



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

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This volume examines China's contacts with neighbouring cultures in Central, South, Southeast, and Northeast Asia, as well as contacts among those cultures from the beginning of the Common Era to the tenth century and beyond. During this period, trans-regional and cross-cultural exchanges were fostered by both peaceful and aggressive activities and movements of peoples across Eurasia along land and maritime routes. Such movements played an important role in world history in the mediaeval period, and yet many aspects of cultural exchanges across Eurasia remain understudied. The lack of knowledge is particularly evident in treatments of Chinese history between the Han and Tang empires. Examining relations with neighbouring cultures during this period calls into question notions of China as a monolithic cultural entity.

Grouped under the four headings of "Networks of Exchange," "Silk Road Crossings," "Textual Centers and Peripheries," and "Buddhist Art and Iconography," the twenty-one chapters in this volume reveal transmissions, transgressions, syntheses, accommodations, and transformations that occurred when peoples and cultures came into contact with one another. They explore the motivations for the movements of peoples and goods--trade, war, diplomacy, acquisition of culture and knowledge (and sometimes of talent), and evangelical Buddhism. They also analyze the impacts of these exchanges through study of the artefacts, concepts, technologies, and practices associated with these interactions from a multidisciplinary perspective.

The focused study of the individual authors, each from her or his disciplinary training (art history, cultural studies, history, literary studies, religious studies, history of science, etc.), sheds light on the crossing of boundaries of geographic, cultural, linguistic, and sometimes temporal distance. Whether it is Tang China, Yamato Japan, Viking Sweden, or Zoroastrian Central Asia, however, each essay highlights the prominent place of cultural crossings as both inter-regional movements and the fertile products they produced.

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