

scribe Java as part of Bali (p. 433), and c) describe Stalin being a political despot due to his “Asian/Georgian background” (p. 424).

It is clearly alarming that such scholarship has had positive reviews. Duchesne is free to make his arguments but must substantiate the same with rigour.

### ***Traditional China in Asian and World History***

By Tansen SEN and Victor H. MAIR

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There has been a long mistaken stereotype of an “isolated China” in its long history among historians of China. In recent years, however, some scholars begin to challenge the conventional perception that Chinese civilization, in particular in its early phase, existed with no or only little influence from other parts of the world (Sanping Chen, *Multicultural China in Early Middle Ages*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012 and Jonathan Karam Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and Its Turko-Mongol Neighbors: Culture, Power, and Connections, 580-800*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). In *Traditional China in Asian and World History*, Tansen Sen and Victor H. Mair offer a radically revised view of China’s past, demonstrating multiple examples of early Chinese interactions with other cultures in a broad range of manifestations including ancient Chinese perceptions of foreigners, military and diplomatic missions to and from China, China’s international trade across land and sea, as well as role of religious pilgrims in fostering intercultural contacts.

As the ninth volume of the series “Key Issues in Asian Studies,” which aims to tackle major events “in an introductory but compelling style appropriate for survey courses” (p. vi) for college and secondary school students, this work endeavors to provide a concise yet in-depth insight into China’s cross-cultural interactions in ancient times within merely one hundred pages. Certainly it is no easy task to cover such a broad theme within this extremely limited scope, but the authors ingeniously incorporate this challenge within a framework that conceptualizes traditional China as substantially involved in Asian and world history in various aspects.

The first chapter begins with a concise examination of Chinese historical records, in particular the official dynastic histories, to outline the value and shortcomings of the ancient Chinese perception of neighboring tribal states and foreign kingdoms, most of them along China’s north and northwestern frontiers. Although these official histories enjoy imperial patronage as being official compilations, their records are still limited and not infrequently they “underscore the fact that these complex interactions between ancient China and the neighboring regions” (p. 11). The authors then offer significant insights into early Chinese attitudes towards the role of emperor and their world view by concentrating on diplomatic exchanges, foreign trade, and religious influences.

Exploring the early period of Chinese history (before the 3rd cent. BCE), Sen and Mair suggest that the Central Plains, the area around the Yellow River that later become the core of Chinese civilization, interacted with neighboring cultures from an early period and gained substantial foreign technologies and ideas, including bronze metallurgy, chariots and horse riding, as well as equestrian arts and equipment. With the help of itinerant traders and travelers, goods and ideas from Eurasia and overseas entered China and *vers versa*. It is clear from both written and archaeological evidence that cross-cultural networks “comprising the movement of people, goods, and ideas connected the Central Plains to the wider world long before the famed Silk Road was

established” (p. 27)(Jianjun Mei, *Copper and Bronze Metallurgy in Late Prehistoric Xinjiang: Its Cultural Context and Relationship with Neighboring Regions*, British Archaeological Reports International series 865. Oxford: Archaeopress, 2000 and Jessica Rawson, “Carnelian Beads, Animal Figures and Exotic Vessels: Traces of Contact between the Chinese States and Inner Asia, c. 1000-650 BC,” *Archäologie in China*, vol. 1: *Bridging Eurasia* [2010]: 1-42). Indeed, some of these networks later became part of the Silk Road, as explained in chapter 3. Almost parallel to the expansion of the Han empire (206BCE-220CE) into Central Asia and spread of Chinese civilization to the coastal areas, the establishment of powerful empires in other parts of the world such as the Persian Seleucid (312-63BCE) and Parthian (247BCE-224CE) empires all helped provide stable and secure environment and contributed to the formation of long-distance trade routes that stimulated cross-cultural interactions and exchanges. For the first time in history, China was connected to the markets in the Middle East and Mediterranean through both an overland and a maritime route. With the growth of trade along these routes, merchants from Central Asia “started venturing into the urban centers and port cities of China” and some of them were “instrumental in introducing foreign cultural ideas and traditions into China” (p. 38).

One of the most important traditions that the merchants introduced into China is Buddhism, the topic of chapter 4. Focusing on the transmission of Buddhist doctrines to China from the third through the tenth centuries, Sen and Mair identify four major reasons for the initial success of Buddhism in China: the translation of Buddhist teachings into Chinese, the chaotic political situations that followed the collapse of the Han, the sponsorship by some of the regional states in China, as well as the flow of monks and Buddhist artifacts from South Asia. Since then, Buddhism has exerted great impact on Chinese society and played an important role in fostering exchange of ideas and diplomatic missions among various parts of Asia, especially in East Asia among China, Korea, and Japan. The final chapter recounts the emergence of China as major participant in world commerce between the tenth to the

fifteenth centuries. Following a brief discussion on the influence that Neo-Confucianism brought on the intellectual and social life in China, the authors analyze the changes in economic policies in the Song (960-1276), Yuan (1271-1368), and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties that influenced world trade, including the historical voyages of Zheng He (1371-1433).

This remarkable book of Sen and Mair employs several features that are well-suited for an introductory historical overview. Key among these is their numerous lively and insightful discussions of important historical events, persons, ideas, and artifacts. Given the target readership of the work, it is unlikely that its primary readers will have had substantial exposure to specific Chinese history, thus the most laudable strength of this volume is its overall brevity and succinctness. At roughly fifteen pages apiece, each of the five chapters is ideal for introducing students to Chinese history and its interconnection with world history in a class hour. To help facilitate more comprehensive understanding, a selection of primary sources that underscore the theme of China's interaction with the outside world is offered in the appendix. Furthermore, the volume also features many maps, photographs of artifacts and relics, a glossary of major terms in Chinese and other Asian languages, as well as a list of reading suggestions, all of which enhance its appeal. Readers more versed in the topic may wonder why some non-Han peoples who were of great significance in the history of China are not dealt with (though mentioned once on p. 69) in the text, for instance the Khitan. For over two centuries the Khitan with their Liao empire (907-1125) and Kara-Khitai Khanate (1124-1218) were so dominant in East and Central Asia that even the name for "China" in many European languages, "Cathay" or "Kitaia," reflects the importance of the Khitan in the interaction between China and Europe. Certainly, this may be a little over-demanding for the limited pages available to the authors.

In sum, the thesis of Sen and Mair is both comprehensive and compelling, making it useful to students and teachers alike. It is no doubt that *Traditional China in Asian and World History* provides its readers with an extensive summary of ancient China's

interactions with other parts of the world. The authors succeed in promoting comparison across time and space and supporting analysis of transnational interactions by considering the influence foreign peoples, goods, and ideas exerted on the progression of Chinese history. It is surely recommended for experts and students in the history of China, but also readers generally interested in world history will ultimately find much of value in this volume.