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‘Han’ Cultural Mobility under Mongol Rule: Biographies of the Jia 賈 Family

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Abstract: There are several intriguing aspects to the *Yuanshi* biography of Jia Shira (d. c.1268). Two substantial Chinese inscriptions run in parallel with the text, allowing an unusual level of comparison between sources and thus insight into the *Yuanshi* compilers’ editorial priorities. The primary subject, though referred to as a *Hanren* (and therefore allowed to leave Qaraqorum’s northern climate), is exclusively identified by the Mongolian nickname Shira (‘golden/yellow’), due to the colour of his facial hair. All of Shira’s descendants, while being ‘Han’ and remembered in formal Chinese inscriptions, are recorded under Turco-Mongol names, and the texts highlight generosity in famine relief to people in the Mongol heartland alongside more typical tropes of concern for a ‘Chinese’ populace. The selective deployment of cultural elements thus differs from other biographical narratives in a number of key aspects. While none of its subjects are of great fame, the texts draw together key themes in Yuan historiography, linking events and personalities through a Mongol century from Shira’s introduction to Sorqaqtani Beki in 1224, via cooking for Qubilai and managing expenses for Ayurbarwada, to the 1323 execution and subsequent rehabilitation of Shira’s great-grandson Tügen Buqa.

Keywords: historiography, ethnicities, Mongol, Han, cultural capital, retinue

Beginning with Jia Shira (d. c. 1268), several generations of the Jia family, identified as Han people originating from around present-day Beijing, served a

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century of Chinggisid qa'ans' households, rising, as cooks and provisioners, through the imperial retinue. A *Yuanshi* biography and two commemorative inscriptions present divergent – sometimes contradictory – life narratives, positioning these figures in a north-facing role based firmly in the Toluid, and under Qubilai Qa'an and his successors, Yuan household rather than the civil bureaucracy.¹ The earliest of these, a court commissioned inscription requested in 1296 by Körgis of the Önggüt, was composed by the scholar, poet and official Wang Yun 王惲 (1228–1304) to celebrate three generations of Mongol-era service.² The fourth generation, Jia *Tügen Buqa (d. 1320), is commemorated by a *shendaobei* (spirit-way inscription) commissioned in the third moon of the third year *Tianli* 天曆 (20th March to 18th April 1330).³ Requested by Grand Supervisor of Agriculture Qarabatu after its subject's disgrace, execution and rehabilitation, this was written by the influential court propagandist Yu Ji 虞集 (1272–1348), and seems to have emphasized, to the point of exaggeration, its subjects' centrality at court and opposition to Tegshi, a regicide and scapegoat.⁴ The *Yuanshi* compilers steered a course between the two previous accounts in compiling their biography. Comparison of these three versions offers glimpses into tensions between retinue and bureaucracy and into mobility – both geographical and cultural – across North and East Asia. The Jia family seems to have shaken off many of its links to Jin-era ancestors, its members working their way into the *keshig* household guard and serving across Yuan territory, especially in the north. Their 'Han' status, linked to physiology and tied to regions south of the Mongol heartland, almost forsaken, was ultimately communicated

1 The biography of Jia Shira 賈昔刺 is found at Lian et al. 1976 [1370] (hereafter *Yuanshi*): 169.3969–3972, and the two inscription texts are Wang 1985 [1296]; / Li 1999: 6: 394–397 (hereafter *Shide zhibe*) and Yu 1985 [1330]; / Li 1999: 27: 276–280 (hereafter *Shendaobei*), respectively. On Shira see also Wang / Li / Pan 1987: 1635. The Jia family have received little attention in scholarship, notable exceptions being; Li 2009; Zhang 2012, which primarily highlight the 'Mongolization' implied by name grants.

2 *Shide zhibe*: 1a / 347. On Körgis, Prince of Gaotang 高唐王, see *Yuanshi*: 118.2925–2926; Wang / Li / Pan 1987: 2391. On the scholar, poet and official Wang Yun, see Franke 1982; Wang / Li / Pan 1987: 113–115; *Yuanshi*: 167.3932–3935.

3 Both *Shide zhibe* and *Shendaobei* were court commissions, and, though differing in formal function – the former celebrating Jia family service and the latter *Tügen Buqa's life and career – they provide a similar range of material, and besides their differing dates, variations seem to reflect political, rather than generic, priorities.

4 *Shendaobei*: 30b / 279. On Ji Yu, see *Yuanshi*: 181.4174–4184 and; Langlois 1978. On Qarabatu, for whom we have little data, see Wang / Li / Pan 1987: 2538. On Tegshi, a grandson of Temür Öljeitü who seems to have received the entire blame for the death of Shidebala (Yingzong, r. 1320–23), see *Yuanshi*: 207.4599–4600; Wang / Li / Pan 1987: 2660; Hsiao 1994: 533.

to posterity in Sinophone inscriptions and a 'Han' biography in the dynastic history.

Jia Tügen Buqa receives most prominence across our texts, which contrast his reluctance to accept rewards and acceptance of symbolic items of clothing against rivals' envy and attempts to trade imperial gifts for transferable wealth.⁵ Perhaps because of this focus on later generations and success in new circumstances, we know little of the Jia family before their Chinggisid service other than their origin in Daxing 大興 (in present-day Beijing). Wang and the *Yuanshi* report that Shira's unnamed father served the Jin as a cook in a hereditary position, marrying a woman surnamed Li 李.⁶ The *shendaobei*'s omission of this generation highlights the ambiguities of status and position afforded to palace cooks and provisioners across East Asian history; ostensibly humble as a class, their access to the centre, functional importance and practical skills led, in some cases, to high office.⁷ While Shira's father's position does not seem to have held much social capital, later generations made good use of food's centrality to household and court.

Shira, described in the *Yuanshi* as "imposing in appearance, with aspirations to serve his contemporaries", was introduced to the Chinggisid court in 1224. According to *Shide zhibei* and *Yuanshi*, he was recruited by Sorqaqtani Beki (d. 1252), wife of Chinggis Qan's fourth son Tolui and mother to the qa'ans Möngke (r. 1251–59) and Qubilai (r. 1260–94), Shira's audience with this powerful woman facilitated by a Majordomo (*fengyu* 奉御) Liu, probably Liu Min 劉敏 (1201–59).⁸ The *shendaobei*, however, provides a conflicting report that Chinggis Qan himself recruited Shira in the 'western desert', questioning him about strategic matters relating to the Jia home region of Yan 燕.⁹ This seems unlikely. Although the qan was returning east from his great central and south Asian

5 On the symbolic importance of dress see Allsen 2001a and the biography of the Cha'adaid prince Tura (*Yuanshi*: 117.2907), whose defiant act of throwing his belt on the floor is a step towards his execution for treason.

6 *Yuanshi*: 169.3969; *Shide zhibei*: 1a–1b / 394. Shira's father remains unidentified – the *Jinshi* (Toghto 1975 [1345]: 104.2301) provides a tempting candidate in Jia Nai'er 賈耐兒, who reportedly constructed a thousand carts to transport provisions during the 1214–15 Mongol siege of Zhongdu (Beijing), but we lack further evidence.

7 For a historical survey of cooks and provisioners at Chinese courts, see Wang 1995. On cooks, butchers and the symbolic status of such skills in early China, see Sterckx 2011: 49–59.

8 *Yuanshi*: 169.3969; *Shide zhibei*: 1b / 394. On Sorqaqtani Beki, whose involvement underlines her role in managing household personnel, see Rossabi 1979: 158–166; *Yuanshi*: 116.2897–2898. For accounts of Sorqaqtani investing resources from the Toluid appanage of Zhending and employing scholars for her sons, see *Yuanshi*: 125.3071, 126.3086; Su 1962 [1329]: 7.127. On Liu Min, see *Yuanshi*: 153.3609–3611; Wang / Li / Pan 1987: 1789.

9 *Shendaobei*: 24b–25a / 276.

expedition that year, his forces had then been active in northern China for more than a decade and had many informants better placed than Shira.¹⁰ It is probable that Yu attempted to reposition Shira, pursuing the imperative, identified by Iiyama Tomoyasu, for funerary inscriptions to prove “close connection and loyalty to the imperial household”, the earlier and more central the better, lending that status to later generations.¹¹

Sent north to serve Tolui at Qaraqorum, the hunting ground and later imperial capital in present-day Mongolia’s Övörkhangaï Province, Shira travelled a considerable distance; Wang claims that he was favoured because he “was not afraid to serve at such a distant palace”.¹² The *Yuanshi*, following Wang, applies contrasting markers to Shira:

Because his beard was yellow, he was granted the name Shira 昔刺 (Mongolian: Yellow),¹³ and his clan were made the same as the Mongol people – he was shown great favour; also, because it was thought that, as a Han, he was not accustomed to the wind and earth [of the north], he was ordered to move and reside in Lianzhou 濂州.¹⁴

The focus on physiology emphasises an unexpected combination. A yellow beard – its colour echoing that of the mythical impregnator of Alan Qo’a, the Chinggisid ancestress, and perhaps a tendency to paler hair among the imperial family – is paired with ‘Han’ discomfort in the northern climate.¹⁵ Yu discusses neither ‘Han’ weakness nor the name’s meaning, the latter omission perhaps indicating doubts on the yellow beard’s veracity. In view of the liberties Yu takes with the record elsewhere, however, and the fact that the *Yuanshi* compilers chose to follow Wang on the ‘yellow’ theme, there is little we can draw from this with any confidence.

Yu’s report, in place of Wang’s discussion of Han identity, that ‘Mongol’ names and status were necessary to join the household, might be seen as positioning Jia family service within an ethnically tinged patrimonial framework, as opposed to the supposedly meritocratic court systems typically idealised in

¹⁰ On the timing of Chinggis Qan’s return journey, see de Rachewiltz 2006: 965; Wang 1962: 1.199.

¹¹ See Iiyama (2017): 20, 21

¹² *Shide zhibeï*: 1b / 394.

¹³ On Mong. *Shira*, Turk. *shangh*, “yellow”, see Clauson 1972: 848.

¹⁴ *Yuanshi*: 169.3969. This is probably Lianzhou 濂州 in Hebei. Wang’s inscription (*Shide zhibeï*: 1b / 394) has Lianzhou 濂州.

¹⁵ On the symbolism of yellow, see de Rachewiltz 2006: 264; May 2016: 54–55. On Chinese reports of earlier ‘northern’ rulers with yellow hair, see Schafer 1990: 150–152. There is little consistency in approaches to translating or explaining Turko-Mongol names among inscriptions and *Yuanshi* biographies. For a survey of naming incidences, see Li 2009: 33–38.

liezhuan and funerary inscriptions.¹⁶ Such ethnic determination of status might be borne out by the family's subsequent Turko-Mongol naming practices – no text records Shira's original name – and employment in positions, such as the powerful *darughachi* agent post, theoretically barred to Han candidates.¹⁷ Shira's release to (slightly) warmer climes due to his 'Han' discomfort was cut short, Wang and the *Yuanshi* report. An unidentified 'emperor', remarking that "when Shira was part of my retinue, eating and drinking was remarkably quiet and comfortable," ordered his return, placing him in charge of the court cooks.¹⁸ The centrality of this position in the *kesbig* – a Chinggisid institution at once guard, retinue, and administrative fulcrum – is hard to overstate. While it is (perhaps deliberately) unclear whether he served Chinggis Qan or his son Tolui, Shira seems to have been accorded considerable proximity to the ruler's person, a centrality that persisted across several generations.¹⁹

Reports in the *shendaobei* (omitted by the *Yuanshi*) indicate Shira's participation in campaigns against the Jin in 1234 and against the Song in Sichuan and Hezhou 合州 (around present-day Chongqing) in 1258.²⁰ Reports in *Shide zhibei* and *Yuanshi* of an undated summons to Qubilai's 'princely residence' being followed by a journey to meet the prince's wife Chabi in 'Qonggirat territory' – probably relating to Chabi's marriage to Qubilai in or before 1240 – suggests Toluid alignment early on.²¹ In another strange distortion, Yu Ji's account shifted this meeting back to the 1220s, reporting that Shira followed Tolui to Qaraqorum in order to meet the future empress.²² This too appears to be an anachronism, likely intended to place Shira in proximity to Tolui as well as his famous father. Shira's household role was central, granting free access to the princely palace, involving him in strategic consultation, with silver to provision the court and

¹⁶ *Shendaobei*: 25a / 276.

¹⁷ On *darughachi* and ethnic limitations, see especially; Endicott-West 1989: 79; *Yuanshi*: 6.118; Melville 2006: 143.

¹⁸ *Shide zhibei*: 1b / 394–395; *Yuanshi*: 169.3969–3970.

¹⁹ On the duties of the *kesbig*, including food provision, see de Rachewiltz 2006: 160, 838; Melville 2006: 135–138. Allsen points out the sensitivity of the cook's access, highlighting the danger of poisoning, and notes the influence of others who rose from the kitchen. See Allsen (2001b): 127–128. See also the discussions in biographies of Öchicher (1249–1311), who also combined duties within the Bureau with northern border service, at Su 1962 [1329]: 3.44; Li 1999: 24.333.

²⁰ *Shendaobei*: 25a / 276.

²¹ Probably referring to the Khinggan Mountains to the north of present-day Inner Mongolia. See *Yuanshi*: 169.3970; *Shide zhibei*: 2a / 395. Yu (*Shendaobei*: 25a / 276) bafflingly conflated this with Shira's 1224 journey to Qaraqorum. On Chabi (d. 1277), second and most famous of Qubilai's wives, see *Yuanshi*: 114.2871–2872; Cleaves 1979–80; Rossabi 1979: 167.

²² See *Shendaobei*: 276.

horses and herdsmen for his own upkeep. This essentially *kesbig* post being nominally formalised after Qubilai's enthronement in 1260, Shira bore a golden tablet in charge of the newly established Office of the Imperial Kitchen and the Palace Medical Service, providing fine food to the qa'an's table.²³ Wang's report that Chabi arranged Shira's marriage to a palace maid (with the Chinese surname Su 蘇), suggests that, like Sorqaqtani, the qatun actively managed household personnel.²⁴

Our texts all highlight the favour shown to Shira's son, reporting that the young Qonichi (Mo. 'shepherd') was doted on by Qubilai and was even once (Yu claims 'always') seated beside the qa'an. Chabi married him, too, to a palace maid, bearing the Chinese surname Mao 毛.²⁵ Qonichi's career, the most southerly of the Jia family, included the impressive feat of defeating naval forces from horseback in the 1253 Yunnan campaign.²⁶ After this reports diverge, the *Yuanshi* following Yu to report that Qonichi died at Ezhou 鄂州 (in present-day Hubei) after the abortive Song campaign of 1259.²⁷ Wang states in an undated report that Qonichi was ordered to provision Qubilai's princely court alongside Qaljın of the Tübeğen but succumbed to illness at Tanzhou 檀州 (northeast of Beijing).²⁸

In another undated report, the *Yuanshi* describes how, elderly and seriously ill, Shira "sought the robes granted to him, put them on, and then died".²⁹ Unlike later generations, whose burial elsewhere suggests a straining of ties with, and perhaps memory of, Jin-era ancestors,³⁰ Shira was interred on March the twenty-second, 1268, in the family graveyard at Qiyuan 漆園, somewhere

²³ *Yuanshi*: 169.3970; *Shide zhibei*: 2a / 395; *Shendaobei*: 25a / 276. On the Office of the Imperial Kitchen 尚食局, see Farquhar 1990: 76. On the Palace Medical Service 尚藥局, absorbed by the Bureau for Imperial Household Provisions and not named as a separate institution by Farquhar, see Hucker 1985: 413; *Yuanshi*: 87.2200.

²⁴ Shira's marriages are confusingly recorded, the inscriptions mentioning another wife surnamed Li 李, suggesting that she bore Shira's son.

²⁵ *Yuanshi*: 169.3970; *Shide zhibei*: 2b / 395; *Shendaobei*: 25b / 277. On *qonichi*, see de Rachewiltz 2006: 440; Lessing et al. 1960: 964; Melville 2006: 137.

²⁶ *Yuanshi*: 169.3970; *Shide zhibei*: 2b / 395; *Shendaobei*: 25b / 277.

²⁷ *Yuanshi*: 169.3970; *Shendaobei*: 25b / 277.

²⁸ *Shide zhibei*: 2b / 395. On Qaljın, replaced as Commissioner of the Bureau for Imperial Household Provisions 宣徽使 by Öchicher in 1281, see *Yuanshi*: 130.3173; Su 1962 [1329]: 4.53; Wang / Li / Pan 1987: 2534.

²⁹ *Yuanshi*: 169.3970. Wang Yun relates that he rose and went to court first; see *Shide zhibei*: 2a / 395.

³⁰ This other place is unnamed. Iiyama's argument (2016: 161) that the four- or five-generation focus of genealogical stelae from northern China in this period reflects new success and upheaval seems to fit here.

west of Dadu (Beijing).³¹ Shira's gold tablet and appointments to the Office of the Imperial Kitchen and the Palace Medical Service were inherited by Qonichi's son Qurimchi (Mo. *qurim* 'feast', so perhaps 'the man of the feast'), who took charge of the Meal Servers and also the Office of the Supervisors of Agriculture, a designation only existing in 1270–71.³²

The *shendaobei* reports that Qurimchi was "well versed in the languages of all countries", valuable skills not mentioned in connection to Shira or Qonichi.³³ Battle amid a sandstorm against Qubilai's brother and rival Arigh Böke *en route* to Qaraqorum in the early 1260s ("there arose a great wind, the daylight dimmed, and the enemy suddenly arrived") demonstrated Qurimchi's ability in the northwestern climate.³⁴ Blending martial virtue with Confucian values, he reportedly pleased Qubilai by stressing agriculture and popular wellbeing as the basis of government.³⁵ Modestly refusing a prestigious Directorship of the Bureau for Palace Provisions, a powerful household body independent of civil government and possessing substantial estates, Qurimchi served as Junior Assistant Director and continued to lead the Meal Servers until his undated death aged 43.³⁶

Wang gives the impression that it was this third generation, in the mid- to late thirteenth century, that rooted the Jia family firmly in Qubilai's court. The *Shide zhibei* reports that while Qonichi's unnamed elder daughter left palace service to become a Buddhist nun, his younger daughter *Maha married Yelü

31 *Shide zhibei*: 2a / 395; *Shendaobei*: 30b / 279. Qiyuan, now a village within the Changping 昌平 District of Beijing, is not found in historical atlases under this period. Shira's death date is unclear: despite Neo-Confucian recommendations that burials should take place no more than three months post-mortem they were often delayed awaiting auspicious dates. See Ebrey 1991: 103. The *Yuanshi* includes possibly indicative examples of funerals, such that for Wang Yue 王約, who, dying on the first of March 1333, was buried within a fortnight, on the 12th. See *Yuanshi*: 178.4143.

32 *Yuanshi*: 169.3970; *Shendaobei*: 26a / 277; *Shide zhibei*: 3a–3b / 396. On the Meal Servers 尚膳, not found in Farquhar, see Hucker 1985: 410. On the short-lived Office of the Supervisors of Agriculture, see Farquhar 1990: 214; *Yuanshi*: 87.2188. On *qurim*, see de Rachewiltz 2006: 481; Lessing et al. 1960: 990.

33 *Shendaobei*: 26a / 277.

34 *Yuanshi*: 169.3970; *Shendaobei*: 26a / 277; *Shide zhibei*: 3a / 396. Biographies of the Önggüt general Alchur (1195–1263) report similar sandstorm combat during the same campaign, somewhere around present-day Gansu and Shaanxi in 1260. See *Yuanshi*: 121.2985; Li 1999: 24: 393.

35 *Yuanshi*: 169.3970; *Shide zhibei*: 3b / 396.

36 *Yuanshi*: 169.3970; *Shide zhibei*: 3b / 396. On the Bureau, a structure established by the Jin and which in its new incarnation absorbed the offices held by Shira, see Wang 1995: 91; Farquhar 1990: 73; Cleaves 1979–80: 143, n. 23; *Yuanshi*: 87.2200.

Xiyi, son of the Kitan minister Yelü Zhu (1221–85).³⁷ Qurimchi's middle son *Maigou served Qubilai's heir apparent Jingim (1243–86), being appointed Office Manager to the Office of Victuals, part of the heir apparent's princely administration.³⁸ The youngest son *Jigou served Qubilai's third son Manggala (d. 1280), Prince of Anxi, being promoted to Marshal of the Sixth Class and later *Darughachi* of the Shaanxi Directorate for Agricultural Colonies, a post theoretically barred to Han candidates, as noted above.³⁹ Links to Anxi were strong, as Qurimchi's wife Qubacha was, Yu reports, the daughter of Manggala's nursemaid, or, according to Wang, Manggala's foster-sibling (lit., fed at the same breast) a relationship (T-Mo. *kökäldäsh*) bearing considerable significance across the Chinggisid polities.⁴⁰

Qurimchi's son *Tügen Buqa 秃堅不花 (Mo. *buqa*, 'bull'), representing the fourth Jia generation in Mongol service, served in both military and civil roles; his career is not discussed by Wang, apart from the briefest summary of his progress as a descendant of the *shide zhibei*'s subjects.⁴¹ Inheriting Qurimchi's posts of Intendant of the Palace Medical Service and Office of the Imperial Kitchen, he joined Qubilai's expedition to suppress Nayan's 1287 rising in Manchuria.⁴² The *Yuanshi* contrasts Tügen Buqa's valour against others' timidity in battle at Khingan: "many of the various close courtiers, seeing their might and splendour, flinched in fear, but Tügen Buqa then spurred his horse forward into the [enemy] ranks, fighting fiercely and routing them, taking their chief general and returning".⁴³ After Nayan's defeat, the *Yuanshi* reports action against someone called Hahan 哈罕, probably referring to Nayan's ally Qadan Türgen, grandson of Chinggis' brother Qachi'un, who was defeated on the

37 *Shide zhibei*: 3a / 396. On Yelü Xiyi, see Wang / Li / Pan 1987: 777; Li 1999: 1: 177.

38 On this office, see Farquhar 1990: 306.

39 *Shide zhibei*: 3a / 395.

40 *Shide zhibei*: 3b / 396; *Shendaobei*: 36a / 299. On this relationship, see Vásáry (1982); the account of Shiregis receiving imperial prerogatives through marriage (also arranged by Sorqaqtani Beki) to the Toluid princes' nursemaid, at *Yuanshi*: 122.3015.

41 On *buqa*, see de Rachewiltz 2006: 320. The first, modifying, element remains unclear: thanks to Márton Vér for suggesting a reading, following Lessing (1960: 335), as *etügeni*, 'Shamanist goddess of the Earth', making this name somewhat like 'Earth Bull', and directing me to Rybatzki (2006: 33–34), where we find both *etügen* as above and *ötöge(n)*, meaning 'elder' or senior'. For Wang's entry on *Tügen Buqa, see *Shide zhibei*: 4a / 396.

42 *Yuanshi*: 169.3970; *Shendaobei*: 26b / 277. On Nayan, a descendant of Chinggis Qan's younger sibling Temüge Otchigin, and this conflict, see Biran 1997: 45–47; Pelliot 1959–1973: 788.

43 *Yuanshi*: 169.3970; *Shendaobei*: 26b / 277.

Naomulian River, the present-day Nen or Non, in Heilongjiang.⁴⁴ Like his father, Tügen Buqa faced a northern enemy appearing from the high winds and dimming daylight of a sandstorm, fighting with great success despite sustaining multiple wounds.⁴⁵

As in many *Yuanshi* biographies, Tügen Buqa's military role extends to advising clemency for defeated commoners, opposed by unidentified people:

Tügen Buqa alone said, "Those of Qanghai are basically our people, and someone led them into rebellion; how could it be their true nature? Additionally, according to the ways of war, killing the surrendered is inauspicious, so they should be pardoned".⁴⁶

Tügen Buqa's argument underlines Atwood's analysis of Mongol-era massacres' punitive logic – only where rebellion reflected commoners' 'true nature' should they be killed.⁴⁷ His intervention endorsed by Qubilai, Tügen Buqa received promotion to Deputy Junior Assistant Director of the Bureau for Imperial Household Provisions.⁴⁸ From this point on, Tügen Buqa's place in the household seems assured, admonishing the qa'an, recommending appointments to the imperial guard, receiving public approbation for his selections.⁴⁹

Our texts next report the 1294 enthronement of Qubilai's grandson and successor Temür Öljeitü (Chengzong 成宗, r. 1294–1307), emphasizing Tügen Buqa's role in preparing the *quriltai* gathering, which, alongside food and animal fodder, required gifts graded by imperial kinship.⁵⁰ Praised by the qa'an, he was promoted to Associate Director of the Bureau for Imperial Household Provisions, the intimacy of this station being underlined in 1300 when, Temür Öljeitü having fallen ill, Tügen Buqa tasted the qa'an's food in a portrait of the caring courtier. Symbolic gifts of clothing are prominent again, as on the qa'an's recovery Tügen Buqa refused monetary reward but accepted the ruler's own robe, a further intimate connection and extension of

⁴⁴ Not corroborated by the *shendaobei*, this must originate from another source. Qadan's defeat is described in the biographies of Urlug Noyan (also known as Us Temür) at Su 1962 [1329]: 3.42; *Yuanshi*: 119.2947. On Qadan Türgen, see *Yuanshi*: 121.2990–91, Wang / Li / Pan 1987: 2529; Hambis 1945: 29–33. For the location, see *Yuanshi*: 118.2916.

⁴⁵ *Yuanshi*: 169.3970.

⁴⁶ *Yuanshi*: 169.3970–3971; *Shendaobei*: 26b–27a / 277.

⁴⁷ Atwood 2016.

⁴⁸ Farquhar's post-1312 summary does not identify this post within the Bureau, but the *Yuanshi* description of the Bureau in 1278 (at 87.2200) includes it.

⁴⁹ *Yuanshi*: 169.3970–3971; *Shendaobei*: 27a / 277–278.

⁵⁰ *Yuanshi*: 169.3971; *Shendaobei*: 27b / 278; Farquhar 1990: 73.

imperial charisma.⁵¹ A further episode, dated to 1304 by the *shendaobei*, highlights humility, filiality and popularity among subordinates when palace guards reportedly persuaded the qa'an to promote Tügen Buqa further as one of six Directors of the same Bureau.⁵² Accepting a pearl-embroidered robe, he declined the promotion, on the filial grounds that this rank exceeded those of his forebears. The *shendaobei*'s description of the qa'an solving this by posthumously promoting those ancestors was omitted from the *Yuanshi*.⁵³

Discussions of subjects' mercy to and charity for the populace are widespread in premodern Chinese biography, and prominent across the *Yuanshi*. After a catastrophic snowfall on the Kerülen in 1305, Tügen Buqa sent camels and horses to replace lost livestock, personally dispensing clothing and money from the treasury, saving many lives, and receiving jades (not robes) as a reward.⁵⁴ Such charity for the north, rather than 'Chinese' territory, is unusual; other accounts, such as the biography of the official Harqasun, treat northern people as backward, stressing instruction rather than generosity (despite Harqasun's own northern background).⁵⁵

In 1306–7 Tügen Buqa again tended Temür Öljeitü, now dying, and although "there was the threat of domestic strife; following the principles of righteousness ... he did not yield in any way".⁵⁶ The texts thus downplay the 1307 succession crisis, in which the qa'an's widow Buluqan and the senior official Aqutai, supporting the candidacy of Manggala's son Ananda, were successfully opposed by Qaishan (Wuzong 武宗, r. 1308–11) and Ayurbarwada (Renzong 仁宗, r. 1312–20).⁵⁷ This cautious portrayal, especially when compared to activist accounts in biographies for Harqasun, Yaqudu and Tura, may reflect Jia family links to Manggala's household.⁵⁸

These links do not appear to have harmed Tügen Buqa. Praised on the new qa'an's succession, his northern alignment seems to have fit the elevation

51 *Yuanshi*: 169.3971; *Shendaobei*: 27b / 278. We follow the *shendaobei* in reading this and later dates during Temür Öljeitü's reign as years of the *Dade* regnal period. On the symbolism of receiving personal robes from the qa'an's body, see Allsen 2001a: 309.

52 Farquhar 1990: 73.

53 *Yuanshi*: 169.3971; *Shendaobei*: 28a–b / 278.

54 *Yuanshi*: 169.3971; *Shendaobei*: 28b / 278. The identification of *Qilulun* 乞祿倫 with Kerülen is uncertain – this is the only occurrence of these characters in the *Yuanshi*. The *Shengwu qinzheng lu* uses 怯綠連. See Wang 1962: 1.69.

55 See Su 1962 [1329]: 4.59–60; *Yuanshi*: 136.3294–3295.

56 *Yuanshi*: 169.3971; *Shendaobei*: 28b / 278.

57 On Buluqan, see *Yuanshi*: 114.2873–2874. On Aqutai, see Wang / Li / Pan 1987: 2206. On the succession struggle, see Hsiao 1994: 504–507.

58 For Tura, Yaqudu and Harqasun's roles in the succession, see *Yuanshi*: 117.2907, 117.2909 and 136.3294, respectively, and on the first two, Humble (2015).

in status, during the reign of the former border general Qaishan, of steppe veterans.⁵⁹ Tügen Buqa's career, in military, charitable and logistical activity, is distinctly north-facing, a contrast to Qonichi's southern service and Shira's 'Han' difficulties with the northern climate. Under Qaishan, Tügen Buqa was promoted to Deliberator on Affairs of the Bureau for Imperial Household Provisions, receiving honorary positions (Grandee of the Fourth Class and honorary Privy Councillor) and a new role as Acting *Darughachi* of Jinfuzhouxinfu Myriarchy, centred on present-day Liaoning in the northeast.⁶⁰ Dispatch north in 1309 alongside the general Öchicher to handle the distribution of gold and silk among northern border troops further underlined his Inner Asian credentials.⁶¹

Promotion to Palace Provisions Commissioner and the award of a gold belt led to resentment from one Jia Tingrui 賈廷瑞.⁶² Tingrui then reportedly attempted to shift the Bureau for Imperial Household Provisions under the auspices of a Chancellery, in a challenge to the imperial family's control over the substantial resources of this essentially *keshig* institution.⁶³ The Secretariat for State Affairs having reported this, Tügen Buqa defended Tingrui against the capital charge of changing bureaucratic structures without authority, facing Qaishan, who angrily argued that "Jia Tingrui defamed my minister and is not worth even a single coin".⁶⁴ Tügen Buqa's reply, which bought Tingrui's pardon, combined bureaucratic logic with humility and distanced him from any suspicion of factionalism: "Tingrui's crime does not merit execution; your servant does not dare, for personal reasons, lead Your Majesty into erroneous punishment".⁶⁵ Tügen Buqa's civil credentials are again highlighted by his response to a consultation on government priorities, recommending increasing prosperity

59 Dardess 1973: 16–17.

60 *Yuanshi*: 169.3971; *Shendaobei*: 28b–29a / 278. On the position Deliberator on Affairs 商議事 in connection to the Central Secretariat, see Farquhar 1990: 170–171; he does not connect it to the Bureau for Imperial Household Provisions (and nor does the *Yuanshi*), but it is the only way to read this post (商議宣徽院事).

61 *Yuanshi*: 169.3971; *Shendaobei*: 29a / 278–279. On Öchicher, see note 20 above.

62 *Yuanshi*: 169.3971–3972. On Jia Tingrui 賈廷瑞 see Wang / Li / Pan 1987: 1635 (under 賈庭瑞); Li 1999: 15: 406–407.

63 Jia Tingrui's proposal, condemned in our narratives, had numerous historical precedents, as a parallel institution, the Court of Imperial Entertainments 光祿寺 (subordinated to the Bureau for Imperial Household Provisions during the Mongol period), had been placed under the Chancellery Department 門下省 under the Wei, Jin and Northern Dynasties. See Wang 1995: 89. The several proposals to establish a Chancellery Department in the Mongol era all proved abortive. See Farquhar 1990: 400; Hucker 1985: 329.

64 On the Secretariat for State Affairs, see Farquhar 1990: 170.

65 *Yuanshi*: 169.3971–3972.

and reducing expense, the *Yuanshi* reporting subsequent promotion to Grandee of the Third Class, a high honorary position.⁶⁶

On the enthronement of Qaishan's brother Ayurbarwada in 1312, Tügen Buqa was promoted two more steps to Grandee of the First Class.⁶⁷ In 1317, he sent two hundred horses from his family stable north in response to a severe winter – a report underlining not only charity but a particularly northern form of wealth – and declined compensation other than a robe from the qa'an's shoulders.⁶⁸ A rare narratorial aside in the *Yuanshi* biography highlights the contrast between Tügen Buqa and his rivals:

Those entrusted with imperial favour through seeking reward always mistreat [others] and do not give.⁶⁹

The targets of this rhetoric are Tügen Buqa's colleagues Tegshi and Wang Tingxian 王廷顯, the former's substantial gift from the qa'an, either the monetary value of a sea-going vessel or the vessel itself, criticised by Tügen Buqa as alienating government property which “those above ought not to give away and those below ought not to accept”.⁷⁰ Tingxian's attempt to trade a gift of a jade belt for livestock was likewise prevented by the Bureau.⁷¹

Tügen Buqa's modesty, charity and refusal to accept monetary reward is thus contrasted against Tegshi and Wang Tingxian. Our texts carefully link his opposition to transgressive giving, echoing earlier recommendations of frugality, to a growing crowd of dissatisfied enemies, disguising factional alignment as moral probity. Retiring ill at Ayubarwada's death in 1320, Tügen Buqa's execution soon after by Ayubarwada's son and successor Shidebala (Yingzong, r. 1320–23), apparently due to slander by Tegshi, reflects the impact of the latter and his protector Temüder in the early 1320s.⁷² Posthumously rehabilitated by the new qa'an Yesün Temür after Tegshi's execution over the September 1323 assassination of Shidebala, our texts provide little further data on this period aside from the posthumous titles lavished on Tügen Buqa and his ancestors.⁷³ The *shendaobei* does provide some information on the careers of Tügen Buqa's four sons: *Banbu and Qoridai both served as Investigating Censor, Yesügü as

⁶⁶ *Yuanshi*: 169.3972; *Shendaobei*: 29b / 279. On this rank, see Farquhar 1990: 25.

⁶⁷ On this rank, see Farquhar 1990: 25. On Ayurbarwada's reign, see Hsiao 1994: 513–527.

⁶⁸ *Yuanshi*: 169.3972; *Shendaobei*: 29b / 279.

⁶⁹ *Yuanshi*: 169.3972.

⁷⁰ On Tegshi, see note 2 above. Wang Tingxian remains unidentified.

⁷¹ *Yuanshi*: 169.3972; *Shendaobei*: 30a / 279.

⁷² On this period, see Hsiao 1994: 528.

⁷³ The *Yuanshi* (169.3972) suggests a more direct causal relationship than does the *shendaobei* (30a / 279). On Yingzong's reign, see Hsiao 1994: 527–534.

Junior Director at the Directorate for the Imperial Accessories and Tuquchi as Commissioner for Attendants at the Central Secretariat.⁷⁴

The Jia family rose quickly under Mongol rule, Sorqaqtani Beki's patronage combining with practical skills and a willingness to serve in distant places seeming to have placed Jia Shira near the centre of Qubilai's entourage. Later generations explored the limits of Yuan territory, moving between Yunnan, Hubei, Liaoning and Qaraqorum. The family's mobility over a century was extreme in other ways, too, from cooking for the Jin and burial in Qiyuan – both apparently forgotten by 1330 – to marriages brokered by qatuns and sufficient wealth for large donations of horses. Service in a patrimonial court seems not to have been circumscribed by formal bureaucratic roles, if such formality indeed affected the imperial household. Our Chinese-language texts' tendency to place subjects within compartmentalised hierarchies is undermined by the personal links manifest in repeated references to personal gifts. Yu Ji's adjustments likewise move his subjects closer to their qa'ans, suggesting either that such patrimonial proximity carried greater status in 1330 than 1296, or, and perhaps more likely, that Yu's work played a part in a post-Tegshi political realignment. The portrayal of Shira, Qurimchi and Tügen Buqa's combination of apparently bureaucratic positions linked to provisioning duties with military exploits in the qa'ans' retinues also suggests that success in the latter role drove promotion in the former. Tügen Buqa's northern status seems to have served him well under Qaishan, and his approach to gift-giving – especially in the *shendaobei*, where he consistently accepts gifts of symbolic rather than economic value – is central to his idealization. Tügen Buqa's career must, however, be treated with caution; Yu Ji's creative handling of early events for which we have comparator texts may extend into periods for which we do not.

The family's placement in the *Yuanshi* 'Han-Nan' biographies seems to reflect both a northward broadening of the category and a kind of essentialised fixing of boundaries. On the one hand, yellow beards aside, marriage (mostly) to spouses with Chinese names and Tügen Buqa's filiality and Confucian speeches establish status in 'Han' terms, matching the 'Han' physiology making service in the north uncomfortable for Shira. On the other hand, with time, Turko-Mongol names and status, such discomfort is comprehensively overcome, and no barrier to gaining status as a northerner, status repeatedly highlighted via military service and charity. The *Yuanshi* compilers' active selection of elements and thus tailoring of the

⁷⁴ *Yuanshi*: 169.3972; *Shendaobei*: 30a–30b / 279. On these offices, see Farquhar 1990: 242, 94, 247, respectively. Wang (*Shide zhibe*: 396) provides an irreconcilably differing account of the fourth and fifth generations.

account indicates a conscious inclusion of such a north-facing, North Asian Han identity. The Jia family may have moved north in their own minds, but they remain (yellow beard and all) within the bounds of ‘Han’ identity in the *Standard Histories*.

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