

Joint Trials as a Key to Local History and Empire-wide Dynamics

Florence Hodous (Renmin University)

Joint trials (yuehui), where people of different ethnicities or occupational categories would be judged jointly by leaders of their respective groups, are known as characteristic of the Yuan dynasty. In fact, however, they were part of a much wider phenomenon, spanning the empire and involving many Mongol-appointed judges (jarghuchi) as well as local legal personnel, among others. Judicial trials were one important place of encounter between the ethnicities of the Mongol empire – a space in which ethnic differences were clarified, defined, and used in order to showcase differences among the subjects of the empire. Such trials link the local histories and individual fates of subjects with the regional histories of the development of such trials, and promotion of particular legal viewpoints, and finally the empire-wide history of the trials themselves and of relationships among different ethnicities.

Despite their importance, a more systematic analysis and investigation of the joint trials in the Mongol empire is still lacking. This paper will analyze trials aggregated in a database newly developed by Prof. Michael Fuller of UC Irvine, which will bring together detailed accounts of trials from the Yuan Dian Zhang as well as other, legal and narrative, sources from the Mongol empire. The database will enable both qualitative and quantitative analysis.

This study will contribute to our understanding of the legal landscape of the Mongol empire, towards understanding the joint trials and the institution of jarghuchi, which were so crucial to the development and functioning of the empire.