



# Uncovering Heian Japan: An Archaeology of Sensation and Inscription (Asia-Pacific: Culture, Politics, and Society)

*Thomas LaMarre*

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The poetry of the Heian court of Japan has typically been linked with the emergence of a distinct Japanese language and culture. This concept of a linguistically homogeneous and ethnically pure “Japaneseness” has been integral to the construction of a modern Japanese nation, especially during periods of western colonial expansion and cultural encroachment. But Thomas LaMarre argues in *Uncovering Heian Japan* that this need for a cultural unity—a singular Japanese identity—has resulted in an overemphasis of a relatively minor aspect of Heian poetry, obscuring not only its other significant elements but also the porousness of Heian society and the politics of poetic expression.

Combining a pathbreaking visual analysis of the calligraphy with which this poetry was transcribed, a more traditional textual analysis, and a review of the politics of the period, LaMarre presents a dramatically new view of Heian poetry and culture. He challenges the assumption of a cohesive “national imagination,” seeing instead an early Japan that is ethnically diverse, territorially porous, and indifferent to linguistic boundaries. Working through the problems posed by institutionalized notions of nationalism, nativism, and modernism, LaMarre rethinks the theories of scholars such as Suzuki Hideo, Yoshimoto Takaaki, and Komatsu Shigemi, in conjunction with theorists such as Derrida, Karatani, Foucault, and Deleuze. Contesting the notion that speech is central to the formation of community, *Uncovering Heian Japan* focuses instead on the potential centrality of the more figural operations of poetic practice.

Specialists in Japanese history and culture as well as scholars working in other areas of cultural criticism will find that this book enriches their understanding of an early Japan that has exerted so much influence on later concepts of what it means to be Japanese.

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