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IMPERIAL CHINA

and Its Southern Neighbours

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IMPERIAL CHINA

and Its Southern Neighbours

Edited by
**Victor H. Mair and
Liam C. Kelley**



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Singapore

First published in Singapore in 2015 by
ISEAS Publishing
Institute of Southeast Asian Studies
30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace, Pasir Panjang
Singapore 119614

E-mail: publish@iseas.edu.sg • *Website*: bookshop.iseas.edu.sg

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ISEAS Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Imperial China and Its Southern Neighbours / edited by Victor H. Mair and Liam C. Kelley.

1. China—Civilization
 2. Political culture—China—History.
 3. China—Relations—Southeast Asia.
 4. Southeast Asia—Relations—China.
 5. Southeast Asia—Economic integration.
 6. China—Relations—Middle East.
 7. Middle East—Relations—China.
- I. Mair, Victor H., 1943-
II. Kelly, Liam.
III. International Conference on Imperial China and Its Southern Neighbours
(2012 : Singapore)

DS721 I34 2015

ISBN 978-981-4620-53-6 (soft cover)
ISBN 978-981-4620-54-3 (E-book PDF)

Typeset by International Typesetters Pte Ltd
Printed in Singapore by Markono Print Media Pte Ltd

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PREFACE

This volume is composed of papers presented at the international conference on “Imperial China and Its Southern Neighbours”, organized by the Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), Singapore, and held at ISEAS on 28–29 June 2012.

The northern periphery of China, from the late Neolithic and the Bronze Age up to modern times, has been carefully scrutinized, both by Chinese scholars and foreign researchers. Even traditional Chinese sources, such as the standard histories, devote considerable attention to the peoples, cultures, and states of the northern and northwestern border regions of the Chinese heartland. Since the Chinese state began in the northern portion of its current configuration and received demonstrable, formative inputs from the north and northwest, it is understandable that correspondingly greater attention would be paid to the north than to the south, particularly during the early periods of the development of the Chinese nation. In contrast, the southern rim of China has been relatively poorly studied, despite the fact that the languages, ethnic groups, and cultures of the south are every bit as complex, interesting, and important as those of the north.

In this conference, we aimed to remedy this disparity by giving due emphasis to the south as a vital region of social, economic, and cultural interaction between Sinitic and non-Sinitic peoples. First, however, we had to recognize that “the south” has not been a fixed entity or a static, well-defined region during the last three millennia of Chinese history. Rather, it has been defined by a continuously changing, amorphous boundary with the north. Indeed, there has been a gradual encroachment of the north upon the south. This was already documented in modern scholarship more than

half a century ago by Harold J. Wiens, *China's March Toward the Tropics* (1954, also published under at least one other title), and C.P. Fitzgerald, *The Southern Expansion of the Chinese People* (1972).

A dramatic change occurred around the time of the fall of the Western Jin Dynasty (265–316) and the founding of the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317–420). This was a time of crisis in the northern heartland, one that was precipitated by climatic distress and consequent geopolitical realignments. The net effect was to catapult large numbers of northerners southward, quickening the pace of expansion and assimilation.

The aim of this conference was to go beyond the bare facts of history in an attempt to understand the dynamics of north-south interaction and exchange. Through examination of art, literature, material culture, trade patterns, and other cultural and economic manifestations, we sought to show that the communication between north and south was by no means unidirectional and that it had profound consequences for diverse aspects of society throughout East Asia, Southeast Asia, and beyond. For example, much of what is referred to as Taoist religion actually consists of elements and practices transmitted from the south. Another salient characteristic of late medieval Chinese culture was tea drinking, but this too was brought from the “barbarian” south. Such conspicuous instances of the northern assimilation of southern culture prompt us to ask precisely what were the mechanisms whereby such aspects of culture were transmitted and what were the processes by means of which they became a part of the national culture.

We wish to emphasize that, although we began with the premise of an originally northern-based China interacting with and encroaching upon the south, it was not our intention for this to be a China-centred conference. Instead, we also wished to investigate how the south viewed the north and assimilated aspects of northern culture. Only through a balanced approach that gives due recognition both to the north and to the south do we feel that full justice can be done to the theme of our conference.

This conference brought together scholars who work on various groups living in the southern reaches of China and in South Asia and Southeast Asia. Our focus was not restricted to contiguous land masses only, but also took into account the burgeoning ocean trade and migration that have occurred during the last two millennia and more. Naturally, both insular and continental societies have been taken into consideration.

We do not want to give the impression that our subject area is one of virgin territory. Indeed, much valuable scholarship on the relationship between the north of China and the south has accumulated during the last couple of centuries. A good indication of the state of our field may be by consulting the classic work by Wang Gungwu entitled, *The Nanhai Trade: Early Chinese Trade in the South China Sea* (1954) and the collection of materials in *China and Southeast Asia*, Routledge Library on Southeast Asia, in six volumes (2009). Nonetheless, we feel that the time is ripe to take stock of the current level of knowledge and bring to bear new bodies of evidence from diverse disciplines.

The overall purpose of our conference was to better understand the nature of the societies and cultures that lie to the south of the Chinese heartland and to bring the south into the mainstream of historical studies. We believe that the papers that have been brought together in this volume achieve these goals in a respectable fashion and hope that others will find them to be of use in pursuing further research on this compelling macro region.

We would like to thank the following for assistance in organizing the conference and preparing the volume: Tansen Sen, Geoff Wade, Caixia Lu, Joyce Zaide, and Paula Roberts.

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Andrew Chittick, the E. Leslie Peter Professor of East Asian Humanities and History at Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Florida, has developed and led the college's East Asian Studies programme since 1998. His primary research focus is on the society, culture, and military history of the Chinese medieval southern dynasties. He is the author of *Patronage and Community in Medieval China: The Xiangyang Garrison 400–600 CE*, as well as a chapter on the southern dynasties in the forthcoming *Cambridge History of China, Volume 2: The Six Dynasties*. He has also studied and taught on Southeast Asian history and early Sino–Southeast Asian relations, Asian environmental history, and the history and contemporary practice of dragon boat racing.

Hugh R. Clark is Professor of History and East Asian Studies at Ursinus College, Pennsylvania. He is the author of *Community, Trade, and Networks: Southern Fujian from the 3rd to the 13th Centuries* (1991) and *Portrait of a Community: Society, Culture, and the Structures of Kinship in the Mulan River Valley from the Late Tang Through the Song* (2007), and has published numerous articles on the history of southern Fujian province across the late Tang and Song. His most recent work, *The Sinitic Encounter with the Southeast through the First Millennium CE*, will be published in Fall 2015.

Rebecca Shuang Fu focuses on Chinese literature and textual culture in the first millennium, and Turfan and Dunhuang manuscripts (200–1000) in particular. At the same time, she also has a broad range of interests in social history, art history, popular religion and culture, current archaeology, history of writing, and women's and gender studies. Her current book project, *Women's Literacy Practices in Late Medieval China (600–1000)*, traces women's engagement and involvement in text-based activities back to the second half of the first millennium, a period during which the written word played an ever-increasing role in people's day-to-day lives. Drawing on certain types of primary materials underutilized in the field of medieval Chinese literature, such as Turfan and Dunhuang manuscripts, the book's interdisciplinary approach brings into focus the generally overlooked category of non-elite women. Rebecca Shuang Fu received her PhD from the University of Pennsylvania in 2015.

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Victor H. Mair, Professor of Chinese Language and Literature at the University of Pennsylvania, has taught there since 1979. He specializes in Buddhist popular literature as well as the vernacular tradition of Chinese fiction and the performing arts. Beginning in the early 1990s, Professor Mair has led an interdisciplinary research project on the Bronze Age and Iron Age mummies of Eastern Central Asia. Among other results of his efforts during this period are six documentaries for television (Scientific American, NOVA, BBC, Discovery Channel, History Channel, and German Television), a major international conference, numerous articles, and a book, *The Tarim Mummies: Ancient China and the Mystery of the Earliest Peoples from the West* (2000). He is also the author of numerous other publications (including several anthologies from Columbia University Press) and is the editor of *Sino-Platonic Papers*, the ABC Chinese Dictionary Series (University of Hawai‘i Press), and the Cambria Sinophone World Series. He blogs frequently for Language Log.

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