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Peoples of Pingcheng (398–494):

Cultural Diversity and Interaction

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Preface

The study of Chinese history during the era of disunity from the 4th to the 6th century is a rather complex and intriguing challenge. Although cultural exchange between states and confederations in Central and East Asia had existed long before this period, the foreign impact on China seems to have been far less dramatic and massive. This concerns not only the trading of objects and the migration of ethnic groups, but also the influence on a great variety of cultural traits. The period was not only hallmarked by political instability and social unrest, it was also accompanied by long-term climate cooling that changed the living conditions.

The result was on the one hand a tremendous, and partially forced, mobility and a continuous coexistence of communities of different cultural backgrounds, and on the other an increasing ability to accept otherness and to innovate. As Albert E. Dien pointed out in the introduction to volume 2 of *The Cambridge History of China* "it was the very disorder, a collapse of central authority, that provided the conditions enabling such important advances which make the Six Dynasties period such a significant one in Chinese History".[1]

During the last twenty years, the construction boom has had far-reaching consequences for archaeological fieldwork. The number of excavations has increased dramatically, providing new insights into the formation of Northern Cultures influenced by both Han traditions and the contributions of inhabitants regarded as "barbarians" by Chinese historiographical sources.

For this reason, in 2015 the Institute for Chinese Studies of LMU Munich established the research project "Cultural Diversity in Northern China during the Fifth and Sixth Centuries", supported by a generous research grant from the German Research Foundation (DFG). From the beginning, Shing Müller served as investigator-in-charge, bearing the main load of coordinating the project and editing the results of the study. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Shing Müller, who was also responsible for the organization of an international conference on "Culture and Cultural Diversity in Early Medieval China" in 2017. The papers were published under the title "Early Medieval North China: Archaeological and Textual Evidence" two years later.

Right from the start, Zhang Qingjie, the former director of the Archaeological Institute of Shanxi Province, was our major cooperation partner in China. He not only facilitated visits to important sites, museums, and collections in Shanxi, but also introduced the members of our research team to colleagues in neighboring provinces and autonomous regions. Thus, we had the opportunity to discuss our ideas with archaeologists, historians, and art historians in Shaanxi, Ningxia and Inner Mongolia. Many thanks to him as well for his continuous inspiration and help.

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1 Albert E. Dien and Keith N. Knapp. ed. 2019. *The Cambridge History of China*, Volume 2: *The Six Dynasties, 220–589*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1.

Both Shing Müller and Zhang Qingjie contributed to this book. The focus is on the excavations of 5th century Pingcheng (Datong), the second capital of the Northern Wei Dynasty. This setting was chosen because of its dense population with inhabitants of diverse origins and a high degree of cultural complexity that could be researched within a manageable timeframe.

I feel indebted to all members of the Archaeological Institute of Shanxi Province, the Datong Archaeological Institute, the Datong Museum, the Museum for Northern Dynasties Arts at Datong, and the Yungang Academy, who supported the research project and shared their knowledge with us. Sincere thanks go finally to Mary Wong-Sommer for her careful proofreading and help with the translation.

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