

BOOK REVIEWS

## *The Rise of the Mongols: Five Chinese Sources*

Edited and translated by Christopher Pratt Atwood, with Lynn Struve. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2021. 229pp. \$16.00 (paper)

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The Mongol Empire (1206–1368) has been notorious for the multi-lingual sources required for its study. While scholarly translations of major Persian and European sources on the rise of Mongols were made available to researchers decades ago,<sup>1</sup> and the indigenous Mongol source for the rise of Chinggis Khan, *The Secret History*, is available in the excellent translation of Igor de Rachewiltz,<sup>2</sup> so far Chinese sources on the Mongols have mainly remained accessible only to Sinologists. Christopher Atwood's volume masterfully fills in this gap. Moreover, when we combine this new work with his ongoing translations of the Basic Annals (*benji*) chapters of the *Yuan shi*, the official history of the Yuan dynasty (1260–1368) whose rulers were also the Mongols' Great Khans,<sup>3</sup> and his long-awaited translation of the *Shengwu qinzheng lu* (Record of the Campaigns of a Holy warrior), an anonymous Chinese chronicle based on a Mongolian source different from the *Secret History* that was also used by the Persian historian Rashīd al-Dīn (d. 1318), Atwood's scholarly enterprise contributes immensely to a holistic understanding of the emergence of the largest contiguous empire, by making the Chinese records accessible.

The volume starts with a succinct introduction that gives short background on the rise of Chinggis Khan (r. 1206–1227) and the United Empire under his heirs (1206–1260) as well as a very useful technical introduction to Chinese conventions of time keeping and administration, as well as to Chinese, Mongolian, Khitan, and Jurchen naming patterns.

The five sources consist of three works compiled by subjects of the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279) and two written under Mongol rule. They include three

<sup>1</sup>Notably al- Juvainī, 'Aṭā-Malik, *History of World Conqueror*, translated by John A. Boyle (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1958, rpt. 1997); Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jami'u't-tawarikh* [sic] *Compendium of Chronicles*, translated by Wheeler M. Thackston (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998–99); William of Rubruck, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, translated by Peter Jackson with David O. Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1990); Christopher Dawson, *The Mongol Mission* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955).

<sup>2</sup>Igor de Rachewiltz trans., *The Secret History of the Mongols: A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2004, 2013).

<sup>3</sup>These are published as articles in the journal *Mongolian Studies* since the issue of 2017–18.

travelogues, one Spirit-Path Stele, and extracts from a history book which, although well-known, is not usually mentioned in connection to the Mongols. The volume starts with the oldest Chinese source for the rise of Chinggis Khan, compiled by the famous Song historian Li Xinchuan (1167–1244) in 1215–1217. Unlike other sources included in this collection, the report is based not on personal acquaintance but mostly on border reports sent to the Song court or to Li Xinchuan's homeland in Sichuan. While he records the rise of “the fierce, arrogant and disrespectful” though “very powerful” Temüjin (the future Chinggis Khan), and gives a very detailed description of the attack of the Mongol troops on Zhongdu (modern Beijing), the capital of the Jin dynasty's (1115–1234), Li Xinchuan does not treat the Mongols as a particularly dangerous threat. He dedicates more space to the actions of the anti-Song rebels in his native Sichuan.

The next two sources, *A Memorandum on the Mong-Tatars* (*Meng-Ta bei lu* 蒙鞑備錄) and the *Sketch of the Black Tatars* (*Heida shilue* 黑鞑事略) were compiled by Song envoys to the Mongol court in 1221 and 1233, respectively. They are better known than Li's account, mainly due to Wang Guowei's edition, and were translated into German and Russian in the late twentieth century. The *Memorandum* is especially informative on the Mongol army under Chinggis Khan (it can be compared to Plano-Carpini's detailed report on the Mongol army of the 1240s) and gives fascinating details on the early organization of Mongol state and society, including the position of women. The author, Zhao Gong, a lesser Song official, reached only Yanjing and not Mongolia. He obviously preferred the once “honest and simple” Mongols to the “Jin caitiffs” whose influence had corrupted the Mongols. While acknowledging the power of Chinggis Khan after his eastern and western conquests, he does not see him as a direct threat to the Song. The *Sketch of the Black Tatars* was compiled by Peng Daya, a Song official who was sent several times to the Mongols, but who wrote his report after his first mission. Another Song envoy, Xu Ting, about whom nearly nothing is known, added his detailed notes to the report in 1237, with Peng's blessing. This report is also extremely informative, detailing Mongol customs from dress and diet to horse management and taxes. It documents the growing confidence of the Mongols in their ability to subjugate the world, and the simultaneously rising hostility of the Song envoys towards this new power.

The next two sources were compiled under Mongol rule. The first is the stele inscription of Yelü Chucai (1190–1244), the Khitan astrologer and minister of Chinggis Khan and Ögödei, who is favorably mentioned even in the hostile *The Sketch of the Black Tatars*. Compiled in 1268 by the Yuan scholar Song Zizhen (1188–1268) at the request of Chucai's son, Yelü Zhu (1221–1285), a high official under Qubilai Khan (r. 1260–1294), the stele portrays Chucai as an exemplary Confucian who did his best to Confucianize the Mongol dynasty and oppose the policies suggested by non-Chinese advisors, notably the Muslim 'Abd al-Rahmān, a confrontation that was relevant also for Qubilai's reign. The last source is *Notes of a Journey* (*Saibei jixing* 塞北紀行) by Zhang Dehui (1194–1274), a former Jin official who after 1234 moved into the Mongol service. It records his first journey to Mongolia in 1247. He was summoned there by Qubilai, then a prince, to discuss the Confucian way of rule. The geographical description of Mongolia is enriched by excerpts from Zhang Dehui's conversations with Qubilai, which are drawn from yet another work (Wang Yun's *Account of Conduct*, compiled after Zhang Dehui's death). Of special interest is Zhang Dehui's explanation that Jin did not fall because of Confucianism, but due to the bad decisions of generals and hereditary officials. Certainly, the text demonstrates Qubilai's interest in Chinese ways long before he became the Great Khan.

Taken together, the five sources not only provide many fascinating details about the early Mongols and north China under their rule, but also highlight the collision and coexistence between the Chinese and Mongol ways of life on the eve of the Mongol conquest of the whole of China. The translation is lucid, accompanied by many (but not too many) informative notes, and a full array of aids such as a chronology, maps, tables of dynastic genealogies, reign titles, and even weights and measures, as well as a glossary of Chinese and non-Chinese names and terms, and notes about the texts consulted. All these help the reader contextualize the sources, while the various images scattered across the pages make the reading more appealing. My only reservation is that sometimes Atwood uses translations that are different from the usual conventions—although this is always explained in the notes and/or the introduction. Thus he translates *Huihu* 回鶻 and *Huihui* 回回, usually rendered as Uighurs or Muslims respectively, as Turkestani and Westerns. While the logic is clear, describing the Uighur script as the Western script (107), may be a bit misleading. A Chinese–English edition would have also been desirable. Such quibbles notwithstanding, Atwood has done a tremendous service to scholars and students of the Mongol Empire by making these important sources accessible in such a superb way. The book convinced me to offer a primary-sources based course on Chinggis Khan for next year, and I’m sure that it will be constantly used for both teaching and research for many years to come.

## *Fusion of East and West: Children, Education, and a New China, 1902–1915*

By Limin Bai. Oxford: Brill, 2019. 295 pp. €127.00, \$153.00 (cloth).

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As the title suggests, in *Fusion of East and West: Children, Education, and a New China, 1902–1915*, Limin Bai argues that children’s primers in the new republic combined elements from both East and West during a pivotal period of political change in modern China. Bai recovers the importance and influence of Chinese Christian educators, and she suggests that secular leaders like Liang Qichao may have been influenced by Christians even when they denied such influences themselves or sought equivalents in the Chinese tradition. Such instances “indicate the influence of missionary education which not only shaped a generation of young Christians like Wang Hengtong, but also contributed to the birth of a modern Chinese education system” (168). Bai shows that Protestants and Catholics, as well as Christian and non-Christian Chinese, shared ideas about modernizing childhood education and the importance of Western scientific knowledge (208). In general, there was widespread agreement across religious and political differences regarding the importance of childhood education, even when ideological aims of those groups differed.