

Kangli Naonao (1295-1345) and His Cursive Calligraphy: Reconsidering “Sinification” during the Mongol Yuan Period

Lu Hui-wen
Graduate Institute of Art History
National Taiwan University

Abstract

Kangli Naonao is one of the most acclaimed calligraphers of the Mongol Yuan period (1260-1368). The Kangli clan was of non-Han origin, but starting with Naonao's father in the late 1290s, the family produced accomplished Confucian scholars, politicians, and poets. Naonao himself was especially successful and since the early twentieth century has come to represent the sinification of non-Han people during the Mongol Yuan period. This paper investigates Naonao's cursive calligraphy, totaling twenty-five pieces on paper and in stone, tracing their stylistic origins and tackling problems of dating and authentication. I demonstrate that Naonao's calligraphy shows stylistic elements from various geographical regions and subcultural groups. This encourages us to ponder whether the “Sinification” model is adequate in considering the complex cultural scenario in the Mongol Yuan empire with its enormous territory and multiple ethnic groups.

Keywords: Kangli Naonao, cursive calligraphy, Sinification, Mongol Yuan