

Centre for the Humanities and Medicine
The University of Hong Kong

Convergence and Collisions: Disease, Religion, and Healing in Asia

**Alchemy, Medicine and Religion Across Asia: A lesson from
Rashīd al-Dīn of Hamadan (1247-1318)**

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Among the prolific works of the eminent Jewish- born court physician and minister Rashīd al-Dīn of Hamadan (1247-1318) numbers one which appears to be the earliest extant monograph about Chinese medicine from the western end of the so-called Silk Routes. It contains substantial tracts of translation that are attributed, often anachronistically, to a host of legendary Chinese figures, known Chinese authors, editors and compilers. He adds to their distant and exotic authority his own commentaries and interpretations, doing for medicine what he had conceived of in his vision of a culturally inclusive world history. Following the conversion of his Mongolian ruler, Ghāzān (1271-1304) to Islam we find that, in his interpretations of the Chinese source materials, he made unique compromises and innovations with prevailing social, cultural and political realities that remain poignant to us today. In undertaking this extraordinary translation project, Rashīd al-Dīn takes his place in a tradition of Jewish translators and commentators on medicine who have acted as cultural intermediaries. This presentation will combine lecture and film.