4

Political Division in China and the Spread of Buddhism (200–580)

China's four centuries of unification under the Han Dynasty were followed by four centuries when division prevailed. This Period of Division began with a stalemate among the rivals to succeed the Han, resulting in the Three Kingdoms. In 280, China was reunited by the (Western) Jin Dynasty, but peace was short-lived. After 300, Jin degenerated into civil war. For the next two and a half centuries, north China was ruled by non-Chinese dynasties (the Northern Dynasties), while the south was ruled by a sequence of four short-lived Chinese dynasties, all of which were centered in the area of the present-day city of Nanjing (the Southern Dynasties). Although Buddhism gained a remarkable hold in both north and south, the two regions developed in different directions in other ways. In the north, despite frequent ethnic conflict, a hybrid culture emerged that drew from Chinese traditions of government administration and the military traditions of the non-Chinese rulers. In the south, although military men repeatedly seized the throne, high culture, especially the literary and visual arts, thrived among the émigré aristocrats.

The Northern Dynasties mark the first period in Chinese history when a large part of China proper was ruled by non-Chinese. Thus, scholars of this period have been particularly interested in issues of ethnicity and sinification (the process of absorbing Chinese culture). In what contexts did the Xianbei (shyen-bay) rulers promote or discourage adoption of Chinese ways? How was conflict between Chinese and Xianbei handled? How did these experiences shape Chinese notions of cultural and ethnic identity? One by-product of warfare during this period was enormous movements of peoples, voluntary and involuntary. What was the impact of these movements on Chinese civilization? Did they promote cultural integration, countering the effects of political division? In both north and south, birth meant more during this period than it had during the Han. Did the decline in the power of the central government foster growth in hereditary status? Another central issue in the understanding of this period is the success of Buddhism. If earlier philosophies laid the foundation for Chinese government and society, what was the effect of the spread of fundamentally different ideas?

THE THREE KINGDOMS (220–265) AND THE WESTERN JIN DYNASTY (265–316)

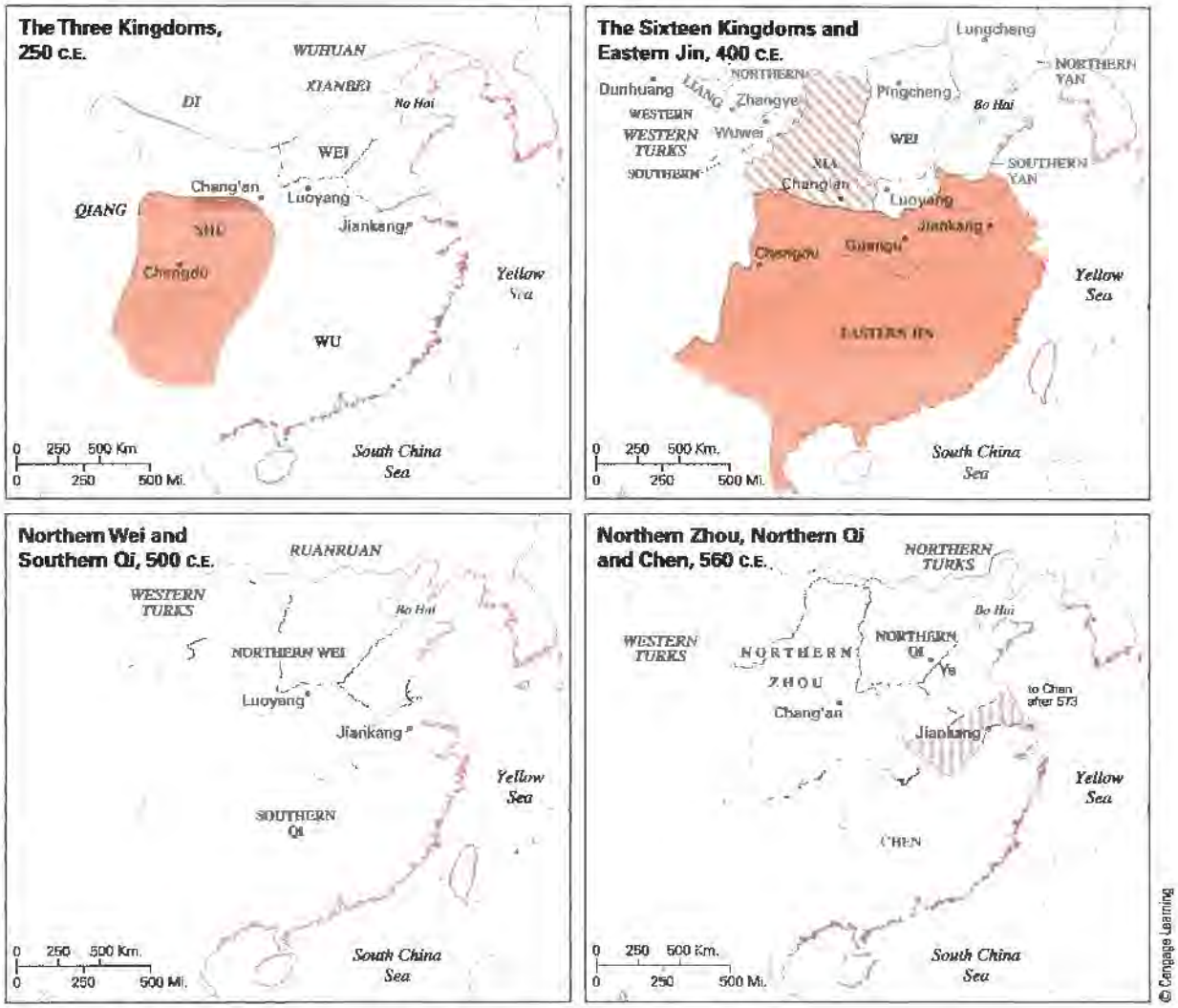
The Han Dynasty began to fall apart in 184 C.E. when the followers of a Daoist religious cult called the Way of Great Peace staged a major insurrection. In their efforts to seize power, hundreds of thousands of followers across the country simultaneously attacked local government offices. Although the original uprising was suppressed within a year, other groups preaching similar doctrines rose up elsewhere in the country. To respond to these uprisings, the Han court gave generals and local officials considerable autonomy to raise their own armies. In these unsettled conditions, they found no shortage of willing recruits from among refugees and the destitute. Larger armies were formed by absorbing smaller armies and their leaders. The top generals, once they no longer had rebels to suppress, turned to fighting each other, ushering in several decades of civil war. In 189, the warlord who gained control of the capital slaughtered more than two thousand eunuchs and took the emperor prisoner. Luoyang was sacked and burned, destroying the government libraries and archives.

By 205, Cao Cao (tsow tsow) had made himself the dominant figure in north China, even though he retained the Han emperor as a puppet. After Cao Cao's death in 220, his son Cao Pei (tsow pay) forced the last Han emperor to abdicate and proclaimed the Wei (way) Dynasty. The old Han capital of Luoyang was retained as the Wei capital.

Cao Cao and Cao Pei wanted to reconstruct an empire comparable to the Han but never gained control over all the territory the Han had once held. In the central and lower Yangzi valley and farther south, the brothers Sun Ce (sun tsuh) and Sun Quan (sun chwan) established the state of Wu. A third kingdom, Shu (shoo), was established in the west, in Sichuan province, by a distant member of the Han imperial clan named Liu Bei (lyoo bay). (See Map 4.1.) Although Liu Bei's resources could not compare with those controlled by Cao Pei in the north, he was aided by one of China's most famous military strategists, Zhuge Liang (joo-ge leeahng). The competition between these rival rulers is glorified in one of the best-known stories in China, the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, a work of historical fiction written many centuries later.

Wei was the largest and strongest of these three kingdoms, and several of the institutional measures Wei adopted remained important for the next several centuries. Wei made the status of soldier hereditary: when a commander or a soldier was killed or unable to fight any longer, a son or brother would take his place. Soldiers' families were classified as "military households" and treated as a group separate from ordinary commoners. Their families were assigned land to farm, and their children were required to marry

Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove. Several tombs near the Eastern Jin capital at modern Nanjing have pictures of the eccentric "seven sages" depicted in the brick walls. In the example shown here, each of the figures is labeled and shown drinking, writing, or playing a musical instrument.



Map 4.1 Rise and Fall of States During the Period of Division

into other military households. These farmers-turned-professional soldiers made good infantrymen, but Wei also needed cavalry. For that purpose, like the Han before them, they recruited Xiongnu (shyung-noo) in large numbers and settled them in southern Shanxi. To raise revenues to supply his armies, Cao Cao carved out huge state farms from land laid waste by war. He settled defeated rebels and landless poor as tenants on these farms and had them pay their rent directly to state coffers. In other words, rather than trying to raise revenues by increasing tax collection on local magnates who had many ways to resist tax collection, he made the state itself an enormous landlord.

Wei also introduced a new system of civil service recruitment known as the Nine Rank System. Although intended to select men with local reputations for talent and character, this system rapidly degenerated into a means for leading families to secure the best posts. Men whose families were ranked high did not have to start at the bottom of the bureaucratic ladder, making it considerably more likely that they would eventually rise to the highest posts.

Because Wei had more than twice the population of Shu or Wu (woo), it was able to field a much larger army and eventually prevailed. The Wei general Sima Zhao (Se-ma jow) defeated Shu in 263. Two years

later, however, the general's son Sima Yan (se-ma yen) forced the Wei emperor to abdicate in his favor, and he established the Jin Dynasty. This was the first of many dynastic transitions during this period that began with a military coup. In 279, the Jin government sent a fleet of ships down the Yangzi River from Sichuan to overwhelm Wu forces and reunify China.

Hope that Jin would be able to restore the glories of the Han Dynasty did not last long. Although Jin held almost all the territory Han had, it did not have the Han government's administrative reach. The census of 280 recorded only 16 million people, evidence that many of those who had fled war, famine, or poverty had not been registered where they settled.

In Luoyang, the Jin Dynasty suffered from strife among the families of empresses. The powerful Jia family was suspected of arranging the assassination of an empress and more than one potential heir to the throne. Another threat came from princes of the Sima family. The Jin founder, wanting to make sure that no general could overthrow his dynasty the way he had overthrown Wei, parceled out the armies and enormous tracts of land to his own relatives. By the time he died in 290, more than half the regional armies were controlled by eight princes. Before long, their bloody struggles for dominance degenerated into general civil war. In 300, one prince marched his army to Luoyang, deposed the emperor, and took his place. One prince after another controlled the capital, but only as long as his army was able to withstand the armies of his opponents. By the end of 304, governors leading locally raised militia forces had been drawn into the fray. By this point, the princes with fiefs in the north were incorporating more and more non-Chinese into their armies. When an army of Xianbei warriors took Chang'an in 306, they pillaged the city, reportedly slaughtering twenty thousand residents. By 307, only one of the original princes still survived, and little was left of the state. With the collapse of control from the center, people everywhere began building fortifications, taking up arms to defend themselves, or fleeing in search of safer places to live. With banditry endemic, both disease and famine spread.

These decades of warfare shaped the intellectual outlook of the educated elite. The late Han had marked a high point in political activism, when many risked their lives and careers to oppose the domination of the court by eunuchs or consort families. When politics took a turn for the worse after 184, many educated men gave up the effort to participate in government.

The philosophically inclined turned to the Daoist-inspired "Study of the Mysterious," which concerned such topics as the meaning of "being" and its relation to "nonbeing," subjects they discussed in new commentaries on the *Book of Changes*, *Laozi*, or *Zhuangzi*. Witty repartee, especially apt characterizations of prominent individuals, was much admired. Sophisticated aesthetes espoused "naturalness" and "spontaneity" and expressed disdain for mastery of established forms. In this environment, poetry flourished. Cao Cao and his two sons, Cao Pei and Cao Zhi (tsow jih), were all gifted poets. Another group of poets, known as the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove, gained fame for shocking their contemporaries. When someone rebuked Ruan Ji (rwan jee) for talking to his sister-in-law, he replied, "Surely you do not mean to suggest that the rules of propriety apply to me?"

The Museum of the Imperial Collections, Japan

The Art of Calligraphy. Wang Xizhi, from one of the most eminent aristocratic families of the eastern Jin dynasty, came to be considered the greatest of Chinese calligraphers. His writing was admired for its grace, forcefulness, and subtle modulations.

NON-CHINESE DOMINANCE IN THE NORTH

After the breakdown of Jin, non-Chinese seized power in north China. Why did this happen? One answer is military technology. The invention of the stirrup in about 300 C.E. made cavalry more crucial in warfare. The stirrup gave heavily armored riders greater stability and freedom of motion. From this time on, horses and their riders began wearing heavy armor, giving them more striking power and the ability to engage in shock combat. By the fourth century, sources mention the capture of thousands of armored horses in a single battle.

Another reason is that Xiongnu and other northern auxiliary troops had been settled within China proper ever since Han times. Most of these groups retained their tribal social structures and pastoral way of life but settled into specific territories. After Cao Cao defeated the Wuhuan (woo-hwahn) in 207, he moved many of them to interior counties and incorporated many of their men into his armies. Jin followed similar policies, in 284–285, moving about 130,000 surrendered Xiongnu to the interior. The non-Chinese soldiers were often dissatisfied with their conditions, and ethnic friction was not uncommon. In some areas of north China, the non-Chinese came to outnumber the Han Chinese. One Chinese writer claimed that in the region around Chang'an, the Chinese had become the minority.

Although many of these ethnic groups had been part of the Xiongnu confederation, they reasserted their distinct identities (such as Wuhuan, Xianbei, and Di) after it collapsed. But these identities continued to be flexible. Xiongnu who settled among the Xianbei, for instance, would in time call themselves Xianbei. As disorder worsened in the first years of the fourth century, uprisings of Xiongnu, Di (dee), and Qiang (chyahng) occurred in scattered sites. The most threatening of these was the uprising of the Xiongnu chieftain Liu Yuan in 304. Liu Yuan was literate in Chinese and had spent part of his youth at the court in Luoyang. His familiarity with Chinese culture only made him resent Chinese policies toward the Xiongnu more strongly. When a prince sought his help in the civil war, Liu declared himself king of Han and made a bid for the throne as an heir to the Han Dynasty (from which his ancestors had received the Han imperial surname). On his campaigns, he incorporated bands of bandits, including both Chinese and non-Chinese. His armies, plundering as they went, moved south through Shanxi to the gates of Luoyang in 308–309.

Another important non-Chinese leader during this period was a much less sinified Jie tribesman named Shi Le (shih luh). Shi Le had been sold into slavery by a Jin official. After gaining his freedom, he led a group of mounted brigands made up of escaped slaves and others on the margins of society, some of whom were Chinese. Early in these wars, Shi Le allied with Liu Yuan, and it was Shi Le's troops who captured and plundered Luoyang in 311. In 319, Shi Le broke with the Liu family and proclaimed himself king of Zhao. Within a decade, he had destroyed the Liu forces.

The regimes set up in the fourth century by various non-Chinese contenders did not have the institutional infrastructure to administer large territories. When they defeated a Chinese fortress, they normally gave the local strongman the title of governor and claimed him as part of their government. This was a fragile system because the recently incorporated governor could easily change sides again.

The regimes established by Liu Yuan and Shi Le drew sharp distinctions between Chinese and non-Chinese. In essence, the non-Chinese were the rulers and the soldiers, while the Chinese were the subjects, who were expected to grow grain, pay taxes, and provide labor service. Enemy generals who surrendered were incorporated into the tribally organized military structure, still leading their old troops. Chinese soldiers were often incorporated into these armies, but usually as porters or infantry, not cavalry. Because much of north China had been depopulated, securing labor was more important than gaining land. Many campaigns were essentially slave raids, with those captured sent back to the victor's capital. Not surprising, most of the Chinese population saw none of these regimes as legitimate. Ethnic conflict flared from time to time. Different groups of refugees on the roads often robbed and murdered each other. When an adopted son succeeded to the Shi line in 350, he reverted to his Chinese identity and called for the slaughter of non-Chinese, which his Chinese subjects carried out with a vengeance.

During these decades, Chinese in the north faced a leadership crisis. Some scholars estimate that 60 percent of the elite of government officials and landowners fled south between 311 and 325, most of them taking relatives, retainers, and neighbors with them. Those who did not move south often took their followers to nearby hilltops, which they fortified in order to defend against marauders.

The Northern Wei and Hybrid Xianbei-Chinese Culture

By 400, the rising power in the north was the Northern Wei state founded by the Tuoba (taw-bah) clan of the Xianbei. From its base in northern Shanxi, Northern Wei established dominance on the steppe to the north, which gave it the advantage of access to the horses and horsemen of the steppe. Gradually Wei defeated the other states set up by other Xianbei clans and, in 439, reunified north China after more than a century of constant conflict.

Like their rivals, the Xianbei sent raiding parties to seize captives, horses, cattle, and sheep from other tribes or from Chinese settlements. Wei forced the relocation of thousands of Chinese to populate their capital and bring deserted land into cultivation. To avoid being overwhelmed by the numerically dominant Chinese, the early Wei rulers kept their capital at Pingcheng in north Shanxi. Xianbei warriors were settled nearby and made their living as herdsmen rather than as farmers. The army remained a north Asian preserve, with Chinese usually playing only support roles.

As the fifth century progressed, the Xianbei learned how to draw wealth from Chinese farmers. To collect taxes, the Xianbei rulers turned to educated Chinese, whom they employed as officials. They put into place the institutions these Chinese advisers proposed based on Chinese experience. In the late fifth century, the Northern Wei rulers adopted an "equal-field" system to distribute land to farmers and increase production. The state claimed exclusive right to distribute land. Allotments were made to families based primarily on their labor power, with extra for officials and nobles based on rank.

The policy of keeping Chinese and Xianbei separate was abandoned by Emperor Xiaowen (shyow-won) (r. 471–499). Born to a Chinese mother, Xiaowen wanted to unite the Chinese and Xianbei elites, and beginning in 493, he initiated a radical program of sinification. He banned the wearing of Xianbei clothes at court, required all Xianbei officials below the age of thirty to speak Chinese at court, and encouraged intermarriage between the highest-ranking families of the Chinese and Xianbei elites. He gave Xianbei new single-character surnames, which made them sound less foreign. The imperial house itself took the name *Yuan* ("primal").

The court itself was moved three hundred miles south to the site of the Han and Jin capital of Luoyang. This transfer was accomplished by subterfuge. Emperor Xiaowen mobilized his army for an invasion of the south, but he halted at Luoyang and announced the plan to build his capital there. By 495, about 150,000 Xianbei and other northern warriors had been moved south to fill the ranks of the imperial guards in Luoyang. Xiaowen also welcomed refugees or defectors from the south, such as Wang Su of the aristocratic Langye (lahng-yeh) Wang family, who was put to work on the reorganization of the bureaucracy. To make southerners feel at home at the palace, they were served tea, newly popular in the south, rather than the yogurt-like drinks consumed in the north. Behind what appear to be pro-Chinese measures may well have been a new ambition to conquer the south and unite China.

Mounted Warrior. The Hulü family, who were Xianbei, produced several notable generals and were given noble rank. This ceramic figurine of a warrior was placed in the tomb of Hulü Che (562–595) near Taiyuan.

Within twenty-five years, Luoyang became a magnificent city again, with a half-million residents, vast palaces, elegant mansions, and more than a thousand Buddhist temples. It had a district where foreign traders lived and another occupied by rich merchants and craftsmen. Many members of the Xianbei nobility became culturally dual, fully proficient in Chinese cultural traditions and comfortable interacting with the leading Chinese families while still consuming

dairy products and enjoying hunting as recreation. So many southerners had been welcomed at Luoyang that there was a district known as Wu quarter, where more than three thousand families lived, complete with their own fish and turtle market.

The Revolt of the Garrisons and the Division of the North

This period of prosperity was cut short in 523, only a generation after the relocation, when the Xianbei who remained in the north rebelled. In the wars that ensued, hostility based on ethnicity repeatedly added to the violence. With the transfer of the Xianbei elite to Luoyang, the garrison forces saw their status plummet to hardly better than that of hereditary military households. When a shortage of food at the garrisons sparked rebellion, the government moved two hundred thousand surrendered garrison rebels to Hebei (huh-bay), where food supplies were more plentiful. This course of action proved to be a colossal mistake. In 526–527, a former garrison officer organized the displaced rebels into a much more potent force.

The Wei court then turned to one of its generals to deal with the new uprising, but he soon turned on the court. The thousand-plus officials who came out of the city to tender their submission were slaughtered by this general, who had the empress dowager and her new child emperor thrown in the Yellow River. He then installed his own puppet Wei emperor.

Struggles of this sort continued for years. In the east, power was seized by Gao Huan (gow hwan). Gao's grandfather was a Han Chinese official who had been exiled to the northern garrisons, and Gao had grown up in poverty, not even owning a horse until he married into a Xianbei family. He was one of the two hundred thousand frontiersmen relocated to Hebei because of the famine, and he took charge of this group in 531. Because of his dual background, he could appeal to both Chinese and Xianbei.

Luoyang soon fell to Gao Huan, but the region of Chang'an was in the hands of rival forces. The central figure there was Yuwen Tai (yew-won ty), not yet thirty years old. Yuwen Tai too came from the garrisons, but his father had organized a loyalist militia to resist the rebels. The struggle between Gao Huan and Yuwen Tai and their successors lasted forty years: neither could dislodge the other, even though they set off with armies of one hundred thousand or more troops. The Gao regime maintained a Tuoba prince on the throne until 550 (thus leading to the dynastic name Eastern Wei, 534–550), then declared a new dynasty, known as the Northern Qi (551–577). The Yuwen regime kept a Wei prince a little longer (Western Wei, 535–556), but eventually declared itself the founders of a new dynasty, called the Northern Zhou (557–580).

Gao Huan tried to convince both Chinese and Xianbei that it made sense for the Xianbei to do the fighting and the Chinese the farming. To the Xianbei he would say, "The Han are your slaves. The men till for you; the women weave for you. They provide you with grain and silk so that you are warm and well fed. For what reason do you bully them?" To Han Chinese he would say, "The Xianbei are your retainers. For a single measure of your grain and a single length of your silk they attack the bandits so that you are safe. For what reason do you regard them as a scourge?"* Ethnic strife continued, however, and there were several bloody purges of Chinese officials.

In the west, the Xianbei were not so numerous, and Yuwen Tai had to find ways to incorporate Chinese into his armies and his government. He encouraged intermarriage and bestowed Xianbei surnames on his leading Chinese officials, making them honorary Xianbei. The Chinese who joined him were mostly men of action who loved to hunt and take the lead in military ventures.

It was in this environment that the multiethnic militia system, called the divisional militia (*fubing*), was created. The households of the soldiers enrolled in it were removed from the regular tax registers and put on the army registers. Such registration carried honorable status. Soldiers of these armies served in rotation as guards at the imperial palace, helping them identify with the dynasty.

With this army, Northern Zhou began expanding, taking Sichuan away from the south in 553 and parts of the middle Yangzi about the same time. In 577, this army defeated Northern Qi, reunifying the north.

THE SOUTHERN DYNASTIES

Among those who fled the confusion that followed the sacking of Luoyang in 311 and Chang'an in 316 were members of the Jin royal house and its high officials. At Nanjing (then called Jiankang, jyen-kahng), these refugees created a government in exile after putting a Jin prince on the throne. Because

*From Sima Guang's *Zizhi tongjian*, cited in David A. Graff, *Medieval Chinese Warfare, 300–900* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 107

Nanjing is east of Luoyang, the second phase of the Jin Dynasty is called the Eastern Jin (317–420), reminiscent of the Western and Eastern Zhou and the Western and Eastern Han. It was followed by four short dynasties that ruled from Nanjing (the Song [sung], Qi [Chee], Liang, and Chen, collectively termed the Southern Dynasties, 420–589). The Yangzi River was the great battlefield of the south, with flotillas of ships sailing from the middle Yangzi to attack forces holding Nanjing, or vice versa. None of the successive Southern Dynasties was fully able to keep its military commanders under control, even when they were imperial relatives. One dynasty after another was founded when a general seized the capital and installed himself as emperor. These generals were strong enough to hold their governments together during their lifetimes but were not able to concentrate power in ways that would ensure successful transfers of power to their heirs. If they had several sons, those sons often ended up killing each other.

Maintaining an adequate supply of soldiers was a constant challenge for the Southern Dynasties. The Jin tried to continue its earlier practice of designating certain households as military households, but the status of military households fell precipitously until they were looked on as little better than state slaves, making desertion a constant problem. Generals sometimes resorted to campaigns against the southern non-Chinese to capture men and make them into soldiers (analogous to the slave raids of the north, this time with the Chinese as the raiders).

Aristocratic Culture

The south experienced considerable economic development during the Southern Dynasties, as new lands were opened and trade networks extended. Trade with countries in the South Seas expanded, especially Funan and Champa (in today's Cambodia and Vietnam), where Chinese came into contact with merchants from India and even farther west.

Social cleavages were pronounced in the south, with deep divisions between the northern émigrés and the local elite; between the aristocrats, who preferred to stay at court, and the generals given the task of defending against the north and maintaining the peace; and between Han Chinese, living in the river valleys, and various indigenous peoples, who largely retreated to upland areas. The aristocracy dominated the upper ranks of officialdom. These families saw themselves as maintaining the high culture of the Han but judged themselves and others on the basis of their ancestors. They married only with families of equivalent pedigree and compiled lists and genealogies of the most eminent families. At court they often looked down on the emperors of the successive dynasties as military upstarts. They dominated the Nine Rank System and used it to appoint men from their families to government service. One of the sharpest critics of the southern aristocrats was Yan Zhitui (see Biography: Yan Zhitui). As he saw it, because life was easy for the southern aristocrats, they saw no need to study. When important affairs were discussed, "they sit with foolish looks and widely-opened mouths as if sitting in a cloud or fog." When conversation turned to history or they were asked to compose poems, "they silently hang their heads, yawning and stretching, unable to say anything."* Members of the Liang royal family were even worse, he charged, perfuming their garments, shaving their faces, using powder and rouge, sitting on cushions and leaning on soft silk bolsters, and getting others to compose their poems for them. Once their dynasty fell, they had no skills to fall back on.

The most outstanding emperor in the south was Emperor Wu (woo) of Liang (r. 502–549). He was not only a major patron of Buddhism but also a patron of literature and the arts. A prolific poet himself, he summoned learned men to court and would order his courtiers to compose and recite poems, rewarding the most successful with gifts of gold or silk. His sons were also ardent patrons, several establishing literary salons of their own. The eldest son, Xiao Tong (shyow tung), was an avid book collector with 30,000 scrolls of books, which he drew on when he compiled an anthology of 761 great writings organized by genre, the *Selections of Literature (Wen xuan)*.

Not long after Emperor Wu's death, the southern court was hard hit by the rebellion of Hou Jing (hoe jing), a would-be warlord from the north who had gathered a huge army and set siege to Nanjing. The siege lasted four months, by which time many members of the great families had starved to death in their mansions. A general declared a new dynasty, Chen, but he could do little more than confirm local strongmen as his governors.

*Ssu-yu Teng, trans., *Family Instructions of the Yen Clan* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), pp. 52–53.

BIOGRAPHY

Yan Zhitui (531–591+)

Many people were dislocated during the Period of Division, but few were dislocated as many times as Yan Zhitui (yen jih-tway). The Yan family was one of the émigré families that had left north China in 317, and thereafter it continuously supplied officials for the Southern Dynasties. Yan's grandfather, out of loyalty to the Qi Dynasty, starved himself to death when Emperor Wu of Liang usurped the throne in 502. Yan's father, however, served at Emperor Wu's court. When his father died, Yan Zhitui was only nine, so his elder brother was responsible for much of his education. In his teens Yan himself became a court attendant of one of the Liang princes. When Yan was eighteen years old, the rebel Hou Jing captured him and the prince he served, and they narrowly escaped execution.

In 552, Yan went with this prince to Jiangling in Hubei (hoo-bay), where the prince set up a rival court. In 554, however, the northern state of Western Wei captured Jiangling, and Yan, at age twenty-four, was one of the one hundred thousand people enslaved and brought north to Chang'an. Two years later, he and his family managed to escape and make their way east, hoping to return to Liang. By this time, however, Liang had been overthrown. Unwilling to serve the successor state of Chen, Yan Zhitui stayed in the northeast, where the Northern Qi rulers gave him court appointments for the next two decades. In 577, Northern Qi was defeated by the Northern Zhou, and Yan, now forty-six years old, was again forced to move, this time back to Chang'an. He apparently did not serve at court for the next couple of years and seems to have faced poverty during this period. After the Sui Dynasty was founded in 581, Yan was given scholarly posts, working on a new dictionary and related projects.

In the twenty-chapter book of advice Yan wrote for his sons, he frequently commented on his experiences. He said his elder brother had not been strict enough with him, letting him develop bad habits that took years to overcome. He stressed to his sons the importance of a solid literary education; it was because he had skills that he had gained court posts under the Northern Qi. Less literate men who had faced the same dislocations had ended up working on farms or tending horses, even though their ancestors had been officials for centuries.

Yan Zhitui also recommended mastering calligraphy, painting, and lute playing, though he warned that those who became too good might be humiliated by being forced by those of higher rank to produce on demand. He said he had spent many hours copying model pieces of calligraphy, including the ten scrolls in his family's collection done by the fourth-century masters Wang Xizhi (wahng shee-jih) and his son Wang Xianzhi (wahng shyen-jih).

Although Yan Zhitui's advice to his sons shows him committed to the study of the Confucian classics and the Confucian ideal of service to the ruler, he also had strong faith in Buddhism and included a chapter defending Buddhism against its critics. He wanted Buddhist services after his death and told his sons to omit meat from the traditional ancestral offerings. Because he expected his sons to marry and have children, he did not urge them to become monks, but he did encourage them to "attend to the chanting and reading of the sacred books and thereby provide for passage to your future state of existence. Incarnation as a human is difficult to attain. Do not pass through yours in vain!"*

Questions for Analysis

1. How many times did Yan move? How many of those moves were involuntary?
2. Why would the Northern Qi and Sui courts offer court posts to a southerner who had been brought north as a slave?

*Ssu-yu Teng, trans., *Family Instructions of the Yen Clan* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), p. 148

Poetry, Calligraphy, and Painting as Arts of Men of Letters

During the Period of Division, men of letters developed poetry, calligraphy, and painting into arts through which they could express their thoughts and feelings. Poets came to play a distinctive cultural role as exemplars of the complex individual, moved by conflicting but powerful emotions. Cao Cao's son Cao Zhi (192–232) was one of the first poets to create such a persona. Chafing at the restrictions his brother the emperor placed on him, he poured out his feelings into his verse.

Another poet whose persona is as important as his poems is Tao Qian (tow chyen) (or Tao Yuanming, 365–427). At times Tao expressed high ambitions, at other times the desire to be left alone. Once when holding a minor post, he quit rather than entertain a visiting inspector, explaining, "How could I bend my waist to this village buffoon for five pecks of rice!" Many of Tao's poems express Daoist sentiments such as "excessive thinking harms life" or "propriety and conventions, what folly to follow them too earnestly." By the age of forty, Tao gave up office altogether and supported himself by farming. He was not a hermit, however, and continued to enjoy friends and family. His poems often express his enjoyment of wine, books, and music:

> I try a cup and all my concerns become remote.
> Another cup and suddenly I forget even Heaven.
> But is Heaven really far from this state?
> Nothing is better than to trust your true self.*

In the somewhat rarefied atmosphere of the aristocracy in Nanjing, calligraphy came to be recognized as an art almost on a par with poetry. Because calligraphy was believed to reflect the writer's character and mood, the calligraphy of men of refinement and education was assumed to be superior to that of technically proficient clerks. Calligraphy was written with a highly pliable hairbrush, and the strength, balance, and flow of the strokes were believed to convey the writer's inner self. To attain a good hand took discipline because one had to copy works by established masters for years before even thinking of developing a distinctive style. Pieces of calligraphy by former masters thus came to be treasured as works of art. With collecting also came forgeries and debates about authenticity. Works by Wang Xizhi (307–365) were highly prized even in his own day. Admirers would borrow pieces of his calligraphy to make tracing copies; before long, copies were much more numerous than original products of his hand.

Once calligraphy came to be considered an appropriate art for the educated class, painting gained a similar status. Paintings came to be associated with known, named painters whose talents were compared and ranked. The most famous of these painters was Gu Kaizhi (goo ky-jih) (344–406), who painted portraits of many of the notable men of his day. It was also during this period that works that criticized and ranked individual poets, calligraphers, and painters began to appear.

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THE BUDDHIST CONQUEST OF CHINA

Why did Buddhism find so many adherents in China during the three centuries after the fall of the Han Dynasty in 220? There were no forced conversions. China's initial contact with Central Asia in Western Han times did not lead to significant spread of earlier religions of the region such as Zoroastrianism. Moreover, several basic Buddhist teachings ran up against long-established Chinese customs. In particular, becoming a monk involved giving up one's surname and the chance to have descendants, thus cutting oneself off from the ancestral cult.

On the positive side, Buddhism benefited from the dedication of missionaries who traveled east from Central Asia along the Silk Road (see **Connections: Buddhism in India and Its Spread Along the Silk Road**). The miracles these missionaries could work also found them followers. Fotudeng, a missionary from Central Asia who arrived in China in 310, converted the violence-prone non-Chinese ruler Shi Le by performing magic; once he filled a prayer bowl with water, then made a blue lotus flower emerge from it. Still, Buddhism's message also attracted people. In a rough and tumultuous age, Buddhism offered an appealing emphasis on kindness, charity, the preservation of life, and the prospect of salvation.

The monastic establishment grew rapidly after 300, with generous patronage by rulers, their relatives, and other members of the elite. By 477 there were said to be 6,478 Buddhist temples and 77,258 monks and nuns in the north. Some decades later, south China had 2,846 temples and 82,700 clerics. Those not ready to become monks or nuns could pursue Buddhist goals as pious laypeople by performing devotional acts and making contributions toward the construction or beautification of temples. Devotional groups were often organized around particular scriptures, such as the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Pure Land Sutra*, or the *Holy Teachings of Vimalakirti*. New sutras were written in China, "apocryphal" ones that masked their Chinese authorship by purporting to be translations of Indian works. Some of these texts were incorporated into the Buddhist canon; others were suppressed by the state or the Buddhist establishment as subversive.

In China, women turned to Buddhism as readily as men did. Although incarnation as a female was

MATERIAL CULTURE

Cave 285 at Dunhuang

In 523, Prince Dongyang, a member of the Northern Wei royal house, was sent to Dunhuang to serve as its governor. During his fifteen-year tenure, he and a group of wealthy local families commissioned a new cave to be dug and decorated at the temple complex outside town, where the Buddhist faithful had been constructing and decorating caves along a cliff face for a century.

The cave the prince sponsored, cave 285, has as its central figure a statue of the historical Buddha seated (see Color Plate 5). He is flanked by figures of crossed-legged meditating monks who wear traditional monks' robes made of patchwork, symbolizing their indifference to material goods. Other monks are depicted on the walls. Temple guardians fill the lower reaches of the walls, heavenly beings the upper reaches.

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Meditating Monk. On either side of the main image is a side niche with a statue of a cross-legged monk.

considered lower than incarnation as a male, it was also viewed as temporary, and women were encouraged to pursue salvation on terms nearly equal to men. Joining a nunnery became an alternative for women who did not want to marry or did not want to stay with their husband's families in widowhood. In 516, the first set of biographies of Buddhist nuns was compiled. Most of the nuns described in it came from upper-class families, but they entered the convent for varied reasons. Huiyao (hway-yow), who entered the convent as a child, had herself immolated as an offering to the Three Treasures (the Buddha; the sanga, or body of monks and nuns; and the teachings). Miaoxiang (myow-shyahng), with her father's approval, left her unfilial husband to enter a convent. Tanhui, after study with a foreign meditation master beginning at age eleven, threatened suicide if forced to marry her fiancé. After her fiancé tried to abduct her, the foreign meditation master solicited funds to compensate him. The nun Xuanzao (shwan-tsow) entered the convent after a miraculous cure at age ten. A monk had told her father that the illness was probably caused by deeds done in a former life, making medicine useless. They should instead single-mindedly turn to the bodhisattva Guanyin. After seven days of devotions, she had a vision of a golden image and then recovered.

Buddhism had an enormous impact on the visual arts in China, especially sculpture and painting. Earlier Chinese had rarely depicted gods in human form, but now Buddhist temples were furnished with a profusion of images. The great cave temples at Yungang (yun-gahng), sponsored by the Northern Wei rulers in the fifth century, contain huge Buddha figures in stone, the tallest a standing Buddha about seventy feet high. Further west, in Dunhuang, the original painted plaster of Buddhist caves has often survived, giving testimony to the great accomplishment of artists (see **Material Culture: Cave 285 at Dunhuang**).

None of the great Buddhist temples in the capitals survive, but texts describe them as large and lavishly decorated (see **Documents: The Monastery of Eternal Tranquility**). These temples became sites of

dazzling ceremonies. For the Great Blessing ceremony held in Luoyang on the seventh day of the fourth month, all the Buddhist statues in the city, more than a thousand altogether, were brought to the largest monastery, where music and incense filled the air and entertainers performed to amuse the crowds.

Buddhism also provided the Chinese with a new reason to travel. Chinese monks made pilgrimages to India to see the holy places of Buddhism and seek out learned teachers. The first pilgrim to leave a record of his journey is Faxian (fah-shyen), who left Chang'an in 399, when he was already over sixty years old. His trip west was overland, through Kucha, Khotan, and Kashgar, into the Indus Valley and then the cities of the Ganges Valley. On his return, he took ship in the Bay of Bengal and stopped in Sri Lanka and then in Sumatra, reaching Guangzhou in 412. By 414 he was back in Nanjing, where he set to work translating the sutras he had carried back with him.

One of the greatest royal patrons of Buddhism during this period was Emperor Wu of Liang (r. 502–549). Although he had studied Daoism as a young man, in 504 he urged his family and officials to give it up. Out of Buddhist faith he banished meat and wine from palace banquets. He also found a new way to divert court funds to Buddhism: in 527 he entered a monastery and refused to return to the throne until his officials paid a large "ransom" to the monastery. Two years later, Emperor Wu repeated this pious act, hoping that it would help save his people from a deadly plague that was spreading at that time.

In contrast to medieval Europe, where the church asserted that secular governments had no authority to interfere in religious matters, in China the governments successfully claimed the authority to regulate Buddhist clergy and monastic establishments. In response to critics who charged that Buddhism threatened the state because monastery land was not taxed and monks performed neither labor service nor military duty, rulers in the north twice ordered the closing of monasteries and the return of monks and nuns to lay life. Neither of these suppressions lasted long, however, and there were no attempts to suppress Buddhist belief.

DAOIST RELIGION

At the same time that Buddhism was gaining converts, the Daoist religion was undergoing extraordinary growth. This religion had many roots: popular religious movements; the elite pursuit of immortality; and, after the third century, the model of Buddhism with its sacred scriptures and celibate clergy. Although some Daoist masters became influential at court, most governments maintained a cautious reserve toward the Daoist religion, aware of the connection between Daoism and uprisings at the end of the Han. Daoism thus was never the recipient of government patronage on the lavish scale of Buddhism.

The Daoism of elite devotees was generally an individual practice aimed at bodily immortality in a kind of indestructible "astral body." One strove for this through dietary control, gymnastics, good deeds, mystic self-identification with the all-embracing Dao, and visualization of the innumerable gods and spirits that dwelled inside the microcosm of the body. Many of the most famous men of letters of the period were devoted to such practices. Ge Hong (guh hung) (283–343), for instance, tried to convince his readers that immortality could be achieved and wrote on alchemy, breathing and meditation exercises, exorcism, sexual hygiene, herbalism, and talismanic charms. Ge gave a recipe for an elixir called gold cinnabar and described methods for walking on water and raising the dead.

The fall of Luoyang and the retreat of so many members of the northern elite to the south had a major impact on the development of Daoism. Priests from the north came into contact with local traditions of esoteric learning in the south. A series of revelations led to the writing down of a large number of scriptures. These texts formed the core first of the Supreme Purity sect and later of the rival Numinous Treasure sect. By the end of the Period of Division, Daoism had its own canons of scriptures, much influenced by Buddhist models but constituting an independent religious tradition.

At the local level, popular collective forms of Daoism continued to thrive. Local masters would organize communal ceremonies for their parishioners. Incantations, music, fasting, and the display of penance and remorse would bring about the collective elimination of sins, which were seen as the main cause of sickness and premature death. According to the indignant reports of their Buddhist adversaries, Daoist ceremonies lasted days and nights and were ecstatic, sometimes even orgiastic. The participation of both men and women may explain the common allegation of sexual excesses at these ceremonies.

In the early centuries, Daoist priests usually married, and the office of Daoist master was hereditary. With the great success of Buddhism, some Daoist leaders introduced celibacy and monastic life in the

DOCUMENTS

The Monastery of Eternal Tranquility

After the Northern Wei moved their capital to Luoyang in 493, the city grew rapidly. Within twenty years, about a half million people had moved there and some one thousand Buddhist temples had been built. Luoyang was no longer after 534, leading to a rapid decline of the city. In 547, Yang Xuanzhi (yahng shwan-jih), on a visit to Luoyang, was so moved by his memories of its former glories that he wrote a five-chapter book on the city and its famous monasteries. He began his account with the Monastery of Eternal Tranquility, just south of the palace.

The Monastery of Eternal Tranquility was built by Empress Dowager Hu (hoo) in 516. . . . Within its walls was a nine-story wooden pagoda 900 feet tall; with the metal spire above it, its top was 1,000 feet above the ground. The pagoda could be seen from 100 *li* away. When the foundations were dug, thirty metal statues were found, which the Empress Dowager took as a response to her faith in Buddhism and used as a reason to build the monastery on such an immoderate scale.

On the top of the spire was a jewel-studded metal jar, large enough to hold twenty-five bushels. Under it were thirty metal plates for catching dew, which had metal bells hanging from them. Iron chains stretched from the pole to the four corners of the pagoda. Metal bells as big as bushel measures hung from the chains. Bells also hung from the corners of each of the nine stories, adding up to 120 bells in all.

The pagoda was square, with three doors and six windows on each side. The doors were painted red and embellished with five rows of metal studs on each of the twelve doors' twenty-four leaves, for a total of 5,400 studs. There were also metal rings as knockers. The quality of the construction, the skill of the design, and the marvels of the Buddhist art were all beyond comprehension. The painted pillars and metal knockers captivated the viewer. At night when the wind was strong, the music of the bells could be heard more than ten *li* away.

North of the pagoda was the Buddha Hall, similar in design to the palace's Hall of the Great Ultimate. In it was an 18-foot tall metal statue, ten life-sized metal statues, three statues embellished with pearls, five made of wire, and two of jade, all exceptionally finely made, the best of the age. The other buildings, including the monks' quarters, came to more than a thousand room-units. They were decorated with carved beams and painted walls; their doors and windows were painted blue; it was beautiful beyond description. Touching the eaves were junipers, cypresses, pine, and cedar trees; near the steps were fragrant herbs. . . .

When the decoration of the monastery was completed, Emperor Ming and the Empress Dowager ascended the pagoda. They looked down at the palace, which seemed small enough to fit in their palms. The whole capital seemed no bigger than a courtyard. People were prohibited from climbing the pagoda because from it one could see into the palace. . . .

In 528, [the general] Erzhu Rong (er-joo rung) quartered his troops and horses in the monastery. . . . In 530, the rebel Erzhu Zhao (er-joo jow) imprisoned Emperor Zhuang (jwahng) in the monastery. . . . In the second month of 534, the pagoda was destroyed by fire. . . . Everyone, monks and lay people, came out to watch the blaze, their sobs shaking the city. Three monks threw themselves into the fire and died. It took more than three months for the fire to burn out. Translated from Yang Xuanzhi, *Luoyang qielan ji jiaozhu* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1958), 1–12, by Patricia Ebrey.

Questions for Analysis

1. What features of the monastery did the author think especially notable?
2. Is it significant that a woman arranged for the construction of this monastery?

sixth century. Daoist monasteries, however, never acquired the economic power of Buddhist ones.

Daoist borrowings from Buddhism did not lead to reconciliation of the two religions. To the contrary, each engaged in bitter polemics against the other throughout this period. Moreover, Daoist masters helped instigate some of the anti-Buddhist persecutions. As an answer to Buddhist claims of superiority, Daoist masters asserted that the Buddha had been merely a manifestation of Laozi, who had preached to the Indians a debased form of Daoism, which naturally China did not need to reimport.

SUMMARY

After the fall of the Han Dynasty, political division prevailed in China for most of the next four centuries. It was not that the elite lost the belief that a unified China was desirable, but rather that no single military man was able to put together an army that could defeat all of his rivals. During the first phase of the Three Kingdoms and Western Jin, Luoyang remained the intellectual center, though many members of the elite living there had lost interest in serving in government. The Western Jin provided a brief period of unification that ended with civil war among Jin princes and uprisings of non-Chinese. There followed a lengthy period when north and south developed in different directions.

In the north, non-Chinese groups were dominant, and slave raids were an unpleasant fact of life. After decades in which many different groups contended for power, the Xianbei were able to create a state (the Northern Wei) that united most of the north. They built their first capital in northern Shanxi, close to where their armies were located. Gradually the Xianbei rulers made greater use of Chinese government practices as well as Chinese personnel. In the 490s, a ruler with a Chinese mother decided to pursue much more radical sinification. He moved the capital to Luoyang, ordered everyone at court to wear Chinese clothes and speak Chinese, and encouraged intermarriage between elite Xianbei and Chinese lineages. He probably went too far because three decades later the Xianbei armies left behind in the north rebelled, leading to several decades of fragmentation and warfare.

In the south, meanwhile, the elite families that had fled the collapse of the Western Jin government set up an émigré government at modern Nanjing, which was known as the Eastern Jin Dynasty. It was followed by four short dynasties founded by generals who were generally not strong enough to set up institutions that would ensure the survival of the dynasty much after their deaths. Nevertheless, the Southern Dynasties were an era of cultural and economic advance. Agriculture and trade both expanded as people found better ways to exploit the natural resources of the south. Several rulers became major patrons of learning and literature. The capacity of poetry, calligraphy, and painting to express personal feelings was expanded by a series of highly creative masters. In both north and south, Buddhism rapidly gained adherents. Monasteries and convents were built in large numbers in both regions, often with royal patronage. Buddhism was intellectually appealing to the educated, and rulers welcomed it as a tool to unite Chinese and non-Chinese citizens. Laymen not only contributed to the support of temples and their clergy but also could join devotional groups, some centering on particular sutras such as the *Lotus Sutra*. Buddhism offered new opportunities to women as nuns and let them pursue enlightenment on terms almost equal to men. Central Asian traditions of depicting Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and monks in wall paintings and sculpture had an enormous impact on the visual arts in China. The great success of Buddhism also stimulated the development of Daoism, which during this period acquired a large set of revealed scriptures. Buddhist and Daoist clergy often competed for political favor and engaged in bitter polemics against the other.

How much did China change over the course of the Period of Division? China in the late sixth century was not more populous or larger, but it had changed in other fundamental ways. Buddhism had gained wide acceptance among people of all social levels and was transforming the landscape with its temples and monuments. Because of the popularity of Buddhism, Chinese civilization became much more closely tied to other parts of Asia. Daoism responded to Buddhism's challenge and acquired a large body of texts and monastic institutions. The great migrations from north to south also meant that more and more land in the south was cultivated by Han Chinese farmers, putting pressure on non-Han indigenous peoples to withdraw or assimilate. The north absorbed a huge influx of non-Chinese peoples, leading to both sporadic ethnic conflict and more complicated notions of Chinese identity. Non-Chinese rule did not dim the memory of the greatness of the Han Dynasty but it showed that non-Chinese rulers could build strong states.