

Women during the tang dynasty



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Women's rights in tang dynasty. The Tang Dynasty has been regarded by most scholars as the most glorious period in the history of China wherein it underwent a form of internationalization through the re-establishment of trade routes, an influx of foreign traders, the flourishing of Buddhism and other religions as well as a sort of Chinese renaissance in the arts, music and dance. Regarded as a period of open mindedness and liberal ideas Chinese women living within this era were actually very fortunate this is due the fact that in the eras preceding and succeeding the Tang dynasty Chinese society was a predominantly male dominated society wherein women had little if next to no social rights and were regarded as nothing more than property similar to the cultural attitudes of the Middle East and Japan[1].

In the Tan dynasty women were accorded a nearly equal social status as men such that they were accorded rights to an education, the right to choose who to marry, property upon the death of a husband, the right to divorce, the ability to choose numerous career paths such that women could even become soldiers, artisans or even members of the imperial court; overall the Tang dynasty accorded women with nearly the same rights and privileges that many women in the modern world enjoy today[2]. This paper seeks to explore the different social, cultural and economic rights that were accorded to women and will also try to discover the reasons behind why they were able to be implemented in this era and not in others. It was when the Emperor Li Shimin took up the throne during the period that preceded the Tang dynasty that laid the seeds for a dramatic change in Chinese politics, cultural identity, economic strength and local and foreign relations[3]. A trend of national unity as well as foreign and material influences accelerated

the growth of China's economy and cultural identity at the time resulting in new policies that benefited both its citizens as well as the country[4]. The end result was the prosperity that the Tang Dynasty enjoyed resulting in numerous new opportunities for women as a result. Education In the Tang dynasty education was considered of great importance as such Women in this era were accorded equal rights to education as men as such they were able to have a more diversified career path ahead of them as compared to their predecessors in the past[5].

Evidence of this is the fact that even though the Tang dynasty had a collection of several thousand poems from thousands of poets Shangguan Wan'er a poetess was able to distinguish herself among this mass of poets due to the unique style of poetry that she possessed that went to inspire Li Bai who became the most famous ancient Chinese poet to date[6]. Not only that since women in this era were able diversify and learn subject such as politics, history, and military skills women were able to ascend into positions that were exclusively for men such as politics and being soldiers[7]. This development which happened nearly 2000 years ago was only a recent development within the past hundred years in today's society, in fact during the 1800's to the early 1900's women in America as well as in most societies were not allowed to vote let alone hold public office and women soldiers were unheard of in most armies and are only a recent development with the past couple of decades. It is through this that we can see the extent of the liberalism that took hold of China at the time and how advanced their interpretation of human rights were since the ideas they had were 2, 000 years ahead of their time. Political Power of Women In the annals of Chinese

history even in the history of most countries at that time the head of state was usually a male, this is due to the fact that area of politics and administration has always been considered a male dominated affair. The closest most women came to holding power was either being a concubine, a wife of the head of state or an empress with the emperor being by her side however the emperor usually wielded all the power and the empress was merely a figurehead.

This concept was shattered in the Tang Dynast with the appointment of Wu Zetian as empress of the Tang dynasty who was able to hold power for well over 50 years till her death when she 82 years old[8]. It was through her rule that Tang era was able expand its borders, develop improved international relations with numerous other states and was able to develop a strong economy through trade. It was through the rule of Wu Zetian that the status of Tang women was able to be raised to the degree that the era is known for today[9]. It was in her rule that the arts started to flourish with the creation of numerous works of statuary, gold, silver and glass jewelry ad well as a proliferation of musical instruments[10]. Marriage rights for womenIt was during the Tang dynasty that concept of marriage truly changed for the first time in Chinese history. Such that a previously male dominated culture was able to accord the right of divorce to both man and woman and not bring with it any social stigma for the woman involved [11].

During this time if both parties find themselves unable to live peacefully with the other they can file for divorce and the woman is allowed to remarry[12]. In previous eras should a husband leave his wife the woman is not allowed to remarry at all and is essentially thrown to the side to die[13]. In the Tang

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dynasty the concept of remarriage was a common one with some women marrying up to three times in a row[14]. A surprising modern concept popular within the U. S. today was actually put into practice 2000 years ago showing just how far the ancient Chinese took the concept of liberalism to heart.

How these rights for women came to beThe Tang era is known for the liberal rights that it accorded to women that were far beyond its time the reason for this can be explained by the following: Openness of the Tang emperorsEmperors of the Tang Dynasty were famous for their openness about new ideas regarding religion, art, music and philosophy which resulted in the start of a form Chinese renaissance at the time. it was through this acceptance of new ideas, philosophies and ways of living that enacted a change within the Chinese cultural at the time. Resulting in an acceptance of new ways of social attitude and behavior. Foreign InfluencesOne of the reasons that the Tang dynasty flourished was due to in part to the rich trade in goods and services that it enjoyed with other states at the time. It was through this trade in goods that another type of trade occurred namely a trade in ideas and cultural concepts.

Due to numerous traders and tradesmen that occupied the cities of Chang'an, Luoyang and Guangzhou that the spread of different cultural nuances started to spread[15]. These traders brought with them the cultural ideas of their home countries as such it subtly influenced the cultural identity of the Chinese people. What occurred was a cultural exchange of sorts wherein these new cultural ideas started to imbed itself into mainstream Chinese cultural concepts until it came to a point that the

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people of the Tang dynasty adopted these ideas as their own. The spread of foreign literature translated into the local language helped them see how other cultures were like and adopted the positive aspects of these cultures.

Arrival of Foreign religionsThe arrival of Christian missionaries, Taoists, Confucian scholars, Buddhist scholars and a plethora of other religions helped to influence the attitudes of the Chinese populace towards women. Advocating equality of treatment and equal rights for both women and men these religions influenced how society viewed the status of women and caused a change in how they were treated[16]. The various religion sects as they grew in number also grew in societal power and as such were able to enact social reforms that were able to give women more rights and privileges within Tang dynasty society[17]. **Ascension to the Throne of Wu Zetian**Perhaps it was the ascension to the throne of Wu Zetian that brought about the greatest change in the perception of women for during that era. Empress Zetian during her reign enacted significant social and political reforms towards the treatment of women thereby allowing them access to education, diverse positions of employment and above all showed that women could be just as good as men since upon her death she was greatly mourned by the people of the country as a strong ruler who helped bring prosperity to her country.

ConclusionThe social liberalism that women in the Tang dynasty could today be described as a concept ahead of it time such that the rights women enjoyed then have only with the past hundred years been available to women now. These rights came about as a result of the numerous foreign influences that changed the behavior of the people, the fact that the rulers

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at the time were accepting of new forms of trade and ideas from another land instead of the usual stance of Chinese isolationism and the fact that women were able to find a sympathetic benefactor for them in the form of Wu Zetian. It was all these factors combined that brought about the change for the better for the women of that era, it is a shame that such a change didn't last longer than it did.;