

The Three Kingdoms of Korea and the Tang Dynasty

In the year 600 CE, the Korean peninsula was divided into three different kingdoms. In the north was the large kingdom of Goguryeo. In the southwest was the kingdom of Baekje. And in the southeast was the kingdom of Silla. During the Sui Dynasty in China (581–618), the Chinese emperor sent armies into the Korean peninsula. But these attempts failed. This was one of the reasons that the Sui Dynasty collapsed.

The dynasty that rose to replace the Sui was the Tang. Like the Sui emperors, the Tang also looked to conquer the Korean peninsula. Also, like the Sui, the Tang armies were held back, largely by the defenders of the northern kingdom of Goguryeo. However, while the Goguryeo were fending off the Tang assaults, the two smaller kingdoms to the south fell into war with each other. The kingdom of Silla saw political possibilities for itself as the Tang weakened its stronger rival, Goguryeo. But Baekje was not going to be overrun so easily. In the end Silla had to seek military assistance from Japan, China and even Goguryeo. This began a process in which Silla further oriented itself towards the Tang. It reorganizing its government along the lines of the Tang model and even adopted Tang dress styles for its court officials.

Silla, with the help of the Tang, first attacked Baekje and conquered it in 660. Then in 668 they attacked and defeated Goguryeo. The Tang believed that Korea united under Silla would now submit to Chinese rule. But the leaders of Silla had other ideas. Between 671 and 676 the armies of Silla forced the Tang out of Korea. But even with Chinese no longer in Korea, the influence of the Tang remained strong. Buddhism had come to Korea earlier, but during the Tang period Buddhism flourished in Korea. Many Korean Buddhist monks went on pilgrimages to China to obtain more knowledge. It was also during this time that Koreans adopted and adapted Chinese writing for their own language. Politically, the court in Silla borrowed heavily from the Tang model. They



borrowed from Chinese architecture, borrowed from Confucianism, and later even began their own version of the Chinese civil service exam system.

Short Answer Essay

Using what you have learned from the reading, answer the following essay question: “How did war between Korea and China result in a blending of cultures in Korea?” Submit your answer on a separate sheet of paper.