Morris Rossabi (ed.)


An edited volume is a bit like an empire, in that its success may be measured by the extent to which it manages to incorporate disparate chapters and unite or ‘pacify’ them under a single theme. How Mongolia Matters rather pre-empts such an assessment and ensures its coherence by designating itself first and foremost a *Festschrift* to its editor, the esteemed Prof. Morris Rossabi. The scholarship of Prof. Rossabi has clearly influenced the research of the contributors, many of whom include personal dedications to the man and his work. Rossabi himself opens the volume by thanking the contributors for the gesture, but he asserts that, beyond being a *Festschrift*, the volume indeed has a common theme. According to the editor, then, the united purpose of the book is to counter a number of ‘widespread myths’ about the Mongols and their role in Inner Asian history (p. 2). Furthermore, in contrast to the many historical sources that present disparaging accounts of the Mongols and also the proliferation of romanticising revisionary histories that emerged in the 1980s, Rossabi states that the volume will be characterised by its presentation of a ‘balanced’ and ‘accurate’ version of Mongol and Inner Asian history and society (p. 4).

The 10 chapters in the volume address a wide array of historical periods and geographical areas, take a broad definition of ‘the Mongols’, and more or less implicitly challenge a variety of myths on a number of scales. Rossabi attempts to provide a rough grouping of the chapters in his introduction; however, it is debatable whether the chapters truly speak to one another (for example, Millward and Robinson sadly do not engage with one another on the question of ‘pacification’).

Elverskog opens the volume with a new history of the Tumu Incident of 1449. In contrast to the already studied writings of Chinese historiographers, Elverskog presents a translation of a seventeenth-century Mongolian source, Sagang Sechen’s *Precious Summary*, that sheds light on the Mongol memory of the Oirat capture of the Ming Emperor. Millward continues the close attention to language and the politics of translation with his chapter that picks up a historical debate over the meaning of the Chinese term *huairou*, usually translated either as ‘cherish’ or ‘pacify’. Millward examines the term in the context of the polylingual Qing court and provides a close cross-comparison with how the court itself represented the concept simultaneously in another three languages, Manchu (*bilumbi*), Mongolian (*nomugadqaqu*) and Tibetan (*‘dul ba*). The study is particularly fascinating for exploring how a trilingual emperor may have used intentionally nuanced and ambiguous language in the
governing of diverse ethnic groups. Atwood also draws on sources in a range of languages in order to question how a ‘standard narrative’ came to dominate the historical record on the deeds and reputation of Jochi, particularly the political, posthumous erasure of his role in the Chem River campaign and the siege of Ürgench (p. 38). Morgan’s chapter returns to the theme of ‘balanced history’ and seeks to rehabilitate somewhat the reputation of the Mongols in Persia. Morgan’s conversational style guides the reader through the argument that, without disputing the Mongol’s ‘brutality’, it should be recognised that their effects were not ‘entirely negative’ (p. 60). The chapter by Brose introduces a new technique for approaching identity strategies through social network analysis, taking the example of the Qipchak in thirteenth–fourteenth-century Mongol China. Brose’s work suggests some interesting lines of analysis regarding political and marriage alliances and how a social network analysis can reveal hitherto unknown techniques by which groups maintained their identity and increased their influence.

Birge’s chapter addresses the underappreciated influence of the laws of the Mongol Yuan dynasty on the laws of later Chinese dynasties, especially penal, marriage and inheritance laws. Robinson takes an already well-studied topic—the conflicts between the Ming and the Mongols—but presents a new medium through which to approach it, namely music and dance performances, such as those commissioned by the Ming court to celebrate their military victories over the Mongols. Crossley’s chapter is a detailed study of the history of the techniques and technologies of horse-riding. Crossley’s attention to minute detail is commendable, as it allows the reader truly to appreciate the complexity of cavalry-based warfare as an assemblage of material culture, embodied knowledge and non-human intentional action. Konagaya introduces the reader to Japanese legends, martial songs and portraits of Chinggis Khan to argue that one may, in fact, trace the development of Chinggis Khan worship to the Japanese, who encouraged his veneration in Manchuko, Inner Mongolia. The chapter disrupts the wide-held impression that Mongolian Chinggis Khan worship was a long-standing Mongol practice, interrupted only by socialism. The final chapter, by the lawyer and former Mongolian Ambassador to Austria and the UN, E. Jargalsaikhan, focuses on Mongolia in the nuclear age. Jargalsaikhan presents the present and hidden dangers of Mongolia being surrounded by massive nuclear powers, the declaration of Mongolia as a nuclear-weapon-free state, and the possibilities for the peaceful development of nuclear technologies in the country.

That the volume should be largely historical is not surprising, given its dedication to Prof. Rossabi and that six of the ten contributors are US-based history professors. Nevertheless, some readers may be left disappointed that the