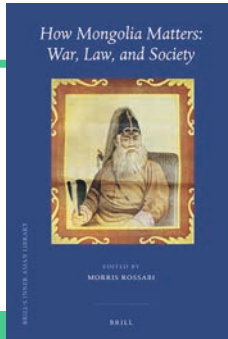


How Mongolia matters

Simon Wickhamsmith



Reviewed title:

How Mongolia Matters: War, Law, and Society

Morris Rossabi (ed.) 2017.

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View of unnamed Mongolian village. Image originally posted on the AFRC website. Reproduced courtesy of US Air Force. Photo by Master Sgt. Linda Welz.

Mongolia's critical placement, in the enveloping grip of Russia and China, has long been a source of discord and challenge, as much intellectual as military or political. The attraction of the Soviet Union following that country's revolution to those who wished to develop Mongolia as a more modern and progressive nation, was in part that it was not China, and now that China and Russia are seeking to prove themselves in 21st-century discourses such as science and technology, in financial investment and mining, Mongolia again finds itself as a quiet but important player in the Asian polity. But this pales somewhat, of course, beside its significance on the world stage at key moments over the last eight centuries, and it is upon a deeper understanding of this significance that the essays in *How Mongolia Matters* are focused.

How Mongolia Matters, in fact, is a Festschrift for Morris Rossabi, who has contributed greatly to scholarship geared to explaining Mongolian history through recourse to original documents and to painstaking multi-perspective research. In his introduction, Rossabi bemoans the mythology which 'enshroud[s]' Mongolian historical scholarship, and rightly claims that 'the overturning of these myths is essential if an accurate portrayal of the role of the Mongols and Inner Asians in history is to be produced' (p. 2).

The 10 essays which make up this book, indeed, seek to overturn some of these myths though focusing on specific aspects of Mongolia's history, from (roughly) the Chingissid period to its current democratic post-Soviet incarnation. They range in theme from the Tumu incident of 1449, in

which the Oirats captured the Ming Emperor (in Chapter 1 by Johan Elverskog), to post-Socialist Mongolia as a nuclear-free zone (in Chapter 10 by Jargalsaikhan Enkhsaikhan), from the Mongols' efforts to prevent a rider's leg from making contact with the horse's flank (in Chapter 8 by Pamela Kyle Crossley) to the influence of the Mongols upon jurisprudence and legal systems (in Chapter 6 by Bettina Birge). The breadth and depth of the scholarship here is such that this volume could provide an interested reader with a good overview of the contribution of the Mongols to the development of Asian and Eurasian sociopolitics.

Two papers in particular caught my eye. The first is James Millward's analysis of the Manchu, Mongol, and Tibetan translations of, in Millward's most apposite clarification (p. 21), 'not so much...what the ancient Chinese meant as what the Qing Court meant when it used' the Chinese term *huairou yuanren* (怀柔远人) during the Qianlong period. As someone who works with these three languages, but not with Chinese, I was struck by Millward's insightful and creative use of these translations to explore the way in which the Qing translators rendered the already ambiguous idea of *huairou yuanren* in equally ambiguous terms, employing 'similar ambiguities between soft and hard, spontaneous and induced approaches to achieving the accommodation of these people [the Mongols, Tibetans and Manchus] from far away' (p. 31). While I would quibble that perhaps, for the Qing, the Manchu language during the Qianlong was not especially distant, either geographically or emotionally, as Millward is suggesting, his point about the powerful effects of translation is well made. If support is needed for the value and suitability of New Qing History, and for the refocusing on the documentary, historiographical and linguistic study of the Qing from the viewpoint of sources in languages other than Chinese, and from actors other than the Han, then this short article offers precisely that.

The second essay which I wish to discuss is Yuki Konagaya's 'Modern Origins of Chinggis Khan Worship', which revisits the thorny question of how Chinggis Khan's place during the turbulent decades of the 20th century is to be understood. Though she modestly refers to 'the minor but tangible evidence'

(p. 154) which she has unearthed in support of the fact that, in Inner Mongolia during the 1940s, the Japanese honored Chinggis Khan, and that ordinary Mongolians were focused more on Tibetan Buddhism than on Chinggis Khan, these are interesting findings nonetheless. Konagawa's use of portraits of, and songs about, Chinggis Khan focuses attention on how culture responded to his image, and she nicely contrasts this with the tragic circumstances surrounding D. Tömör-Ochir's promotion of the 800th anniversary in 1962 – catalyzed by his own experience, whilst hospitalized in China, of preparations for that country's own impending commemoration – of Chinggis Khan's birth, which was likewise founded on image management, in the form of postage stamps, books and public celebrations. More such research is needed to develop a clear idea of how Chinggisid imagery was developed and manipulated on both sides of the Mongol–China border during this period, and how this has been handled in recent years. Certainly, in my own realm of modern Mongolian literature, there is great thematic and stylistic variation to be explored in literary works about Chinggis Khan written after 1990, and this is clearly replicated in the use of his image in advertising, the arts and culture and, of course, in politics. Konagawa's contribution, then, is a most welcome stimulus to further study of this important subfield.

The social and political machinations which form the hub around which this collection revolves is complex and, at times, fraught, yet these are exemplary essays, presenting the historical material, and its ramifications, in ways both accessible and illuminating. This, fittingly, is very much in keeping with the spirit in which Morris Rossabi has always presented his own work. In conclusion, to redirect Michael Brose's opening tribute to Rossabi to those represented here, this book is not only well-researched and well-considered, but is welcome for its 'deep analytical insight spun out in persuasive, accessible prose, and always favoring an approach that looks, if even slightly, outside the box' (p. 69). Would that all books dealing with complex areas of humanities inquiry be so expertly presented.

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Thailand: shifting ground between the US and a rising China

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Thailand: Shifting Ground between the US and a Rising China

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This book shines a useful light on Thailand's foreign relations since the end of the second World War. Benjamin Zawacki creates a great contribution to the study of Thailand's triangular relationship with the United States and China, examining the way in which Thailand could situate itself among greater powers. The book presents a succinct and well-informed analysis and investigation on Thailand's efforts to maintain, balance and bandwagon positions with greater powers. The author argues that at the end of the Cold War the United States became a choice for Thailand to strengthen its relationship with. China has risen in power during the 21st century and, as a result, the relationship with China has also been a fundamental concern of Thailand.

In the earlier stage from the commencement of the Vietnam War in the 1950s, Thailand's relationship with Washington was close, particularly in terms of helping to maintain regional peace and security. However, after the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, Thai elites shifted Thai foreign policy behavior towards China. The United States seemed to disregard

the increasing power vacuum in its relationship with Thailand. The re-emergence of China's engagement with Thai diplomatic relations has been generally welcomed among Thais. This has provided enhancement of economic cooperation between the two countries.

The book has been divided into two parts, consisting of 10 chapters. Zawacki chronologically examines the evolution of Thailand shifting positions between the United States and China over the course of time. Thailand was selected by Zawacki as a single case study and has presented as a well-written piece of work, adopting a content analysis approach. The deeply rhetoric descriptions illustrate the challenging positions that Thailand has faced since the end of the Second World War.

The author focuses in the first part of the book on examining the historical events of Thai diplomacy and its relationship with the United States and China, from the early post-war period in 1945 up to Thailand's election in 2001 in which Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra was victorious. In the second part, the author examines Thailand's triangular relationship with the United States and China from 2001 to 2014.

The examination of the American–Thai relationship during the Cold War mainly focuses on the military forces. An interesting point is uncovered, especially regarding the complex relationship with the United States and China towards the end of the Cold War. This bilateral relationship with the United States was a key feature in the formation of Thailand's political characteristics in controlling security and armed forces throughout the Cold War period. The deepening relations with Washington continued up until the regional conflict in Indochina in the late 1980s.

Nevertheless, Thailand had doubts about the next phase of America's diplomatic relationship with Thailand after the end of military base usage in the country. At the same time, Sino–Thai relations became much closer after 1978, following Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia. The critical circumstance of the Cambodian–Vietnamese War led Thailand to come under pressure with its security interests. Therefore, Thailand became cautious in its relationship with the United States and China as well as being determined to contain the Vietnamese and Soviet influence in Southeast Asia. Afterwards, China became a significant partner in Thai foreign affairs, as Thailand developed proactive relations towards Beijing in the early post-Cold War era, particularly in economic engagement. On the other hand, Thailand was still tied in its relations with the United States, for example during the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997–2001, in which Thailand suffered from economic collapse. Thailand needed to remain close with the United States, which was demonstrated by following American-led international order in the form of the IMF package and Washington consensus, despite requiring a painful transition period for Thailand's economic restoration.