

# The tang dynasty of china



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Tang dynasty had a civil service system through which officials were employed by way of standardized examinations and recommendations to office. This was a system that was still used in the 20th century. It is considered as the greatest age of Chinese poetry, as well as historical literature and geographical works compiled by scholars. During the Tang era, there were several innovations like the development of woodblock printing. At the time Buddhism had become a major influence in Chinese culture and with other native Chinese sects gaining prominence among the people at the time. The Tang Dynasty was extraordinary within Chinese history. Its dominance in economics, military power, politics and foreign relations made it one of the greatest civilizations of their time.

A woman being treated unequally as compared to men in areas of work and life in general has been the case since the ancient times. But, women in the Tang Dynasty were better off and they enjoyed a higher social status as opposed to earlier times where women have been seen as lower beings than men in social status and physically. This transformation brought a great change in the history of women. Like Yang Yuhuan the favourite concubine of Emperor Li Shimin who was regarded as an icon for the beautiful women led to a change in the prospective of beauty at that time. This consequently elevated the role of women in the reign. From these aspects, the women in China were valued for the first time, and their influence back on the society was very significant.

Women in the Tang had a lot of difficult decisions to make in order to carry out their duties efficiently. Adult women especially those who were mothers to legitimate sons were greatly respected as this was the most important

role of women throughout the history of China. All mothers had to decide freely on whether to abort or grant life to an illegitimate child decisions which had great emotional and socio-economic influences in their lives. These two major decisions of either granting or taking the life from the unborn child depict that women in the Tang era enjoyed a great deal of freedom and dependency . This portrayed that the women made a lot of decisions in the absence of influence from men.

The medieval ideas about the lifestyle of the common womenfolk was completely different from the lifestyle of the Buddhist nuns, emperors' wives , witches and imperial women who had created for themselves a comparatively liberated lifestyle, in compared to the one common women enjoyed in the Dynasty. The Tang being a male dominated society, men determined the functions of other community members in society. Women were considered as unstable and unpredictable persons who were attributed to them being transferred to other communities as part of their role in society. The emotional connection with their sons, physical condition, experiencing monthly periods and child birth were also factors that contributed to women being regarded as unstable persons in society.

During the Tang Dynasty women were classified into four main images. Those who were independent and mostly played polo , the lonely, dependent and bound by men while the others were termed dangerous due to their state of instability and seclusion from men. The major roles and position of women in the Dynasty were expressed in an early imperial saying:" Three dependencies and four virtues". This saying defined how a woman related with the male counterparts during her life and how she was to contribute

economically to the community. The saying was meant to uphold peace and order in the community as they feared intrusion by strange women. The three dependencies focused on the male centers a woman was supposed to have: father, master or older brother, her husband and son(s). While the four virtues regarded to necessary skills that a girl was expected to have in order to find a good husband. A role mothers had to play by ensuring their daughters were well-educated with the expected skills.

The women of Tang had various roles that they played in the Dynasty and in the society at large. Among them was marriage. The engaged women were expected to be well behaved and be virgins, or they would be deprived of dignity and despised for losing their virginity before marriage. Married wives were expected to be subjective to their husbands according to the Chinese traditions, by accepting and agreeing with whatever their husbands said and wanted. During that time polygamy was a common practice and the women were to take on their father's surnames. Which in actual sense made the woman to have a lower social status as compared to men as most things were done in their favour, making them have greater control over women.

Economically, the women carried out various financial activities and also had jobs of various ranks in Tang Dynasty which ranged from being emperors. Princesses, vendors, entrepreneurs, hoteliers to being labourers, and prostitutes. This reflected a major stride in their lives by realizing they could fend for themselves rather than depend wholly on men to provide everything. Wu Zhao who was the first-ever female emperor in the history of China greatly influenced that decision of the women of Tang fending for themselves and feeding their families. Despite her being an emperor being a <https://assignbuster.com/the-tang-dynasty-of-china/>

controversial issue at the time due to being a patriarchy society, this was seen as a major breakthrough in the history of women. This realization made the women gain freedom from the male centred society of Tang.

The women of Tang pursued beauty and fashion and in their efforts they came up with different dressing styles and costumes which reflected their tastes . The common trends that were predominant in the Dynasty at the time ranged from revealing to unrevealing dressing styles for the delicate to plump body shapes. As a way making the women look full and pompous, their robes were usually lantern-like and baggy. But later on, the various clothes for women were based on three kinds which included long robes, Hu-style wearing, narrow sleeves and cross-dressing . The robes at the time were quite colourful with green, red and yellow being the main colours. Regarding fashion, the women of Tang had a role of ensuring that they looked sexy and attractive which meant adorning lithe capes as part of their dressing. Plump and full-figured women were considered beautiful and fashionable, with the affluent wearing expensive pearls and perfumes.

Mothers of Tang Dynasty made important contributions to the education of their families more so in the aspects of studies and moral character of their children. As compared to other dynasties in existence before and the time of Tang; the women of Tang were quite different from the other dynasties in terms of learning quality and how they were filled with thoughtfulness, intelligence, firmness, love and competence in imparting the necessary skills to their children. During Tang regime, the women's role in the family education became very important because it was at that time that the Tang Dynasty was experiencing an opening in society and the women were also

enjoying more freedom. With the role of women in the family education gradually becoming obvious, this situation lasted several reigns of different dynasties.

The Tang Dynasty mothers applied different techniques in educating their families and in the specific learning fields they considered important. They taught at a personal level because of their diverse knowledge on the Confucian classics, as opposed to the previous women's teachings which were done by way of examples in accordance to the Confucian principles. These mothers paid close attention to the direction of official careers in the education of their sons. Owing to their immense contributions to education, they enjoyed more freedom and rights in family life. The success of the women to the family education was due to the love and rigorousness used in the course, proper ideas and also the excellent educational background they had from their childhood.

Women in the Tang dynasty contributed immensely to the Chinese literature through writing of poems. The classical poems the shih which were composed of lines of four words with every other line rhyming. Lines of more or fewer words were also allowed. The Empress Wu Chao introduced the Po Liang style of poetry, which was a seven-letter poem with every line rhyming in the last word. This phase of poetry represented the thoughts and life of the people during that period. Tang dynasty become recognized as the golden age of poetry , where almost every emperor was a great lover of poem and many of them becoming poets . A special recognition was given to the Woman Emperor Wu Chao. Who through her contribution to poetry, poetry became an important course leading to official promotions and a

requisite in examinations for degrees. Hence leading to every official and scholar becoming a poet.

The poems in examinations followed a certain formula and many regulations as to their writing were established. The length of the poems was limited to either four, eight or twelve lines, while the length of the lines was limited to five or seven characters. Maintaining balance of tones, parallelism of characters and rhyme were also essential rules in the writing of those poems. Towards the end of the Tang dynasty, another new verse form of poetry known as Tzu was developed. It was composed of lines of irregular length and was written as lyrics to musical tunes and applied melodies of foreign origin. These poems were popularized by professional women singers of Tang as easily understood when sung for they had a natural rhythm of speech. This led to these poems attracting the attention of most poets at the time and becoming a major vessel of lyrical expression during that period.

Tzu-yeh, a woman poet who wrote the Ballad of Mulan, which celebrated the adventures of a woman soldier disguised as a man and The Peacock Flew to the Southeast, a tragic family love narrative that was ranked among the best Chinese folk lyrics. This portrayed how poets found consolation and refuge in poetry in times of political and social upheavals. The great Chinese poet Li Ch'ing-chao was renowned for the Tzu concerning her widowhood. Most of the poems sang of love, friendship, and romance, injustices of the time, satire, criticism and aspects of nature. However, in general, rhythm and lyrics were the essential parts of Chinese poetry.

Politically, women played some major significant roles in the political history of the Tang dynasty. A case in history was Empress Wei who convinced her husband Emperor Zhongzong to place his sisters and her daughters in government offices. She further requested him to grant women the right to bequeath hereditary privileges like ruling the empire to their sons in year 709, which by then was only a right for the males. The women at that time proved to be power-hungry with most killing their husbands and sons in order to take over the throne like Empress Wei. Empress Wu Zetian who entered Emperor Gaozong's court as a low consort rose to power in 690 becoming the first emperor in the history of China. During her rule she circulated a document which predicted the reincarnation of Maitreya with Buddha being a female monarch who would dispel disaster, disease and worries from the world. During and after Wu's reign, there were also other prominent women at court.

Shangguan Wan'er, a female poet and trusted official of Wu's private office made major contributions both politically and also through her writing and poems. Women like Yang, Kui-fei concubine to Emperor Tang, Hsuan-tsung adamantly persuaded the Emperor to get her Lichee that was her favorite food even from far off places like Ling-Nan in order to please her. Portraying how men were persuaded by women in order to meet their demands. Yang portrayed a symbol of a raise in women's status and in the history of women. Other prominent court women like Yang Guifei convinced Emperor Xuanzong to appoint her cronies and relatives to important martial and ministerial positions. Indicating a change in equality and a rise in their social status.



Culturally, women of Tang played various roles like in the adoption of the Confucianism as the main culture which played a major role in the daily lives of the people. With Buddhism and Daoism being recognized as the main ideologies at the time. The Tang Chinese enjoyed a variety of activities which included sports, drinking, feasting and entertainment as part of their leisure activities. The women were involved in the organizing of events such as the drinking game and dances as entertainers as well as participants.

Socially, the social rights and status of the women during the Tang era were so liberal-minded for such an ancient time. This mostly applied to the urban and elite women as opposed to the women in rural areas who were responsible for domestic tasks. Most women acquired religious authority after taking vows as priestesses of Dao. At the time, women acquired wealth and power freely with those in the high class being well respected in social circles. The courtesans of high class supervised feasts and banquets and were women who were known to be great poets and singers. They also happened to know the rules to such games as the drinking games and were well trained to portray proper table manners and polite behavior during such occasions.

The courtesans also dominated conversations by elite men, and were known to criticize openly the prominent males who boasted or talked too much and loudly about their achievements. During such occasions, the courtesans composed the lyrics to the songs they performed. But were mostly popular for singing songs written by famous Chinese men in new and different forms of lyrics. Clearly proving that men actually enjoyed being in the presence of

active and assertive women, a reason why the men loved playing polo together with the elite women.

Women also played a role in prostitution. There were many brothels in Tang dynasty where men visited for pleasure. This worsened the status of women in Tang as they were commoditized by men in order to satisfy them. They had to talk seductively and look appealing in order to get more customers. With the ladies talented in music and instruments being more popular and having more customers as compared to their fellow prostitutes.

In the social life, women played the role of encouraging their sons to choose Zhong as their first choice in times of conflicts between Zhong and Xiao. Zhong and Xiao were chronicles filled with historical meanings that were special to the people. This influence on the sons from their mothers was meant to help them make wise decisions more so in times of war or disasters. The sons were encouraged to devote themselves to the service of the regime by their mothers and not be concerned their family's safety. Also, mothers in Tang dynasty held the opinion that making friends was important. They judged the types of friends their sons befriended and had the task of educating their sons naturally because fathers were always out for business. This was important to the future of the dynasty and its prosperity. The Chinese proverb: "He who stays near vermilion gets stained red, and he who stays near ink gets stained black." was what the mothers went by. Just like the mother to the founder of the Confucian's achievements, mothers believed in maintaining a close relationship with their sons.

Through the investigation of women in Tang and their changing status, we see that Tang dynasty attached great importance to educating its people, and the women were granted the same opportunities for and rights to, education as the men. Poetry writing was done by both the common and noble women of Tang. With poetesses such as Shangguan being famous for their poems and literary works. Women taking up leadership and political roles was viewed a breakthrough in women's history, showing that they were also capable of jobs done by men.