

The West Asian Network in Yuan China as Represented in the Local Gazetteers and Islamic Epitaphs from the Southeast Coast of China

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This paper aims to present a case study of the West Asian network that constituted a bridge between the center and the Southeastern periphery of the Mongol empire. The analysis is based on comprehensive research of multilingual sources, including the official documents of the Yuan dynasty, local chronicles and Islamic inscriptions.

Throughout history, *diasporas* could serve an important role as bonds to maintain and consolidate the unity of *empires* which covered vast geographical areas and in the control of culturally diverse societies. The Muslim diaspora dispersed among the core and periphery of Yuan took on such an important role as a bond connecting regions distant from each other. This study confirms, first, that Fujian had a great number of appointed officials with Muslim names. This finding is in line with the high concentration of epitaphs written in Arabic on the southeast coast of China. It can also be confirmed that the ratio of officials with a Muslim name remained high until the middle of the Yuan Period. Among others, this was due to the fact that many Muslim officials from areas such as Iran and Western Turkistan, who were originally merchants, were engaged in the transportation of tax revenues for the Yuan Dynasty.

Although we cannot prove that these Muslims constituted a homogeneous cultural entity, as was the case in the Jewish diaspora, Muslims around the Southeastern coastal region of China did share cultural traditions. At least this is what evidence from cities in Yuan China that were far apart seems to suggest. There was a common style and frequent usage of specific expressions of the Prophet in Islamic inscriptions, such as “man māta gharīban faqad māta shahīdan” (who died as a foreigner died as a martyr).