History 170E
Tang-Song Transition & China’s “Medieval Economic Revolution”
An Lushan Rebellion (755-763)

- Reign of Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712-756): unprecedented prosperity & cultural efflorescence
- An Lushan 安祿山, Tang general of Sogdian descent, rebelled against Tang in 755
- An Lushan was assassinated in 757; but the rebellion severely crippled the Tang dynasty
Provincial Autonomy in Late Tang

- Northern provinces provided little or no revenue to the Tang court
- Instead, southeastern provinces became mainstay of state finances
Song faced formidable steppe kingdom rivals of Liao and Xia on its northern frontiers.
Tang-Song Transition in Chinese History

- Transition took place over centuries (from 750 to 1250)
- Power of central government enhanced
- Aristocracy lost its dominance over government, society, economy
- Economic heartland of the empire shifted to south
- Dramatic growth of the market economy
- Intellectual reassessment: Confucian renaissance & repudiation of Buddhism
Population Distribution in China in 750 (left) and 1100 (right)
“Scenes of Ploughing and Harvesting”
Anonymous, probably 12th century
Water-powered Threshing Mill
(10th century)
Canal Traffic, Wuxi 無錫 (Yangzi Delta)
Tea Preparation

Eleventh-century tomb mural shows servants preparing tea for master and mistress of household.
“Reeling Silk” (detail)

- 11th-12th century
- The woman turns the reel with a crank to spin raw silk into yarn, while holding a suckling baby to her breast
Feeding Silkworms
(detail of 13th century painting)
“Scenes of Silk Manufacture”

- Upper right: women are reeling silk thread from boiled cocoons to make yarn
- Left: woman weaves silk on a loom
Song Dynasty Porcelain Styles

The first true porcelains were created in China beginning in the tenth century.

Left: Ding ware 定窯
Bottom left: Ru ware 汝窯
Bottom: Jun ware 鈞窯
Bronze Coins of the Northern Song

Coins in the top row were issued in the 1070s-80s, when Song mints produced 6 billion coins per year.
Song Dynasty
“Armored Truck”

Detail from a 12th-century painting of urban life shows strings of bronze coin being loaded onto a cart in front of a “second-class” tavern.
Song Paper Money

Left: One-guan (worth 1,000 bronze coins) note, ca. 1100-1110; Right: Southern Song one-guan note
Layout of Tang Capital of Chang’an

- From Empress Wu’s time, emperors mostly resided at Daming Palace at northeast corner of the city
- East and West Markets shown in yellow
Su Zhou City Map (based on 1227 engraving)
Government offices: pink box at center
Commercial districts: yellow areas to north & west
Grand Canal runs along west wall
Walled Town

Detail from “Ten Thousand Leagues of the Yangzi River” by Yang Yanguai (13th c.)
“Spring Outing Along the River” (detail)
“Spring Outing Along the River” (detail)