Cross-cultural Influences on Law in the Ilkhanate and the Yuan Dynasty

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This paper will examine mobility of people and ideas through two case studies of religious minorities in the Ilkhanate and the Yuan dynasty respectively. It will examine why these minorities, namely Muslims in Persia and Buddhists and Confucians in China, were able to have an impact on legal practice in places where they were minorities, and why one minority had an impact while the other did not.

In the near absence of long-distance mobility of jarghuchis themselves, in particular after the period of the united empire, the transmission of ideas via the influence of minorities was one way in which influences from China could reach the Ilkhanate and vice versa. However, the presence of minorities in itself in no way determined any influence on the law; rather, these case studies give insight into the particular ways in which influences were transmitted, as well as the 'filter' which Mongol beliefs and values applied to these influences. The paper will show that the direct influence of minorities on law was rejected, while indirect influence through first influencing the beliefs of the khans, or responding to their practical needs, led to new practices being adopted.

The paper shows an as yet unnoted instance of influence between China and the Ilkhanate and contributes to the discussion about the transmission of cross-cultural influence, a process in which rulers, elites and subjects all exercised agency in fostering or blocking such influence.