

Harvard University Press, 2011) and Grace C. Huang's *Chiang Kai-shek's Politics of Shame: Leadership, Legacy, and National Identity in China* (Harvard Asia Center, 2021). These revisionist monographs respond to Lloyd Eastman's *Seeds of Destruction: Nationalist China in War and Revolution, 1937–1949* (Stanford University Press, 1984), which blamed the “loss of China” on the self-destructive decisions and actions of Nationalist leaders. One might have hoped that the release of Chiang Kai-shek's personal diaries would help settle the debate about this complex political figure, but it has only complicated the picture. While one scholar sees in these diary entries a Chiang Kai-shek deeply concerned about the nation, another reads them as evidence of Chiang's ignorance of what needed to be done to save the economy.

Perhaps a productive venue for research, besides (re)appraisals of top leaders, would be to study the late 1940s from the ground up. In recent years, the Academia Historica (*Guoshiguan*) in Taipei has digitalized a large number of archival files from the late 1940s. Although most of these documents were generated by the government, some were petition letters from the general public. As I am also interested in the immediate post-war period, I have come across many of these letters, which speak to public opinion and sentiment. Contrary to what I expected, these archival materials show that many people from different walks of life maintained a sense of hope even after the failure of the gold yuan reform and offered their suggestions for saving the economy. There are also many other types of documents that show how people lived through the ravages of war and economic instability on the scale that China experienced in the 1940s. Future research should investigate the topic of hyperinflation from a social and even cultural perspective.

Coble's volume could have benefited from some trimming and reorganization. There is quite a bit of repetition and recapitulation. Because the author organizes the narrative by year, the same or similar trends that occurred in multiple years are reiterated in different chapters. However, this does not detract from the book's excellent treatment of the Chinese economy. Including this monograph in a graduate seminar on modern China would certainly generate lively and productive discussion among students.

## The Precious Summary: A History of the Mongols from Chinggis Khan to the Qing Dynasty

By Sagang Sechen, translated by Johan Elverskog. New York: Columbia University Press, 2023. 376 pp. \$140.00 (cloth), \$35.00 (paper), \$34.99 (ebook)

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doi:10.1017/jch.2023.29

The Mongolian chronicle *Erdeni-yin tobci* (“Precious Summary”), written in 1662 by the Ordos nobleman Sagang Sechen, occupies a special position among the Mongolian chronicles of the seventeenth century. It was widely received and read

among the Mongols, as evidenced by the more than twenty-four manuscripts that have been found to date. Moreover, the work was given the rare honor of being translated from Mongolian into Manchu and from there into Chinese by order of the Qianlong Emperor. In 1777, the three versions of the work were even printed. Thus, the *Erdeni-yin tobci* proved to be probably the most widespread and well-known Mongolian historical work in the Qing Empire. Moreover, the work was also the first Mongolian historical work to become known in Europe. In 1829, the Moravian missionary Isaac Jacob Schmidt published a German translation of the chronicle. Before this date, Mongolian historiography was practically unknown in Europe. The early translation into a European language ensured that the view of Mongol history presented in the *Erdeni-yin tobci* continues to shape scholarly accounts to this day.

The chronicle was translated into English for the first, and until now only, time in 1967 by John R. Krueger.<sup>1</sup> It is to the credit of Johan Elverskog that this important Mongolian historical work has now been made accessible to a wide range of readers in a new, carefully annotated translation. He has based his translation on the expanded version of the Urga manuscript, which was published in 1990.<sup>2</sup> Elverskog has explicitly set himself the goal of presenting a translation that makes the *Erdeni-yin tobci* accessible to an academic audience beyond that of Mongolian Studies. To this end he has made a special effort not only to present an easily readable translation, but also to preface each chapter with a brief introduction that places it in the larger cultural-historical context of Inner Asia in general and the Mongols in particular. In addition, the present translation captivates the reader with an extensive annotation apparatus that provides deeper historical, as well as cultural and political, insights into the details of the story that Sagang Sechen unfolds.

Johan Elverskog provides his translation with a general introduction that places the *Erdeni-yin tobci* in the context of the time in which it was written. He describes, briefly but very precisely and in rich in detail, the events in the Mongolian regions after the collapse of the Yuan Empire in 1368, and he outlines the Mongolian political theory that was prevalent in Sagang Sechen's time. Thus he succeeds in unfolding in a few pages the motivations for Sagang Sechen to write his chronicle. Elverskog also briefly discusses the reception of the work in the Qing Empire and in Europe. This excellent introduction is followed by the actual translation. Here, Elverskog does not follow the author's own division into three parts (of varying length), but instead divides the work into individual chapters, which he prefaces with brief introductions to help the readers find their way around. The translation is thus newly divided into a total of fourteen chapters. The new structure was made according to content-related aspects, which, on the whole, prove to be very coherently chosen. However, the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters are an exception to this rule. The thirteenth chapter is titled "Epilogue," while the fourteenth is titled "Colophon." Sagang Sechen's work is an early example of Mongolian historiography that was heavily influenced by Tibetan historiography in the context of Tibetan Buddhist literature, which in turn was influenced by the Indian *Nītiśāstra* tradition. Thus, he also draws on Tibetan Buddhist models

<sup>1</sup>The *Bejewelled Summary of the Origin of Khans (Qad-un ündiüsün-ü Erdeni-yin tobci): A History of the Eastern Mongols to 1662* [by] Sagang Sechen, Prince of the Ordos Mongols. Newly translated from the original Mongolian by John R. Krueger (Bloomington: The Mongolia Society, 1967).

<sup>2</sup>*Sagang Secen: Erdeni-yin tobci ("Precious Summary"): A Mongolian Chronicle of 1662*. 1: The Urga text transcribed and edited by M. Gö, I. de Rachewiltz, J.R. Krueger, and B. Ulaan (Canberra: Faculty of Asian Studies, Australian National University, 1990).

including *Nītiśāstra* literature in the writing of the colophon. The actual concluding note itself is followed by seventy-nine verses in the manner of the *Nītiśāstras*. Both the concluding note (Chapter 13) and the poem of seventy-nine verses (Chapter 14) together form the colophon, and therefore they must be read together.<sup>3</sup> However, one can also go as far as György Kara, who explicitly states in the introduction to his translation of the seventy-nine verses that this poem is actually not a colophon: “The prince wrote this gnomic or moralistic poem, actually not a colophon.”<sup>4</sup> This final poem has already been translated twice into English.<sup>5</sup> Elverskog’s own English rendering adheres very closely to the translations of his two predecessors, but smooths them out so that the poem becomes more comprehensible to a wider readership.

The translation of the individual chapters of the chronicle is overall very well done. To what extent Elverskog makes use of Krueger’s translation I cannot ascertain, since at the time of writing this review his translation was not available to me.

Elverskog has not only provided a readable translation, but also in the extensive annotation apparatus a tool to gain a deep insight into the history of the Mongols from the time of Chinggis Khan to the second half of the seventeenth century. The annotation apparatus on the history of the Mongols (Chapters 3–12) is extremely detailed and based on the latest research, mostly taking into account English-language research. The chapter on Tibet, on the other hand, falls short here, and it is a pity that this chapter was not as carefully historically annotated. The uninformed reader may probably not notice the considerable discrepancies in Sagang Sechen’s version of the actual chronology of the history of the Tibetan Empire. For example, Sagang Sechen’s statement that the construction of Samye Monastery was begun in 811 is not explicitly corrected, but in the footnote (218n48) it is merely noted that the construction took place during the reign of Trisong Detsen. However, since the dates of Trisong Detsen’s life are not corrected (Sasang Sechen gives Trisong Detsen’s death date as 845, but he died around the year 800),<sup>6</sup> the incorrect dating of the temple foundation simply remains as it is. The absent corrections in the annotation apparatus are surprising, because in the notes to the following chapters dealing with the history of the Mongols, such inaccuracies are always noted, commented on, and corrected. For Tibetan, there are also a number of transliteration errors, such as *snags pa* instead of *sngags pa* (276), *lugs nyis* instead of *lugs gnyis* (231n51), or *gsar gyal* instead of *gsar rgyal* (283n26). Potentially careless copyediting is to blame for the misprints in German titles in the bibliography.

However, these minor issues do not in any way diminish the extraordinary achievement of this new translation of the *Erdeni-yin tobci*, which will remain the standard reference work for this important Mongolian chronicle for many years to come.

<sup>3</sup>Based on the Tibetan usage of the term (Tib. *mjug byang* and *mdzad byang*), a colophon can be defined as “a piece of writing found as a rule at the end of a work ... providing information on one or more facts related to its identity, production, and transmission, including the work’s title, names of persons involved, such as author or compiler ... and the duration, date, place, (re)sources, and motives of composition or production.” (Dorji Wangchuk, “The Syntax of Tibetan Colophons: An Overview,” in *The Syntax of Colophons: A Comparative Study across Pothi Manuscripts*, edited by Nalini Balbir and Giovanni Ciotti (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022), 328.

<sup>4</sup>G. Kara, “Sasang Sechen’s Teachings Reconsidered,” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 74.2 (2021), 268.

<sup>5</sup>John R. Krueger, “The Epilogue and Gnomic Colophon of the *Erdeni-yin Tobci*,” *Central Asiatic Journal* 8 (1963), 104–34, and Kara, “Sasang Sechen’s Teachings Reconsidered.”

<sup>6</sup>See Sam van Schaik, *Tibet: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 41–42.