The Song Dynasty was highly influenced by Buddhism and Confucianism, which was reflected in their art.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE [edit]

- Discuss the significance of Neo-Confucianism and literature on the art of the Song dynasty.

KEY POINTS [edit]

- Advanced in landscape and portrait painting heightened the visual arts during the Song Dynasty.
- The elite engaged in the arts as accepted pastimes of the cultured scholar-official, including painting, composing poetry, and writing calligraphy.
- Emperor Huizong was a renowned artist as well as a patron of the arts and his court entourage included court painters, calligraphers, poets, and storytellers.
- In philosophy, Chinese Buddhism had waned in influence but it retained its hold on the arts and on the charities of monasteries.
- Buddhism had a profound influence upon the budding movement of Neo-Confucianism, led by Cheng Yi (1033–1107) and Zhu Xi (1130–1200).
- Different clothing styles distinguished peasants, soldiers, artisans, merchants, scholars, and officials.

TERMS [edit]

- **calligraphy**: The art of writing letters and words with decorative strokes.
- **Neo-Confucianism**: A moral, ethical, and metaphysical Chinese philosophy influenced by Confucianism; originated with Han Yu and Li Ao (772-841) in the Tang Dynasty, and became prominent during the Song and Ming dynasties.
- **Buddhism**: The religion and philosophy founded by the Indian teacher Gautama Buddha.
Background

The Song Dynasty was a ruling dynasty in China between 960 and 1279. It was the first government in world history to issue banknotes or paper money, and the first Chinese government to establish a permanent standing navy.

The visual arts during the Song Dynasty were heightened by new developments such as advances in landscape and portrait painting. The elite engaged in the arts as accepted pastimes of the cultured scholar-official, including painting, composing poetry, and writing calligraphy.

The Significance of Literature in Art

The poet and statesman Su Shi and his associate Mi Fu (1051–1107) enjoyed antiquarian affairs, often borrowing or buying art pieces to study and copy. Poetry and literature profited from the rising popularity and development of the ci poetry form. Enormous encyclopedic volumes were compiled, such as works of historiography and dozens of treatises on technical subjects. This included the universal history text of the Zizhi Tongjian, compiled into 1000 volumes of 9.4 million written Chinese characters.

The genre of Chinese travel literature also became popular with the writings of the geographer Fan Chengda (1126–1193) and Su Shi, the latter of whom wrote the 'daytrip essay' known as Record of Stone Bell Mountain that used persuasive writing to argue for a philosophical point. Although an early form of the local geographic gazetteer existed in China since the 1st century, the matured form known as "treatise on a place", or fangzhi, replaced the old "map guide", or tujing, during the Song Dynasty.
The imperial courts of the emperor's palace were filled with his entourage of court painters, calligraphers, poets, and storytellers. Emperor Huizong was a renowned artist as well as a patron of the arts. A prime example of a highly venerated court painter was Zhang Zeduan (1085–1145) who painted an enormous panoramic painting, Along the River During the Qingming Festival. Emperor Gaozong of Song initiated a massive art project during his reign, known as the Eighteen Songs of a Nomad Flute from the life story of Cai Wenji (b. 177). This art project was a diplomatic gesture to the Jin Dynasty while he negotiated for the release of his mother from Jurchen captivity in the north.

The Influence of Buddhism in Art

In philosophy, Chinese Buddhism had waned in influence but it retained its hold on the arts and on the charities of monasteries. Buddhism had a profound influence upon the budding movement of Neo-Confucianism, led by Cheng Yi (1033–1107) and Zhu Xi (1130–1200). Mahayana Buddhism influenced Fan Zhongyan and Wang Anshi through its concept of ethical universalism, while Buddhist metaphysics had a deep impact upon the pre–Neo-Confucian doctrine of Cheng Yi. The philosophical work of Cheng Yi in turn influenced Zhu Xi. Although his contemporary peers did not accept his writings, Zhu's commentary and emphasis upon the Confucian classics of the Four Books as an introductory corpus to Confucian learning formed the basis of the Neo-Confucian doctrine. By the year 1241, under the sponsorship of Emperor Lizong, Zhu Xi's Four Books and his commentary on them became standard requirements of study for students attempting to pass the civil service examinations.
Buddhism’s continuing influence can be seen in painted artwork such as Lin Tinggui’s Luohan Laundering. However, the ideology was highly criticized and even scorned by some. The statesman and historian Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072) called the religion a "curse" that could only be remedied by uprooting it from Chinese culture and replacing it with Confucian discourse. Buddhism would not see a true revival in Chinese society until the Mongol rule of the Yuan Dynasty, with Kublai Khan’s sponsorship of Tibetan Buddhism and Drogön Chögyal Phagpa as the leading lama. The Christian sect of Nestorianism—which had entered China in the Tang era—would also be revived in China under Mongol rule.
Portrait of the Zen Buddhist monk Wuzhun Shifan (1238)

Portrait of the Zen Buddhist monk Wuzhun Shifan, painted in 1238.
The Art of Clothing

Clothing was made of hemp or cotton cloths, restricted to a color standard of black and white. Trousers were the acceptable attire for peasants, soldiers, artisans, and merchants, although wealthy merchants might choose to wear more ornate clothing and male blouses that came down below the waist. Acceptable apparel for scholar-officials was rigidly defined by social ranking system. However, as time went on this rule of rank-graded apparel for officials was not as strictly enforced. Each official was able to display his awarded status by wearing different-colored traditional silken robes that hung to the ground around his feet, specific types of headgear, and even specific styles of girdles that displayed his graded-rank of officialdom.

Women wore long dresses, blouses that came down to the knee, skirts and jackets with long or short sleeves, while women from wealthy families could wear purple scarves around their shoulders. The main difference in women's apparel from that of men was that it was fastened on the left, not on the right.