

# Cambridge Elements

Elements in the Global Middle Ages

edited by

Geraldine Heng

*University of Texas at Austin*

Susan Noakes

*University of Minnesota, Twin Cities*

## SLAVERY IN EAST ASIA

Don J. Wyatt

*Middlebury College*



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS



Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom  
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,  
New Delhi – 110025, India  
103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,  
a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of  
education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781009001700](http://www.cambridge.org/9781009001700)

DOI: 10.1017/9781009007009

© Don J. Wyatt 2022

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions  
of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take  
place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

First published 2022

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

ISBN 978-1-009-00170-0 Paperback  
ISSN 2632-3427 (online)  
ISSN 2632-3419 (print)

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence  
or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this  
publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will  
remain, accurate or appropriate.

## Slavery in East Asia

Elements in the Global Middle Ages

DOI: 10.1017/9781009007009  
First published online: December 2022

---

Don J. Wyatt  
*Middlebury College*

**Author for correspondence:** Don J. Wyatt, [wyatt@middlebury.edu](mailto:wyatt@middlebury.edu)

**Abstract:** In premodern China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, just as in the far less culturally cohesive countries composing the West of the Middle Ages, enslavement was an assumed condition of servitude warranting little examination, as the power and profits it afforded to the slaver made it a convention pursued unreflectively. Slavery in medieval East Asia shared with the West the commonplace assumption that nearly all humans were potential chattel, that once they had become owned beings, they could then be either sold or inherited. Yet, despite being representative of perhaps the most universalizable human practice of that age, slavery in medieval East Asia was also endowed with its own distinctive traits and traditions. Our awareness of these features of distinction contributes immeasurably to a more nuanced understanding of slavery as the ubiquitous and openly practiced institution that it once was and the now illicit and surreptitious one that it intractably remains.

This Element also has a video abstract: [www.cambridge.org/slaveryineastasia](http://www.cambridge.org/slaveryineastasia)

**Keywords:** slavery, bondage, human trafficking, East Asia, Middle Ages

© Don J. Wyatt 2022

ISBNs: 9781009001700 (PB), 9781009007009 (OC)  
ISSNs: 2632-3427 (online), 2632-3419 (print)

## Contents

Preface	1
Medieval East Asian Slavery in Overview	1
Medieval East Asian Slavery Defined and Ideologized	5
Trafficking in Slavery and the Law in Medieval East Asia	10
Coercive Laboring Economies in Medieval East Asia	16
Slave Social Organization, Culture, and Identity in Medieval East Asia	20
Gender, Enslavement, and Trafficking in Medieval East Asia	24
Family, Age, and Bondage in Medieval East Asia	30
Enslavement by Outsiders in Medieval East Asia: The Jingkang Incident and Aftermath	33
Enslavement of Outsiders in Medieval East Asia: China's Inevitable African Slaves	50
An East Asian Mode of Medieval Slavery?	67
References	70