The Lama Question: Violence, Sovereignty, and Exception in Early Socialist Mongolia

Christopher Kaplonski
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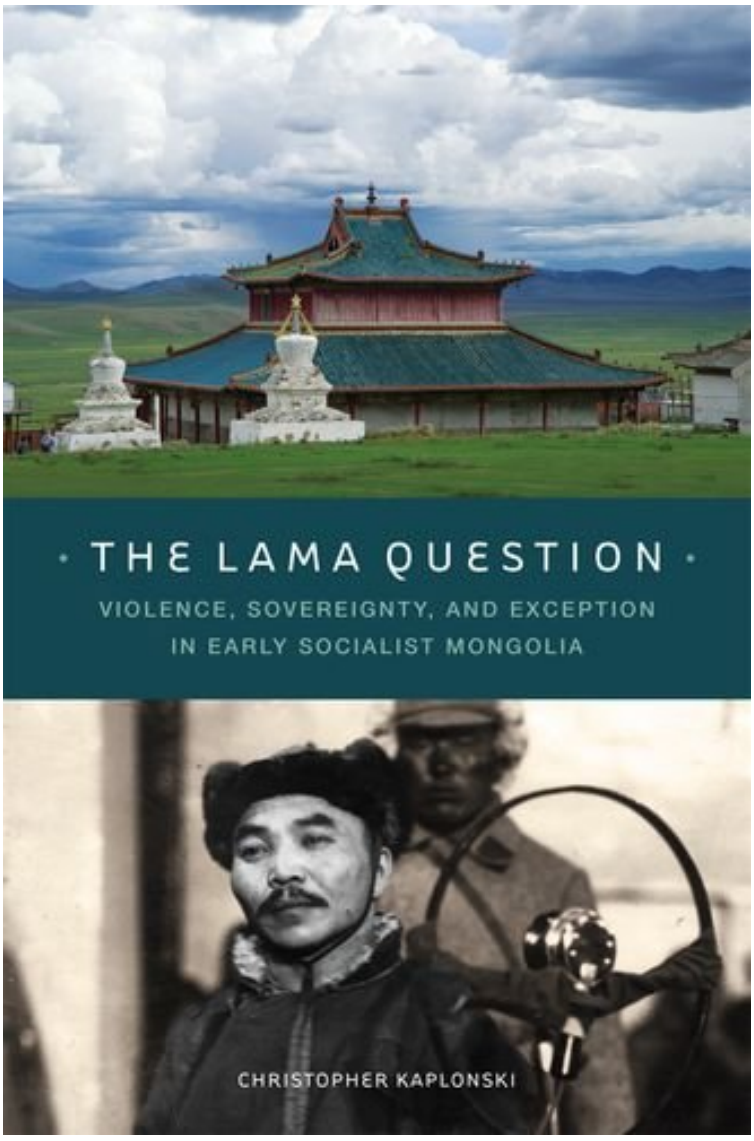

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Christopher Kaplonski : The Lama Question: Violence, Sovereignty, and Exception in Early Socialist Mongolia before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Lama Question: Violence, Sovereignty, and Exception in Early Socialist Mongolia:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Kaplonski at his bestBy JPCIn The Lama Question, Christopher Kaplonski uses the example of political violence against Mongolian Buddhist lamas to interrogate Agambens theory of

exception. Here, exception refers to the states ability to rely on extrajudicial means in times of crisis the state essentially being the one that can utilize extrajudicial, exceptional means when faced with crisis. Agamben roots his notion of exception in the idea of homo sacer a Roman legal concept that denoted a person who was stripped of their citizenship and subject to execution. Kaplonski refines Agambens theory of exception to make use of it in the Mongolian case. There was no homo sacer in Mongolia the early Mongolian state simply did not possess enough power to simply execute them. As far as states go, the Mongolian government of this period was liminal it lacked the traditional authority of a state to impose the rule of law, and it also lacked the exceptional authority to resort to extrajudicial means. This liminality of the early Mongolian socialist state answers Kaplonskis problematique, that is, why did it take so long for the socialist Mongolian government to purge the lamas?. Lacking power, the Mongolian government made a concerted effort to make the political violence experienced by the lamas fit within an existing legal framework. Im not sure if it would be fair to characterize Kaplonskis book as a revisionist history, partly because there is not much literature, at least in English, to be revised. The Lama Question does provide a necessary counter-balance to earlier works in English, such as Baabars From World Power to Soviet Satellite. Juxtaposing the two accounts, an irreconcilable irony develops: to refocus historical agency onto the Mongols, that is, to make them more than a Soviet satellite, is also to hold them accountable to the purges. Kaplonskis work also problematizes long-standing conceptions of the state, such as Webers famous dictum that the state is the entity/institution that can make legitimate use of violence. Kaplonskis work demonstrates that the early Mongolian socialist state was in no position to make legitimate use of violence, and that it was only after the early Mongolian state attained a decree of judicial legitimacy that it could resort to violence at all.0 of 14 people found the following review helpful. ?By NHKHusband bought it for school. I really don't know anything about it.

Before becoming the second socialist country in the world (after the Soviet Union) in 1921, Mongolia had been a Buddhist feudal theocracy. Combatting the influence of the dominant Buddhist establishment to win the hearts and minds of the Mongolian people was one of the most important challenges faced by the new socialist government. It would take almost a decade and a half to resolve the lama question, and it would be answered with brutality, destruction, and mass killings. Chris Kaplonski examines this critical, violent time in the development of Mongolia as a nation-state and its ongoing struggle for independence and recognition in the twentieth century.Unlike most studies that explore violence as the primary means by which states deal with their opponents, The Lama Question argues that the decision to resort to violence in Mongolia was not a quick one; neither was it a long-term strategy nor an out-of control escalation of orders but the outcome of a complex series of events and attempts by the government to be viewed as legitimate by the population. Kaplonski draws on a decade of research and archival resources to investigate the problematic relationships between religion and politics and geopolitics and biopolitics in early socialist Mongolia, as well as the multitude of state actions that preceded state brutality. By examining the incidents and transformations that resulted in violence and by viewing violence as a process rather than an event, his work not only challenges existing theories of political violence, but also offers another approach to the anthropology of the state. In particular, it presents an alternative model to philosopher Georgio Agambens theory of sovereignty and the state of exception.The Lama Question will be of interest to scholars and students of violence, the state, biopolitics, Buddhism, and socialism, as well as to those interested in the history of Mongolia and Asia in general.

The Lama Question ranks as one of the best books I have read on Soviet-era Mongolia, a book to be urged upon all those with an interest in the early revolutionary period, in the sociohistory of religion and, of course, in the disturbing and sadly ever-pertinent issue of state violence.-- "International Institute of Asian Studies Newsletter"In this remarkable book that fuses in-depth archival research with a sophisticated reinterpretation of Giorgio Agamben's theory of the exception, Christopher Kaplonski not only rewrites the early history of communist Mongolia but also forces us to rethink the nature of states and their use of political violence. To do so, he explores in fascinating detail the internal Mongolian debates about the "lama question," namely the question of how this fledgling socialist state could break the power of the Buddhist establishment and thereby not only shore up its own legitimacy but also do so in a manner that would not alienate the vast majority of Mongols.-- "Religious Studies " The Lama Question ranks as one of the best books I have read on Soviet-era Mongolia, a book to be urged upon all those with an interest in the early revolutionary period, in the sociohistory of religion and, of course, in the disturbing and sadly ever-pertinent issue of state violence. (International Institute of Asian Studies Newsletter)In this remarkable book that fuses in-depth archival research with a sophisticated reinterpretation of Giorgio Agambens theory of the exception, Christopher Kaplonski not only rewrites the early history of communist Mongolia but also forces us to rethink the nature of states and their use of political violence. To do so, he explores in fascinating detail the internal Mongolian debates about the lama question, namely the question of how this fledgling socialist state could break the power of the Buddhist establishment and thereby not only shore up its own legitimacy but also do so in a manner that would not alienate the vast majority of Mongols. (Religious Studies) Studies of state violence have mainly concentrated on the victims and the repercussions and circumstances of the violence. Insufficiently explored are the motivations and specific contexts

behind the perpetrators of violence. Chris Kaplonski, in this sophisticated study of Mongolia in the twentieth century, shows that the birth and building of the modern nation-state involves more than revolutionary violence and state-induced terror. Kaplonskis main point is that the Mongolian states violence beginning in the 1930s and later was a sign of its weakness, not its power. The Lama Question is a refreshing and entirely new perspective on Mongolias nation-building. It is also a bold and rare contribution to the study of the violence of the state. Extensively researched and brilliantly argued, the book helps to explain the politics of retribution, the problems surrounding truth commissions, and many other aspects related to the politics following state violence. (Manduhai Buyandelger, MIT)This innovative book is the first to investigate state violence in early socialist Mongolia. Through his penetrating study of archives and personal memories, Kaplonski provides an extraordinary account of the brutal repression of Buddhism, along with a new critical argument about how such state interventions can be interpreted. This book is a must for all those interested in the modern history of Inner Asia. (Caroline Humphrey, Kings College, University of Cambridge)