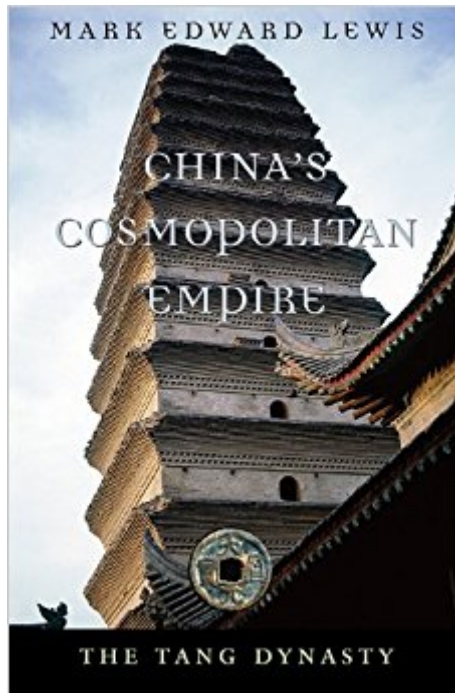


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China's Cosmopolitan Empire: The Tang Dynasty (History Of Imperial China)



Synopsis

The Tang dynasty is often called China's golden age, a period of commercial, religious, and cultural connections from Korea and Japan to the Persian Gulf, and a time of unsurpassed literary creativity. Mark Lewis captures a dynamic era in which the empire reached its greatest geographical extent under Chinese rule, painting and ceramic arts flourished, women played a major role both as rulers and in the economy, and China produced its finest lyric poets in Wang Wei, Li Bo, and Du Fu. The Chinese engaged in extensive trade on sea and land. Merchants from Inner Asia settled in the capital, while Chinese entrepreneurs set off for the wider world, the beginning of a global diaspora. The emergence of an economically and culturally dominant south that was controlled from a northern capital set a pattern for the rest of Chinese imperial history. Poems celebrated the glories of the capital, meditated on individual loneliness in its midst, and described heroic young men and beautiful women who filled city streets and bars. Despite the romantic aura attached to the Tang, it was not a time of unending peace. In 756, General An Lushan led a revolt that shook the country to its core, weakening the government to such a degree that by the early tenth century, regional warlordism gripped many areas, heralding the decline of the Great Tang.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Yet another nice volume in the Belknap Press series on Imperial China. As with the other books in this series, the goal is to provide a solid introduction to the period covered, in this case the Tang dynasty. The general approach of these books, 3 of them written by Prof. Lewis, is the same. There

is usually a chapter devoted to basic narrative and then several chapters covering major themes and developments during the period under review. Including footnotes and what are generally very nice bibliographies, each of these books is about 300-325 well written pages. For this volume, Lewis's focus is on the cosmopolitanism of the Tang period. By this Lewis means the relatively high degree of engagement of Chinese society with outside cultures and traditions. In particular, Lewis stresses the diverse nature of Tang society with multiple religious traditions - Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism (to the extent that it can be called a religion) and other religions that come over the Silk Roads. At the same time, Tang was a period of relative economic dynamism with the Tang state producing a huge internal market and expanding trade and Chinese influence in its East and Southeast Asia. The relative importance of Chinese interactions with the non-Han societies and traditions of Inner Asia is also a theme. But Lewis shows also that the Tang period proceeded towards a less cosmopolitan, more "Chinese" society. The great expansion into the southern regions of what is now China plus environmental degradation and political complications in northern China moved the center of gravity of Chinese life away from the North and the influences of Central Asia and more eastern cultures.

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