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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Tang 'cosmopolitanism': Towards a critical and holistic approach

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Abstract
The Tang dynasty is the only period of Chinese history to which the word 'cosmopolitan' is now routinely applied in Western-language historical writing. This article traces the origins of this glamorous image of the Tang to the 1950s and 1960s, but also links its current popularity to a more recent increase in the appeal of the concept of cosmopolitanism, as well as the idea of a 'cosmopolitan empire' among Western intellectuals since the end of the Cold War. The article then proposes a less presentist and more critical and holistic reading of Tang 'cosmopolitanism' as part of a larger, interconnected, multi-centred, and changing medieval world of numerous coexisting cosmopolitanisms, and argues for recognizing the existence of a different but equally important mode of 'cosmopolitanism' in the Song.

Keywords: Tang dynasty; cosmopolitanism; empire

Introduction

About ten years ago, I began to notice the habitual characterization of the Tang empire (618–907) and its elite culture as 'cosmopolitan' in English-language history textbooks and other secondary sources produced since the late twentieth century. Such sources almost never try to define the word 'cosmopolitan', but they typically emphasize the presence of large immigrant or expatriate communities in the empire's major cities (especially the capital Chang'an 長安) and the metropolitan elite's taste for Central Asian music, art, and fashion. Often implicit in these works is an assumption that Tang 'cosmopolitanism' reflected a spirit of exceptional inclusiveness, openness, pluralism, and tolerance that, more than the 'hard power' of military strength and wealth, made this period both 'China's golden age' and a contrast to later, more ethnocentric, xenophobic, or inward-looking eras. Although I, too, had once taken the 'golden age' mythos surrounding the Tang for granted, I began to realize that a thick layer of idealization, romanticism, and presentism has built up around modern understandings of the Tang empire, not just in the popular imagination but also among professional Sinologists and historians. Since then, I have increasingly criticized the 'cosmopolitan empire'

trope for its tendency towards an uncritical, under-theorized, and over-romanticized understanding of Tang China. In this article, I will begin by tracing the intellectual genealogy of this interpretation of the Tang and suggesting explanations for its current popularity and ubiquity in both the Western world and China. This will be followed by sections proposing a more critical and holistic reading of Tang 'cosmopolitanism', arguing that we should recognize the existence of a different but equally important mode of 'cosmopolitanism' in the Song period (960–1276).

Historicizing the 'Tang cosmopolitanism' trope

It is now somewhat customary to trace the cosmopolitanism trope to the American Sinologist Edward Schafer and his book *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand: A Study of T'ang Exotics* (1963).[1] As Jonathan Skaff has noted, 'Schafer wrote about foreign people and goods with relish, which has served to glamourise the [Tang] dynasty. His ability to entertain readers has kept his book in print long after his death and burnished the image of the Tang as a glorious and cosmopolitan age.'[2] But while Schafer certainly did much to popularize the image of a flourishing empire filled with foreign merchants and fascinated with foreign luxury imports, he himself barely used the word 'cosmopolitan' when writing *Golden Peaches*. The book's first chapter, 'The Glory of T'ang', describes China's eighth century as 'the international age, the age of imports, the age of mingling, the golden age, [which] began to pass away at the beginning of the ninth century', and then, slightly further on speaks of Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 713–756) as 'the fabulous king, most glorious monarch of a cosmopolitan age, himself a connoisseur of the exotic'.[3] That, however, is the only time 'cosmopolitan' appears in *Golden Peaches*; compare that to 'exotic', which (according to a Google Books search) occurs a hundred times, and 'exoticism', which is used 17 times.

In general, the tenor of Schafer's Sinological writing from the 1960s indicates that it was meant for an audience of middle-aged white men who (like him) had grown up in a world of Western colonialism and its attendant Orientalism. This background enabled Schafer to imagine the Tang Chinese exoticizing their own colonial frontiers and colonial subjects in a sort of reverse Orientalism. As a result, his reading of Tang attitudes towards foreigners was actually more critical and less positive than many later treatments of Tang 'cosmopolitanism'. He acknowledged that even during the eighth century, foreign merchants in the Tang faced strict and somewhat capricious restrictions on trade, corrupt officials, 'arbitrary segregation laws', and occasionally even violent massacres. He also argued that the ninth century was an 'age of ambivalent attitudes' when 'a love of exotic things' coexisted with 'suspicion and persecution' or '[d]istrust or hatred' of foreigners.[4]

Schafer seems to have drawn this view of ninth-century Chinese society from Arthur F. Wright's studies on the history of Buddhism in China, which interpreted the

[1]Edward H. Schafer, *The golden peaches of Samarkand: A study of T'ang exotics* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1963).

[2]Jonathan Karam Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and its Turco-Mongol neighbors: Culture, power, and connections, 580–800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 9.

[3]Schafer, *Golden peaches*, p. 35.

[4]Ibid., pp. 22–25.

An Lushan Rebellion (755–763) as a turning point in Tang attitudes towards Buddhism. Here is Wright in a paper originally delivered to a conference of Sinologists in Paris in 1956 and subsequently published in the *Journal of Asian Studies* in 1957: 'After the An Lu-shan rebellion, T'ang self-confidence and governmental effectiveness were not fully restored. The cosmopolitanism of the great days of T'ang slowly gave way, under the influence of barbarian attack and internal decay, to a cultural defensiveness which occasionally broke out into xenophobia.'[5] In *Golden Peaches*, Schafer cites this passage as his sole basis for reading the late Tang elite as 'a generation of fear and attendant xenophobia' that rejected and persecuted Buddhism and other foreign religions.[6] Wright would repeat the same claims, in only slightly different wording, in his book *Buddhism in Chinese History* (1959), which was based on lectures delivered at the University of Chicago but which drew heavily on the 1957 article.[7] It is worth noting that Wright only used the word 'cosmopolitanism' once in each of these works. He seems to have assumed that his readers would understand it in the same way that he did: as an openness to foreign cultures and religions that was the exact opposite of xenophobia.

A similar understanding of the word is reflected in the other influential survey of Chinese Buddhist history produced in this period, Kenneth Ch'en's *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey* (1964). Ch'en made the following statements at the beginning of his chapter on Buddhism in the Tang: 'Though the imperial clan claimed descent from Lao-tzu and thus favoured Taoism, the central authorities pursued a policy of religious toleration, giving each religion an opportunity to develop. Nestorian Christianity, Islam, and Manichaeism all were introduced during T'ang times, and each faith found adherents among the Chinese. The cosmopolitan ideal was upheld by the T'ang emperors because they regarded themselves as rulers not only of the Chinese but also of the barbarians.'[8] Here Ch'en went a little further in linking the 'cosmopolitan' to a notion of universal rulership and multi-ethnic empire, in addition to religious tolerance. But, like Wright and Schafer, he used the word only once in the entire book and did not subject it to any analytical discussion. It is also worth noting that Ch'en disagreed fundamentally with Wright and Schafer by identifying Buddhist–Daoist rivalry and 'economic considerations', rather than xenophobia, as the primary reasons for the state persecution of Buddhism in the 840s (more on which later).[9]

The first effort at defining Tang 'cosmopolitanism' was made a full decade after the publication of Schafer's *Golden Peaches*. On the very first page of the Introduction to a volume of conference papers titled *Perspectives on the T'ang*, co-editors Arthur Wright and Denis Twitchett identified what they considered to be the two key features of Tang society: 'First, was its eclecticism—the way that the T'ang drew together the many cultural strands from the tumultuous history of the preceding four hundred years. Second was its cosmopolitanism—its openness to foreign influences of all kinds.'[10] But one

[5]Arthur F. Wright, 'Buddhism and Chinese culture: Phases of interaction', *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1957, p. 37.

[6]Schafer, *Golden peaches*, p. 10.

[7]Arthur F. Wright, *Buddhism in Chinese history* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1959), p. 83.

[8]Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism in China: A historical survey* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 213.

[9]Ibid., pp. 226–227.

[10]Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett (eds), *Perspectives on the T'ang* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), p. 1.

finds no examination of aspects of Tang 'cosmopolitanism' in the papers collected in *Perspectives on the T'ang*. Indeed, as Schafer (who was not one of the contributors) complained in a review of the volume, written in his lively and somewhat eccentric literary style:

> The 'Introduction', after a few kindly nods towards the T'ang as 'a radiating center of civilization', plunges quickly into the sort of thing that clearly fascinates the organizers of the conference that generated the book—'the structure of government' and 'the exercise of power'. Other matters are regarded as secondary. They are, in effect, the pâté that embellishes the Tournedos Rossini—the gloss on the beef.[11]

In other words, the conference was heavily defined by Twitchett's interests in political, social, economic, and institutional history, and lacked serious engagement with the romantic, exotic, and fanciful dimensions of Tang culture and literature that Schafer so loved. As a result, the significance and extent of 'cosmopolitanism' in Tang cultural and intellectual history remained underexplored. Unfortunately, Schafer himself did little more to address this gap in scholarship, as his research interests had shifted to the Daoist poetry of the Tang and he did not return to the subject of Tang exoticism, save for an article on Tang poetry concerning the mysterious and perilous sea separating China from Japan.[12]

Perspectives on the T'ang was read by only a relatively small Sinological audience. The more engagingly written *Golden Peaches* was enjoyed by a broader readership, and the survey histories of Chinese Buddhism by Wright and Ch'en were used as college textbooks for many years. But even more credit for popularizing the standard characterization of the Tang empire, and its capital city in particular, as 'cosmopolitan' should probably be given to a number of American and French textbook surveys of Chinese history that were written in the 1960s and 1970s and remained influential for decades afterwards. The first of these was Edwin Reischauer and John King Fairbank's *East Asia: The Great Tradition* (1960), which included Wright's *Buddhism in Chinese History* in its Bibliography (describing it as 'an excellent brief survey'), and was evidently heavily influenced by his interpretation of Chinese Buddhist history.[13] Fairbank (who wrote the chapters on China) characterized the early Tang and its predecessors, the Northern and Southern Dynasties (or 'Six Dynasties'), as an age of exceptional openness to foreign cultures and visitors:

> Despite the political disunity and chaos of the Six Dynasties period, this epoch, as well as the early T'ang, was a period of significant cultural growth. China was pervaded by a spirit of cultural tolerance. The 'barbarian' invasions left the North wide open to foreign influences; Buddhism was both a vehicle for and a stimulus

[11]Edward H. Schafer, 'Review: *Perspectives on the T'ang*', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 95, no. 3, 1975, p. 466.

[12]Edward H. Schafer, 'Fusang and beyond: The haunted seas to Japan', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 109, no. 3, 1989, pp. 379–399.

[13]Edwin O. Reischauer and John K. Fairbank, *East Asia: The great tradition* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), p. 682.

> to close cultural contacts with distant areas; inter-regional trade by sea and by land was growing far beyond anything known in Han times; and the early T'ang empire brought the Chinese into direct contact with the borderlands of Indian and Near Eastern civilisation. Never again until the twentieth century was China to prove so responsive to foreign influences.
>
> One sign of the close contact with the outside world was the large number of foreign residents in China…In the early T'ang, Ch'ang-an was literally crowded with foreigners—thousands of members of the official embassies which came periodically from all over Asia, and still larger numbers of merchants, soldiers, monks, and jugglers and other entertainers attracted to this, the greatest metropolis of the world.[14]

Although this passage does not use the word 'cosmopolitan', on the facing page Fairbank suggests that states in Japan, Korea, and Yunnan imitated Tang institutions in part because of 'the very cosmopolitanism of T'ang culture, which made it more attractive to foreign peoples'.[15] The next chapter also claims, in an interpretation owing much to Wright, that 'the open, cosmopolitan spirit of the early T'ang gradually faded into a narrower, more exclusively China-centered and introspective attitude'.[16] In 1973, Fairbank, Reischauer, and Albert Craig (who, like Reischauer, was a Japanologist at Harvard) co-authored another textbook, *East Asia: Tradition and Transformation*, in which Fairbank again echoed Wright by claiming that after the An Lushan Rebellion, 'in their rejection of foreign religions and their losing battle with the "barbarians", [the Chinese] gradually lost the cosmopolitanism and cultural tolerance they had shown in the Six Dynasties period and early T'ang and became much more narrowly ethnocentric'.[17]

American historians like Fairbank who described Tang China at its height as culturally open and tolerant in spirit were implicitly setting up a contrast to a Maoist China that had cut off relations with the Western world and rejected its liberal democratic ideals. To their minds, the Tang 'golden age' was a model of what China could again become if it returned to being open and receptive to Western cultural influence. Fairbank, in particular, very likely had comparisons to the modern 'treaty ports' in mind, especially old Shanghai, when he described a Chang'an 'literally crowded with foreigners'.[18] Schafer's approach to Tang 'exoticism', while later invoked to support the 'cosmopolitan Tang' image, was actually less sanguine, in that his preferred parallel

[14]Ibid., p. 176.

[15]Ibid., p. 177.

[16]Ibid., p. 185. See also the book's account of late Tang 'anti-foreignism' on pp. 235–236.

[17]John K. Fairbank, Edwin O. Reischauer and Albert M. Craig, *East Asia: Tradition and transformation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), p. 117.

[18]Fairbank's final textbook survey of Chinese history was published posthumously in 1992 and subsequently re-issued in 1998 and 2006, with new chapters on post-1991 China by Merle Goldman. In it, the Tang is not explicitly described as 'cosmopolitan', but the association of 'openness' with the presence of foreigners in Chang'an remains evident: 'Tang expansion through the oasis trading cities of the Silk Road opened the way for increased contact with West Asia. The Tang capital at Chang'an became a great international metropolis, a focal point of the Eurasian world…The creative vigour of the Tang let it be a more open society, welcoming foreigners in its urban life from Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, as well as

to the Tang elite was the arrogant and ethnocentric colonial elites of the European empires, to whom '[f]oreign luxuries were too good for foreigners'.[19]

In 1975, the American historian Charles Hucker published *China's Imperial Past*, a popular textbook survey of Chinese history from antiquity to 1850. Its chapter on the Tang painted this glamorous picture of Chang'an as a kind of medieval World's Fair:

> Ch'ang-an in T'ang times was unquestionably the most populous, most cosmopolitan, and most brilliant city in the world...The resident population within the walls was about a million, and the city always thronged with visitors from afar—horsemen from Mongolia, camel drivers from Central Asia, holy men from India, Arab traders from the Persian gulf, Malay adventurers, and Korean and Japanese monks, diplomats, and students. Musical troupes, jugglers, acrobats, dwarfs, and blacks from distant realms amused the crowds at the city's fairs; sing-song girls enlivened its eating and drinking houses; and exotic wares from much of Eurasia, as well as specialty goods from every region of China, were sold in its markets.
>
> The cosmopolites of Ch'ang-an were fascinated by foreign things, and adopted one outlandish fad after another—in music, dancing, costume, food and drink, hairdressing, makeup, pets, and slaves. The same cosmopolitan spirit infected other T'ang cities and left its mark on subsequent urban life in China.[20]

This passage clearly draws much inspiration from both Fairbank and Schafer, but ignores Schafer's more ambivalent 'colonial' view of the Chang'an elite in favour of an unequivocally positive picture.

A similarly idealized characterization of Chang'an can be found in leading French Sinologist Jacques Gernet's *Le Monde Chinois*, first published in 1972 and translated into English (as *A History of Chinese Civilization*) in 1982 and again, in a revised edition, in 1996. To Gernet, Chang'an was 'the centre of a cosmopolitan civilisation coloured by the influences of central Asia, of India, and of Iran', and 'the meeting-place of all the peoples of Asia—Turks, Uyghurs, Tibetans, Koreans, people from Khotan and Kucha, Sogdians, Kashmiris, Persians, Arabs, Indians, Cingalese'. In his opinion, '[t]his invasion of foreigners, of elements of distant cultures, of exotic products (slaves, animals, plants, foods, perfumes, medicines, textiles, and jewels) could not fail to affect the sensibilities of the age or to enrich the T'ang civilisation with its new contributions'.[21] Gernet used the same word *cosmopolite* to describe other cities, including Dunhuang 敦煌, Yuan-era Beijing (1271–1368), and the Iranian city of Tabriz under the Ilkhanate; this usage is again accompanied by language implying that the key feature

from Persia and West Asia': John K. Fairbank and Merle Goldman, *China: A new history*, 2nd enlarged edn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 78.

[19]Schafer, *Golden peaches*, p. 23.

[20]Charles O. Hucker, *China's imperial past: An introduction to Chinese history and culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975), pp. 176–178.

[21]Jacques Gernet, *A history of Chinese civilization*, (trans.) J. R. Foster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 258, 282. Cf. the original French text: Jacques Gernet, *Le Monde Chinois* (Paris: Libraire Armand Colin, 1972), pp. 225, 247.

of a cosmopolitan city is ethnocultural diversity and a large population of foreigners from many different countries.[22] It is also worth noting that Gernet, like Fairbank, relied heavily on Wright's interpretation of the Tang after the An Lushan Rebellion as xenophobic and anti-Buddhist, to the extent of likening such sentiments to modern nationalism.[23]

Although Gernet described Chinese *civilization* in the first half of the Tang as 'cosmopolitan', and Hucker described Chang'an as a cosmopolitan *city*, they did not refer to the Tang as a 'cosmopolitan empire'. The popularization of 'cosmopolitan empire' as a description of the Tang most likely began with Patricia Ebrey's widely used textbook *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China* (1996), which titled its chapter on the Tang as 'A Cosmopolitan Empire' and boldly declared (echoing Fairbank): 'More than in any other epoch in Chinese history before the twentieth century, Chinese in early and mid Tang had the self-confidence to be open to the new and different…Chinese in this period were more than happy to gather about them the best of what the rest of the world had to offer.' Ebrey described the culture of the Tang capitals, Chang'an and Luoyang 洛陽, as 'enthusiastically cosmopolitan', and went on to list some standard examples: Buddhist pilgrim Xuanzang's 玄奘 (*circa* 602–664) travels to Central Asia and India; the presence of foreign envoys, merchants, and pilgrims and their religions; the fascination with foreign goods and fashions; the popularity of polo (an Iranian game introduced via Central Asia); the placement of ceramic figurines of Central Asians in tombs; and foreign influence on the decorative arts, musical culture, and interior furnishings.[24]

In the early twenty-first century, the title of Mark Edward Lewis's textbook *China's Cosmopolitan Empire: The Tang Dynasty* (2009) further established the phrase 'cosmopolitan empire' as a standard description of the Tang. Lewis, a specialist in the intellectual and cultural history of pre-imperial and early imperial China rather than the Tang, produced the book by synthesizing a wide range of secondary sources in English, as well as a smaller number in Chinese, Japanese, French, and German. Despite the book's title, it does not, in fact, use cosmopolitanism as a central framework for analysing Tang society and culture. Instead, the word only appears once in a thematic chapter on Tang foreign relations, titled 'The Outer World', in which Lewis simply paraphrases the formulations of 'eclecticism' and 'cosmopolitanism' given in his *Perspectives on the T'ang* in 1973.[25] Much of the rest of Lewis's discussion of foreigners in the Tang is heavily dependent on Schafer, and thus replicates Schafer's emphasis on the foreign presence in Chang'an and other cities and the popularity of Central Asian music and dance. However, Lewis did not engage with Schafer's argument that the Tang elite

[22]Gernet, *History of Chinese civilization*, pp. 19–20, 213, 377, 383.

[23]Ibid., pp. 291–296.

[24]Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Cambridge illustrated history of China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 117, 118–119. The relevant passages are slightly rearranged and revised in this textbook's third edition, published in 2022, though the chapter title remains the same. Most notably, the new edition changes the section heading from 'Life at the centre' to 'Cultural confidence' and adds sentences observing that in the Tang, '[s]ome foreigners even rose to high civil or military office' while other foreigners (especially Sogdians) 'were valued for their special skills as handlers of horses and camels, for instance, and as entertainers'.

[25]Mark Edward Lewis, *China's cosmopolitan empire: The Tang dynasty* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 163–164.

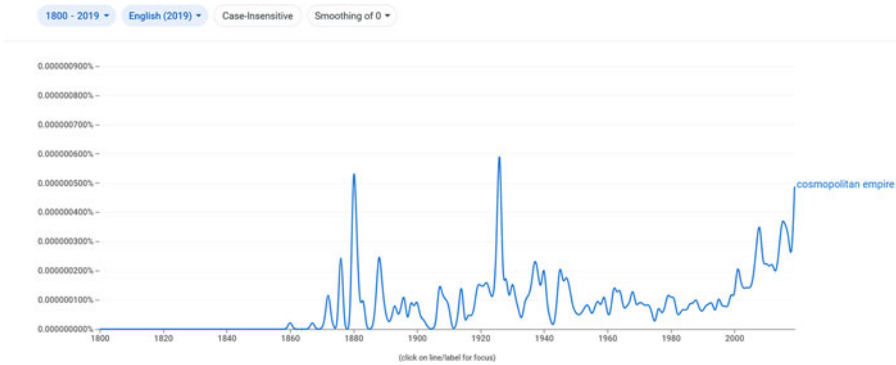

Figure 1. Usage of the phrase 'cosmopolitan empire' from 1800 to 2019 (based on Google Ngram).

avidly consumed foreign luxuries without necessarily welcoming or liking foreigners. Lewis did make use of more recent scholarship on Tang foreign relations, notably Marc Abramson's *Ethnic Identity in Tang China* (2008), which employs concepts other than cosmopolitanism to analyse Tang elite attitudes towards ethnic and cultural diversity.[26] Unfortunately, his choice of title for the book reflected uncritical acceptance of an outdated historiographical model, one that prevented him from presenting a more sophisticated and up-to-date discussion of the Tang as a multi-ethnic and multicultural empire.

The use of the phrase 'cosmopolitan empire' by Ebrey and Lewis may reflect a broader discursive change surrounding the idea of empire. Using the Google Ngram Viewer tool, I found that, while the use of this phrase in published English-language literature (as reflected in scanned texts collected by Google Books) is still relatively uncommon, it has increased quite steadily since the late 1990s, after 70 years of very low usage (see Figure 1).

This growing tendency to characterize premodern empires as cosmopolitan is, I believe, at least partly related to a much bigger increase in the popularity of the concept of cosmopolitanism among Western intellectuals since the end of the Cold War, also reflected in Google Ngram Viewer (see Figure 2).

In Western academia since the end of the Cold War, the idea of cosmopolitanism has come to serve as the basis for a philosophical or ethical ideal of global citizenship that advocates for universal human rights, diversity, and inclusiveness and rejects the influence of nationalism, racism, religious bigotry, and nativism.[27] Historians with liberal or multiculturalist leanings tend to think of themselves as cosmopolitan, or at least aspire to be so, and to prefer living in hyper diverse and heavily globalized (thus 'cosmopolitan') cities. This has made it difficult to resist idealizing the 'cosmopolitan' elites and urban centres of premodern empires that we have chosen to study, rather than subjecting them to the critical scrutiny that we typically direct towards their modern colonial counterparts. The editors of a recent volume on cosmopolitanism and empire

[26] Marc S. Abramson, *Ethnic identity in Tang China* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

[27] See, for example, Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a world of strangers* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006); Robert Fine, *Cosmopolitanism* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2007).

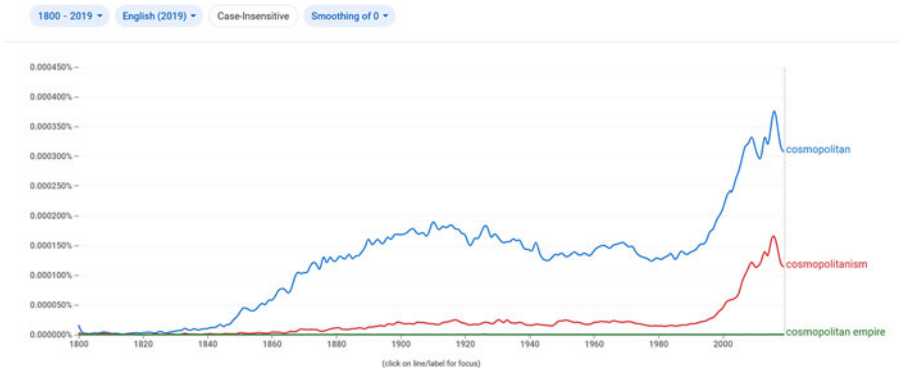

Figure 2. Usage of the phrase 'cosmopolitan empire' and the words 'cosmopolitanism' and 'cosmopolitan' from 1800 to 2019 (based on Google Ngram).

in the ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean worlds offer an insightful critique of this tendency:

> [T]he post-World War II and, especially, post-Cold War eras precipitated a resurgence of cosmopolitan philosophy and political theory. Positive arguments in favour of ethical commitments to all of humanity, the development of transcultural perspectives and the establishment of universal, rationally grounded principles have elevated cosmopolitanism to a normative value, incumbent on individuals, institutions, and states, at least in liberal democracies.
>
> And yet the advocates of cosmopolitanism have only rarely addressed its historically intimate relationship with imperialism…Proponents and critics alike acknowledge the role of various forms of cosmopolitanism in the maintenance of American, or western, political and economic dominance, while disagreeing on the possibility of recovering its emancipatory potential. Ancient historians have participated in this cosmopolitan revival without directly addressing themselves to these debates…The term 'cosmopolitan', however, performs little analytical work in ancient historiography. The label tends to characterize the openness of a culture to the commodities and ideas of outsiders, or simply its comparative diversity. It is almost always a compliment, a sign that a particular ancient society practiced the same values we—the implied readers of such studies—espouse.
>
> The study of cosmopolitanism in antiquity is thus disjointed. On the one hand, historians are producing ever more insightful studies on the politics of cultural difference. On the other, cosmopolitanism is invoked as a virtue, without further examination of its role in the shaping of the imperial formations that gave rise to its theory and practice.[28]

[28]Myles Lavan, Richard E. Payne and John Weisweiler (eds), *Cosmopolitanism and empire: Universal rulers, local elites, and cultural integration in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 9–10.

In effect, a subset of early twenty-first century historians seem to be prone to assuming that an empire can be viewed positively if its imperialism is multicultural, tolerant, and 'cosmopolitan' rather than, say, founded on ideas of racial and religious supremacy. Whereas premodern empires were typically praised as 'great' on the basis of their military power and territorial conquests for much of the twentieth century, historians who admire them for whatever reason tend now to glamorize them as engines of cross-cultural exchange and global trade—that is, as agents of early globalization. In that context, the Tang empire's close association with the frequently romanticized idea of the 'Silk Road'—a modern concept coined by a German geographer in around 1838—has made it a perfect candidate for such glamorization.[29]

But glamorization of the Tang is, of course, not a solely Western phenomenon. Positive appraisals of the Tang as a glorious period of Chinese history were suppressed as 'rightist' in Maoist China, where the true golden age was believed to be in the socialist future rather than the dark 'feudal' past. But they became entrenched among Chinese communities outside the People's Republic (including those in Hong Kong and Taiwan), where the idealized image of Emperor Taizong 太宗 (r. 626–649) as a great conqueror and model Confucian ruler, receptive to honest criticism from his ministers, was particularly popular. Since its reintroduction to the mainland in the 1980s, the interpretation of the Tang as a 'golden age' (*shengshi* 盛世) of national power and prosperity has been increasingly politicized and promoted by the communist regime, which has moved away from a class-based denunciation of 'feudal' imperial dynasties and re-embraced the country's imperial past as a locus of nationalist nostalgia and cultural pride. The 'Great Tang' now features heavily in state propaganda surrounding Xi Jinping's 'Chinese Dream' ideology and the Belt and Road Initiative (billed as a revival of both the Tang-era 'Silk Road' and a later 'Maritime Silk Road'), as well as Chinese political discourse on the idea of a future Sinocentric world order.[30]

In recent decades, the image of the Tang as culturally 'cosmopolitan' has also been popularized in Chinese society by media depictions (e.g. movies and television dramas), as well as reprints of Xiang Da's 向達 classic 1933 study 'Tangdai Chang'an yu xiyu wenming' 唐代長安與西域文明 (Tang Chang'an and the Civilization of the Western Regions) and translations of Western works like Schafer's *Golden Peaches*. Chinese historians frequently hail the Tang's relative success in integrating Inner Asian peoples into a Sinitic empire—success purportedly symbolized by Taizong's assumption of the hybrid Sino-Turkic title Celestial Khagan 天可汗—as an ideal precedent for China's modern official identity as a 'unified, multi-ethnic nation' in which ethnic minorities are improved and ultimately assimilated by the 'advanced civilisation' of

[29]On the history of the Silk Road concept, see Justin M. Jacobs, 'The concept of the Silk Road in the 19th and 20th centuries', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, published online on 31 March 2020, available at https://oxfordre.com/asianhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277727-e-164, [accessed 30 October 2023]. For the problems with a Sinocentric approach to the Silk Road, see Scott C. Levi, *The Bukharan crisis: A connected history of 18th-century Central Asia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020), Chapter 2.

[30]See Victor K. Fong, 'Imagining the future from history: The Tang dynasty and the "China dream"', in *Alternative representations of the past: The politics of history in modern China*, (eds) Ying-kit Chan and Fei Chen (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2021), pp. 149–172, esp. pp. 162–168; Tim Winter, *Geocultural power: China's quest to revive the Silk Roads for the twenty-first century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019); Tansen Sen, 'Inventing the "Maritime Silk Road"', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 57, no. 4, 2023, pp. 1059–1104.

the Han.[31] But this ironic use of the idea of cosmopolitanism to promote nationalism and, arguably, a form of cultural imperialism and ethnic supremacism is not the whole story. China's increasingly repressed and isolated liberal intellectuals (i.e. those who support classical liberal ideas like political freedom and freedom of speech) are also drawn to the popular image of the Tang as a utopian age of intellectual pluralism and openness to foreign ideas and cultures. Conservative authoritarian nationalists see early Tang society's fabled openness to foreigners and foreign cultures as a *product* of the supreme self-confidence and security afforded by military power and wealth: a strong China can afford to be open *on its own terms*, while a weak China cannot. The liberals, however, would prefer to credit the empire's greatness and strength to the openness itself and use the Tang ideal to argue for more intellectual diversity, tolerance, freedom, and receptivity to Western liberal ideals in today's censorship-obsessed China. In other words, Chinese conservatives and liberals may disagree over what kind of political culture their country should have, but they share common ground in viewing the Tang, and the Tang from Taizong's reign to Xuanzong's in particular, as a model and precedent for it. Such is the power and appeal of the 'golden age' mythos.[32] In addition, whereas earlier generations of Chinese feminists based their arguments for women's rights in Western liberal or socialist values and rejected Confucian values as irredeemably patriarchal, feminists in China may now choose to use the mythologized image of the Tang as an exceptional age of female empowerment and sexual liberation to argue for the compatibility of gender equity with both Chinese nationalism and traditional Chinese culture.[33]

A constellation of cosmopolitanisms

Each of the treatments of Tang 'cosmopolitanism' that I have described above engages in a kind of presentism that over-simplifies, sanitizes, and romanticizes the Tang, as is generally the case with any historical era nostalgically elevated as a country or civilization's golden age. Thinking more comparatively and globally might alert us to the fact that the existence of significant ethnic and cultural diversity, or of openness to foreign cultures, does not make an empire inherently more benign or enlightened than an ethnic nation-state. After all, empires by their very nature are built on military

[31] Abramson, *Ethnic identity in Tang China*, p. 1. On the title 'Celestial Khagan', see Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and its Turco-Mongol neighbors*, pp. 119–122. Unlike some Western and Japanese historians who stress the Tang imperial clan's Inner Asian heritage, modern Chinese historians typically view the early Tang emperors as ethnically and culturally 'Han'. I find both approaches to the Tang imperial clan's identity to be overly simplistic, for reasons the detailed explication of which lies beyond the scope of this article. Suffice to say that I view the majority of the Tang political elite as identifying with the legacy of the Han empire rather than with Inner Asian cultures, but also as identifying ethnically as Hua 華 or Xia 夏 rather than 'Han'.

[32] The observations above are based on my reading of numerous Chinese magazine articles, non-academic web articles, and online discussions on the Tang, which tend to be much more overtly presentist than academic writing.

[33] But, for a feminist Sinophone scholar's critique of this mythologized image, see Jowen R. Tung, *Fables for the patriarchs: Gender politics in Tang discourse* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000). Note that Tung does still accept uncritically the conventional view of the Tang at its height as 'the center of a cosmopolitan civilisation, emitting a brilliance that attracted people from all over Asia' (p. 3), as well as the equally conventional notion that it underwent a xenophobic 'inward turn' (p. 13) after the An Lushan Rebellion.

conquest and domination of other peoples, and frequently engage in selective appropriation of the conquered peoples' 'exotic' cultural practices in a way designed to symbolize their subjecthood and enhance the imperial elite's prestige. The Tang was no exception to this rule, and its aspirations and pretensions to geopolitical pre-eminence and universal hegemony rarely went unchallenged by its stronger neighbours. Rather than achieving a 'Pax Sinica', the empire constantly had to assert and maintain its supremacy on various frontiers at great cost in blood and treasure, a cost paid not by officials and their families (who were exempted from taxes and conscription) but by the long-suffering peasantry, for whom life was never all that 'golden'. Naturally, the cost in 'barbarian' lives was heavy as well. Throughout the dynasty's history, victorious Tang armies were known to pillage enemy or 'rebel' cities and massacre or enslave their inhabitants in a manner that the Han Chinese of today (due to ethnocentric or nationalistic biases in their historical education) tend to associate only with 'barbaric' Inner Asian and Japanese invaders.[34] Yet many modern historians have mistakenly assumed that a massacre of foreign merchants in Yangzhou 揚州 by a rebel-quelling army in 760 was a previously unheard-of act of xenophobia and a sign of the waning of Tang 'cosmopolitanism' after 755, rather than part of a long-standing culture of predatory violence in the Tang military.[35]

The state-centred and elitist bias of our sources is part of the reason for our often insufficiently critical perspective on the 'cosmopolitanism' of the Tang. The vast majority of extant texts from the Tang naturally reflect a Chang'an-centred perspective, since they were written by officials and literati whose worlds did revolve around the imperial capital.[36] As a result, we have a much deeper understanding of elite life in Chang'an than for any other locality in the Tang empire. But every empire has a darker side of oppression and violence that is usually most visible at its unstable, ambiguous, and heavily militarized edges, not at its political and cultural centre, though it is visible even at the centre if we look hard enough.[37] One can therefore better understand the Tang empire *as an empire* by maintaining some critical emotional distance from the Chang'an elite and not empathizing or identifying exclusively with their point of view. In this regard, I agree fully with a comment that Finbarr Flood made recently in the context of the role of slavery in the Indian Ocean world of maritime trade routes, ports, and networks: 'If our interest in recuperating histories of the premodern global is to be more than a form of narcissism—cosmopolitan elites privileged with the contemporary means of mobility recognizing themselves in the mobility of premoderns—the

[34]Shao-yun Yang, 'Letting the troops loose: Pillage, massacres, and enslavement in early Tang warfare', *Journal of Chinese Military History*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2017, pp. 1–52.

[35]For example, Schafer, *Golden peaches*, pp. 18, 23; Gernet, *History of Chinese civilization*, p. 292. Both Schafer and Gernet misidentified the commander of this army as a rebel, whereas a local Tang official had in fact promised him a reward in plunder from the wealthy commercial city for suppressing a revolt. See Yang, 'Letting the troops loose', pp. 42–44.

[36]Manuscripts recovered from Dunhuang and Turfan, on the empire's north-western frontier, are the main exception. They have survived due to the dry conditions in that region and have enriched our understanding of life on the empire's north-western frontiers, though that understanding is rarely reflected in history textbooks, most of which still focus on the grandeur and glamour of Chang'an.

[37]Yang, 'Letting the troops loose', p. 40.

question of subaltern labor and the violence that often accompanied it has to be folded into any consideration of the histories that we write.'[38]

Unlike Indian Ocean merchants, the defining characteristic of the Tang 'cosmopolitan elite' was not mobility across oceans and state borders but consumption of foreign luxuries, fashions, and entertainments. But even today, accounts of Tang 'cosmopolitanism' rarely acknowledge that the '[m]usical troupes, jugglers, acrobats, dwarfs, and blacks from distant realms' (as Hucker enthusiastically described them), as well as the Sogdian bar wenches (*huji* 胡姬) celebrated in Li Bai's 李白(701–762) poems, had mostly come to Chang'an not as voluntary visitors, 'attracted to this, the greatest metropolis of the world' (in Fairbank's words), like aspiring artists to modern New York City, but as slaves brought into China by tribute missions or traders.[39] A significant part of the Tang capital's ethnic and cultural diversity was thus a result of human trafficking and what Schafer called 'human tribute', not conventional immigration.[40] As Don Wyatt recently argued, 'just as it is crucial for us to recognize the Tang period as the apogee of cosmopolitanism, we must acknowledge and accept that in this same era the Chinese themselves began to enslave substantial numbers of non-Chinese'.[41] It would be ahistorical and ethically problematic to elide this fact just because it does not cohere with a twenty-first century audience's ideal mental image of a 'cosmopolitan' society.

I would suggest that we can also understand the character of Tang 'cosmopolitanism' more holistically by situating it within a transregional historical context, rather than one defined by the traditional Sinological reliance on written sources produced by and for the Chinese elite.[42] Such a holistic approach would see Tang 'cosmopolitanism' not as centred on, and emanating from, the city of Chang'an and the exotic tastes of its elite denizens, but rather as a product of the whole empire's interactions (or, in some cases, lack thereof) with a complex constellation of large, overlapping cultural, religious, and economic spheres or 'cosmopoleis' (see Supplementary material, Figure 3).

At least two of these spheres were a direct product of other recent projects of imperial conquest and expansion: the Turkic world of the steppes, which stretched from Mongolia to the Volga and the Caucasus; and the Islamic or Islamicate world, which emerged concurrently with the Tang empire and by 750 extended from Spain and

[38]Beate Fricke and Finbarr Barry Flood, 'Premodern globalism in art history: A conversation', *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 104, no. 4, 2022, pp. 6–19 (quote on p. 13).

[39]Schafer did recognize this grim reality in Chapter 2 of *Golden peaches*, probably due to his willingness to view the Tang as a colonial empire. But he nonetheless could not resist eroticizing the bar wenches as 'compliant green-eyed beauties' and suggesting that they were employees rather than slaves. Schafer, *Golden peaches*, p. 21. For the quote from Fairbank, see the citation in n. 14 above.

[40]Ibid., p. 49.

[41]Don J. Wyatt, 'Slavery in medieval China', in *The Cambridge world history of slavery. Vol. 2: AD 500–AD 1420*, (eds) Craig Perry, David Eltis, Stanley L. Engerman and David Richardson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 271–294 (quote on p. 279). Note, however, that I do not agree with Wyatt's more conventional reading of the Tang as 'the preeminent age of traditional cosmopolitanism', for reasons that will become clear below.

[42]The approach I am advocating here bears some similarity to the 'integrative' or 'connected' approach favoured by Joseph Fletcher, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, and Scott Levi: see Levi, *The Bukharan crisis*, pp. 65–67.

Morocco in the west to Sogdiana and Sindh in the east.[43] The transformation of the relationship between these worlds from conflict to synthesis is one of the more consequential themes of medieval Eurasian history. As reflected by the Tang emperors' use of the title Celestial Khagan, a more short-lived blending of the political cultures of the Sinitic and Turkic worlds occurred in the early Tang; Jonathan Skaff has analysed this blending in detail and interpreted it as a product of Tang imperial expansion, ideological competition with Turkic empires, and integration of Turkic leaders into the Tang military elite.[44] In contrast, the Tang literati elite seems to have had very limited interaction with Islamicate culture and the religion of Islam, despite the presence of Muslim merchant communities in Yangzhou and Guangzhou 廣州. There is no authentic evidence of a permanent Muslim presence in Tang-era Chang'an, or of Chinese conversion to Islam (*pace* Kenneth Ch'en's claim to the contrary).[45] An account of the Islamic world by one Du Huan 杜環, who apparently lived in the Abbasid capital between 751 and 762, may have contributed somewhat to Chinese understandings of Islam, but it is highly doubtful that a late ninth-century Tang emperor would be familiar with the prophets of Islam and have a casket filled with images of them, as an Arab writer claimed in the early tenth century, based on the testimony of a traveller named Ibn Wahb al-Qurashi.[46] Meaningful cultural synthesis between the Sinitic and Islamic worlds probably did not begin until immigration of non-merchant Muslims to China from Central Asia and the Middle East increased significantly under the Mongol Yuan empire, creating the conditions for a community of Sinophone Muslim literati to emerge in the Yangzi delta.[47]

Other spheres of cosmopolitanism extended beyond and between empires. One of the oldest was the pre-Islamicate Iranian world, which included the Sasanian empire and the states of Sogdiana before their fall to the Muslims, but also the Sogdian merchant networks and immigrant diasporas that dominated Central Asian trade and extended deep into the Sinitic and Turkic heartlands from the sixth century to the ninth. In recent decades, archaeological discoveries and new research have given us a better understanding of the scale of the Sogdian presence in Inner Asia and China during these centuries, as well as its role as a carrier of aesthetic and religious cultures from the pre-Islamicate Iranian civilizational sphere to the Sinitic and Turkic worlds.[48]

[43]The term 'Islamicate' was coined by Marshall Hodgson to refer to 'the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims'. Hodgson reserved the term 'Islamic' for ideas and practices recognized as originating directly from the religion of Islam. This distinction is now widely but not universally applied in Western scholarship. See Marshall Hodgson, *The venture of Islam. Conscience and history in a world civilization. Vol. 1: The classical age of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 59.

[44]Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and its Turco-Mongol neighbors*.

[45]Ch'en, *Buddhism in China*.

[46]For more discussion, see Shao-yun Yang, *Late Tang China and the world, 750–907 CE*. Cambridge Elements: The Middle Ages (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), pp. 12–13, 47–48; John W. Chaffee, *The Muslim merchants of premodern China: The history of a maritime Asian trade diaspora, 750–1400* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 20–23.

[47]This synthesis culminated in the Chinese Muslim 'Han Kitab' scholarship of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which sought to harmonize Islam and Neo-Confucianism.

[48]An excellent multimedia introduction to this subject is the Smithsonian Institution's digital exhibit 'The Sogdians: Influencers on the Silk Roads', available at https://sogdians.si.edu, [accessed 30 October 2023].

To a large extent, the Tang elite inherited its 'cosmopolitan' taste for certain aspects of Central Asian culture from the influence that the Sogdian diaspora had already exerted in the capitals of the preceding Northern Dynasties, so it is incorrect to credit this form of cosmopolitanism solely to the Tang.[49] It should also be noted that the majority of Zoroastrians, East Syriac ('Nestorian') Christians, and Manichaeans in the Tang appear to have been Sogdians, and that (again, *pace* Ch'en)[50] there is no evidence to date of Chinese conversion to these religions originating from Iran.

Another of the transimperial cosmopoleis was the Indian Ocean world, in which Arabian, Iranian, Indian, Sri Lankan, Southeast Asian, and Chinese ports became increasingly interconnected through a Muslim merchant diaspora after the seventh century.[51] This trading world eventually became a vehicle for the Islamic world's expansion into maritime Southeast Asia during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Prior to that expansion, however, the Indian Ocean world overlapped with much of a 'Sanskrit cosmopolis' proposed by Sheldon Pollock, in which South Asian and Southeast Asian elites employed classical Sanskrit literature (transcribed using a variety of Indic writing systems) as a common source of political and social capital from *circa* 300 CE to *circa* 1300 CE.[52] The Tang's engagement with this 'Sanskrit cosmopolitan order' was minimal; only a relatively small number of Tang subjects (mostly monks) mastered the Sanskrit language, either when travelling to India on Buddhist pilgrimage or by learning from Indian monks in China.[53] And they used literacy in Sanskrit purely for reading and translating Buddhist sutras, not literary works like the *Ramayana*. But the fruits of earlier sutra translation projects, undertaken by Central Asian monks in China from the second to fifth centuries, allowed the Tang to participate in a larger 'Buddhist cosmopolis', in which travelling Buddhist monks (and the scriptures they carried and translated) used land and sea routes to connect religious communities in a space spanning India, Tibet, and the Tarim Basin to Korea and Japan.[54] China's engagement with the Buddhist cosmopolis predated the Tang by several centuries, but the Tang was the period when Chinese Buddhists began to interpret their country as a second centre of the Buddhist world after India, in contrast to the

[49]On pre-Tang Sogdian influence, see the Smithsonian digital exhibit and Bi Bo 畢波, *Zhonggu Zhongguo de Sute Huren—yi Chang'an wei zhongxin* 中古中國的粟特胡人—以長安爲中心 (Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2011). A recent textbook by Charles Holcombe overtly acknowledges the Tang's debt to the cultural diversity of the Northern Dynasties by terming the sixth century, rather than the early Tang, as the 'age of cosmopolitanism', though it does not mention the Sogdian contribution to this diversity. Charles Holcombe, *A history of East Asia: From the origins of civilization to the twenty-first century*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), Chapter 3.

[50]Ch'en, *Buddhism in China*.

[51]See Angela Schottenhammer (ed.), *Early global interconnectivity across the Indian Ocean world*, 2 vols (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); Chaffee, *The Muslim merchants*.

[52]Sheldon Pollock, *The language of the gods in the world of men: Sanskrit, culture, and power in premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 11–19.

[53]Jeffrey Kotyk, 'The study of Sanskrit in medieval East Asia: China and Japan', *Hualin International Journal of Buddhist Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2021, pp. 240–273.

[54]For the concept of the Buddhist cosmopolis, see Tansen Sen, 'Yijing and the Buddhist cosmopolis of the seventh century', in *Texts and transformations: Essays in honor of the 75th birthday of Victor H. Mair*, (ed.) Haun Saussy (Amherst, MA: Cambria Press, 2018), pp. 345–368.

peripheral place it had previously occupied in the Buddhist world view.[55] Buddhist cosmopolitanism in the Tang thus underwent a shift from Indocentrism to Sinocentrism that would be cemented in the post-Tang period.

Due to the popularity of the 'Silk Road' image, historians have tended to take cultural influences from the Turkic, Iranian, Islamic, and Indic worlds as the benchmark for a 'cosmopolitan' Chinese empire. But we should recognize another kind of cosmopolitanism, in which Chinese cultural influence flowed outwards, as equally deserving of the label 'cosmopolitan'. A 'Sinographic cosmopolis' or Sinographic sphere emerged in East Asia from the sixth to ninth centuries, as an outcome of secondary state formation in four polities that successfully resisted or escaped incorporation into the Chinese empire while remaining within the Chinese tributary orbit.[56] In part through educational missions that gave them access to a classical Sinitic education in Tang territory, elite men from Silla, Japan, Bohai/Parhae 渤海, and Nanzhao 南詔 became well-versed in classical literary Sinitic and the non-phonetic Sinographic ('Chinese') script, even though they spoke mutually unintelligible languages.[57] Besides using Sinographic writing as a kind of 'scripta franca', countries within the Sinographic cosmopolis also tended to share political ideologies and institutions derived from the Tang imperial model, including state patronage of Buddhism and the study of the Confucian classics.[58] In addition, Sinographic literacy was the vehicle through which Korean and Japanese monks and aristocrats became participants in the Buddhist cosmopolis, despite their countries' extremely limited contact with Central Asia and India.

It is important to recognize the decisive role that East Asia's geography played in shaping the Sinographic cosmopolis, and thus avoid the kind of Sinocentrism reflected in Fairbank's claim in 1960 that 'the very cosmopolitanism of T'ang culture…made it more attractive to foreign peoples' such as the Koreans and Japanese. Literacy in Sinographs is significantly harder to acquire than literacy in alphabetic and abugidic writing systems, and literary Sinitic elite culture (which could only be accessed by acquiring Sinographic literacy) thus held little appeal to a wide range of peoples in Inner Asia and Southeast Asia who had the option of writing their languages in scripts derived from Brahmic or Sogdian. In other words, the difficulty of mastering Sinographs actually limited the transregional exportability and accessibility of Tang Chinese elite culture, making it far less 'cosmopolitan' than Indic Sanskrit culture or even Sogdian culture. The people of Silla, Bohai, and Japan chose to become Sinographic because, being located at the eastern end of Eurasia, they lacked access to other writing systems and literate cultures—not because of the inherent attractiveness

[55]Tansen Sen, *Buddhism, diplomacy, and trade: The realignment of Sino-Indian relations, 600–1400* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), Chapter 2.

[56]This sphere is known by numerous other names, including the Kanji cultural sphere, the Sinosphere, and the East Asian Confucian cosmopolis. The Pollock-inspired term 'Sinographic cosmopolis' is favoured by Ross King: see Ross King, 'Ditching "diglossia": Describing ecologies of the spoken and inscribed in pre-modern Korea', *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2015, pp. 1–19.

[57]Yang, *Late Tang China and the world*, pp. 48–54.

[58]The term 'scripta franca' was coined and popularized by Wiebke Denecke: see her essay Wiebke Denecke, 'Worlds without translation: Premodern East Asia and the power of character scripts', in *A companion to translation studies*, (eds) Sandra Bermann and Catherine Porter (Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley and Sons, 2014), pp. 204–216, esp. p. 209.

of Sinitic culture. The people of north Vietnam were Sinographic not by choice, but because they were colonized and ruled by Chinese empires for a thousand years; to their south were the Chams and Khmers, who ruled themselves and chose to be part of the Sanskrit cosmopolis instead.

Nanzhao, a Yunnanese buffer state sandwiched between the Tang and Tibetan empires, was a special case in that its kings chose Sinographic literacy over literacy in Tibetan (a Brahmic-derived script) as part of a diplomatic deal made with the Tang empire in the late 700s, under which Nanzhao elite men gained access to a heavily subsidized educational programme in Sichuan in exchange for an alliance against the Tibetan empire. With the literacy and administrative skills thus gained, Nanzhao eventually cast off its vassalage to the Chinese emperor and declared itself an empire in its own right, resulting in a 20-year war with the Tang from 860–880. Nanzhao's rise to imperial status is a good example of how states that joined the Sinographic cosmopolis did so for their own interests rather than being passively drawn to the charisma or 'superiority' of Chinese civilization, contrary to the self-aggrandizing claims of Tang imperial rhetoric.[59]

If we understand a cosmopolitan individual as one with the ability to cross or straddle cultural boundaries with relative ease, then the most important representatives and vectors of 'cosmopolitanism' in this constellation of cosmopoleis were travelling monks, merchants, interpreters, scholars, and migrants of various ethnicities who were able to bridge cultures within and between the cosmopoleis. Their cosmopolitanism, defined by familiarity with multiple languages and cultural traditions, would have been of a much deeper kind than that of Tang emperors, aristocrats, and literati officials engaging in conspicuous consumption and treating foreign objects, foodways, and fashions mostly as exotic symbols of social and political prestige, without any deep engagement with the cultures that produced them. Moreover, these 'cosmopolitan' individuals often accomplished their boundary-crossing in spite of, not because of, the laws on foreign trade and travel that the Tang political elite sought to enforce.

Contrary to the popular notion of 'openness' being the key attribute of a 'cosmopolitan' empire, the Tang state more often sought to control and restrict human movement across its borders than to remove barriers to such movement.[60] Even within the empire, all travel was heavily regulated by a system of state-issued passes and checkpoints. According to a late seventh-century biography of Xuanzang, he violated a ban on foreign travel when departing for his celebrated pilgrimage to India in 629; less well-known is the fact that such laws remained in force long after his travels.[61] Under Tang law, it was illegal for any subject of the emperor to leave the empire on non-official business, whether by land or sea; it was also illegal for foreign merchants

[59]For more discussion, see Yang, *Late Tang China and the world*, pp. 56–60.

[60]See also Xin Wen, *The king's road: Diplomacy and the remaking of the Silk Road* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023), pp. 294–295. Wen questions the common assumption that large empires are always good for long-distance trade, and perceptively observes: 'The pro-connection or anti-connection impulses of an empire should both be considered in order to have a more accurate assessment of that empire's role in activities on the Silk Road.'

[61]Note, however, that the factuality of this account of Xuanzang's departure has recently been questioned. See Jeffrey Kotyk, 'Chinese state and Buddhist historical sources on Xuanzang: Historicity and the *Daci'en si sanzang fashi zhuan*', *T'oung Pao*, vol. 105, 2020, pp. 513–544.

to enter Tang territory without government authorization.[62] Thus, although popular accounts of the 'Silk Road' credit the Tang with promoting and protecting private foreign trade, the Tang emperors actually criminalized such commerce, especially when it involved the export of silk and other high-value goods like gold and silver. The notable exceptions when it came to overland trade were a special category of expatriate Sogdian merchants known as *xingsheng Hu* 興生胡 or *xing Hu* 興胡, whom the Tang state allowed to engage in cross-border trade on the northern and north-western frontiers, in exchange for paying taxes and tolls.[63] But even these Sogdians were forbidden to export silk from Tang territory. Laws banning the export of all or most forms of silk textile are found in the Tang Code and are known to have been reissued, in revised form, in 714, 737, and 780.[64] Of course, there probably *was* private foreign trade in silk and other embargoed goods along Tang frontiers in Central Asia, but any such trade was effectively smuggling, carried out in violation of imperial law. Restrictions on foreign trade at the port of Guangzhou, Tang China's primary maritime link to the Indian Ocean world, were probably looser, but by 737, Tang law also forbade the transportation of silk to the Lingnan 嶺南 region, presumably to prevent its private export by foreign maritime merchants.[65] These embargoes on private foreign trade in high-value commodities, which persisted throughout Tang history but were abolished under the Song, are best interpreted as an effort to compel foreign rulers to participate in the Tang system of tributary relations in exchange for luxury goods.[66]

In addition to these trade restrictions, Tang law also forbade marriages between Tang subjects (of any ethnicity) and subjects of other states (known legally as *huawairen* 化外人, 'people from beyond the bounds of civilization'), except in the case of foreign envoys granted an extended stay in Chang'an—and even they were forbidden to take their Tang-subject wives back to their home countries. I interpret such laws primarily as measures to prevent foreign agents from using Tang subjects as spies or sources of information. For the same reason, even simple interactions between foreign envoys and ordinary Tang subjects or local officials were subject to extremely strict legal limits during an embassy's journeys to and from Chang'an.[67] Despite the empire's ethnic diversity, the non-elite population's ability to interact with people of other states and empires in Eurasia was thus highly circumscribed by law, with consequent limits on the potential for cross-cultural exchange beyond the confines of the imperial court. In sum, the Tang was never as open in its treatment of foreign visitors and foreign trade as many modern historians have assumed any 'cosmopolitan empire' to be.

[62]Zhangsun Wuji 長孫無忌 et al., *Tanglü shuyi* 唐律疏議 (rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 8.177–78, 16.307.

[63]Arakawa Masaharu, 'Aspects of Sogdian trading activities under the western Turkic state and the Tang empire', *Journal of Central Eurasian Studies*, vol. 2, 2011, pp. 25–40, esp. pp. 30–32.

[64]Zhangsun et al., *Tanglü shuyi*, 8.176–77; Wang Pu 王溥, *Tang huiyao* 唐會要 (rpt. Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1968), 86.1581; Gao Mingshi 高明士 (ed.), *Tiansheng ling yizhu* 天聖令譯注 (Taipei: Yuanzhao, 2017), pp. 343–345; Wang Qinruo 王欽若 et al., *Cefu yuangui* 冊府元龜 (rpt. Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2006), 99.11562–63.

[65]Gao (ed.), *Tiansheng ling yizhu*, pp. 343–345.

[66]See Shao-yun Yang, 'Unauthorized exchanges: Restrictions on foreign trade and intermarriage in the Tang and Northern Song empires', *T'oung Pao*, vol. 108, 2022, pp. 588–645, esp. pp. 595–603.

[67]Zhangsun et al., *Tanglü shuyi*, 8.178, 9.195; Wang, *Tang huiyao*, 100.1796; Yang, 'Unauthorized exchanges', pp. 606–609.

'Cosmopolitanism' in late Tang and beyond: Transformation, not decline

Building on the critical and holistic approach to 'Tang cosmopolitanism' outlined above, the markedly different elite cultures and aesthetics of the Tang and Song periods can be better explained by changes in the constellation of cosmopoleis (see Supplementary material, Figure 4) than by the oft-claimed decline in Chinese 'cosmopolitanism' during the late Tang and Song. Rather than assume that the only significant changes were in the Chinese elite's attitudes towards foreign cultures and sense of identity, we need to pay more attention to what else was changing in Eurasia around the time of the Tang-Song transition. My approach interprets Chinese 'cosmopolitanism' as evolving and transforming in response to these changes, and thus differs from those of Charles Holcombe and Jonathan Skaff, both of whom have postulated a diminution of 'cosmopolitanism' in the Chinese elite during the Tang-Song transition but used terms other than the traditional 'xenophobia' (i.e. 'Confucian universalism' or 'literati Confucian exclusivism') to describe what took its place.[68]

It should be emphasized that Tang China's connections to the Buddhist cosmopolis remained strong to the dynasty's very end; what changed after the Tang was the fracturing of the cosmopolis itself due to the 'domestication' or indigenization of Chinese Buddhism and the rise of the Sinographic cosmopolis. The notion that the late Tang was anti-Buddhist for xenophobic reasons, which (as we have seen) was popularized by Wright and Schafer and remained standard for decades, can be refuted with abundant evidence of the Tang court's fervent patronage of the Indian or Sogdian (or Indo-Sogdian) Esoteric Buddhist master Amoghavajra (705–774) as a source of supernatural protection during and after the An Lushan Rebellion.[69] From 760 to 819, the court also maintained a tradition of having a Buddha fingerbone relic, normally housed in the Famen Temple 法門寺, brought into Chang'an to be displayed and venerated every 30 years to bring the empire a new karmic dispensation of peace and prosperity.[70] Han Yu's 韓愈 (768–824) famous 819 memorial to Emperor Xianzong 憲宗 (r. 805–820), in which he denigrated the Buddha as a barbarian (Yi-Di 夷狄) and called for the bone relic to be destroyed, is often taken as reflecting the purportedly xenophobic spirit of his age.[71] On the contrary, Han Yu directed polemics against both Buddhism and its indigenous competitor, Daoism, rejecting them as immoral and inimical to Chinese civilization and calling for them to be proscribed, and his views were regarded as outrageously extreme and narrow-minded by most of his peers. Han Yu's Confucian exclusivist views became popular among segments of the Chinese literati under the Song dynasty, due to a revival of interest in imitating both his powerful prose style

[68]Charles Holcombe, 'Immigrants and strangers: From cosmopolitanism to Confucian universalism in Tang China', *T'ang Studies*, vols 20–21, 2003, pp. 71–112; Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and its Turco-Mongol neighbors*, p. 300.

[69]See Yang, *Late Tang China and the world*, p. 43 and sources cited therein.

[70]Tansen Sen, 'Relic worship at the Famen Temple and the Buddhist world of the Tang dynasty', in *Secrets of the fallen pagoda: Treasures from Famen Temple and the Tang court*, (ed.) Alan Chong (Singapore: Asian Civilisations Museum, 2014), pp. 27–49.

[71]Xianzong was enraged by Han Yu's blasphemy, as well as the memorial's inauspicious insinuation that venerating the relic would shorten his life, and banished Han Yu to the far south. For the memorial, see Ma Qichang 馬其昶 (ed.), *Han Changli wenji jiaozhu* 韓昌黎文集校注 (rpt. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2014), pp. 683–688.

and his critique of ideological pluralism.[72] But rigid Confucian exclusivism was never state policy in either Tang or Song, and it is simply wrong to project Han Yu's personal prejudices onto late Tang or Song society at large.

As for Emperor Wuzong's 武宗 (r. 840–846) infamous persecution of Buddhism in 842–846, all extant evidence suggests this was rooted not in popular xenophobia but in competition between the Buddhist and Daoist clerical establishments for imperial patronage, a centuries-old rivalry in which Daoists frequently employed ethnocentric arguments to assert that a Chinese religion had to be superior to one from the barbarians, or at least that it was better suited to the Chinese.[73] Both the Japanese pilgrim-monk Ennin's 圓仁 (793/4–864) diary and Tang court sources make it evident that Wuzong began persecuting Buddhism under the influence of Daoist priest-alchemists who had promised him an elixir that would enable him to become an immortal transcendent.[74] Ennin also tells us that the Daoists actively poisoned Wuzong's mind against Buddhism: they cited a prophecy that implied that monks would seize the throne from him, and they claimed in 845 that the *qi* 氣 imbalance caused by a foreign religion's continued existence in China was blocking Wuzong's path to immortality, even after he consumed alchemical elixirs and ascended the massive 'immortal's terrace' that he had constructed on their advice. Ennin claims that Wuzong then resolved to eradicate Buddhism from his empire completely.[75] In 1956, Kenneth Ch'en argued that economic considerations were more important than Buddhist-Daoist rivalry in Wuzong's decision to persecute Buddhism, in that he wished to replenish the imperial treasury by seizing the immense wealth of the tax-exempt monasteries.[76] However, the fact that Wuzong did not target the equally wealthy Daoist religious establishment, and instead lavished more patronage on it, indicates that immortality-seeking rather than economics lay at the heart of the persecution.[77]

The Buddhist monastic establishment was hit hard by mass monastery closures and property confiscations during Wuzong's persecution, but it soon recovered fully after his death (from elixir poisoning), thanks to generous support from his successors. Most monasteries were reopened and the vast majority of forcibly laicized monks and nuns quickly returned to monastic life.[78] Chinese Buddhism continued to flourish under the Song, contrary to a once-prevalent narrative (espoused by Arthur Wright and Kenneth Ch'en, among many others) of its irreversible post-Tang decline.[79] It did, however,

[72]Shao-yun Yang, *The way of the barbarians: Redrawing ethnic boundaries in Tang and Song China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019), pp. 74–77.

[73]Abramson, *Ethnic identity in Tang China*, pp. 52–82.

[74]Edwin O. Reischauer, *Ennin's travels in T'ang China* (rpt. New York: Angelico Press, 2020), pp. 243–253; Sima Guang 司馬光 et al., *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1956), 248.8020–21.

[75]Edwin O. Reischauer (trans.), *Ennin's diary: The record of a pilgrimage to China in search of the law* (rpt. New York: Angelico Press, 2020), pp. 342–343, 354–358.

[76]Kenneth Ch'en, 'The economic background of the Hui-ch'ang suppression of Buddhism', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 19, 1956, pp. 67–105. This argument is repeated, more briefly and equivocally, in Ch'en, *Buddhism in China*, pp. 226–227.

[77]See also Yang, *Late Tang China and the world*, pp. 41–42.

[78]Benjamin Brose, *Patrons and patriarchs: Regional rulers and Chan monks during the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015), pp. 30–47.

[79]Many historians believe it had a more permanently damaging effect on Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Manicheism, which were also targeted under the persecution policy. But see Yang, *Late Tang China and the world*, pp. 46–47.

lose its formerly vibrant connections to Buddhist communities and institutions outside the Sinographic cosmopolis, including Central Asia, India, Sri Lanka, Tibet, and Southeast Asia. Earlier scholarship has tended to attribute this to Buddhism's decline in the Indian subcontinent and disappearance from Islamic western Central Asia. But Tansen Sen has argued that past studies overestimated the speed and extent of the decline of Indian Buddhism, and that the real cause for Chinese Buddhism's estrangement from its Indian roots lies in its increasing indigenization into popular schools and sects, most notably Chan 禪, that did not rely on models and scriptures from India.[80] Rather than China simply exiting the Buddhist cosmopolis, the Buddhist cosmopolis itself broke up into separate Sinographic and Indic spheres that rarely interacted via either translation or travel. Song Buddhism was thus significantly more Sinocentric or East Asian in orientation than its Tang predecessor and increasingly also diverged from the more India-oriented Esoteric Buddhism of Tibet, though (as discussed earlier) the foundations for this shift to Sinocentrism had already been laid in Tang times.

The fading of Central Asian influences from Chinese elite culture had much to do with complex historical changes in Central Asia itself, most of which occurred only towards the end of the Tang or even later. Although the Tang did lose its Central Asian empire to the Tibetans and Uyghurs by the beginning of the ninth century, skilled musicians of Central Asian origin remained popular at the Tang court. Some modern historians have claimed that rising xenophobia in the late Tang led to a rejection of Central Asian music, but the *Yuefu zalu* 樂府襍錄, a compilation of Tang court music history and lore written in the 890s, shows no such change in attitudes.[81] The frequent use of a few satirical 'new *yuefu*' 新樂府 poems from the early ninth century as evidence of a general turn against Central Asian music and clothing styles is actually illogical, because the poetry is aimed precisely at mocking these foreign fashions' continued popularity among the Chang'an elite despite their potential for interpretation as ill omens of a barbarian invasion.[82] As the preface to the *Yuefu zalu* suggests, the influence of Central Asian musical arts in China probably declined only after the sacking of Chang'an and the death or dispersal of its court musicians in the rebellions and civil wars of the late ninth century.[83] It was practically impossible to reconstruct the lost repertoire of foreign musical styles, as the Song dynasty's diminished contact with Central Asia and the Iranian world prevented it from importing musicians skilled in those styles.

[80]Sen, *Buddhism, diplomacy, and trade*, pp. 102–141.

[81]Duan Anjie 段安節, *Yuefu zalu jiaozhu* 樂府雜錄校注 (rpt. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2015). For a detailed exploration of Central Asian music and 'musical cosmopolitanism' in the Tang, see Gabriela Currie and Lars Christensen, *Eurasian musical journeys: Five tales*. Elements in the Global Middle Ages (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), which, however, exhibits the common flaw of overusing the word 'cosmopolitanism' without defining it.

[82]For recent examples of this flawed interpretation, see Moriyasu Takao 森安孝夫, *Shirukurōdo to Tō teikoku* シルクロードと唐帝国 (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2016), pp. 205–225; Currie and Christensen, *Eurasian musical journeys*, pp. 23–26. For further discussion of the idea of foreign clothing and music as ominous, see Shao-yun Yang, 'Changing clothes in Chang'an'. Review of BuYun Chen, *Empire of style: Silk and fashion in Tang China* (2019), *China Review International*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2017, pp. 255–266, esp. pp. 259–261.

[83]The preface by Duan Anjie laments the dispersal of the court musicians and loss of their repertoire in the aftermath of the Huang Chao Rebellion (874–884), and identifies cultural preservation as Duan's motivation for writing the *Yuefu zalu*. Duan, *Yuefu zalu jiaozhu*, p. 1.

Whereas the Tang military presence in the Tarim Basin from the 690s to the 790s left virtually no trace culturally and did not result in westward expansion of the Sinographic cosmopolis, Central Asia from the ninth to eleventh centuries was profoundly reshaped ethnically and culturally by Turkic immigrants from the east and Muslim Arab and Iranian immigrants from the west. A Muslim dynasty of Iranian origin, the Samanids, ruled over Khurasan, Sogdiana, and Fergana in the ninth and tenth centuries and promoted a new courtly culture in which New Persian, written with the Arabic script rather than Pahlavi, displaced both Sogdian and Arabic as the language of elite writing. Turkic Muslim dynasties that emerged from the Samanid realm, namely the Ghaznavids and Seljuks, spread the new Persianate elite culture to Afghanistan, the Indian subcontinent, and Iran, creating a cultural sphere that some scholars now call (with inspiration from Pollock) the Persian cosmopolis.[84]

The Samanids fell in the 990s to the Turkic Muslim Qarakhanids, under whose rule Persian-speaking Muslim Sogdians and Ferganans adopted a new identity as Tajik, a Persian term once used to refer primarily to Arab Muslims.[85] Like Sogdian, the Saka Iranian languages of Kashgar and Khotan disappeared after these western Tarim oasis states' conquest by the Qarakhanids and were replaced by Middle Turkic.[86] The Turkic world increasingly overlapped with the now-coterminous Iranian and Islamic worlds in Central Asia, and ceased to interact culturally with the Sinographic cosmopolis.[87] The main exceptions were the semi-Sinographic Buddhist kingdoms of the Uyghurs in Gansu, Turfan, and the eastern Tarim Basin, which developed a unique mix of Sinitic, Sogdian, and Turkic cultures. The Gansu Uyghurs remained Buddhists after coming under Tangut and then Mongol rule, while the Tarim and Turfan Uyghurs finally converted to Islam in the fifteenth century, under the rule of the Mongol Chagatai Khanate. Ironically, by then the Chinese had begun referring to all Muslims as *Huihui* 回回, a term derived from the ethnonym Uyghur and originally used for Central Asians of any religion.[88]

Due to much of Central Asia's political and cultural reorientation towards the Islamic world after the ninth century, the Sinitic heartland ceased to be an attractive

[84]Nile Green (ed.), *The Persianate world: The frontiers of a Eurasian lingua franca* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), pp. 9–17.

[85]The Middle Persian form *tāzīk* was the root of *Dashi* 大食 (Middle Chinese *Dazhik*), the Tang name for the Arabs. See Joo-Yup Lee, 'The Sogdian descendants in Mongol and post-Mongol Central Asia: The Tajiks and Sarts', *Acta Via Serica*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2020, pp. 187–198.

[86]The Qarakhanids are said to have captured Kashgar in 934–955 and Khotan in 1006.

[87]Diplomatic and commercial interactions did continue, on which see the excellent new study by Dilnoza Duturaeva, *Qarakhanid roads to China: A history of Sino-Turkic relations* (Leiden: Brill, 2022). Duturaeva argues that the Qarakhanids 'served as middlemen in trade, diplomacy and culture between the Sino-Tibetan and Turko-Islamic worlds' (p. 208), but the evidence she presents suggests that their influence was primarily commercial. Turko-Islamic culture had no discernible impact on either elite culture or popular culture in the Song, mostly because few (if any) Turkic Muslims settled in China permanently like the Sogdians had previously done.

[88]The emergence and evolution of *Huihui* as a label is a telling sign of how Turkic migration and Islamization changed Chinese perceptions of the 'Western regions' after the end of the Tang. In the Northern Dynasties, Sui, and Tang, the standard label for Central Asians, especially Sogdians, had been *Hu* 胡, a term originally applied to nomadic peoples of the Eurasian steppe under the Han empire. As the Song Chinese began labelling Central Asians as *Huihui*, not *Hu*, the latter word reverted to being a label for northern steppe peoples.

destination for Turkic and Sogdian immigrants, who instead chose to move west towards the Islamic heartland.[89] Already by early Song times immigrant families in China had assimilated into the general population. Why they did so, after centuries of maintaining their ethnic and cultural distinctiveness, remains poorly understood. But, contrary to claims that have been made for about 20 years, it is very unlikely to have been due to prejudice and persecution.[90] Consider that Sogdian officers remained prominent in the late Tang imperial guards and may even have increased in number, and that Türks and Turkicized Sogdians (who had merged into a quasi-ethnic grouping known as the Shatuo) ruled three of the Five Dynasties in tenth-century North China.[91] The Shatuo themselves appear to have assimilated relatively quickly into the Chinese population after losing their privileged status with the end of the last Shatuo dynasty in 951. They were the last Turkic military elite to play a significant role in Chinese political history; in contrast, the westward migration of Turkic-speaking steppe peoples through Central Asia gave them immense influence in the politics of the Islamic world for centuries to come.

The division of the Buddhist cosmopolis, the Turkic migrations, and the assimilation of the Sogdians resulted in Song China being less connected to the cultures of Central Asia, the Turkic world, and Iran than the Tang had been. But one could argue that the Song surpassed the Tang in connections to the rest of the Sinographic cosmopolis and to the Indian Ocean world. The key difference is that these connections were no longer state-centred and defined by tributary relations and the culture of the imperial capital elite; instead, they were shaped and sustained by private maritime trade. Any claim that the Song was less 'cosmopolitan' than the Tang thus rests mostly on an ahistorically static understanding of cosmopolitanism that focuses narrowly on the Chang'an elite and its connections to the Buddhist cosmopolis, the pre-Islamicate Turkic world, and the pre-Islamicate Iranian world and Sogdian diaspora, while discounting the world-historical importance of the growth of Asian maritime trade and the formation and maturation of the Sinographic sphere.

Arabic sources claim that Indian Ocean trade with China declined following a massacre of foreign merchants in Guangzhou in 879, during the Huang Chao Rebellion. However, the trade seems to have recovered fully by the late tenth century, due in large part to pro-trade policies adopted by regional states in Guangdong and Fujian.[92] The existence of large foreign merchant communities, including Arabs, Iranians, Indians, and Malays, in the southern port cities of Guangzhou and Quanzhou 泉州 under the

[89]Take, for example, the scholar Mahmud Al-Kashgari (1005–1102), who was born in Qarakhanid Kashgar and migrated to Baghdad, where he wrote a dictionary of the Turkic languages.

[90]For a refutation of the influential theory of an anti-Sogdian backlash in the late Tang, see Yang, 'Late Tang China and the world', pp. 22–36.

[91]On Sogdians in the late Tang imperial guards, see Bi, *Zhonggu Zhongguo de Sute Huren*, pp. 148–161, 166–167. On the origins of the Shatuo, see Moribe Yutaka 森部豊, 'Tōmatsu Godai no Daihoku ni okeru Sogudo-kei Tokketsu to Sada' 唐末五代の代北におけるソグド系突厥と沙陀, *Tōyōshi Kenkyū* 東洋史研究, vol. 62, no. 4, 2004, pp. 660–693.

[92]Chaffee, *Muslim merchants*, pp. 47–65. Modern claims that the 879 massacre explicitly targeted Muslims or reflected anti-foreign sentiment are unconvincing, since the sources state that the rebels slaughtered the Chinese population of Guangzhou as well. Unfortunately for historians, the massacre is unattested in Chinese sources.

Song is well-attested and by now well-known.[93] Less known, but equally indicative of intense interaction with the Indian Ocean world, is the fact that in 960–1022 alone, the Abbasid caliphate and other Arab polities sent 21 'tribute' missions to the Song court in Kaifeng, while the Sumatran Malay thalassocracy of Srivijaya sent 16, all for the sake of expanding trading relations.[94]

In addition, whereas Chinese seafaring for commercial purposes had been prohibited under the Tang, it became legal in the Song after 989 and was increasingly favoured by the imperial court as a source of revenue.[95] The rapid expansion of Chinese maritime commerce stimulated major advances in shipbuilding and navigation techniques, such as bulkheads and the maritime compass, which allowed Chinese merchant vessels to begin playing an active role in East Asian, Southeast Asian, and Indian Ocean trade.[96] Valerie Hansen may have exaggerated slightly in claiming that the Song Chinese 'had more extensive trade ties to foreign countries than any other people in the world in 1000′ (that honour probably belongs to the Arabs), and the Song court did maintain strategic restrictions on trade with specific countries, including Koryŏ and Đại Việt.[97] Nonetheless, Song merchants could venture out to sea and become 'cosmopolitan' boundary-crossers in a way that was never possible for their Tang predecessors. Some of them even resided in Southeast Asia, Korea, or Japan for extended periods, intermarrying with local families.[98] Until formal diplomatic relations between the Song and Koryŏ courts began in 1078, Song maritime merchants often played the role of unofficial envoys to Koryŏ.[99] Maritime trade also became vital to sustaining international connections within the Sinographic Buddhist world, especially between monasteries in China and Japan during the tenth to fourteenth centuries, when the Japanese state did not maintain diplomatic contact with mainland East Asia.[100] Compared to the active trade between Song Ningbo 寧波 and Hakata Bay in Japan, facilitated by a Chinese merchant community residing in Hakata itself, it is hard to see how the occasional arrival of a Japanese diplomatic mission in Tang Chang'an would be a better indicator of 'cosmopolitanism', unless one proceeds from the elitist assumption that imperial courts and aristocrats are inherently more important than port cities and merchants.[101]

[93]Ibid., Chapter 3.

[94]Ibid., p. 68.

[95]Yang, 'Unauthorized exchanges', pp. 624–628.

[96]Valerie Hansen, *The year 1000: When explorers connected the world—and globalization began* (New York: Scribner, 2020), pp. 204–205.

[97]Ibid., p. 199. On Song trade restrictions, see Yang, 'Unauthorized exchanges', pp. 626–628, 631–633.

[98]For examples, see Chaffee, *Muslim merchants*, p. 91; Zhao Yingbo 趙瑩波, 'Zailun dongya haiyu shijie de "guihua Songshang"—yi Riben, Gaoli wei zhongxin'再論東亞海域世界的 "歸化宋商"—以日本、高麗爲中心, *Yuanshi ji minzu yu bianjiang yanjiu jikan* 元史及民族與邊疆研究集刊, vol. 38, 2019, pp. 180–187.

[99]Remco Breuker, *Establishing a pluralist society in medieval Korea, 918–1170: History, ideology, and identity in the Koryŏ dynasty* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 235–241.

[100]See now Yiwen Li, *Networks of faith and profit: Monks, merchants, and exchanges between China and Japan, 839–1403 CE* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

[101]Nicolas Tackett has argued for a different kind of Song 'cosmopolitanism' shaped by literati officials' participation in diplomatic missions to the Kitan Liao. I would suggest that this is still too court- and literati-centred an approach and does not acknowledge the likelihood that significantly more Song merchants than Song officials travelled out of the country and interacted with foreign cultures.

Conclusion

Since the late twentieth century, historians of China have tended to privilege the Tang (especially early Tang) form of 'cosmopolitanism' as though it were exceptional in Chinese or premodern world history, while ignoring the existence of other forms. A more balanced view of the Tang empire's foreign connections can be gained by engaging more deeply with the histories and historiographies of other Eurasian regions and states, including new concepts of religious, linguistic, cultural, and literary cosmopolitanism that have emerged in recent years. Our colleagues in Medieval Studies have, for several years now, been advocating for a Global Middle Ages approach as a corrective to the Eurocentrism of their field, but relatively few specialists in the history, religions, and literature of Middle Period China have availed themselves of this opportunity for interdisciplinary exchange and collaboration.[102] Until more of us step beyond the boundaries and siloes created by our training as scholars, standard textbook narratives of Tang cosmopolitanism will continue to reflect the limited perspective of the imperial court in Chang'an. Somewhat ironically, then, narratives of the 'cosmopolitan' Tang must become less Sinocentric and parochial and acknowledge more fully China's place in a larger, interconnected, multi-centred, and changing medieval world of numerous coexisting cosmopolitanisms.

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Nicolas Tackett, *The origins of the Chinese nation: Song China and the forging of an East Asian world order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

[102]See Geraldine Heng, *The Global Middle Ages: An introduction*. Elements in the Global Middle Ages (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

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