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**FINE2055 Crossing Cultures: China and the Outside World
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**Crossing Culture in the Blue-and-White with Arabic or
Persian inscriptions under Emperor Zhengde (r. 1506-21)**

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INTRODUCTION

According to John Carswell, “the powerful control exercised by the Muslim eunuchs directly affected the porcelain industry” under the reign of Zhengde (r. 1506-21) (fig. 5) in Ming dynasty (1368-1644).¹ Emperor Zhengde was only a child when he ascended the throne in 1506. While he was known to occasionally wear Arab dress, he was also strongly influenced by Muslim eunuchs at court and may have even converted to Islam.² Many of the porcelain vessels produced during his reign show Islamic influences, sometimes in shape and Arabic calligraphy was also frequently used.

The nature and production of blue-and-white porcelain is in itself embedded with aspects of cross-cultural exchange. Blue-and-white porcelain came into production at the imperial kilns, Jingdezhen, South China, when the Yuan dynasty began to import the Persian cobalt blue (sometimes known as ‘Mohammedan blue’) in the early decades of the 14th century.³ But in order to narrow down the focus of this essay, I will chiefly investigate the crossing culture in certain blue-and-white pieces under the Zhengde reign of the Ming dynasty, which seem to suggest the Chinese court’s interaction with adherents of an alternative religion, Islam. Through considering the Arabic or Persian inscriptions on the porcelains of this époque,⁴ their popularity at the time, site of

¹ John Carswell et al, *Blue and White: Chinese Porcelain and Its Impact on the Western World* (Chicago: University of Chicago, David and Alfred Smart Gallery, 1985), p. 31. A eunuch is a castrated male who is employed in the imperial service. For map of Ming dynasty, see fig. 4.

² ‘Arabic Script: Mightier than the Sword. Blue-and-White Brushrest,’ British Museum website, http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_object/asia/b/blue-and-white_brushrest.aspx, accessed April 24, 2008. Islam is a monotheist religion and an Abrahamic religion like Judaism and Christianity. The Qur’an is the holy text of Islam and Allah is the god of Muslims.

³ The practice of underglaze painting using blue had been established in Iran for more than a century before its occurrence in China. The Chinese imported raw material from the ‘West’ which is then melted and used to decorate the double fired and highly translucent porcelain made by the technologically advanced kilns of Jingdezhen. Oliver Watson, *Ceramics from Islamic Lands* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004), p. 61.

⁴ Arabic is the scriptural language of the Qur’anic text in Islam, whereas Persian is the more secular language of Central Asia.

production, as well as different functions, motifs, patronage and audience, I will argue that the following five items of blue-and-white ware reflect a growing presence of the Muslim eunuchs at court under the reign of Zhengde. This demonstrates an inner layer of interculturalism within the production of these blue-and-whites as Qur'anic texts (fig.1), Central Asian motifs, designs and forms were adopted by the Chinese potters at Jingdezhen in the 16th century. Moreover, the five pieces to be discussed will witness the transmission of artistic Chinese practices as well as foreign, through time and space. I will begin by considering the reasons behind such developments through looking at China's historical contact with Muslims in the 'West',⁵ and evaluating the political situation and imbalance of powers at Zhengde's court.

CHINA'S HISTORICAL CONTACT WITH ISLAM

The Han Chinese first came into contact with people of the Islam faith in 651, when the first mission from the Arab State was received at the Tang court.⁶ Ever since, gifts such as horses, decorated pitchers made of precious materials, grapes, textiles, sweets, frankincense and more have been offered to the Chinese court in hope of promoting trade relations between the two lands. In return, the Chinese present silver vessels, silk, porcelain and brocade robes. The establishment of the two silk trade routes (sea and land) made these transmissions to from Central Asia to China proper possible (fig. 2).

⁵ In this essay, I will refer to the 'West' as the territories to the west of China proper: Central Asia.

⁶ I have also read that the first Islamic envoy official sent to Emperor Gaozong was in fact the uncle of Abu I-Qasim Muhammad. Muhammad (c.570-632) is regarded by Muslims as the prophet of God and the central human figure in the world of Islam. Hans Bielenstein, *Diplomacy and trade in the Chinese world, 589-1276* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 357-8. Also, for the numbers of recorded missions from the Arabs to Tang and Song, see p. 368.

Islam, too served as a catalyst to the silk trade,” Muslim merchants and artists had intermediated Chinese motifs into Central Asia and Iran during the Tang dynasty (618-906).⁷ By then, Muslim merchants had also established autonomous communities in northwest and southeast China. Guangzhou was the site of the first Islamic community, and Quanzhou, in the modern province of Fujian had superseded as the centre of trade with West Asia during the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1278).⁸ Evidently, even before the Muslims who arrived in China with the Mongols in the Yuan dynasty, an Islamic minority had already been established in China proper. The Muslim descendants of the Yuan dynasty wave and those who arrived in China before took Chinese names and adopted Chinese culture. By late Yuan/ early Ming, the *Hui* (Muslim) ethnicity in China has emerged.

MUSLIMS SERVING THE IMPERIAL COURT DURING THE YUAN AND MING DYNASTIES

By 1280's, Khubilai Khan (r. 1271-1294) had lifted all restrictions on Chinese, Uighur and Muslim merchants and granted them a higher rank in the society,⁹ and expanded trade with Central Asia under the Yuan dynasty (fig.3). Supervisory positions at local and central government levels were also held by non-Chinese, as well as the Mongols themselves.¹⁰ Additionally, Khubilai Khan's edicts were often translated into Arabic and Persian, indicating that Muslims played an important role in government.¹¹

⁷ James Watt, *When the Silk Was Gold: Central Asian and Chinese Textiles*, (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997), p. 9.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 10.

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 15.

¹⁰ Minorities were considered more easily controllable and more loyal to the government than the majority of the Chinese.

¹¹ 'It was common practice at this time to appoint Muslims... particularly in financial administration, indicating that Muslims played an important role in government. Muslims promoted trade with the rest of Asia and served as tax collectors and financial administrators. Khubilai was also eager to use Muslim advances in astronomy, medicine, architecture, and military technology.' Ann L. Kumar, 'Review: Islam,

This establishes a precedent to the Ming dynasty's use of foreign, and particularly Muslim personnel at the imperial court.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BLUE-AND-WHITE WARE

By 14th century, due to the expansion of the Mongol empire which covered Central Asian territories, trade and diplomatic relations between Persia (present-day Iran) and China increased.¹² It was also around the same time that cobalt began to be imported from Central Asia,¹³ and potters at the imperial kiln Jingdezhen began to manufacture the first blue-and-white porcelain. According to Watson, by early 15th century, blue-and-white porcelain had been accepted in China as imperial ware.¹⁴ Since, China has also been supplying the Middle East and later Europe with enormous quantities until the 18th century.¹⁵ Although Chinese blue-and-white had set the trend for luxury ceramics around the world, Watson regards that the highest quality Chinese porcelain was still made for use at the imperial court rather than for the export market.¹⁶

Having established a brief background on the cross-cultural relations between China and Central Asia, and the coming into production of blue-and-white porcelain, I will proceed to discuss several works with Arabic/ Persian inscriptions with the six-character

the Chinese and Indonesian Historiography,' *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 46, no. 3 (August, 1987), p. 604.

¹² China had a very friendly relationship with Il Khanate at the time cultural exchanges were strong during their reign. The Il Khanate was part of the Mongol empire from 1256-1353, centered in Persia or present-day Iran. It was established by Hülegü Khan (r. 1256-65), Khubilai Khan (first emperor of Yuan dynasty China)'s younger brother. R. L. Hammers, 'Song and Mongol Elite Portraiture,' *FINE2053 Beauties and the Beasts: Song and Yuan Painting lecture notes*, March 31, 2008.

¹³ Carswell suggests that by the 15th century, 'the Chinese began to mine their own cobalt and mix it with the imported ore (Producing a softer and less striking color compared to the previous blue-and-white works). By the 16th-17th century, Chinese cobalt was generally used alone.' Carswell, p. 24.

¹⁴ Watson, p. 61.

¹⁵ It is interesting to note that it was during the end of Zhengde's reign that the Portuguese established their first direct contact with China in 1517, when Manuel I sent an embassy to Beijing, during the time when potters at Jingdezhen were filling the orders of their Muslim patrons. Carswell, p. 31.

¹⁶ Watson, p. 490.

reign mark of Zhengde, 大明正德年製, *Da Ming Zhengde Nian Zhi*, which appear to be too refined for export and suggest of cross-cultural interactions between Muslims and the Chinese court. They will also be considered in the context that Emperor Zhengde was strongly influenced by Muslim eunuchs at court and that he may have even converted to Islam.¹⁷ As a result, many of the porcelain vessels produced during his reign show Islamic influence: such as Islamic shapes and Arabic calligraphy, which was frequently used in the decoration.

BLUE-AND-WHITE TRIPOD INCENSE-BURNER

The first piece to consider is a blue-and-white tripod incense burner (fig. 6). “Porcelain incense burners would have been used by members of the Chinese elite,¹⁸ but due to the Qur’anic inscriptions on the body of this Zhengde blue-and-white incense burner, it was probably made for an audience who adhered to Islam. Such as Muslim members of the Chinese imperial court, or that it was produced for the emperor’s own use, as Zhengde was heavily surrounded by Islamic influences. The Arabic inscriptions in the roundels translate: ‘I am the tender-hearted, ask for me, you will find me, pray for me do not seek any other than me’.¹⁹ However, the encircled Arabic scripts on blue-and-white is reminiscent of the ethnic Han display and practice of writing auspicious Chinese characters such as 壽, *shou* (longevity) on various mediums. I believe there are further

¹⁷ He was also known occasionally to wear Arab dress. ‘Arabic Script: Mightier than the Sword. Blue-and-White Brushrest,’ British Museum website.

¹⁸ ‘They were found at temples or in homes and used for burning incense sticks, powders or pellets made from vanilla, aloes, wood or camphor (its scent released after heating on charcoal).’ ‘Arabic Script: Mightier than the Sword. Porcelain Incense Burner,’ British Museum website, http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/online_tours/museums_and_exhibition/arabic_script/porcelain_incense_burner.aspx, accessed April 24, 2008.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

cross-cultural interactions by placing a foreign script placed in a usually Chinese practiced decorative structure.

The blue fret border around the mouth of the censer, the band of scrolls around the neck, as well as the numerous scrolls and diamonds around the body are also incorporated as a part of its Chinese-style decoration. All are arranged in an orderly symmetric and manner. Moreover, the shape of this blue-and-white tripod incense-burner is based on Chinese bronze forms, such as the bronze tripod ding (fig. 7). This evokes the cultural transcendence of Chinese artistic practices through time.

The white of this blue-and-white incense-burner is almost translucent, and is therefore very fine. Because of its excellent quality, this piece is unlikely to have been produced for export ware, but rather, served members of the imperial family or court. Moreover, the function of this piece is for incense burning, a frequent feature of religious ritual in Islam, often used to show sacrificed to a god.²⁰ But the practice of incense burning is in fact almost universal. In Chinese practices, it is applicable to Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism, where one may also do so to pay respect to a deity or ancestor.

As a result, the cross-cultural interactions in this piece are not only from the influence of Islam in the production of imperial blue-and-white ware, or the presence of a Muslim minority at Zhengde's court. There are also the elements of crossing culture in the tripod incense-burner through time (as it is inspired by ancient Chinese bronze forms), space (its function as a censer at home, in a studio or temple of the Chinese elite) and function (incense burning is a practice in both Islamic rituals and Chinese ceremonies as gestures of offerings).

²⁰ Furthermore, incense was supplied by South Arabia and Chinese expeditions bartered porcelain and other commodities for frankincense and myrrh (plant used for incense and perfume) at Dhofar. Carswell, p. 31.

BLUE-AND-WHITE BRUSHSET WITH AN ARABIC INSCRIPTION

The second Zhengde reign piece to consider with Arabic inscription is a blue-and-white brushset (Fig. 8). A translation of the script is unavailable from the British Museum website, but gathering that it is scripture in Arabic rather than in Persian, the writing is likely to refer to the Qu'ran. Again, the idea of placing Arabic texts in a circle, like the practice in Chinese context with auspicious words is highly transcultural. The squiggly scroll-like or cloud-like motifs which are painted throughout the surface of the piece indicate the heavy use of Chinese-style decoration despite its use of Arabic inscription. A blue-cloud-collar pattern models the pedestal of the brushrest. The function of this piece is for calligraphy brushes to rest between the gaps of the porcelain stand and rather than letting the writing utensils sit on the table. The brushrest is thick-bodied and solid.

The blue-and-white brushrest with Arabic script was produced in the imperial kiln site, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province in southern China,²¹ which suggests of its courtly patronage. Moreover, I believe that the five sections (allowing four brushes to rest) which rise from the base of the brushrest look similar and match in number to the claw of a five claw dragon, an imperial symbol used only by the emperor (fig.9). It could also look like the peaks of a mountain, where the central mountain is often symbolic of the emperor in artworks through Chinese history. If so in either case, then the blue-and-white brushrest must also be a personal item of emperor Zhengde. Otherwise, as it is clearly an article for the study, this blue-and-white brushrest would have also situated well in an official or Muslim eunuch's office.

BLUE-AND-WHITE *CHANDELIER* DECORATED WITH PERSIAN INSCRIPTIONS

²¹ 'Arabic Script: Mightier than the Sword. Blue-and-White Brushrest,' British Museum website.

In contrast, the following blue-and-white piece (fig. 10) under Zhengde's reign has Persian rather than Arabic inscriptions, which implies that it was probably not evocative of the Qur'anic text, but rather, Persian poetry or sayings. The inscriptions translate to 'I have reached a full blow of misfortune, source of all sorrow.'²² Yet, its audience or patron during Zhengde's reign must have appreciated its Persian context and symbolisms in order for this candle holder to have been produced at the imperial kiln, Jingdezhen. Used as a decorative holder for candles, the blue-and-white *chandelier* is hexagonal in form and stands on six feet. The modelling of the feet is emphasized by blue-cloud elements. There are four-petaled flowers bordering each Persian inscription on the six sides, and three different borders are painted on the rim, shoulder and base of the holder; all these features are decorative in a Chinese manner. On the other hand, the candle holder's geometric form reminds the audience of something foreign and exotic, as do the Islamic floral textile-like pattern (fig. 11.) 'foliage scrolls in the spandrels'.²³ Thus, the pictorial language combined in this candle holder addresses the East 'West' cross-culturalisms during Zhengde's reign.

Moreover, the candle holder is thick bodied and 'imitates Persian metal ware in form, and without a doubt it is part of a group of ritual vases.'²⁴ Because the website of the Grandidier Collection only provides information in French, I have tried my best to translate and make sense of what is available to my understanding. With the above claim, I believe that the next item is what the Grandidier Collection is possibly referring to as 'a

²² 'Chandelier à Décor d'Inscriptions Persanes,' *Chefs-d'oeuvres de la Collection Grandidier*, Grandidier Collection website. <http://www.guimet-grandidier.fr/html/4/selection/notice/notice-imp.htm?Id=1592>, accessed April 24, 2008.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ 'Ce chandelier, imité d'une orfèvrerie persane par la forme, faisait sans doute partie d'un ensemble de vases rituels.' *Ibid.*

group of ritual vases' related to the current candle holder. In terms of their style, motifs, inscriptions and their thicker bodied forms, the blue-and-white Zhengde *chandelier* is in several ways similar to the following globular flower vase (fig. 12), also of the Zhengde reign.

GLOBULAR VASE WITH ARABIC INSCRIPTIONS

Like the previous blue-and-white ware, the *chandelier*, this globular vase with Arabic inscription is also thick bodied and sturdy. Therefore, practical of its function in holding water to feed flower roots. Its unique shape is perhaps also evoked by Persian metal ware, such as the Celestial Globe (fig.13).²⁵ as Muslims extremely interested and excelled in astronomy. In its motifs, the globular flower vase also has foliage scrolls surrounding the inscriptions, though not as dense as those on the *chandelier*. There are five holes at the top of the vase, corresponding to its surrounding five-petaled flower design. Again, I wonder whether this number of openings has a direct correlation with the emperor's imperial symbol, the five-clawed dragon. Moreover, the modelling of the feet here is also accented by Chinese blue-cloud elements, just like the *chandelier* and brushrest, and thus giving the vase an essence of hybridity in contrast with the foreign inscription and foliage pattern.

However, amidst all the similarities, one obvious differentiation between the *chandelier* and the vase is that the inscriptions in this piece are referred to as Arabic rather than Persian, thus bearing religious associations. The inscription is immediately bordered by a diamond shape and encircled by a plant like pattern on each of the four edges on the outside. A translation of the Arabic inscriptions of this vase is also

²⁵ Muslims were extremely interested and advanced in astronomy, particularly during the Islamic Golden Age (8th-13th centuries) and had developed astronomical models such as the *Celestial Globe* (fig. 11).

unavailable, where Wen Fong and James Watt suggest that the texts are ‘so poorly written or copied that they make no sense.’²⁶ Nevertheless, the blue-and-white pieces discussed so far authenticate the idea that the Zhengde emperor was in favour of Islam enough that Arabic and Persian inscriptions were permitted on official wares (whether for Muslim members of the court, or for the emperor’s own personal), perhaps on the assumption that the inscription had some religious significance.

LIFE OF MUSLIM EUNUCHS DURING THE MING DYNASTY

The objects discussed above, the brushset, globular vase, candle holder and incense burner are items which would have situated well in a literati environment, such as a studio.²⁷ According to Huang Ray, eunuchs after the middle period of the Ming dynasty who had qualified in becoming the Director of Ceremonies had graduated from the Inner Palace School, and given a classical education no different from that of the bureaucratic, after having been screened for unusual talent and potential.²⁸ Senior Eunuchs also had the ability to read and write, and the power to handle court papers. Since the emperor customarily signed only several documents a day, most state papers carried finishing touches by those eunuchs. Therefore, eunuchs were not just domestic servants who rose to meddle in state affairs.²⁹ They also held bureaucratic positions, which might explain

²⁶ Wen C. Fong and James Watt, *Possessing the Past: Treasures from the National Palace Museum, Taipei* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996), p. 445.

²⁷ ‘Zhengde pieces with Arabic calligraphy and six-character or four-character marks were either items for the study of an official or utilitarian vessels such as dishes and bowls. They also incorporate Chinese-style decoration.’ ‘Arabic Script: Mightier than the Sword. Blue-and-White Brushrest,’ British Museum website.

²⁸ A Director of Ceremonies handled court papers and employed several senior eunuchs to examine these documents before reporting to the throne. During the close-door session with the emperor in the morning, it was the duty of these half-dozen eunuchs to advise the sovereign either to read the complete text of the memorial or merely to scan the significant parts of it, giving it close attention to certain names and arguments. Ray Huang, *1587, A Year of No Significance: The Ming Dynasty in Decline* (Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 19-20.

²⁹ Even during the earlier years of the Ming dynasty, eunuchs have held special positions in court. During the reign of the first Ming emperor, Hongwu (r. 1368-98), eunuchs were frequently dispatched to tributary states as the sovereign’s personal envoys and to the provinces as tax auditors, This suggests of their

the use of Arabic inscribed blue-and-white items of the study such as the pieces discussed above. Moreover, central to Ray Huang's argument, eunuchs represented the personal will of the Emperor, while officials represented the alternate political will of bureaucracy. As Zhengde was determined to carry out his own concept of monarchy rather than that of his courtiers, he gathered around himself a staff of eunuchs when the bureaucrats refused to cooperate.³⁰

BLUE-AND-WHITE BOWL WITH ARABIC INSCRIPTION

Alternatively, a Zhengde blue-and-white bowl with Arabic inscriptions (fig. 14) will be briefly discussed here as it does not belong to the group of items for the study. Rather, it serves as a utilitarian vessel. A blue fret border is painted around the rim of the porcelain bowl, in contrast with the Arabic inscriptions on the inside (bordered by a scroll-like pattern) and outside (along with floral designs) of the piece, it is evident of the stylistic nuances between Chinese and Central European practices. A translation of the inscription is unavailable from the Freer Gallery Washington website. Regardless, this blue-and-white ware displays the patron's interest and identification with an alternative culture in China proper. Judging from the image available, the quality of this bowl is excellent and refined like the Zhengde incense burner with Arabic inscriptions. The body of this blue-and-white bowl is also very thin. The bowl's site of production at the imperial kilns of Jingdezhen and quality suggest of its imperial patronage or commission by Muslim court members during Zhengde's reign.

presence as more than just domestic servants. *Ibid*, p. 19. For example, Zhenghe, the famous eunuch and mariner who was also a Muslim under emperor Yongle (r. 1402-1424).

³⁰ After 1517, Zhengde often absented himself from the capital for prolonged periods. During his absences, the office of the grand-secreary was maintained by him mainly as a center for transmitting messages and made little use of civil officials for decision-making. *Ibid*, p.8. Also, for a discussion on the units which the eunuchs under Zhengde gained control of, see Appendix I.

CONCLUSIONS

Through consulting different sources by both Chinese and Western scholars, I have found that Chinese books tend to be more hesitant about (in fact, avoid completely) discussing the presence of Muslim minority in court.³¹ Although having discovered that eunuchs under emperor Zhengde grew to have a strong and powerful presence at the imperial court, it is still uncertain as to the number of them who were actually devoted to Islam. If they were, the question of whether they were ethnically Chinese has also been left open by historians. Nevertheless, it is evident that Muslim members of the imperial court gained enough influence over or had so inclined the Zhengde emperor in favor of Islam that Arabic or Persian inscriptions were permitted on official wares. As the eunuchs were separated from bureaucracy and were holding office at the emperor's interest, they were responsible to the sovereign himself. Therefore, the eunuchs could interact with emperor Zhengde on a personal level, impacting his spiritual beliefs, and artistic tastes and sensibilities, as reflected by the blue-and-white wares with Arabic or Persian inscriptions discussed in this paper.³²

The fact that I cannot read Persian or Arabic, or know the Qur'an has made it difficult to decipher whether these pieces were secular or religiously affiliated with Islam. Yet, it is certain that in Central Asia, Qur'anic scripts tend to be written in Arabic, while secular poetry and verses tend to be written in Persian. Based on the catalogue entries from various museum websites and books, I have come to the conclusion that most of

³¹ The references which refer specifically to 'Muslim' eunuchs in court were by John Carswell, James Watt and the British Museum website. Zhang Renzong in *Zhengde di* has avoided discussing the religious affiliations of the eunuchs under Zhengde completely, despite lengthy and in-depth descriptions of their role and power.

³² Furthermore, the importance of a powerful Muslim minority at the court of Beijing particularly in the late 15th and early 16th century is also indicated by the many mosques built at this time, such as the Niujie Mosque in Beijing, first built during the Tang dynasty but rebuilt during the Ming. 'Arabic Script: Mightier than the Sword. Porcelain Incense Burner,' British Museum website.

these items under the reign of Zhengde were inscribed with Arabic, and thus intended for their Islamic messages to be displayed in the Chinese court.³³

While we cannot deny the possibility that the Arabic or Persian inscriptions on the incense burner, vase, candle holder, brushrest and bowl might have been for mere decorative purposes rather than serving as items associated with the Islam faith, they still display their patrons' taste, interest and acknowledgment of an alternative culture from the 'West' within the Chinese court. As argued by James Cuno, president and director of the Art Institute of Chicago, the basic truth of culture is that it is 'always mongrel, made of numerous and diverse influences from contact with new and strange experience.'³⁴ Thus, it is through art and other tangible items of the past which provide for the evidence of the interrelatedness of cultures. It is demonstrated in this case with the hybridity of Jingdezhen blue-and-white porcelain with Arabic scripts under the Zhengde reign, which thrived to be cross-cultural in different layers, through functions and styles, 'across time and place in China' and between China and the 'West.'³⁵ At the same time, these blue-and-whites are authenticating the presence of a Muslim minority during emperor Zhengde's reign in the Ming dynasty.

³³ 'The earliest known examples of these [blue-and-white porcelains and bronzes inscribed in Arabic script] date to the reign of Emperor Hongzhi (1488-1505), while the bulk are from the reign of Zhengde.' 'Arabic Script: Mightier than the Sword. Porcelain Incense Burner,' British Museum website.

³⁴ James Cuno, 'Who Owns the Past,' *Yale Global Online* (21 April, 2008), <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/display.article?id=10678>, accessed 24, April, 2008.

³⁵ 'The writing of Chinese art often stresses continuity at the expense of change... while difference within the field of practice across time and place in China is underplayed.' Craig Clunas, *Art in China*, (Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 9.

ILLUSTRATIONS



Fig. 1. *Pages from a Qur'an Manuscript*. Early 10th century. Egypt of Syria. Brown and red ink, and gold on vellum. Louvre Museum, Paris.



Fig. 2. *Map of the Silk Road which Marco Polo (1254-1324) traveled across.*

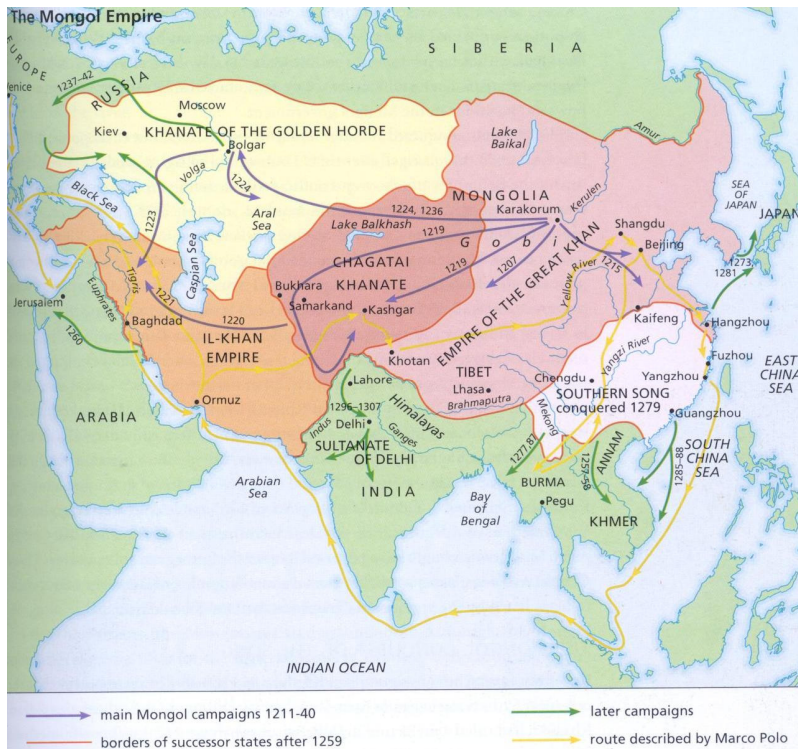


Fig. 3. Map of the Mongol Empire.



Fig. 4. Ming China's contact with the outside world.



Fig. 5. Anonymous, *The Zhengde Emperor* (r. 1506-21). Ming dynasty (1368-1644). National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Fig. 6. *Porcelain Incense Burner*. Ming dynasty, Zhengde mark and period (1506-1521). White porcelain with underglaze blue decoration. Height 12.4 cm; Diameter 14 cm. The British Museum, London



Fig. 7. *Bronze Ding (Ritual Food Vessel)*. Shang dynasty (12th-11th century BCE). Height: 20.3 cm. The British Museum, London.



Fig. 8. *Blue-and-white Brushset with an Arabic Inscription*. Ming dynasty, reign of Zhengde (1506-21). White porcelain with underglaze blue decoration. The British Museum, London.



Fig. 9. *Panel from an imperial Chinese silk dragon robe embroidered in silk and gold thread*. 17th century, early Qing dynasty. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.



Fig. 10. *Chandelier*. Ming dynasty, Zhengde period (1506-1521). Height: 14.9 cm; Width: 14cm. White porcelain with underglaze blue decoration. Musée Guimet, Grandidier Collection, Paris.



Fig. 11. *Mihrab*. 1354–55. Isfahan, Iran. Mosaic of monochrome-glaze tiles on frit body; set into plaster. 343.1 x 288.7cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Fig. 12. *Globular Flower Vase with Persian Inscription*. Ming dynasty, mark and period of Zhengde (r.1506-21). White porcelain with underglaze blue decoration. H. 19.6 cm; D. of base 12.1 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Fig. 13. *Celestial Globe*. 1144-1145 AD. Syria or Iran. Engraved Brass with Silver Inlays. Diameter: 16.5cm. Louvre Museum, Paris.



Fig. 14. 1. *Bowl*, 1506-1521. Ming dynasty. Zhengde reign. Porcelain with cobalt decoration under colorless glaze. H 12.3 W 28 cm. Jingdezhen, China. Freer Gallery Washington, Washington D.C.

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APPENDIX I.

Zhang Renzhong, *Zhengde di*, (Changchun: Jilin Wen Shi Chu Ban She, 1996), p.42.

(自劉瑾用事，朝臣受盡摧折，而內官却縱橫而行，權勢大張。)

其時太監布列內外，盤据要津，十三省有鎮守太監，各邊有鎮守、分守、守備、監鎗太監，切近京師關隘口等處有守備太監，京師有提督宮太監及眾多坐營坐司監，又有提督九門太監。太監除典兵外，又經提倉場，提督營造、珠池、銀礦、市舶、織染，無所不預。