

Rashid al-Din's Approach to Cross Cultural Translation: from Chinese Medicine to Buddhist Reincarnation

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The most prominent examples of the multifaceted inter-cultural translation project headed by the Jewish convert to Islam, physician and Ilkhanid vizier, Rashid al-Din, include the first translation of Chinese medical works into any Islamic language (in this case, Persian) known as the *Tankusuq-name*, *Treasure Book*, and the inclusion and integration of translated Buddhist histories of China and accounts on the life and teachings of the Buddha in the chapters on China and India respectively in the vizier's famous world history, the *Jami' al-Tawarikh*. Scholars have explored these translation project through the wider perspective of the flow of inter-cultural contacts and exchanges, initiated, promoted and filtered by the Mongol courts, or through the vizier's own, personal ecumenical worldview that was necessarily informed by the expansion of the horizons of the Islamic world under the Mongols' Eurasian empire.

The paper takes a different approach to these translations by shifting focus to the vizier's theological rationale that informed these projects. It juxtaposes the vizier's advocacy and justification of the translation of Chinese medicine and his negative, polemical treatment of the Buddhist reincarnation in his theological and historical writing, to show how the vizier's theological worldview and broader Mongol conversion project informed his understanding of the goal of these translation projects. The paper demonstrates that the vizier seeks to "reinvent" both Chinese medicine and Buddhism as "acceptable" traditions, namely, as part of an Islamic-informed "universal" prophetic world, and thus, informed not by inherent differences that need to be overcome through "translation", rather by a shared salvific history that can be "recovered" through translation. Doing so, Rashid al-Din theorizes what constitutes "legitimate" translation and innovation in Ilkhanid Islam.