



Centers of Progress, Pt. 12: Hangzhou (Paper Money)

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Lesson Overview

Featured article: [Centers Progress, Pt. 12: Hangzhou \(Paper Money\)](#) by [Chelsea Follett](#)

Despite China having the second biggest economy in the world and being the nation with the world's largest population today, many students know surprisingly little about the country's history. Even students that know a bit about China have probably never heard of the city of Hangzhou, one of the ancient capitals of China and now its fourth-largest metropolitan area with a population of over 20 million.

This article will give students a glimpse into the fascinating history of Hangzhou during its "golden age" and relates many of the innovations that made the city one of the most influential centers of progress in world history. In particular, students will learn about one commercial innovation that originated in China and has now spread all over the world: paper currency.



Warm-up

Imagine that paper money, electronic payments, and credit and debit cards disappeared tomorrow. In this alternate reality, the only way to pay for things would be by using small metal coins.

How would this change affect you, your family, and your friends?

- Take a few minutes to reflect on how life would be different if you could use only coins to make purchases.
 - How would you feel? Do you think the transition would be easy?
 - Do you think using only coins to pay for things would be an impossible task? What would be the biggest challenges for you and your family?
 - Would there be any advantages to this old style of payment?
- Write a paragraph describing how this change would affect your life.
- Share your paragraph with a partner. Reflect and discuss together:
 - In what ways would you and your community be worse off with only the use of coins?
 - Would you want to live this way for a day, a month, or even a year?
 - Do you think it is possible or desirable for your town or city to flourish without the use of paper money?
- Today you will learn about the origin of paper money in China. Before we begin, answer these questions:
 - Why do you think paper money was invented in the first place? What were the advantages of paper money over the types of money used previously?
 - What technology do you think had to be developed in order for paper money to be introduced?
 - Make a prediction: Do you think paper money originated with a central government or as an innovation of private businesspeople?

Questions for reading, writing, and discussion

Read the [article](#), and then answer the following questions:

- What were some of the characteristics of the economy of Hangzhou during the Song dynasty? List at least three.
- The article mentions two advantages of using paper currency over coins. What were these advantages?
- What role does Hangzhou play in the economic life of China today? Why is it still one of the most important cities in China?
- According to the article, at what point did Hangzhou become the most important city in China?

- What critical piece of infrastructure first built during the 600s CE allowed Hangzhou to be connected to the cities of northern China?
- What technological innovation allowed for the mass production of books, documents, and banknotes during the Song dynasty? Be specific. What was the critical invention devised by Bi Sheng?
- Despite Hangzhou becoming one of the most populous and richest cities in the world during the Song era, which segment of its society was cruelly discriminated against at that time?
- What were some of the cultural milestones of the Song dynasty in each area of achievement? How did these innovations improve the lives of many ordinary Chinese people living in cities like Hangzhou? Fill in the chart below.

	What were the achievements during the Song dynasty?	How were the lives of ordinary Chinese people improved as a result?
Culture (including clothing, literature and poetry, cuisine, and architecture)		
Technology		
Economics		

- How did paper currency evolve? Write a short description of its origin and development from the Tang dynasty through the Song dynasty.
- What were some of the features of the banknotes printed by the Chinese central government in Hangzhou beginning in 1265 CE? Why did the Chinese people ascribe value to this form of currency?
- If not managed correctly, what is one of the dangers of using paper currency in an economy? What are the consequences for ordinary people of this type of fiscal mismanagement?

Extension Activity/Homework

- **Watch and Learn from a China Scholar**

Dr. Valerie Hansen teaches Chinese history at Yale University. She is a well-known expert on one of the most famous Chinese paintings, a masterpiece known as the “Qing Ming Scroll,” which was commissioned by a Song dynasty emperor.

Although the cityscape depicted in the scroll is a fictional rendition of an “ideal” Chinese urban area during the Song dynasty, it provides extensive evidence of the technological sophistication and economic innovations that were present in Hangzhou at the time.

Watch the [video](#) of Dr. Hansen describing the entire scroll in detail.

As you watch, find specific evidence in the scroll that exemplifies Chinese society during the Song dynasty.

	Examples in the Qingming Scroll
Social organization	
Politics and governance	
Interactions with the environment	
Cultural developments	
Economic systems	
Technology	

- **Create a Virtual Tour of Hangzhou**

Imagine that you are a tour operator in the modern city of Hangzhou. Your job is to promote your area to foreign visitors. Create a virtual tour of modern Hangzhou city using Google Presentation or PowerPoint and present it to your potential clients. What types of places would you like to show visitors to the city? How would you make Hangzhou appealing to them?

Find information on popular tourist sites in Hangzhou, such as:

- West Lake
- The Grand Canal
- Leifeng Pagoda

- Lingyin Temple
- Jingci Temple
- Yue Fei Temple
- Longjing Tea Farms
- Xixi National Wetland Park
- Qinghefang Ancient Street
- Wuzhen Water Village

On a Google Presentation or PowerPoint, create a slide for each site you wish to include in your presentation. Include images of each site, its location on a map of Hangzhou, and its importance to the history of the city. Make your slideshow as interesting as possible to entice potential visitors to visit Hangzhou.