



these nomadic peoples travelling in the Central Plain all integrated themselves into one ethnic group which eventually became known as “Han.” Their own ethnic group names disappeared one by one; their cultures were taken in by the Han culture and also became part of it. This appeared to be the result of intermarriages, which were very common at the time between ethnic groups that were living in the same area. The development of the Han during this period is further historically significant as it also gave rise to China’s traditional “culturalism.”

The split of the Southern and Northern Dynasties ended in the unification during the Sui (581–618) and Tang (618–907) dynasties. The ruling classes in both dynasties had non-Han origins themselves. The royal court of the Sui Dynasty was full of *Xianbei* statesmen, and even King Wen of Sui Dynasty himself, the founder of the dynasty, married a *Xianbei*. The following Tang Dynasty inherited this practice and Li Yuan (618–626), the founder of the Tang Dynasty, was born to a *Xianbei* mother and married a *Xianbei* as his queen. Early in the Tang Dynasty, *Xianbei* nobles willing to be converted by the Han culture played a pivotal role and were serving in important positions from the very beginning. In other words, the Tang Dynasty that Chinese are so proud of is actually one great dynasty that was created by many ethnic groups altogether. Though it was ruled by the Han ethnic group in name, all ethnic groups had in fact participated in the administration.

Ethnic group names such *Xianbei*, *Di* and *Jie* disappeared in the long river of history with the end of the Sui and Tang dynasties—as for nearly 500 years from the Southern and Northern Dynasties to the Tang Dynasty, the Central Plain was in reality a melting pot of ethnic groups, with the Han ethnic group serving as the core.

The following Northern Song (960–1127) and Southern



Song (1127–1279) dynasties continued to interact actively with emerging nomadic peoples in the north. The *Qidan* ethnic group set up a strong Liao Kingdom, but when the name *Qidan* spread to Europe as a byword of China, the *Qidan* ethnic group itself had already disappeared on the lands of the Central Plain. The bulk of the *Qidan* ethnic group had been conquered and destroyed by other northern nomadic people called *Nozhen*, leaving the remaining Qidan minority to gradually become members of the “Han” people. The *Dangxiang* people, who established the Xixia Kingdom to the northwest of the Northern Song Dynasty, also vanished after a two-hundred-year-long era of prosperity when they were devastated by Mongolian military forces. Again, those remaining *Dangxiang* people later peacefully integrated themselves into the “Han” people.

The historical evolution of Chinese shows that the Han ethnic group is by no means an ethnic group with only one origin. At the same time, during all periods in Chinese history, there were always trends moving in the opposite direction, too. In other regions, Han also fused with other ethnic groups.

Many Han people moved to border barbarian areas due to factors such as wars, natural disasters and military settlement. For example, the war at the end of the Eastern Han Dynasty prompted more than a hundred thousand households to flee to areas where the *Wuhuan* ethnic group lived. These Han people who had moved to border ethnic regions had to change their lifestyle and folklore in order to adapt to the new local environments and social life surrounding them, and subsequently they became a part of local ethnic groups.

The *Gaochang* Kingdom set up by the *Qus* in Turfan, Xinjiang in AD 499 was originally a state consisting mostly of settled soldiers in the Han-Wei period and fleeing Han people