

SSYCDS-Sponsored Panel (2019 AAS)

The Impact of Visual and Material Cultural Networks in the Mongol Empire and Beyond

Paper Abstracts

Shih-shan Susan Huang, “Elite Uighurs as Cultural Middlemen of Buddhist Books and Woodcuts in the Mongol Empire”

Elite Uighurs migrating from the Uighur homeland in Central Asia to China under the Mongol rule in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries played major roles as cultural middlemen of the Buddhist book culture. Drawing primary sources from Buddhist woodcuts excavated in Turfan, and epigraphic sources found in southeast and northwest China, this study highlights two individuals. Mengsusu (1206-1267) was a high-ranking official serving Kubilai Khan before the founding of the Yuan dynasty. Fragments of Buddhist frontispieces found in Turfan reveal Mengsusu’s sponsorship of the Buddhist printing in Beijing, and his family’s cultural adaptation of Mongolian material culture. The woodcuts were transmitted over long distance back to Central Asia due to his family’s tie to the Buddhist community in the Uighur homeland. The second case shifts to Yihemishi (ca. 1270s-1320s), a wealthy Uighur diplomat, navigator, merchant, who was also a fervent Buddhist donor. A broken stele dated 1316 and discovered in Quanzhou reveals his generous sponsorship of more than 100 temples in Yuan China housing the Buddhist Canon. This vast temple network expanded from the capital Dadu to Fuzhou and Gansu. Taken together with the Mongol postal system, the elite Uighurs’ network extending from China to the Uighur homeland in Central Asia, and to Buddhist countries in South and Southeast Asia can all shed light on how Buddhist books and woodcuts were circulated. Responding to the recent

scholarship of spatial history and digital humanities, the study also plans to create a GIS “story map” which visualizes the interlocking networks.

Yong Cho, “Carving a Multicultural Empire on Stones: Juyongguan from a Trans-regional Perspective”

The Cloud Platform at Juyongguan, completed sometime between 1343 and 1345 under the imperial patronage of the Yuan court, is a major architectural monument located along the Great Wall near Beijing. For over a century, textual historians have noted unusual nature of the multilingual inscriptions on the interior walls of the building. The monument’s pictorial stone carvings, however, are as unusual. Covering the inner and outer surfaces of the monument are the shallow, surface-oriented carvings of complex Buddhist iconographies and ornaments. Simply put, the Juyongguan’s approach to sculptural form is unprecedented in the history of Chinese art, hinting at non-local influences.

This paper analyzes the elaborate sculptural program at Juyongguan from trans-regional perspective. Much like the multilingual inscriptions accompanying the monument, the stone carvings were products of a confluence of multiple artistic traditions that the Yuan governed, including Mongolian, Tibetan, Tangut, and Chinese visual cultures. The most striking, however, is the visual connection between the artistic traditions of the Yuan and Southeast Asia, suggested by the similarity of approaches to stone surface and figural forms as well as workmanship between the stone carvers at Juyongguan and those at the contemporaneous monuments of Angkor in present-day Cambodia. The connection, perhaps, is not so surprising, considering the commercial and political relationships the Yuan had in the region. The extant textual records, such as the one that the Yuan diplomat Zhou Daguan wrote after visiting Angkor in 1296-1297, suggest the possible exchanges of sculptural and architectural knowledge between these two places.

Yusen Yu, “Paper on the Move in Mongol and Post-Mongol Eurasia”

This paper focuses on the large-scale circulation and distribution of paper between different regions under Mongol rule and the succeeding dynasties from the 1300s to the 1500s. Based on Persian and Chinese primary sources and material-oriented studies, four types of paper, made in different places, will be investigated: Chinese paper, Korean paper, Baghdadi paper, and Samarqandi paper. The production and circulation of paper brought technical and aesthetic shifts in local artistic practice in the East and West Asia. In China, the extensive use of paper as painting ground coincided with the rise of literati painting; in the Islamic world, Baghdad and Samarqand became centers of paper production. Illustrated manuscripts, made of local and foreign paper, began to appear in greater number in monumental formats. Paper was on the move on a continental scale: the so-called Muslim paper (*huihui zhi*), introduced to China together with Islamic astronomy, was used in the annual making of the *huihui li* (or Muslim calendar) for the Yuan court. Chinese paper, especially gold-decorated paper with hand-painted images, transmitted through diplomatic contacts to Central Asia and Iran, was lavishly used in Persian manuscript production and decree writing. Korean paper, sought after by the Yuan and Ming courts and frequently used in painting practice by the literati, was also brought to Iran as writing material for diplomatic occasions. Locating itself in the “material turn” in historical research, this preliminary study sheds lights on the networks of paper circulation in pre-modern Eurasia.

Eiren Shea, “Panni Tartarici (“Tartar Cloths”) and the Image of the Mongol Empire in Renaissance Italy”

This paper investigates the cultural impact of the Mongol Empire, as reflected in Mongol textiles and dress, on Europe, and in particular, on Italy, in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. By focusing on *panni tartarici*, or

“Tartar cloths,” as trading commodity and culturally significant object, I illuminate the impact that this elite Mongol product had on the arts of the period, and on the formation of identity by both elites and the rising merchant class in Italy and elsewhere in Europe. My focus here is on textiles preserved in European church treasuries and tombs (such as the alleged dalmatic of Pope Benedict XI) alongside pictorial representations of *panni tartarici* in religious paintings. The production of *panni tartarici*, which were produced in the Mongol Empire, is connected to *nasij* (one type of *panni tartarici*), lampas-woven “cloth of gold,” which was produced in both Yuan territories in East Asia and the Ilkhanate in West Asia.

To uncover the full significance of *panni tartarici* past their intrinsic value as luxury goods, I interrogate what the term “Tartar” meant in the early fourteenth century context, to whom it referred, and how this was connected to imaginaries of the Mongol Empire in Italy and Western Europe more broadly. By examining the term Tatar in this European context, I show how the desire for luxury commodities and the idea of the Mongol played crucial roles in the creation of the concept of self and other in fourteenth century Europe.