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Elements in the Global Middle Ages

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EARLY TANG CHINA AND THE WORLD, 618–750 CE

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Early Tang China and the World, 618–750 CE

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Abstract: For about half a century, the Tang dynasty has held a reputation as the most “cosmopolitan” period in Chinese history, marked by unsurpassed openness to foreign peoples and cultures and active promotion of international trade. Heavily influenced by Western liberal ideals and contemporary China’s own self-fashioning efforts, this glamorous image of the Tang calls for some critical reexamination. This Element presents a broad and revisionist analysis of early Tang China’s relations with the rest of the Eurasian world and argues that idealizing the Tang as exceptionally “cosmopolitan” limits our ability to think both critically and globally about its actions and policies as an empire.

Keywords: Tang dynasty, foreign relations, China and Inner Asia, Chinese empire, cosmopolitanism

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