

The Missing Border: the Construction of Foreign Lands in Yuan Sources

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The paper analyses the perception of borders under the Yuan through a comparison between the representations of the different frontiers of the Empire. Starting from the observation that the *Yuanshi* chapters on foreign lands focus on the southern borderlands and the maritime frontier, whereas the designation of a northern border is practically missing, the paper looks for common criteria underlying these very different representations of reality. A first question will be to understand where the Yuan empire ends and where foreign lands start, with special attention to both the western and southwestern borderlands. This issue is clearly not only a matter of geopolitical representation, but is related to how “foreignness” was constructed as a matter of ethnicity, military rhetoric, and practical administration. A second point is the analysis of how the different attitudes toward the empire’s shifting peripheries can be read as a statement of Yuan political identity in relation to Chinese and Mongol traditions. Retrospectively using some recent theories on globalization to read the virtually borderless Mongol vision of empire, the paper proposes to interpret Yuan borders more in terms of ethnoscapas than of geopolitical divisions. The analysis of several Yuan sources is, in this context, necessary to supplement the descriptions in the *Yuanshi* and to overcome the problems related to its compilation. The construction of identity boundaries resulting from these sources is a mixture of traditional elements and innovations, which deeply influenced the following development of an East Asian multiculturalism.