

Khitan and Uighur Sources of Yuan Court Dress

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My paper examines the role that semi-nomadic groups such as the Uighurs and Khitan played in the formation of Mongol cultural identity in China after the founding of the Yuan dynasty (c. 1276-1368) under Khubilai Khan. This study will specifically focus on the Uighur and Khitan impact on Yuan court dress. While Mongol culture absorbed aesthetic aspects of a variety of cultures, the Uighur and Khitan elements at court played a particularly important role, especially in the early years of Mongol empire. The issue of court dress touches on a number of topics, including the spread of textile patterns and production techniques, trade and tribute, and the origins and significance of costume in court ceremonial. Studying Uighur and Khitan antecedents and exploring the role of Uighurs and Khitans advisers in the entourages and courts of the 13th century Mongol khans will help to elucidate the origins and significance of specific types of court dress.

In particular, I will address the question of the jisün (Chinese zhisun 質孫) robe described in the Yuan shi and in travel accounts such as Marco Polo, but of which no archaeological or pictorial evidence has been uncovered. I hope that through analysis of excavated and pictorial remains of other Uighur, Khitan, and Mongol clothing, some conclusions about the origins, appearance, and function of jisün robes will be reached.