

nondemocratic forces. The image is presented that these women arrived in this position solely by chance, through the death of their male-associated figure and the lack of an alternative strong leader. They are seen to be like puppets, jerked around by (perhaps ill) fate. A dismissal of these women's rise to power as insignificant and their representation as puppets is not entirely accidental. If a woman is already at the top of the elite, the observers consciously or unconsciously preserving gender bias in the political system can discount her as an anomaly unlikely to be repeated or attribute her success to family and spouse rather than her own skill or efforts.

Returning to the main paradox of female prime ministers balanced against the hierarchically low position of the vast majority of South Asian women, the book under review argues that succession to head of the government is not an automatic, accidental process. Suvorova explores the way in which succession always has to be 'constructed'. To illustrate this point Suvorova considers in detail the rise to power of some South and Southeast Asian women. These accounts show that all women-leaders had to win popular elections, usually after significant periods of campaigning or political struggle.

Suvorova tries to answer the question how these women have managed to take power? For while they have had the essential family background for the task, they have still had to overcome the huge barrier of being female. What factors could possibly have led so many men who believe in their own natural dominance over women in society to vote for a female as their most powerful citizen? Suvorova suggests there are many possible advantages which elite women can hold over elite males. She also advances a hypothesis that these women have not presented themselves as de-facto males, but have instead been able to exploit the traditions of femininity, motherhood, and kinship in South Asia. She also refers to the tradition of religion, myth and even tales of family structure, in which both the male and the female are united in some sort of a whole. Suvorova argues that the mere existence of a role model of a woman running the country is likely to have a positive influence on the position of women within that country, no matter how difficult that may be to measure. <vibraginsky@hotmail.com>

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LIFE ALONG THE SILK ROAD. By SUSAN WHITFIELD. pp. xvi, 288. Berkeley, University of California Press, 2015.

doi:10.1017/S1356186315000577

In the second edition of her book on the Silk Road, Susan Whitfield once again shows how remarkably difficult it is to write simply. Eschewing theoretical jargon, she performs the remarkable feat of providing concrete and lively depictions of the voyagers who travelled across West, Central, and East Asia. This splendid simplicity in writing actually requires considerable knowledge. Whitfield describes in detail, the musical instruments played by entertainers, the hairdos worn by princesses, the medicines purveyed by Buddhist monks, and the weapons employed by guards in forts, oases, and ships. *En passant*, she offers concise descriptions of Manicheism, Zoroastrianism, and other religions that are not well known to the Western reader and provides sketches of numerous great cities, including Chang'an, Isfahan, and Samarkand. She focuses on the period from the seventh to the tenth centuries or what is equivalent to China's Tang dynasty. Readers would benefit if she wrote a similar book on the Mongol era, a time during which the Silk Road was once again reaching new heights.

Specialists have questioned the concept and significance of the Silk Road. They have legitimately pointed out that commodities other than silk were as important, if not more so, in trade. They have also

shown that local and short-distance commercial exchanges had far greater economic significance than long-distance Silk Road trade. To be sure, the Silk Road commerce consisted principally of luxury items—objects of low volume but of great value while local trade often comprised necessities. Yet the Silk Road trade was vital in facilitating intercultural relations and exchanges. Buddhism and Islam reached China via the Silk Road, and Chinese textiles were transmitted, via these same routes, and would dramatically influence Persian illustrated manuscripts. Music and military tactics and weaponry would all be affected by the exchanges the Silk Road prompted. It is no accident that only one of the twelve composite biographies Dr Whitfield wrote is that of a merchant. The other stories, which include tales about a nun, a writer, an artist, and a pilgrim, reveal the Silk Road's cultural dimension.

A perhaps pedestrian note about the Silk Road that emerges from Dr Whitfield's book is its contribution to global history. Arabs, Chinese, Armenians, Koreans, Jews, Persians, Khazars, Turks, Indians, Rus, Japanese, and Southeast Asians make an appearance, and the cast of characters could readily be expanded. Dr Whitfield unobtrusively weaves all of them in her various narratives, adding considerably to an understanding of intercultural relations. She can thus draw on numerous traditions, which permit her to incorporate many legends and systems of belief.

Whitfield's writing style is lively and engrossing, but specialists on the Silk Road have legitimately questioned some parts of her narrative. She generally bases her characters and their activities on careful reading of primary and secondary sources, but she also speculates concerning their feelings or reactions to events involving them. She may not be able to substantiate those parts of her narrative, but she has been able to provide the reader with a valuable vision of the Silk Road. <mr63@columbia.edu>.

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CHINA AND BEYOND IN THE MEDIAEVAL PERIOD: CULTURAL CROSSINGS AND THE INTER-REGIONAL CONNECTIONS. Edited by DOROTHY C. WONG and GUSTAV HELDT. pp. 441, New Delhi and New York, Manohar Publishers and Cambria Press, 2014.

doi:10.1017/S1356186316000079

Anyone who has worked on a conference volume knows the challenges: making sure the text and notes have transformed to a publishable level, editing for repetition, and interweaving in accordance with the major theme or themes. Editors Dorothy Wong and Gustav Heldt have challenged themselves with an additional hurdle: this is yet another book on Eurasian or trans-Asian interchange. Every criterion of a successful conference volume, and in addition a book with new information on a heavily researched subject, is met in this book, and more are accomplished. *China and Beyond in the Mediaeval Period* is an excellent set of twenty-one papers that offers twenty-one fresh ideas; many of them are important, stand-alone papers. Each deserves attention. The number is such that I comment on them as succinctly as possible.

Wong lets the reader know in her introduction what the book seeks to accomplish. Recognising the existence of cultural spheres that cross linguistic, political, and religious boundaries, and that China was the centre of Buddhism in the Tang dynasty, the essays explore transmission, transgression, hybridisation, dialectic encounters, synthesis, and transformation of peoples, goods and cultures in conditions of trade, war, diplomacy, and evangelicalism that produce evidence of exchange. The