

Reflections of Globalizations: Localized Consumptions of Chinese Material Culture Across Eurasia in the Early First Millennium CE

Bryan K. Miller (Research Associate, History Faculty, University of Oxford)

The history of early East Asia and the multitude of developments that occurred during and after the turn of the millennium has long been dominated by the *Pax Sinica* model, used to rationalize the presence of elements of Chinese culture from the Han Empire in other regions and thereby explain social and political advances in those outlying areas. Rather than notions of cultural diffusion or imperial acculturation that buttress core-periphery constructs, a paradigm of globalization offers alternative explanations for the circulations of elements of Chinese material culture and the concurrent social, cultural and political changes that occurred in both neighboring and far-distant regions. This paper redresses the notion of Chinese cultural hegemony for early East Asia through the examination of Han-style bronze mirrors, and their derivatives, and their patterns of distribution outside of the Chinese empire into (a) the Korean Peninsula (early Three Kingdoms era), (b) Japan (Yayoi period), (c) Mongolia and South Siberia (realms of the Xiongnu nomadic empire), and even (d) across oasis and steppe groups of central and western Eurasia as far as the Black Sea. Analyses of the forms and contexts of Han mirrors in these various regions and cultures, juxtaposed with their consumption within the Chinese realms, demonstrate how these mirrors were globally disseminated (not ‘diffused’) and locally consumed through diverse processes of ‘glocalization’ (*dochakaku* 土着化). The importation and implementation of particular elements of Chinese material culture, which often were re-interpreted or re-contextualized in accordance with local traditions, were more akin to an archaic *chinoiserie* than an acculturative Sinicizing force. These mirrors are presented as merely one component of a diverse cornucopia of exotic global goods, materials, and ideas that flowed amidst an increasingly interconnected ‘multi-polar’ world of regional powers. The varied patterns of global distributions and local consumptions of Han mirrors are therefore reflections not of an expanding Sinitic world but of an intensively globalized world, one in which exotic materials were not instruments of exogenous acculturation but accoutrements of interregional diplomacy and local power politics.