

Research Intention for PhD Studies

Scientific Exchange in Mongol Eurasia: Astronomers and Physicians in the Mongol Empire

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The Mongol empire, the largest contiguous land empire in world history, is characterized by the unprecedented scale of mass migration and subsequent exchange of knowledge in and beyond the empire. The current study aims to examine the role of astronomers and physicians as agents of scientific exchange in the Mongol empire.

Astronomers and physicians are chosen for two reasons. First, these two scientific fields are among the most important scientific “disciplines” in medieval Islamic world and in China. Secondly, the two groups of scientists enjoyed a highly esteemed status in the Mongol courts, therefore leaving behind them abundant records on their professional and social activities.

This study will approach these records with the methodology of prosopography. The first stage of the study will focus on the reconstruction of scientists’ biographies. Biographical information regarding the scientists will be retrieved from the wide-ranging contemporaneous Yuan, Ilkhanid, and Mamluk sources, composed in Arabic, Chinese, and Persian, and covering historical chronicles, records of governmental offices, laws and regulations, biographical dictionaries, contemporary literature, travelers’ records, and scientific works. I will analyze the scientists’ professional and social background and activities. Migration of the scientists is of special importance and interest, since it generally has the most direct influence on scientific exchange. In the second stage of the study I will further organize the details on individual scientists in order to reconstruct the scholarly and social networks of their communities.

This study will contribute to the understanding of the scholarly, political and social circumstances the scientists faced, and to the mechanism of cultural exchange and transformation in Mongol Eurasia. It will also contribute to the ongoing academic discussion regarding scientific achievements, influence and legacy of the Mongol empire.