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Foreword

Iran, as an important country located on the East-West trade routes, has endured many foreign invasions over thousands of years. The first was the Greek invasion in the fourth century BCE, followed by the Arab Muslim invasion in the seventh century, and later the Mongol invasion in the thirteenth century.

After their invasion of Egypt, the Muslims crossed North Africa and headed for Spain. Egypt had an ancient civilization, but its continuation was interrupted by the invasion and later transformed into Arab civilization. On the contrary, the Spaniards resisted the attack and drove the foreign invaders out of their land. The Persians, however, adopted a compromise approach in the face of foreign aggression. In response to these invasions, they embraced the new religion while preserving their traditional customs, creating a new civilization by merging two cultures and ensuring Persian elements remained prominent.

Such processes of absorption and assimilation recurred in every subsequent foreign invasion. In the early stage of each invasion, the Persians always conceded to the social organizations, politics, and culture of the foreign invaders. But, once the military power of the aggressor weakened, they would change these religious beliefs and customs that had been accepted. This approach had long been adopted in Persian court art, including painting and bookbinding, leading to the creation of numerous brilliant and unparalleled works of art. Despite the influence of foreign cultures, Persian art has always managed to preserve its own traditions.

Therefore, this book also examines the historical events that contributed to the change in the Persian painting art.

Given Persia's many foreign invasions and its numerous ethnic groups and dialects within its borders, it is impossible to ignore the foreign influence on the development of Persian painting techniques. Although Persian painting boasts its own excellence and uniqueness, these characteristics didn't stand out from the beginning. Only through the passage of time and the long-standing external influence did Persian painting develop its current depth.

The continuous evolution of all arts has benefited from the exchange and mutual influence of different cultural styles. Art scholars and researchers have found that in ancient artworks across various categories, the decorative and expressive elements can be found in similar works of their predecessors. Such interconnection has contributed to the continuation of ancient civilizations such as those of Egypt, China, India, Greece, and Persia.[1]

As mentioned earlier, Persia has historically been a melting pot of Eastern and Western cultures. During the Sasanian Empire, Persian aesthetic principles underwent pivotal changes. The artistic accomplishments of this period permeated a vast area from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to China in the east. The Silk Road, the primary commercial and diplomatic route between the East and the West since ancient times, facilitated the mutual influence among Persian, Greek, Roman, Indian, and Chinese cultures, shaping these great and marvelous civilizations along the route. The mutual influence between these cultures continued until the Mongol expansion. With the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the West Asian region, two streams of economic and cultural interaction emerged between the East and the West. Silk spread from the East to the West, while Buddhism and Persian-Greek art spread to China. With the close contact between Manichaeans and Buddhists, many elements of Buddhist art infiltrated Manichaean art. Meanwhile, Central Asia Buddhist art absorbed Persian artistic traditions. For instance, the cultural and artistic influence from the Sasanian Empire and the Ashkāniān Empire in Persia appears in some mural remains in the Dunhuang region of western China. In addition, the ancient artifacts

[1] Zeki Mohammad Hossein, *China and the Arts of Islam* (*Chin va Honarha i Islami*), Art Academy Press (Entesharat i Farhangstan i Honar), p. 9.

found in the Turpan area[2] reflect that Manichaeism and the illustrations of its religious classic, *Arjang*,[3] were of vital importance when the ancient Persian stories and myths were relayed to the peoples of Central Asia, especially some of the peoples of China. All these make a strong case for the close connection between the arts popular in Central Asia and China. Dr. Arthur Upham Pope[4] observed: "Brushes became popular in Persia in a short time, and the technique of manufacturing painted decorative vessels spread from Persia to China". It is well-known that Chinese and Persian arts both boast a long history, and both civilizations have grown and expanded as history progressed. For 5,000 years (3000 BCE to present), Chinese art has featured uniform craftsmanship, consistent technique, and excellent style. The Persians have known about and learned from Chinese art since ancient times. It is said that there were Chinese artists and craftsmen serving the Sasanian Empire by molding statues and making exquisite works of art. In Chinese textile workshops, fabrics with decorative motifs from the Sasanian Empire were produced and similarly, Persian workshops crafted cloth decorated with Chinese motifs and Chinese paintings. These cultural, artistic, and trade exchanges between the two countries have created favorable conditions for understanding the cultural heritage of both. This relationship began in the early Tang dynasty, developed in the Song dynasty, peaked during the reign of the Mongols in the Yuan dynasty (1280–1368), and continued through the Timurid[5] (the Ming dynasty) and the Safavid[6] (the early Qing dynasty) Empire.

In the thirteenth century, the Mongol attack and conquest of Persia (1220–1258), led by Genghis Khan, introduced Chinese art to Persia, promoting the development of various Persian arts, including its own painting and bookbinding arts.

[2] Turpan was one of the important commercial, cultural, and artistic centers in Central Asia, and once became the southern capital of Uyghur in the Middle Ages.

[3] Mani was a religious prophet and painter in Persia. It is said that he studied painting in China and painted the illustrations in *Arjang*, the classic of Manichaeism.

[4] Arthur Upham Pope (1881–1969), American expert in archaeology and art research, famous in Persian art research.

[5] The Timurid Empire, established during the Mongol rule, governing the entirety of Persia.

[6] The Safavid Empire, with Shia Islam the official religion established in Persia in the sixteenth century, lasted from 1502 to 1736.

The Mongols established the Yuan dynasty in China and the Il-Khanid Empire[7] in Persia. Through the Mongols, the relationship between these two ancient civilizations reached its pinnacle over a span of nearly 200 years.

The Chinese reverence for beauty has long fascinated Iran. During the Il-Khanid Empire, Chinese artists were sent to Persia to serve the Il-Khanid court. After the Mongols conquered Persia, they continuously imported Chinese goods—fabrics, ceramic utensils, and handicrafts—by land and sea, while also exchanging envoys, facilitating Persian understanding and inspiration from Chinese art.

Therefore, the reign of the Il-Khanid led to two major achievements in Persian painting. First, Chinese artistic traditions were introduced into Persia as a new source for Persian painters to draw upon. Second, the foundation was laid for a new method of artistic creation in which artists gathered in libraries or royal academies for collective work. In this new cultural climate, the widespread activities of painters in bookbinding art were quite remarkable.

With the support of the Il-Khanid government, the compilation of academic and historical books flourished. Rashid al-Din Fazlollah Hamadani,[8] the Grand Vizier of the first Mongol ruler of the Il-Khanid, Ghazan Khan Mahmud,[9] ordered to build a city-within-a-city known as Rab i Rashidi[10] in Tabriz, which was dotted with beautiful buildings and various art workshops. There, Persian and Chinese artists collaborated to compile what are considered to be some of the most valuable illustrated books and masterpieces of literature and history in the Persian language, including the illustrated *The Book of Kings* and the *Compendium of Chronicle*. The latter presents a historical overview of countries worldwide,

[7] The Il-Khanid Empire, also known as the Il-khanate or Ilkhanids, a feudal dynasty established by the Mongols after their attack on Persia, one of the four major khanates (the others being the Golden Horde, the Chagatai Khanate, and the House of Ögedei) of the Mongol period.

[8] See Sect. 1.3 in Chapter 1.

[9] Ghazan Khan Mahmud (1295–1304), the most outstanding ruler of the Il-Khanid Empire. To gain the support of the upper class of Islam and Muslims in Persia, he renounced Buddhism in favor of Islam, changed his name to Mahmud, ordered his court ministers, nobles, army, and Mongols within the country to convert to Islam, and later established Shia Islam as the state religion.

[10] See Sect. 1.3 in Chapter 1.

including Mongolia and China, and is recognized by researchers and historians as the only medieval encyclopedic document of world history. Therefore, I examined *The Book of Kings* and the *Compendium of Chronicle* and some other important illustrated books from the same period to explore the mutual artistic influences between China and Iran. The selection of books was based mainly on the significant value of *The Book of Kings* and the *Compendium of Chronicle* in Chinese and Iranian history, as well as on the aesthetic characteristics of the painting art and the style of illustration and bookbinding of these works. Under the guidance of Professor Luo Shiping, I titled my doctoral thesis "Chinese Painting Elements in Persian Miniature Art: Centering on the *Compendium of Chronicle* and *The Book of Kings*". In the research, I found that numerous foreign researchers and Iranian scholars have extensively studied the influence of Chinese art on Persian painting. I have consulted many books in this respect, mostly edited and published by foreign researchers, though capacity constraints prevented an exhaustive study of all relevant materials. Of course, when quoting from these materials in this book, I will present the titles, authors, and details, with additional explanations in footnotes. My research drew from a variety of books and articles in Chinese, Persian, and English, with a detailed table of contents included at the end of this book. Some online information is also quoted in the book as supplements. Naturally, this book has its shortcomings, but hopefully, there is an opportunity to correct them in due course.

Tehran, Iran Nasrin Dastan

Preface

Both China and Persia (present-day Iran) are ancient civilizations that have played pivotal roles in the development of human culture, art, and technology. Undoubtedly, the Silk Road has brought the two countries closer together and further enhanced their cultural and artistic exchange. In addition, it gradually expanded the mutual influence in economy, trade, science, technology, art, culture between China and Persia. Artists from both countries were often inspired by each other's artwork, trying to blend their art and culture. These exchanges led to the development of some art styles that influenced later art genres.

A close examination of paintings, musical compositions, sculptures, artifacts, and ceramics from both nations reveals notable similarities, highlighting their deep cultural and artistic ties. While artistic and cultural interactions predated the Yuan dynasty, the close communication between the Yuan and Il-Khanid governments paved the way for remarkable artistic and cultural growth in the two countries.

Historically, Chinese art has influenced Persian art, peaking during the Yuan dynasty. The primary reason was the blood relation between Kublai Khan, the main founder of the Yuan dynasty, and Hülegü Khan, the key figure of the Il-Khanid Empire, both of whom were of the Borjigin clan. This connection provided a solid foundation for good bilateral relations. Therefore, the Yuan dynasty holds a significant place in the history of interactions between China and Persia.

With the support of the Yuan and Il-Khanid governments, some Chinese artists and craftsmen were sent to Persia to serve the Il-Khanid court alongside their Persian counterparts. They were mainly engaged in bookbinding and painting—both highly popular arts at the time.

During the Islamic period of Persia, illustrations generally fell into the category of Persian miniatures. In the early Islamic period, with the spread of Manichaeism, Persian paintings were introduced to China from the Western Regions and evolved during the Yuan dynasty. Meanwhile, Chinese painting and bookbinding art were also introduced to Persia. At the time, Persian painters combined the Chinese painting techniques with their own unique artistic views according to their taste and interest.

Notably, Persian painting in the Yuan dynasty was influenced by the artistic styles in both Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq) and Byzantium, while blending both Chinese and Persian artistic traditions. For example, some Persian painters serving at the Il-Khanid court adopted the painting methods of their Chinese counterparts, drawing inspiration from the patterns found on Chinese utensils and fabrics, which popularized certain Chinese elements in Persian painting.

In summary, Persian painters assimilated influences from the painting traditions of other countries, including China, while retaining the essential characteristics of their own painting tradition. For example, Persian illustrations during the Yuan dynasty generally borrowed Chinese techniques of painting hills, rivers, and clouds—but not for the blank-filling method. This indicates that while preserving Persian painting art, Persian painters also adopted Chinese painting art traditions with an open-minded approach, making the combination of different styles a main feature of Persian painting art.

I studied at the Central Academy of Fine Arts with a research focus on Han and Tang art and earned my doctorate there. This book expands on my doctoral dissertation. Herein, I extend my gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Luo Shiping, for his guidance and suggestions during the topic selection and the writing processes. His high level of dedication and sense of responsibility is fully demonstrated. I am also deeply grateful to Professor Zhang Xiping, former director of the Sinology Research Center of Beijing Foreign Studies University, for supporting the publication of this book. At the same time, thanks should be given to the president, editors, and other staff of Elephant Press. This book could not be published successfully without their support.

Finally, I hope this book helps readers better understand the relationship between China and Iran.

Tehran, Iran
In the spring of 2022

Nasrin Dastan

Competing Interests The author has no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this manuscript.

Radiant Interplay of Chinese Painting and Persian Miniature Art

Among the Eurasian civilization connected by the ancient Silk Road, Persian miniature art emerged in the Il-Khanid Empire, established by the Mongols. A new round of dialogue between the two great civilizations—China and Persia—was recorded in ancient manuscripts such as the *Compendium of Chronicle* (*Jami'al-Tawarikh*), *The Benefits of Animals* (*Manafe-ol Hayavan*), and *The Book of Kings*. These masterpieces not only document a new world in words but also present exquisite handpainted illustrations. If you examine these handmade illustrations closely, you may find many Chinese painting elements—some easily identifiable, others ambiguous or hard to distinguish. It is both challenging and interesting to comprehend and interpret its "to be", "not to be", or "not similar, yet similar". Perhaps this mysterious art phenomenon, which can only be understood but not expressed, attracted Dr. Nasrin Dastan, a Persian art historian. She came to Beijing from Tehran to study Chinese art history in the Central Academy of Fine Arts, and later started her research on Chinese painting elements in Persian miniature art. This book now presented to Chinese readers is the result of Dr. Nasrin's research.

Chinese elements in Persian miniatures may seem straightforward, but as you dive deeper, they become much more complicated. Take the illustrations in the *Compendium of Chronicle* manuscripts as an example. The earliest one was created by Rashid al-Din Fazlollah Hamadani in Rab i Rashidi, Tabriz, during the Il-Khanid Empire. Chinese painters from the Yuan dynasty also participated in the project. Therefore, the

Chinese painting elements in that manuscript are considered to be the purest. Unfortunately, this edition was lost in later tumultuous events. The four editions that are currently circulating were all compiled between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries. According to textual research, the edition most similar to the original *Compendium of Chronicle* manuscript is the Arabic version (Scottish edition) stored in Edinburgh University Library in Scotland, whose transcription and illustrations were completed around 1314. Other versions such as the London, Turkish, and Persian editions were all compiled between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. Similarly, there are more than eight editions of *The Book of Kings* manuscripts compiled in different periods and preserved in different countries and regions. To conduct research in this field, one must collect different editions of various ages, compare their strengths and weaknesses, and distinguish their calligraphic features and painting styles, in order to eliminate the uncertainties in the materials.

Dr. Nasrin did not shy away from the difficulty. Instead, she rose to the occasion, utilizing extensive resources and carefully organizing all the information. She carried out her research in multiple fields, including book editions, languages and texts, and painting elements. Like unraveling threads from a cocoon, she extracted persuasive evidence from the messy clues and pushed open the door of Persian miniature art with her diligence and perseverance.

According to the ancient manuscripts cited by Dr. Nasrin, some Chinese painting elements in Persian miniatures are quite intuitive. For example, in the illustrations of the Scottish edition of the *Compendium of Chronicle* and *The Book of Kings of Demotte*, readers can find dragons, phoenixes, cranes, lions, lotus flowers, and landscapes including hills, rivers, trees, stones, as well as Ganoderma lucidum-shaped clouds. These are all typical subjects of Chinese paintings during the Yuan and Ming dynasties and common decorative patterns in Chinese ceramics and silk fabrics. There is also heraldic attire, typical examples of which are the attire and swords of Chinese emperors and Mongolian knights depicted in the *Compendium of Chronicle*. These Chinese painting elements are intuitive and classic in Persian miniature art.

Some other patterns can be seen as the variations shown in Chinese paintings. The most typical example is the paintings of Chinese emperors in all dynasties illustrated in the *Compendium of Chronicle*, where a "one-emperor-with-two-attendants" composition is adopted. The emperor

wears the coronation attire in the portrait with his name written horizontally at the bottom. Such non-Persian portrait style more closely resembles the figure painting method in Tibet, China. Following such pattern, 85 portraits of ancient Chinese emperors and Khotan kings were painted in the Golestan Palace edition of the *Compendium of Chronicle* manuscript in Persia. The story of Sakyamuni was depicted in a handscroll composition, partly decorated with hills and trees—a style common in Chinese Buddhist temple murals or Buddhist scriptures during the Yuan and Ming dynasties.

Some miniatures also absorb the Chinese painting philosophy of "reflecting the true shape of the object". For example, in *The Book of Kings*, painters mostly sketched with ink lines and applied light colors when drawing Chinese emperors. In the *Compendium of Chronicle*, hills and rocks show a touch of Chinese landscape painting style. Moreover, the technique of depicting birds in these miniatures is obviously inspired by the vivid images of Chinese flower-and-bird paintings.

In her research, Dr. Nasrin also provided insights into how these Chinese painting elements influenced Persian miniature art. Two observations are particularly noteworthy. Firstly, in the context of Persian painting history, these miniatures with Chinese painting elements are usually categorized as the Mongolian School, which existed from the thirteenth century to the fifteenth century. It can be inferred from the name of "Mongolian School" that the Chinese painting style spread to Persia from east to west, starting from the establishment of Mongol Il-Khanid Empire. This process lasted for more than 200 years, so Chinese painting has made a historic contribution to the Persian painting history. Secondly, historical materials show that Sino-Persian exchanges were more often government-led. Due to the ethnic ties between the Chinese Yuan dynasty, the suzerain state, and the Persian khanate, a number of Yuan painters were invited to contribute to the *Compendium of Chronicle* illustrations. This is usually considered to be the beginning of the incorporation of Chinese painting elements into Persian painting. Since then, there have been frequent diplomatic embassies between China and Persia, and painters were among them. According to Persian documents, between 1412 and 1419, there were still Timurid-Ming embassy exchange, with painters engaged in artistic activities. It can be concluded that the Chinese painting elements presented in Persian miniature art are mainly due to the official promotion between the two countries.

In the meanwhile, the book industries in China and Persia also flourished from the thirteenth century to fifteenth century. Through the confluence of history, Chinese book illustrations and Persian manuscript miniatures, each with unique pictorial form, brilliantly reflect one another, together recording a new chapter in the Silk Road's artistic narrative.

Beijing
March 30, 2022

Luo Shiping

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