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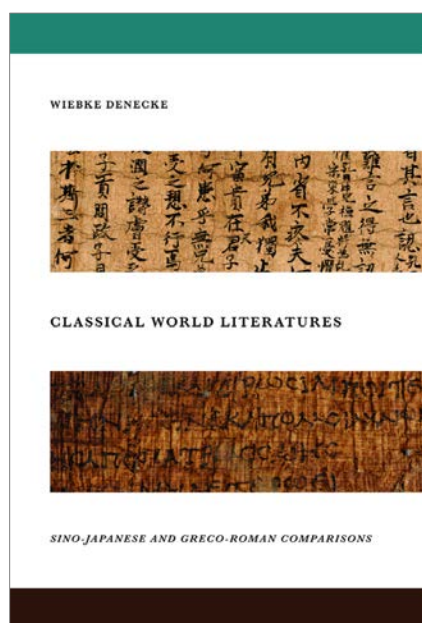
Classical World Literatures

Sino-Japanese and Greco-Roman Comparisons

Wiebke Denecke

"Deeply learned and intellectually adventurous, *Classical World Literatures* sets a new standard for comparative study in a global perspective."

—David Damrosch, Harvard University



Ever since Karl Jaspers's "axial age" paradigm, there have been a number of influential studies comparing ancient East Asian and Greco-Roman history and culture. However, to date there has been no comparative study involving multiple literary traditions in these cultural spheres. This book compares the dynamics between the younger literary cultures of Japan and Rome and the literatures of their venerable predecessors, China and Greece. How were writers of the younger cultures of Rome and Japan affected by the presence of an older "reference culture," whose sophistication they admired, even as they

anxiously strove to assert their own distinctive identity? How did they tackle the challenge of adopting the reference culture's literary genres, rhetorical refinement, and conceptual vocabulary for writing texts in different languages and within distinct political and cultural contexts?

Classical World Literatures captures the striking similarities between the ways early Japanese authors wrote their own literature through and against the literary precedents of China, and the ways Latin writers engaged and contested Greek precedents. But it also brings to light suggestive divergences that are rooted in geopolitical, linguistic, sociohistorical, and aesthetic differences between early Japanese and Roman literary cultures. Proposing a methodology of "deep comparison" for the cross-cultural comparison of premodern literary cultures and calling for an expansion of world literature debates into the ancient and medieval worlds, *Classical World Literatures* is both a theoretical intervention and an invitation to read and re-read four major literary traditions in an innovative and illuminating light.

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“Deeply learned and intellectually adventurous, *Classical World Literatures* sets a new standard for comparative study in a global perspective. In her fourfold account of Japanese and Roman relations to the older ‘reference cultures’ of China and Greece, Wiebke Denecke develops a series of fascinating, revealing comparisons and offers as well a probing essay in method, raising fundamental questions concerning the challenges and opportunities involved in the study of incommensurable cultures. East Asianists, Classicists, and comparatists of many varieties will see their field differently after reading this strikingly original book.”

—David Damrosch, Harvard University

“This is a truly pathbreaking book. Denecke’s perception of a deep similarity between the literary cultures of ancient Rome and early Japan is as convincing as it is unprecedented. Remarkable both for the range of its erudition and for its nimble negotiation of local particularities, this is an exemplary work, and one that I hope will be a provocation to further exploration of an unexpectedly rich field for comparative study.”

—Joseph Farrell, University of Pennsylvania

“*Classical World Literatures* is a groundbreaking and innovative work with important implications for the study of East Asia, the Classical world, and comparative literature. The result is a truly distinctive work that casts fresh light on the development of literary traditions and is certain to stimulate further comparative work and similarly ambitious projects in the future.”

—Peter Kornicki, University of Cambridge

“A literary and historical tour-de-force. Denecke draws brilliant comparisons across two major literary spheres—Greco-Roman and Sino-Japanese—showing the different ways in which a younger, later civilization (Roman and Japanese) utilize, cope with, and parody an older, prior civilization (Greek and Chinese). Denecke compares these two sibling rivalries to each other on both a micro and macro scale to create new perspectives and readings that will startle both the specialist and the comparatist.”

—Haruo Shirane, Columbia University

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