

Networks under the Mongol Empire as Seen in the Turco-Mongolian Documents Discovered from Central Asia

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This paper investigates the influence and reflection of the networks constructed by the Mongol Empire in the contemporaneous Turco-Mongolian texts discovered in the Eastern part of Central Asia. These texts have been excavated since the end of the nineteenth century, mainly in the Turfan basin of the Xinjiang region (PRC). In this connection, I also introduce the results of the fieldworks on the wall inscriptions written by pilgrims (mainly Buddhists) at the cave temples or other sanctuaries in the Xinjiang and Gansu regions.

Although most of the Turco-Mongolian documents concern Central Asian local society and daily affairs, they can sporadically or collectively cast light on the influence of the Mongol network. For example, the Old Uigur-Turkic documents are an indispensable source to prove that the system of denomination (i.e. weights of silver ingot) was unified throughout the Mongol dominion, i.e., Mongolia, China, East Turkestan and Iran; they offer a solid base for arguments about “the first Eurasian silver century.” Moreover, the multilingual comparison of the Old Uigur, Mongolian, Chinese and Persian sources provides ample evidence to suggest that such unification was implemented also for other weights and measures to facilitate more remote transactions.

The Old Uigur bureaucrats and Buddhist high priests at the Mongol court offered financial support for the publication of the Buddhist scriptures by the technologically advanced printing offices in North and South China. The Buddhist scriptures, along with other commercial goods or silver ingots, arguably reached and spread in Central Asia through the hands of Uigur merchants or Buddhist pilgrims, who, in turn, cooperated in this remote transfer. The Turkic wall inscriptions scribbled by the Christian Turks on the Buddhist sanctuaries in Inner Mongolia or their epitaph inscriptions retrieved from Southeast China in recent years may suggest that the Christians shared the transfer and transaction networks with the Buddhists.

The evidence mentioned above confirms that Mongol Eurasian networks certainly included Central Asians, who expanded their range of activity over the entire region of Eastern continental Eurasia.