This is a book that highlights how slight is the "Chinese" influence on "China." The societies based in the premodern Yellow River or Yangzi valleys are addressed overwhelmingly in scholarship that works from materials written in Chinese, and on this basis presumes the centrality and primacy of the associated cultural tradition. This tradition, lauded as persistent, powerful, and appealing, is accordingly labelled as Chinese and located in a place that is called China. Thus "China" is placed as the unchallenged "Middle Kingdom" in a sinocentric world order to which all its neighbours acceded. But scholars in this tradition, when asked to define what it is that makes their object of study specifically Chinese, are at a loss to do so. The written language is often cited as the core of the tradition, but it was shared with at least three neighbouring societies. The spoken languages were numerous. All of the main religions and traditions of thought were also shared with one or more neighbour. Political forms, government institutions, and social structures have not been regarded as sufficiently distinctive to define a culture. One way around this is to claim "China" (wherever that might be) as the source for many of the elements listed here, but Chen Sanping's point is that this ignores the depth, extent, and ongoing character of borrowings from other places and cultures, and especially from further west. Dr. Chen argues that after the Han dynasty (202 BCE-220 CE) established some basic patterns there was remarkably little that was "Chinese" about subsequent cultural developments until the Song dynasty (960-1276), which is a 740-year gap often labelled as China's medieval period. The "foreign" influences of this time came from the north and even more from the west, especially from the Iranian world.

Chen fights on traditional ground, citing primarily linguistic and philological material. The book is a collection of essays rather than a single argument, and is stated by its author to be a set of chapters preliminary to a monograph. All but chapters four and seven have been published elsewhere, in Chinese or English, either in shorter forms or in some cases as two separate papers here combined into one. The topics are varied, sometimes even eccentric. In chapter one, Chen discusses the foreign Tuoba, Turkic roots of "China's greatest dynasty," the Tang (618-907). Chapter two assembles largely linguistic evidence for why the famous woman warrior Mulan was actually Turkic rather than female, and by somewhat abstruse philological extension, how the East Asian unicorn was different from the western one. Chen presents in chapter three a rather tortured case for dogs being used as positive imagery despite the Chinese dislike of dogs, and for dog-loving western and northern nomads absorbing dog-hating language from their eastern and southern neighbours. Chapter four links the Huns and Bulgars to the Jihu or Buluoji, who lived in the Shanxi region east of the Great Bend of the Yellow River, and in the narrow Gansu corridor linking the Yellow River valley to the Central Asian oases. Chen argues that the Buluoji's historical significance has been largely unrecognised, but that their avowedly "mixed" character ensured that far western influences remained in China long after the Han dynasty. In chapter five, Chen argues that Iranians were prominent in medieval Chinese society, and may have provided more westerly methods of government to the many non-Chinese rulers in the region, perhaps in the same way...
Some valuable points can be extracted from many of Dr Chen's chapters, but for me the greatest weakness of the book is that a "Chinese" culture that is neither problematical nor complicated by external influences. What we need is more work that instead sets aside the insistence upon equating the geographical region of China with favour of treating the Tang as a fundamentally "Chinese" dynasty, which is what allows it to be claimed as said more about the way that the Tang's Turkic connections are often acknowledged by modern writers, but then set aside in critiques modern authors for automatically expecting "Chinese" traits and marvelling when these are absent. I wish he had discussion about his family's ancestry and the impact of his dynasty's monopoly over official historical writing. He also rightly concerned in a field that has tended to focus on literary output, society, and culture, and has been insufficiently critical of surviving sources were produced and how these have affected the history relayed to us. This is a surprisingly unusual world as the fount of innovation in Eastern Eurasia. "Chinese" ideas that are not Chinese at all. This is not an argument that will find favour with those who wish to see the sinitic rulership in the sinitic world. Chen argues that to administer their regimes. An important example is the sinitic term of incoming regimes like the Northern Qi (550-577) and others of the Northern Dynasties (386-589). These non-Chinese rulers approaches that he suggests reached the steppe from the Iranian world. These preferences then moved on to China by way influence on the ancient Steppe" (129) and contrasts sinitic governmental norms such as centralisation with contrasting roots of the "Son of Heaven" title, used by Chinese emperors, to adoptions from the steppe and ultimately the Iranian world, indicating a "symbiotic relationship between the Iranian, Altaic, and Chinese cultures in the ancient world" (156). And in chapter seven, Chen emphasises the non-sinitic ancestry and close connections of the famous Tang poet Bo or Bai Juyi with Central Asia, to illustrate the complexity of Tang views on ethnicity. In an appendix, Chen conducts statistical analysis on name changes to suggest that the Tuoba core clans were probably Turkic, while the federated "four corner" tribes were more likely to be Xianbei groups with proto-Mongolian elements. There are several incomplete references and some careless copypasting, and the complete absence of any characters is a great inconvenience.

Despite the effusive claims of the foreword, it is not a revelation that "foreign" elements influenced sinitic empires from the third to the tenth century. The presence of such contacts and influence has long been known to specialists, especially those familiar with the classic pieces from the older Chinese scholarship on the period, and even more so the new generation of scholars on this period. Chen Yinke had discussed the "barbarisation" of the Tang and related topics in his works of the 1930s to 1950s, and Jonathan Skaff's *Sui-Tang China and its Turko-Mongol Neighbors: Culture, Power, and Connections, 580-800* came out at the same time as Dr Chen's volume and provides exhaustive documentation of an entangled history. That said, Chen's part is to add several detailed case studies to the empirical base for these known connections and thereby to draw out some specific points about borrowing and interaction. This is not a minor contribution, since the sinocentric view remains so powerful that a great deal of evidence is having to be assembled even to set it in question. Given the wide range of Chen's research and useful iconoclastic intent of the volume, it is regrettable that the series editor allowed Chen to drop the concluding remarks to his chapters, which we have to assume that at least some of the original journal editors would have required. The full value of the material in each chapter is therefore not realised, and this problem is compounded by the disjointed form of the volume. The task to which these ideas contribute is of such interest and potential importance that it is a shame that Chen Sanping did not take the time to finish the job and connect his arguments into a coherent whole. In the rest of this review I will try to highlight some of Chen's main points.

Chen seeks to argue for a significant cultural gap between the Tang imperial house, surnamed Li, and native Chinese aristocratic houses. This involves emphasising the Tuoba Turkish roots of the Li family and the differences between Chinese and Tuoba beliefs and practices. Chen does this by identifying examples of surviving distinctions between Chinese and Turkic ways, which he uses to trace the Tuoba/Turkic origins submerged within certain elements of Tang culture. (He assembles additional evidence for this wider point, less successfully, in his chapter on Mulan). Hence the avenue of stone figures leading to the tomb of the Tang emperor Taizong is not merely imitating Turk-style balbal tomb figures but "in fact reflected the Tang imperial house's Steppe background and identity" (35). Taizong was also critical when the Eastern Turks adopted Chinese-style tomb burials. Meanwhile, "Chinese" ways continued among much of the Tang aristocracy and commoners. This is hard to see because according to Chen, although the Turks contributed many elements to the multicultural world of the post-Han period (c. 300-600), they also began borrowing Chinese elements at the same time, and ultimately an "unstopable process of sinicization" absorbed the Turks and the Tang ruling house alike, whereupon the earlier Turkicisation was covered up by historians. This final resort to the inevitable attractiveness (that is, superiority) of "Chinese" culture, underpinned by retention of the idea of some kind of "pure" group leading to something "mixed" (92), is disappointing. It is, however, extremely difficult to escape from if your starting point is ethnic categories.

A second theme, elaborated especially in chapters five and six, is that Iranian influences reached China by way of "Steppe and Steppe-origin regimes" (101). Chen disagrees with old-school views, represented here by John King Fairbank, that non-Chinese rulers were sinicised by their conquered subjects. Rather Chen argues that "[o]ne can hardly exaggerate the Iranian influence on the ancient Steppe" (129) and contrasts sinitic governmental norms such as centralisation with contrasting approaches that he suggests reached the steppe from the Iranian world. These preferences then moved on to China by way of incoming regimes like the Northern Qi (550-577) and others of the Northern Dynasties (386-589). These non-Chinese rulers reinforced their own Iranian absorptions by employing western "assistant conquerors"--notably Sogdians (who were Iranian)--to administer their regimes. An important example is the sinitic term tianzi or "Son of Heaven," which is central to concepts of rulership in the sinitic world. Chen argues that tianzi denotes the steppe title transcribed in Chinese as mohetu or motu, which he believes comes, via Sogdian, from the Iranian term bagapuhr or "son of god." His point is that this is just one of several key "Chinese" ideas that are not Chinese at all. This is not an argument that will find favour with those who wish to see the sinitic world as the fount of innovation in Eastern Eurasia.

One of Chen's most worthwhile but underplayed contributions is his serious effort to consider the contexts within which the surviving sources were produced and how these have affected the history relayed to us. This is a surprisingly unusual concern in a field that has tended to focus on literary output, society, and culture, and has been insufficiently critical of historical writing about the periods under examination. Chen notes, among other things, Tang Taizong's suppression of discussion about his family's ancestry and the impact of his dynasty's monopoly over official historical writing. He also rightly critiques modern authors for automatically expecting "Chinese" traits and marvelling when these are absent. I wish he had said more about the way that the Tang's Turkic connections are often acknowledged by modern writers, but then set aside in favour of treating the Tang as a fundamentally "Chinese" dynasty, which is what allows it to be claimed as China's "golden age." What we need is more work that instead sets aside the insistence upon equating the geographical region of China with a "Chinese" culture that is neither problematical nor complicated by external influences.

Some valuable points can be extracted from many of Dr Chen's chapters, but for me the greatest weakness of the book is that
Chen's arguments all rest upon the identification of "western," Iranian, and Turkic influences as being notably distinct from sinitic ones. This approach to the question means that the discussion continues to focus on the foreignness or otherwise of "Chinese" civilisation. While Chen's approach is refreshingly destructive of apparently untouchable verities, if we wish to be free of the impossible task of defining what is "Chinese," we need to move beyond analyses that continue to give such primacy to ethnicity and culture.

"Sanping Chen's fine new work on the diversity of the first millennium of the Common Era in China is exactly what teachers and scholars of Chinese history need to be reading at the beginning of an even newer millennium. Chen begins with a startling title that immediately shakes the Confucian historiographical cobwebs with its modern sound. . . . Chen's arguments are both penetrating and backed by linguistic evidence and a thorough understanding of the key historical documents of his period."—History: Reviews of New Books. "Chen's work is a useful corrective and pr