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## **Yelü Chucai's Movement in the Mongolian Court Described in *Yuanshi***

### **Abstract**

This article is about an outstanding political figure Yelü Chucai (1189–1242), who was the main advisor of the Mongol khans. Due to his excellent abilities and skills, he managed to play a significant role at the court of Ögedei Khan (1186–1241), as well as in the elaboration of a tax policy used in Northern China. Yelü Chucai contributed to the creation of a symbiosis of the nomadic Mongolian and sedentary Chinese civilisations that took shape during the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368) in what is modern-day China.

**Keywords:** Yelü Chucai, nomadic civilisation, tax policy, *Yuanshi* 元史

The era of the Mongol conquests (1209–1279) is undoubtedly one of the most interesting pages in Chinese history. This historical period not only features the victories and conquests of the great Genghis Khan (born Temüjin, 1162–1227) and his descendants, but it also reveals the process of the interaction of two different cultures – nomadic and agricultural. During the Mongol rule, in the vast expanses of China, for the first time in their lives local citizens lost the position of the people who politically dominated their territory and found themselves included in a polyethnic conquering empire. Particular attention should be paid to the activities of Yelü Chucai (1189–1242), an advisor of Genghis Khan and later of his son, Ögedei (1186–1241), who made a significant contribution to the development of an effective tax policy in Northern China, which had a huge impact on the restoration of the country after Genghis Khan's crushing conquest.

In the process of writing this article, materials in Chinese, English, and Russian were used. These valuable sources helped to restore the historical picture of the time. In many documents and monographs, a rather subjective assessment

of the court activities of Yelü Chucai is given. As such, I make a modest attempt to shed light on the political role of Genghis Khan's (and later Ögedei's) advisor based on a detailed study of primary sources, as well as influential pieces of work by witnesses of relevant events written almost immediately after the death of Yelü Chucai.

### Review of primary and secondary sources

The biography of Yelü Chucai, written in *Yuanshi* 元史, serves as an important material in terms of the study of the chosen topic.<sup>1</sup> It gives a unique opportunity to plunge into the historical period and evaluate the role of Yelü Chucai. Another influential work, *Yuanchao Mingchen Shilie* 元朝名臣事略 [*Brief History of Famous Officials in the Yuan Dynasty*] by Su Tianjue (1294–1352), was also used.<sup>2</sup> The author provides interesting facts of the life of Yelü Chucai, as well as analyses some of his life's more important turning points. However, it is crucial to emphasise that in the Chinese monographs, the activities of Genghis Khan's close associates are a little embellished. Therefore, some of the described episodes of the life of Yelü Chucai should be viewed with scepticism.

The works of N.Ya.Bichurin,<sup>3</sup> Herbert Franz Schurmann,<sup>4</sup> Liu Xiao,<sup>5</sup> A.Sh. Kadyrbaev,<sup>6</sup> and Igor de Rachewiltz<sup>7</sup> also serve as important materials for studying the historical role of Yelü Chucai. The authors focus their attention on many important facts, pointing out the reasons for the rise of Yelü Chucai as an adviser of Genghis Khan and later of his son Ögedei.

A very influential monograph is the work of N.Ts. Munkuev,<sup>8</sup> in which the author analyses in detail the biography of Yelü Chucai and describes the successes and failures of the political and economic courses that he proposed. The value of the work lies in the provision of unique materials of tax policy in relation to the population of Northern China. N.Ts. Munkuev also translated a very rare historical work written by a contemporary of Yelü Chucai, Song Zizhen 宋子真 (1188–1267), titled *Zhongshuling Yelü gong shendaobei* 中书令耶律公神道碑 [*Stella on the Path of the Spirit of His Excellency Yelü Chucai*].<sup>9</sup> It is

<sup>1</sup> Song Lian 1976: 3455.

<sup>2</sup> Su 1936.

<sup>3</sup> Bichurin 1829: 12.

<sup>4</sup> Schurmann 1956: 177.

<sup>5</sup> Liu Xiao 2001: 15.

<sup>6</sup> Kadyrbaev 2016: 78.

<sup>7</sup> Rachewiltz 1993: 136.

<sup>8</sup> Munkuev 1965: 11.

<sup>9</sup> Song Zizhen 1965: 68–90.

important to point out that it serves as a valuable guide into the events of the chosen historical period.

The main objectives of the study are: 1) to provide a short biography of Yelü Chucai; 2) to explore the reasons for his rise as an advisor of Genghis Khan and Ögedei Khan; and 3) to analyse the tax reform of Northern China proposed by Yelü Chucai. These objectives serve to reveal why in historical materials the name and political activities of Yelü Chucai are so highly esteemed.

For almost an entire quarter of the 13th century, Northern China was the main stronghold of the long-term war between the Mongol conquerors and the Jin State (1115–1234). This historical period is characterised by a sharp decline in the economy and a complete disorganisation of social life. The arbitrariness of the Mongolian military created unbearable conditions for the existence of the conquered people. This is characterised by the following testimony from *Yuanshi*:

‘At that time, China had just been pacified and there were no laws yet, everywhere senior officials could arbitrarily dispose of the life and death of the population under their control, for the slightest attempt of disobedience they used the executioner’s tools, whole families were killed and even babies were not left alive, and in certain districts and regions, at the first impulse, troops rose up and attacked’.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, the Mongolian commanders pursued a predatory policy towards the conquered population, which is expressed in countless exactions. Moreover, while representatives of the Mongolian army became progressively richer, the state treasury was empty. As such, Ögedei Khan and his court did not receive any taxes from Northern China’s population. Song Zizhen 宋子真 in an influential document<sup>11</sup> points out that after Genghis Khan’s crushing campaigns in Central Asia in 1219–1225, there was not a single measure of grain and not a single piece of silk yarn in state warehouses. For political reasons, the author deliberately does not indicate the reasons for the plundering of the khan’s treasury, since he was the main witness to the historical events of that period, and his work was created during the lives of many Mongolian military leaders who actively took part in plundering the conquered people of Northern China. According to *Yuanshi*, ‘The officials collected taxes and thought only of themselves, their wealth reached a myriad, but the treasury did not have any reserves’.<sup>12</sup> It is important to emphasise that officials here refer to not only the Mongolian commanders, but also the Chinese officials who joined the Mongolian effort. This situation did

<sup>10</sup> Munkuev 1965: 34.

<sup>11</sup> Song Zizhen 1965: 34.

<sup>12</sup> Song Lian 1976: 3455–3469.

not suit Ögedei Khan, since his main goal was to become rich at the expense of the conquered population and to make use of natural resources. An important developer and later implementer of policies who aimed to achieve these goals was Yelü Chucai.

Yelü Chucai was a Khitan by birth on his paternal side, and his mother apparently was Chinese.<sup>13</sup> After the overthrow of the Khitan Liao dynasty (916–1125) by the Jurchens, his family members began to serve the new state of Jin. During the reign of Emperor Zhangzong (1290–1208), Yelü lü (the father of Yelü Chucai) was the minister of rites and an assistant of the right in the Presidential Council.<sup>14</sup> After Yelü lü died when Yelü Chucai was two years old, his mother became engaged in his upbringing. Yelü Chucai was well versed in astronomy, geography, and music. He mastered the skills of divination by the elements and on tortoise shells, and wrote poetry during his spare time.<sup>15</sup> The above qualities characterise Yelü Chucai as a versatile personality, whose talents and skills could play a very important role in court service. It should be noted that he also received an academic degree due to his successful passing of the state exam (1205), but Yelü Chucai failed to contribute to the further prosperity of the Jin Empire due to the conquest of Genghis Khan.

In 1211, Genghis Khan's punitive campaigns to Northeast China began. The damage done by the Mongolian warriors was truly colossal. In 1215, the capital of the state of Jin was conquered by the armies of Genghis Khan.<sup>16</sup> In most cases the Mongols did not show mercy to the population, who chose the brave path of struggle; the same fate befell the region as a whole. Yelü Chucai miraculously managed to escape, finding refuge in a Buddhist monastery. For three years he studied Buddhist sacred books under the leadership of the monks.<sup>17</sup>

The year 1218 was a turning point in Yelü Chucai's life. According to *Yuan-shi*, Genghis Khan actively sought representatives of the Khitan Liao dynasty for court service. It is likely that this strategic move was due to the fact that the Jurchens were enemies of the Khitans (the Liao dynasty was overthrown by the Jurchens). However, the most significant historical fact is that Genghis Khan long had respect for the Yelü family. As Temüjin became a Great Khan and struggled for supremacy among the Mongol tribal leaders, he met Yelü Ahai (ca. 1153–1226), the envoy of the Jin emperor Zhangzong (1189–1208), who was sent to the Khereite leader Wang Khan (ca. 1130–1203). Yelü Ahai expressed a desire to join Temüjin's army. In honour of his devotion to the future Mongol

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<sup>13</sup> Kadyrbaev 2016: 78.

<sup>14</sup> Rachewiltz 1993: 137.

<sup>15</sup> Song Lian 1976: 3455.

<sup>16</sup> Keay 2009: 353.

<sup>17</sup> Munkuev 1965: 14.

khan, he left his younger brother Yelü Tuhua (11??–12??), who was accepted into Temüjin's guards; later Yelü Ahai also became one of his guards.<sup>18</sup> During the punitive campaign of the Mongols against the Jin dynasty, Yelü Luge (11??–12??) began a rebellion against Temüjin's enemies. It is important to note that Genghis Khan valued devotion most of all, especially among those who showed it before he was proclaimed the Great Khan in 1206.<sup>19</sup>

During the meeting of Genghis Khan and Yelü Chucai, the Mongol Khan said:

'Liao and Jin are eternal enemies. I took revenge on them [the Jin] for you!' Yelü Chucai replied: 'Since the days of my grandfather and father, all [we] have served him [the Jin] as subjects. So can I still dare to be double-minded and become the enemy of [my] sovereign and father, being a subject and a son?'<sup>20</sup>

Genghis Khan was impressed with Yelü Chucai, since he did not betray the emperor to the overthrown Jin dynasty. At court Yelü Chucai was well known under the name 'the long-bearded one' (*changgranren* 長髯人).<sup>21</sup>

It is evident that Genghis Khan's interest in Yelü Chucai is due to the following facts: 1) The Yelü family was revered by the Mongols; 2) the education of Yelü Chucai (knowledge of traditional Chinese canons, knowledge of the way of life of the Chinese) was an important strategic tool for the conquest of China; and 3) Yelü Chucai was a fortune teller and astrologer, and in most cases his forecasts were accurate (e.g., he predicted the victory of the war against Khwarezm and the death of its ruler Muhammad), which helped Genghis Khan to carry out successful campaigns on certain territories. Based on these facts, I argue that Yelü Chucai was a valuable figure to the Mongol rulers.

During the crushing defeat of the Tangut State (Xi Xia, 1038–1227), Mongolian generals and the military plundered the cities, seizing valuable booty. Noteworthy is the fact that Yelü Chucai, on the contrary, only took several books and rhubarb herbs, famous for its medicinal properties. While the choice of Yelü Chucai was ridiculed by representatives of the Mongolian army, a decoction of rhubarb later saved many Mongols from an active infection (however, the name of the disease is not given in any source).<sup>22</sup> Yelü Chucai's perspicacity played a key role in further promotion. Genghis Khan told his son Ögedei, 'The Sky sends us smart, noble, learned people, you need to appreciate the loyalty of Yelü Chucai!'<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Song Lian 1976: 3548–3549.

<sup>19</sup> Wilkinson 2012: 776.

<sup>20</sup> Rachewiltz 1993:140.

<sup>21</sup> Humble: 'Yelü Chucai Yuanshi Biography' – *online*.

<sup>22</sup> Song Lian 1976: 3456. Kadyrbaev 2016: 79.

<sup>23</sup> Song Lian 1976: 3456.

It is important to emphasise that Yelü Chucai actively prevented the spread of arbitrariness and violations against the population of Northern China, constantly urging Genghis Khan to show mercy. This is vividly demonstrated by the following historical event. During the conquest of a small village, when the inhabitants of which showed fierce resistance to the invaders, the Mongolian military decided to execute the population. However, Yelü Chucai persuaded the khan to not take such radical measures by saying, 'by mercy he would win the trust of the conquered people rather than by sword and fear'.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, it was decided to forbid the commander Subutai<sup>25</sup> from inflicting reprisals on the village's inhabitants. This fact shows the compassion of Yelü Chucai towards conquered individuals.

After the death of Genghis Khan in 1227, the position of Yelü Chucai in the state apparatus became even more solidified. Ögedei Khan made Yelü Chucai his main advisor and listened to his advice and recommendations regarding the future fate of the conquered population of Northern China.

It is crucial to focus our attention on another interesting fact from Yelü Chucai's biography during the regency of Tolui Khan (r. 1227–1229). In Yanjing (in modern-day Yunnan Province) there were many bandits who committed unspeakable acts, such as robbery and violence, and those who resisted were killed. Having heard of these affairs, Tolui sent an imperial commissioner together with Yelü Chucai to investigate. Yelü Chucai identified those individuals involved in these crimes, and it turned out that all of the bandits belonged to powerful families. Despite bribing the imperial commissioner, the bandits could not escape punishment. Yelü Chucai insisted on the death penalty for the guilty ones. Thus, 16 people were executed in the marketplace.<sup>26</sup> After that, the population of Yanjing found peace. Undoubtedly, this historical event characterises Yelü Chucai as a fair and uncorrupted official who was guided by morality and the desire to restore justice.

Yelü Chucai played a significant role in terms of Ögedei Khan's (1229–1241) ascension to the throne. According to *The Secret History of the Mongols*, Genghis Khan chose his son Ögedei as a successor after his death.<sup>27</sup> However, in 1229 there was a disagreement in the Mongolian assembly, a section of which supported Tolui's candidacy over Ögedei's. Tolui wanted to postpone the coronation ceremony to another day on account of this disagreement. Being an influential court astrologer, Yelü Chucai pointed out that the chosen day was auspicious,

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<sup>24</sup> Song Zizhen 1965: 76.

<sup>25</sup> Subutai (1176–1248) was a well-known general and military strategist of Genghis Khan and Ögedei Khan.

<sup>26</sup> Song Lian 1976: 3456–3457

<sup>27</sup> Onon Urgunge 2005: 262.

and the inauguration could not be postponed. Moreover, Yelü Chucai insisted that Chagatai (1183–1241; then the eldest living son of Genghis Khan) lead the imperial clan and officials, and that they all pay obeisance to Ögedei Khan in order of rank. Thus, Yelü Chucai not only contributed to the ascension of Ögedei Khan to the throne, but also introduced a new element of an inauguration ritual of the Mongol Khans (the bowing of the clan elders to the new Khans).

In addition to the above-mentioned actions of Yelü Chucai, I argue that his most valuable contribution is his effort to establish an effective tax policy for the people of Northern China. Before analysing his role at court, it is worth mentioning the goals of the conquerors towards the conquered after the conquest.

During the reign of Ögedei Khan (1229–1241), two groups arose that considered the future of Northern China in completely different ways.<sup>28</sup> The representatives of the first one wished to establish an effective policy of government according to the old Chinese model, involving Chinese officials and avoiding the dismemberment of the country into the inheritance of the Mongolian nobility. Actually, by the time Ögedei Khan ascended the throne, a significant part of Northern China had been turned into a number of semi-independent estates of Mongolian generals, their close entourages, as well as allies from among the Chinese and Khitan landowner-military leaders.<sup>29</sup> It is important to note that a city or region was placed at the disposal of the commander who captured it. Consequently, under these conditions, the Mongolian court received a small income from the occupied regions, since food supplies and collected taxes were inherited by the Mongolian commanders. It is not surprising that after Genghis Khan's campaign in Inner Asia, Ögedei Khan's court did not receive any taxes from Northern China and that Mongolian commanders and their supporters gained wealth due to their constant pillaging of the local populations. In order to suppress the activities of the generals, Ögedei Khan readily accepted the methods of exploiting Northern China, which were recommended to him by his Chinese advisers. The development and implementation of a new administrative system, the essence of which was the separation of powers in the conquered territories, became a fundamental element in changing the political and social situation in the country. According to the plan, military power would belong to the Mongolian and some Chinese military leaders who had defected to the Mongolians. Civil power would be transferred into the hands of representatives of the local educated elite.<sup>30</sup> Ögedei Khan supported these ideas.

It should be pointed out that Yelü Chucai was a prominent representative of the first group. Quoting the words of the ancient Chinese sage Lu Jia (240–170

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<sup>28</sup> Kadyrbaev 2016: 79.

<sup>29</sup> Munkuev 1965: 27.

<sup>30</sup> Munkuev 1965: 35. Su 1936.

BCE), he said to Ögedei Khan, ‘Although [you] conquered the Celestial Empire sitting on a horse, you cannot control [it] while sitting on a horse!’<sup>31</sup> These words meant that the khan needed to implement a more rational strategy for managing the conquered territories, primarily relying on the experience of China’s previous ruling dynasties. He said that the development of a clear political course, a tax policy, and the use of natural resources in the interests of Ögedei Khan would become the main mechanisms for the prosperity of the new state.

The representatives of the second group included Mongolian generals, military, and influential members of the court who were opponents of a sedentary lifestyle that involves agriculture and living in towns. They called for the complete destruction of the conquered population, the seizure of their lands, and their transformation into pastures. They believed that the mixing of Mongolian and Chinese traditions would lead to the destruction of Genghis Khan’s legacy and the loss of the traits that led the Mongols to power. Yelü Chucai completely rejected the concept of the second group and urged Ögedei Khan to act prudently. A compromise was made – Yelü Chucai proposed to the khan a tax policy that would prove the fallacy of the concept of the second group’s representatives and become the main source of replenishment of the khan’s treasury. Every year he could receive 500,000 *liang* (Chinese measure, 1 *liang* = 37.3 g) of silver, 80,000 pieces of silk cloth, and over 400,000 *shi* (Chinese measure, 1 *shi* = approximately 71.6 kg) of grain, by imposing land-based commercial and monopoly state taxes on wine, vinegar, and salt on the population of Northern China.<sup>32</sup> It is important to point out that the annual income of silver *liang* was envisaged only from Chinese traditional monopoly state taxes on salt and other commodities, while the pieces of silk cloth and grain came from taxes in kind from the citizens of Northern China.

Ögedei Khan approved the proposed policy, as he believed that Yelü Chucai’s awareness of the peculiarities of the settled, agricultural culture and customs of the conquered people would play a key role in stabilising the situation in the country.

Tax offices (*keshuisuo*) were established in the 10 administrative regions of Northern China (*lu*).<sup>33</sup> Former officials of the State of Jin were appointed as officials there. It is likely that such a decision was dictated by the fact that the Mongols were not familiar with the administrative system, and consequently, hiring experienced workers was vital to the Mongols in order to earn considerable income from the territories of Northern China. Through implementing such

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<sup>31</sup> Munkuev 1965: 19.

<sup>32</sup> Song Zizhen 1965: 73.

<sup>33</sup> Rachewiltz 1993: 150.



a system, Yelü Chucai managed to achieve relative independence of the tax offices rescued from the impunity and arbitrariness of the Mongolian military leaders.

It is worth mentioning that the representatives of the Mongolian nobility were not satisfied with the tax policy initiated by Yelü Chucai. The main disagreement between the two groups was the first one's dissatisfaction with the issuance of a 1231 decree on the independence of tax offices from local authorities. This marked the beginning of the emergence of hostile attitudes towards Yelü Chucai, which continued until an eventual demand for his execution. Thus, the military was deprived of the right to perform arbitrariness and collect countless taxes from the inhabitants of Northern China. In all of the large administrative divisions (*lu*) into which Northern China had been divided, tax offices (*keshuisuo*) were established and were independent from local officials.<sup>34</sup>

The salt monopoly was established around 1230 or 1231 and was undoubtedly one of the most significant sources of government revenue. During the reign of the Mongols in China, the extraction and distribution of salt was monopolised. The state derived income from the salt monopoly by selling salt licenses. Each license cost 10 *liang* of silver and gave one the right to receive 400 *jin* (200 kg) of salt. In order to prevent robberies, tax offices were established to provide control. It is worth mentioning that this enterprise was profitable for the state.<sup>35</sup> For example, in Hejiang (located in east-central modern-day Hebei Province) in the early 1240s, 34,700 bags of salt had been received by the tax office annually, but from 1243, 90,000 bags were collected annually.<sup>36</sup> For 34,700 salt bags, the Mongolian court received 347,000 *liang* of silver, and for 90,000 bags the income was 900,000 *liang* of silver.<sup>37</sup> As we can see the increase in silver received by the newly established tax offices was significant. In 1230, Yelü Chucai determined the total annual amount from all monopoly taxes to be 500,000 *liang*, and in 1243, 900,000 *liang* were received from the salt monopoly from just one region of Northern China. These results show the efficiency of the tax policy implemented by Yelü Chucai.

In the early 1230s, a population census was conducted in Northern China in order to collect poll and land taxes from the conquered.<sup>38</sup> A tax on adults of 25 *liang* of silk yarn and on each bull or sheep of 50 *liang* of silk yarn was implemented in towns; each rural landowner had to provide 100 *liang* of silk yarn. As for peeled rice, individuals had to pay 4 *shi* from each yard annually.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Song Zizhen 1965: 73.

<sup>35</sup> Munkuev 1965: C.56.

<sup>36</sup> Schurmann 1956: 177.

<sup>37</sup> Munkuev 1965: C.56.

<sup>38</sup> Munkuev 1965: 44.

<sup>39</sup> Munkuev 1965: 37–38.

Overall, by introducing such a system of collecting taxes from the population, Yelü Chucai wanted to show the Mongols, who were inexperienced in matters of governing settlements, that communication and humane treatment could bring great benefits to the ruler.

In 1236 another population census was held in Northern China.<sup>40</sup> The families registered during the previous one were called ‘old households’ (the total was about 730 households), and those who were first registered in 1235–1236 were deemed ‘new households’ (there were more than 1,100 new households). The *kezheng* tax system was implemented in the middle of the 1230s. Poll and land taxes were compulsory. An adult male’s obligation was 1 *shi* of grain plus an additional 5 *dou* (approximately 15.29 kg) of grain per adult slave in their old household, and in the new households, the tax rate was 5 *dou* of grain per adult male and 2.5 *dou* of grain per slave.<sup>41</sup> We can conclude that all families were subject to an annual poll tax, levied on a free member in full and on a slave belonging to the family in half. Elderly people and children were exempted from paying the poll tax, but if they were engaged in agriculture, they had to pay a tax (poll or land tax) that was larger in amount.

There is comparatively little data on land tax. Song Zizhen’s monograph is an important source regarding this issue.<sup>42</sup> In 1236, a land tax was set at 3.5 *sheng* (approximately 2.41 kg) per *mu* (1/15 of a hectare) of superior quality fields, 3 *sheng* for medium quality fields, and 2 *sheng* for inferior quality fields. The quality and quantity of land played an important role in terms of egalitarian land taxation.

Taking into account the above-mentioned data, we can conclude that such an effective tax policy served as a vital mechanism for the ‘exploitation’ of Northern China’s population from a Chinese point of view. The revenues were colossal, and Ögedei Khan highly valued Yelü Chucai’s contribution to the prosperity of China. Having seen his devoted service and the fruits of his tax policy, Ögedei Khan appointed Yelü Chucai *zhunshulin* (‘head of the great imperial secretariat’).<sup>43</sup> For Ögedei Khan, the most important goal was the annual income from the conquered lands, and the tax policy proposed by Yelü Chucai proved effective in terms of replenishing the treasury. It goes without saying that the tax policy had many positive aspects for the inhabitants of Northern China; however, during this period there were still cases of arbitrariness of officials in relation to the conquered, as well as the seizing of their territories for pastures.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Allsen 1994: 378. Munkuev 1965: 48.

<sup>41</sup> Rachewiltz 1993: 156.

<sup>42</sup> Song Zizhen 1965: 68–90.

<sup>43</sup> Song Lian 1976: 3458.

<sup>44</sup> Su 1936.

However, some of Yelü Chucai's advice and suggestions were rejected by Ögedei Khan. For example, Yelü Chucai constantly fought against the introduction of a specific system in China for representatives of the Mongolian nobility. In the mid-1230s many territories were granted to the influential officials, which led to an aggravation of the social situation in the country. Furthermore, Yelü Chucai was unable to prevent the predatory policy of the local population by Ortak merchants<sup>45</sup> from flourishing. Farming taxes became one of the crucial problems of that time. The influence of Muslim merchants at the court steadily increased. After the death of Ögedei Khan, the tax farmer Abdar Rahman received forms with the imperial seal from Ögedei Khan's wife Töregene, so that he could issue decrees at his own discretion on behalf of the Mongol court.<sup>46</sup> This had a negative effect on the daily life of the conquered population.

The death of Ögedei Khan in 1241 became an important reason for the loss of influence of Yelü Chucai at the court, and constant court intrigues undermined his health. On 2 June 1243, Yelü Chucai died.

## Conclusion

Yelü Chucai, a Genghis Khan- and Ögedei Khan-era progressive figure, contributed immensely to the tax system in Northern China as well as to the Mongolian court. Ögedei Khan was pleased with taxes, was interested in the establishment of social peace, and therefore supported Yelü Chucai, who proved to be a mediator between the classes of conquered and conquerors. As a court adviser to Genghis Khan, and later Ögedei Khan, he advocated the establishment of justice, humanity, and social order. Intelligence, incorruptibility, fidelity to duty, and humanity were among his main traits. Yelü Chucai's policy aimed at establishing fixed taxes from the conquered people instead of the robbery carried out by the Mongolian military leaders, as well as at creating a Chinese-style administration with the involvement of Chinese officials. In addition, preventing the dismemberment of the country into the destinies of the Mongolian nobility was a progressive principle of Yelü Chucai's policy. Consequently, Yelü Chucai sketched a draft of the Mongolian administrative system, which with all its limitations represents a humble attempt to impose the rule of the nomads on the great agrarian civilisation of the East.

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<sup>45</sup> Ortaks were merchants who actively collaborated with selected aristocrats in the Mongol Empire.

<sup>46</sup> Munkuev 1965: 22.

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