

## **Conquerors' Qualities? Reading Elements of 'Mongol' Identities and Social Capital in *Yuanshi* Biographical Narratives**

Geoffrey Humble. Abstract of the paper presented at the AAS Annual Meeting (Philadelphia, 27-30 March, 2014)

The *liezhuan* of the *Yuanshi*, or *History of the Yuan Dynasty*, present rich source material on several hundred individuals prominent under Chinggisid rule in China, plus their families, colleagues, offices and activities. These portrayals have been mined for information on Inner Asian and late imperial Chinese culture and history, but the nuance of their varied and interesting assignation of elements of 'Mongol' identities to their subjects invites further examination. Including the formal ascription of ethnonyms and names, transliterated vocabulary, symbolic numbers and accounts of martial prowess and excess, these elements – often somewhat inconsistently employed – seem to function both as static taxonomies of the individuals to whom they are applied, and as dynamic value-laden elements of narratives juxtaposed for didactic effect. Taking a sample of linked biographical narratives from the Ögödeid period this paper will interrogate their deployment of 'Mongol' elements across boundaries, whether spatial, civil/military or intra-familial, questioning the meaning carried by these markers in narrative context and with a view to assessing the social capital adhering to these conquerors' qualities. Re-reading these elements in the comparative structure of the *liezhuan* will allow us to ask new questions about the political and editorial context of the work, whose interests biographical narratives might represent, and the extent to which the placement of 'Mongol' elements in such narrative reified or re-imagined social boundaries in Mongol Eurasia.