



Zizhi tongjian: Warring States and Qin Volume 1 to 8

Sima Guang

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Zizhi tongjian Vol 1-8 – Warring States and Qin – Translated by Joseph P Yap Sima Guang (1019-1086 CE) completed his Zizhi tongjian (Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance) in 1084, a monumental historiography that commences in 403 BCE and ends in 959 CE, covering a span of 1362 years of ancient and medieval Chinese history. Qin Mu the eminent contemporary Chinese historian remarks, “Sima Guang successfully merged the three disciplines of literature, history, and philosophy into one entity.” The Zizhi tongjian is about historical experience, and Sima Guang maintains that the heads-of-states can learn so much by studying history. The book has earned high acclaim among Chinese and Asian scholars ever since its publication. However, only a very small part of the work has been translated into English; hence, the work is not widely read. This volume of this translation begins in 403 BCE and concludes with the fall of the Qin Dynasty in 207 BCE. The Zizhi tongjian assimilated the exceptional attributes and defining qualities of the Zuo zhuan (the Commentary of Zuo) and the Shiji (Records of the Grand Historian). Since its publication, it has held a very special and esteemed position among Chinese scholars and historians. Although the work was principally sponsored and financed by the Song Imperial Court, it was organized and written by private individuals; it, therefore, deviated significantly from historical texts prepared by court officials during previous dynasties. In 403 BCE, the once powerful Jin hegemonic state was partitioned into Hann, Wei, and Zhao. Together with Qi, Qin, Chu and Yan they came to be known as the seven warring states. Sima Guang in his annotation on the enfeoffment of the three fief lords by the King of Zhou laments over the breakdown of li (rites). He says, ‘It was not the three Jin ministers who bankrupted the instituted rites; rather, the Son of Heaven brought on the collapse.’ He contends that as the illegitimate act of partitioning a state by its subjects was legitimized by the Son of Heaven - the Zhou king was wholly accountable for the demise. Sima Guang thus chose to commence his chronicle of Zizhi tongjian during the 23rd year of King Weilei of Zhou, 403 BCE, when the Son of Heaven enfeoffed the Jin ministers. The times of the Warring States was about reforms, political strategies, intrigue, warfares, conquests and wholesale massacres when the major states vied for control of China. Wei was the first state that made reforms and enjoyed of decades of prosperity and military strength; it was followed by others in varying forms. The tide turned when Duke Xiao of Qin ascended to the throne; he made resolve to strengthen his state, and it was the turning point of the Warring States. Through Shang Yang’s reform, Qin basically laid down the foundation for the final conquest of the six states. This volume offers the readers a glimpse of the political struggles between the seven states culminating in the final unification of China by by the First Emperor Qin Shihuang in 221 BCE. The book ends with the demise of Qin. When Sima Qian (145?-90 BCE) composed the Shiji (Records of the Grand Historian) he used all the information that was available to him, numerous errors were incorporated. Sima Guang, while conducted extensive research, drew copiously on the information from Shiji on the parts of Warring States, Qin, and early Han, and his work included many of the mistakes made. Ever since much textual and archaeological information on the Warring States have become available. Yang Kuan, one of the most eminent contemporary scholars, had conducted extensive textual and archaeological research on the Warring States, shedding much light on the errors on Shiji, Zhanguo ce (Warring States Strategies) and Zizhi tongjian. The author translated some of his more outstanding articles.

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