did not remain as conquerors but withdrew as raiders to form the Xia state. This created an opportunity for the Xianbei who had created an integrated government of nomads, indigenous farmers and Chinese in Manchuria. Murong Hui the Xianbei leader asked the Jin for a generalship in order to legitimize his conquest of the Yellow River region and to begin his claim to rule all of China. The Murong descendants however could not balance the Xianbei expectation that their leader should spread the wealth and the need to tightly manage finances to maintain a Chinese style state.

The northern dynasties were a mix of nomadic tribes and Chinese which created several challenges. Chinese leaders were expected to show power through their palatial wealth while nomad leaders showed their power by distributing gifts to important families. Also the Chinese tended to favor systems where the son (ideally the eldest) becomes the next emperor while the nomads often encourage lateral inheritance so that a younger brother could inherit. Consider back to the idea of power depending upon trust. As a nomad your leader needs to act like a nomad to maintain your trust, but as a Chinese official, your leader needs to act Chinese to maintain your trust. As a leader you need both. Think about how you would have to train your son to be a nomad leader and a Chinese emperor at the same time? The last Murong emperor lapsed into Chinese imperial luxury with 4,000 concubines, 40,000 servants and allowed aristocrats gain power and avoid taxes.

Another Xianbei tribe then moved in to create the Wei State. The Wei demanded settled their own tribesmen on lands making nomadism illegal. Thus they destroyed their own nomadic way of life to reduce the conflict between Chinese style administration and nomadic administration. However, different from the Chinese, the Xianbei Wei understood how nomads like the Xiongnu and others fought. So rather than merely defending against nomadic attacks, they maintained warfare against the northern nomads to keep them weak.



The Wei, combining Chinese administration with the military knowledge of the nomads managed to conquer the states of Northern China. This created a relatively stable period of two empires – one in the North and the other in the South. We will see a similar configuration in the later Song period when a “pure” Chinese dynasty remains established in the South while in the North a Dynasty ruled by nomads who have adopted Chinese ways rules. Again we see a fine balancing act between power groups – the Chinese aristocratic bureaucrats and the Xianbei nomadic warriors. Over time the Wei became more Chinese by the late 5<sup>th</sup> century. Notably the Empress dowager Feng who was Chinese and maintained power as a regent over her step son led this transformation. The Xianbei had a tradition that the mother of the new emperor should be killed so that she would not unduly influence him, however Feng avoided this by controlling her step-son who she convinced to move the capital South to Louyang. This isolated the Xianbei in the North from the riches of the imperial court and favored the Chinese aristocrats. The Xianbei military became resentful of the luxurious court while they defended the Northern border from the Ruan Ruan. [What are they going to do?] The Xianbei destroyed Louyang resulting in a civil war that broke Wei into two separate states: Qi and Zhou.

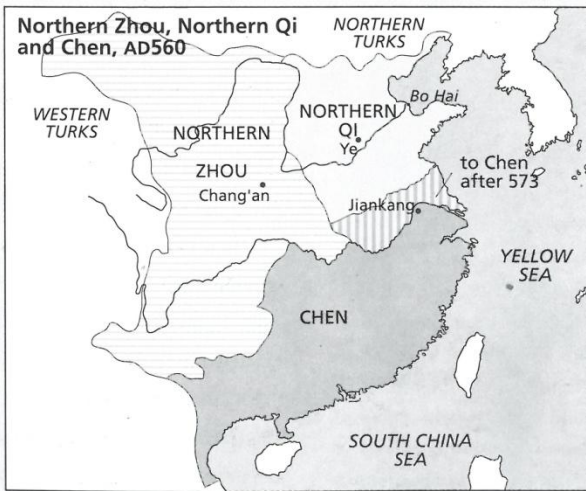
### Could there have been many Chinas?

Yes: Before the Qin there were many Chinas. The Zhou had fallen apart into regional kingdoms with clear borders. The Qin and Han erased those borders so successfully that they did not re-appear during the Age of the Division. Instead China broke into North and South China’s in a way that is repeated later during the Song Dynasty. These two Chinas: one based around the Yellow River and the other around the Yangtze could have continued. The North was a mix of Chinese and nomad customs and turned into a synthetic amalgamation of the two cultures that in many ways became characteristic of the Sui and Tang Dynasties which are not considered by Chinese scholars to be foreign dynasties. Due to refugees fleeing from the Yellow into the Yangtze, the South for the first time became fully Chinese. A North China and a South China could have continued for more centuries than it did if not for Emperor Wen of Sui.

No: Even though China was divided for over 300 years, the rulers of China still saw a united China like the Han Dynasty to be an ideal. In Europe, the Roman Empire was an ideal that many attempted to reunite but failed. China however was easier to reunite because a Chinese literate population continued to play a strong role in both Northern and Southern governments. Even though there was diversity between courts during this period, the literacy and ability for the different courts to communicate continued. As well the nomads in the North who could have created a distinctive alternative culture became literate in Chinese and connected to Chinese literature, the library of which was a force uniting the North and South.

Question and debate: Could China have remained disunited to become two separate countries?

### How did China become united again?



Yang Jian (Chinese Name) or Puliuru Jian (Xianbei Name) an official in the Northern Zhou dynasty grew in prestige. He married his daughter to the Zhou Emperor Xuan. When the Emperor Xuan died this daughter the Empress Yang Lihua became regent over the child Emperor Jing. Yang Jian defeated in battle the generals who opposed this seizure of power and then the young Emperor Jing gave his throne to Yang Jian. Yang Jian declared himself Emperor Wen of Sui. From Zhou, Emperor Wen conquered the other two states and united China. Clearly there is still a question as to exactly why this unification stuck and the Jin unification did not. This question is still open although Ebrey suggests:

1. Wen's military structure allowed for a large army loyal to the emperor without great cost to the state. This was through a land distribution system that created citizen farmers who were required to provide military service.
2. Wen claimed his legitimacy in part from Buddhism as his new Mandate from Heaven at time and from a position where any claim based upon inheritance from an ancient dynasty no longer held any legitimacy.

### Sources:

Barfield, Thomas. Inner Asia: A Study in Frontier History, Draft Manuscript for Foreign Cultures 38, Inner Asian Civilizations, 1986.

This manuscript was made into The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China by Thomas J. Barfield.

Ebrey, Patricia Buckley. The Cambridge Illustrated History of China, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2002.

At times I have copied pages 84-85 which detail the Fall of the Han so that my students can read it. Reading these pages requires some scaffolding and often I will read it with them to explain things as we go. Much of this lesson is derived from a summation and explanation of Chapter 4: Buddhism, Aristocracy and Alien Rulers: The Age of Division 220-589.

Minor biographical details were derived from the Wikipedia articles on particular personages though I could not fact check all of the material back to more reliable documents.

**Closing Comments:** While delving into an area largely ignored by the textbook, I have stumbled upon an era that in some ways deals with complexities that would inspire one to look away and tackle more easily digested periods. This could be appropriate if this period did not include the development of popular Buddhism, a synthetic Manchurian style state system reproduced in other periods, and Chinese poetry and a role for poetry that established it deeply within Chinese culture. The challenge of the complexity has created a rather long lesson and one that while seemingly detailed remains incomplete as many questions remain unanswered. Yet, exposing incomplete knowledge to students in a way that creates questions and highlights the gaps is extremely useful and instructive because it inspires curiosity and curiosity is the genesis of discovery.