

*China and Beyond in the Mediaeval Period: Cultural Crossings and Inter-Regional Connections.*

Editors by DOROTHY C. WONG and GUSTAV HELDT, New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, in association with Cambria Press, 2014. 444 pp. \$99.99, £62.99 (cloth).

*The Silk Road: A New History.* By VALERIE HANSEN. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 320 pp. ISBN 9780195159318. \$34.95, £20 (cloth); \$21.95, £12.99 (paper).

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doi:10.1017/jch.2016.8

Liberating China from the isolation that popular imagination has for so long confined it to, and transcending modern national borders in general, has become somewhat fashionable in historical scholarship lately. The two volumes under review here both do this splendidly, and in very different ways, although both focus on the first millennium CE. The more recent of these two books, Wong and Heldt's *China and Beyond in the Mediaeval Period*, originated with a 2010 conference at the University of Virginia. As such, it presents the reviewer with the usual conference volume difficulty: the book contains twenty-one different chapters written by twenty-one different authors on twenty-one different topics, mostly unrelated. To do it full justice might require twenty-one reviews. It is impossible to encapsulate all the wealth of material here. But the multiplicity of topics is exactly appropriate for "border crossing," and this book provides a rich introduction to an inherently wide-ranging field.

Among the farthest-reaching surprises are Lewis Lancaster's observation of South Indian (Tamil/Dravidian) influences on the Hebrew Bible (29); Eric Ramírez-Weaver's analysis of a small figure of the Buddha that was cast in what is today Pakistan but had travelled all the way to central Sweden by around 800 CE (171–86); and Kam-Wing Fung's discussion of how the Hellenistic astrolabe made its way through the Islamic world, where it was useful in determining the direction of Mecca for prayer, and finally to China, where it addressed Chinese interests in astronomy and the promulgation of calendars (187–203).

Other chapters are more familiarly East Asian. Several, for example, are devoted to East Asian interactions in Nara period (710–84 CE) Japan. Dorothy C. Wong provides a definitive account of the Chinese Buddhist monk Jianzhen's journey to Japan (where his religious name is pronounced Ganjin; 鑑真, 688–763), emphasizing his role in the transmission of artwork and other aspects of material culture (63–99). Joan R. Piggott studies the "dialectic" between Chinese and Japanese ideas in Nara Japan across three stages, showing, among other things, how it resulted in a gendering of kingship and an end to the tradition of female rulers in Japan (243–59). And H. Mack Horton shows how Chinese verse—in "a language native to neither but common to both" (261)—was employed in diplomacy between Sillan Korea and Nara Japan.

For China, Keith N. Knapp shows how Tang era Confucian stories of "filial cannibalism"—nurturing one's parent with one's own flesh—can be traced to *Jātaka* tales of the Buddha's lives (135–49), and Albert E. Dien provides a fascinating, nuanced, discussion of the extent to which Sogdians (that is, Central Asians) in China were sinicized during the most flourishing period of the overland trade routes (117–34). While many scholars have assumed an inevitable process of sinicization (*hanhua* 漢化), Dien correctly suggests that the reality was probably more complicated. Because the Sogdian homeland was never incorporated into China and the Sogdians did not become rulers of China, however, the issue of the degree of assimilation of the Sogdians resident in China will be much less contentious than the controversy over the sinicization, or lack thereof, of the Manchu rulers of the later Qing dynasty, for example.

I have mentioned, only briefly and in passing, fewer than half of the chapters in this volume. Readers' interests will naturally vary, and there is much more to discover here. The volume also contains many excellent illustrations, often in color, which may partially justify its relatively

high list price. If nothing else, this book certainly proves that China was not isolated, but part of a larger Eurasian whole, during the first millennium.

The book by Valerie Hansen is, by contrast, more tightly focused, looking only at the classic “Silk Road” that led through what is now Xinjiang, during its first-millennium heyday, and written from a single authorial perspective. The book consists of separate chapters on five different Silk Road oasis communities, four of which are located in Xinjiang (Niya and its environs, Kucha, Turfan, and Khotan), and one in Gansu (Dunhuang), with additional chapters on the Tang dynasty capital, Chang’an, at the Chinese end of the Silk Road, and on the western (actually Central Asian) terminus of the Silk Road in Samarkand and Sogdia. These communities are presented in very rough chronological order, starting with Niya (and the larger surrounding Kingdom of Kroraina, including Loulan), which seems to have stopped being visited much by travelers after about 500 CE, and ending with Khotan, which stopped being Buddhist around 1006 CE. Hansen’s major primary sources are archeologically recovered written documents: contracts, legal cases, letters, and so forth. She also interweaves accounts of the famous modern explorers—Aurel Stein, Sven Hedin, and others—and of the great early Chinese Buddhist pilgrims Faxian 法顯 (c. 342–422) and Xuanzang 玄奘 (c. 602–66), to provide some narrative threads and a degree of human interest. She also occasionally interjects personal observations from her own travels, somewhat in the time-honored *National Geographic* style. Unlike the Wong and Heldt volume, which is clearly intended for specialist scholars, Hansen is apparently trying to write for a general audience, and she is careful to be both comprehensive and easily comprehensible.

I wonder how many general readers will have the patience to sit through even moderately detailed discussions of old textual fragments pulled from a remote desert region, but Hansen truly does an excellent job, and this volume should become a standard source on the Silk Road for a long time to come. Even for the most advanced experts, Hansen provides a helpful “big picture” of the entire Xinjiang Silk Road. Hansen’s conclusion that the Silk Road did not really lead all the way to Rome will not be controversial, because scholars have long known that evidence of direct contact between China and Rome is scarce. Hansen’s more surprising conclusions are that the volume of private trade was small—“The Silk Road was one of the least traveled routes in human history” (235), at least as measured by quantities of goods and numbers of travelers, though Hansen does acknowledge that the cultural, religious, and technological exchanges across the Silk Road nonetheless “changed history”—and that “The major player... was the Tang government” (106–7), and other strong Chinese dynasties. That is, Chinese military garrisons and resulting government spending were the major stimuli for documented transactions in Xinjiang.

These conclusions are securely and persuasively based on the available evidence, however unpopular they may be. One might wonder, though, why Chinese governments bothered investing so many resources in the region if it was otherwise worth little. That apparent mystery seems to remain inadequately explained here. To play devil’s advocate, I would also like to raise three other issues. One is the possibility that small scale, petty, short distance trade may cumulatively and collectively be more important than occasional large-scale governmental activities, no matter how insignificant individual case examples may appear. The second is the fact that written sources from early China are often effectively the monopoly either of governments or of literate elites who viewed commerce with disdain, and private trade may therefore be greatly under-represented in the early Chinese written record—even as recovered through the accidents of archeology. My third issue is to question the extent to which the Xinjiang routes really were the dominant conduits for east-west transmission.

From the perspective of successive Chinese dynasties, Xinjiang certainly was the “western regions,” and the preferred route west: China’s own favored Silk Road (though, of course, the term “Silk Road” was not actually coined until 1877). But, it is possible that the alternative northern steppe transmission route may sometimes have rivaled the Xinjiang desert oasis route in importance, though the steppe was usually harder for Chinese governments to control. And the southern

maritime route was also more important from much earlier than many people realize, as Tansen Sen skillfully demonstrates in his chapter on “Buddhism and the Maritime Crossings” in the Wong and Heldt volume (39–62). For example, in a seventh- or eighth-century collection containing biographies of Chinese Buddhist monks who travelled to India, in thirty-six out of sixty cases they went by sea (50–51). Xinjiang was never the only Silk Road. But it will probably always be the classic Silk Road of our imagination, and Valerie Hansen has written a wonderful introduction to it.

*The Confucian-Legalist State: A New Theory of Chinese History*. By DINGXIN ZHAO. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. 472 pp. \$85, £54.99 (cloth), \$84.99, £52.24 (ebook).

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doi:10.1017/jch.2016.17

Dingxin Zhao presents a sweeping account of the emergence of the Confucian-Legalist state and its consolidation in Chinese history. Zhao aims at “a theory of historical change” (Chapter 1), but also offers a theory of the impossibility of change. Dramatic change took place when Western Zhou feudalism was transformed through incessant warfare and Legalist reforms in the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods (Chapters 2–8) into the Confucian-Legalist state in the early Han dynasty (Chapter 9). Once formed, the Confucian-Legalist state was resilient against challenges for two millennia (Chapters 10–13). Zhao insists on “the impossibility of an indigenous creation” of constitutionalism or capitalism (370, also 353, 284). However, his meticulous empirical discussions also open up potentials for unsanctioned “interstitial developments” (329, 346). Zhao’s book thus accounts for more historical change and contingencies than he may have intended.

Zhao develops “a theory of historical change” that goes “beyond Spencer’s, Weber’s, [and] Mann’s” (48). He does so first by “adding competitive/conflict logics to Michael Mann’s version of Weberian structural analysis and mechanism-based explanations” (4), and second by adopting Mann’s four sources of power, namely ideological, political, military, and economic (10). The theory then seeks to explain two principal research questions. The first is “how and why China was unified and developed into a bureaucratic empire under the state of Qin” (6). The second is how the Confucian-Legalist state that emerged in the Western Han “showed such resilience” until the nineteenth century (6).

Zhao’s answer to the first question points to the “dominance of military competition” which “subdued all the other power actors” (11). “War-driven dynamism” eventually culminated in both absolutism and unification (Part III). Zhao’s answer to the second question zooms in on the Han dynasty’s turn to ideological power. The Han learned the lesson that the Qin’s Legalist model was unstable because the very strength of the state “freed it from checks and balances by other societal actors” (263). Han’s Emperor Wu developed “a synthesized ideology” of “imperial Confucianism” (279) that gave moral legitimacy to otherwise instrumental Legalist ruling methods (292). This “amalgam of political and ideological power” allowed Chinese emperors to simultaneously “strengthen state authority and... penetrate the society” (282) and “curbed military power [and] marginalized economic power” (15). This ruling structure did not just convert warlords-turned-emperors (Chapter 10) and semi-nomadic invaders (Chapter 11), but also subdued potentially “state-weakening” Buddhism (304, Chapters 10 and 12) and commercialization (Chapter 13). As a result, the Confucian-Legalist state remained resilient until the nineteenth century.

In highlighting the Confucian-Legalist state’s persistence, Zhao’s “new theory of Chinese history” paradoxically confirms age-old theories, such as Jin Guantao and Liu Qingfeng’s