

Justice of the Khan: Writing the Lives of the Jarqučis in the *Yuan Shi*

Edith Chen (Princeton University)

Prior scholarship on Mongol legal history debated the nature of traditional Mongol law, which consist of the decrees of Chinggis Khan (*jasaq*), and traditional Mongolian customs (*yosun*). My interests are in the personnel and procedures of officials involved in the justice system. I will use the official biographies of the judges (*jarquči* and *yeke jarquči*) in the *Yuan Shi* and trace the institutional history from Chinggis until the last Yuan emperor, Shun-di. The biographical section of the work enables us to take a sustained look at the origins and careers of the judges, offering a chance for comparison across historiographical traditions.

The *Yuan Shi* biographies of individuals who had served as *jarqučis* in the Mongol empire confirm some of the existing scholarship on such figures. They often came to the court early and began their career in the imperial bodyguards (*keshig*), and continued to serve in military as well as civil capacities. They were literate and knowledgeable of multiple languages, which would have facilitated in governing a linguistically diverse empire. The post was powerful at the outset of the empire but its jurisdiction appears to have shrunk with time to settling matters within the imperial clan, especially after Qubilai's reign. The didactic impulse behind the *liezhuan* official biographical tradition made the judges appear, at first glance, to be the bastions of justice. However, by choosing to emphasize commendable acts of leniency and compassionate figures, the biographies suggest that these illustrative characters and episodes were not typical for such officials of the time. A comparison between what Chinese, Arabic, and Persian sources offer about the justice system in the Mongol empire could help construct a more nuanced picture.