

The book's only shortcoming is that it focuses exclusively on the maneuvers by the major military and political leaders who made Taiwan a separate state. To be sure, the institutions they created far outlasted the expectations of most observers in 1949. Few would have forecast how Taiwan would continue as the Republic of China and eventually develop a democratic government and a free society. Once considered a pawn by both the Nationalists and the United States, Taiwan has become an important economic and political actor in its own right, despite its loss of diplomatic recognition starting in the mid-1960s. But other than brief mentions of the Formosa League for Re-emancipation and the Taiwanese Democratic People's Association, there is limited analysis of the views of those Taiwanese who pressed for independence or democracy during these early years, let alone whether Chiang Kai-shek took any of their views into consideration. This invites further study of the other important groups and individuals who are not covered in this otherwise ambitious book.

Today, the people of Taiwan, including aborigines, Hakka, Hokkien, and the mainlanders who came with the Nationalists in 1949, must grapple with the island's unusual status as a separate state, created largely unintentionally, that is not recognized by most countries in the world. In doing so, they can draw on one of the most important lessons of this book: the international context may limit the range of options available to small states, but does not fully determine the outcome, and leaders and societies always retain some degree of agency.

Syaru Shirley Lin

Syaru Shirley Lin is an adjunct associate professor in the Faculty of Social Science at the Chinese University of Hong Kong specializing in international and comparative political economy especially in cross-Strait relations and high income economies in East Asia.



Thomas Maissen and Barbara Mittler. *Why China Did Not Have a Renaissance – And Why That Matters: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*. Critical Readings in Global Intellectual History 1. Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2018. xvii, 238 pp. Hardcover \$79.99, ISBN 978-3-11-057639-9.

In 1907 a young D. T. Suzuki described the Song Dynasty as a “renaissance,” when after a “long slumber of one thousand years” Buddhism “stirred up the

Chinese nerve to respond to the new stimuli.”¹ In poetically reattaching the concept to other cultural, and sometimes social, movements, such inventive scholars have made the “renaissance” do heavy labour, often far from home. Rebirth gets reborn, again and again.

Although the half century after Jules Michelet brought the Italian “renaissance” into our professional lexicon saw its casual use in a variety of contexts (such as Robert Brown’s 1894 reference to an “African renaissance” fuelled by imperialist “philanthropy, greed, and a love of science”),² renaissance production reached a new professional stage with the American historian Dana C. Munro’s 1906 essay proposing a “Renaissance of the Twelfth Century.”³ If we look at English, German, and French works, by the 1930s the Byzantine, Carolingian, and (American) Southern Renaissances were commonplace in historical scholarship, and pioneer entrepreneurs had brought the concept to Provence, Scotland, the Yiddish, and the Ottonians. In 1914, William Nesbit could not resist the “Sumerian renaissance,” when the Mesopotamia of the twenty-first century B.C. rediscovered the Mesopotamia of the twenty-third century B.C.⁴ Since then the concept has found new footholds in the wider world and in more recent historical periods: We have had Renaissances described as Bengali, Tamil, American, Arabic (Al-Nadha), (European) Neo-, Nepal Bhasa, Harlem, San Francisco, (British) Urban, Native American, and Maori.

With that professionalization and proliferation came reflection, and sometimes doubt, embarrassment, or insistence, about the re-purposing of the term for contexts so far from Alberti’s Florence. A 1918 article refers to the “Hawaiian Renaissance, whatever that may be.”⁵ Thirty years after the first appearance of the “Timurid renaissance,” Jean Aubin questioned both words: “Mais, au fait, renaissance de quoi? Et en quoi timouride?”⁶ Even that first essay by Munro had anticipated the doubt and offered a defence: His “twelfth-century Renaissance” was “misleading” in the “narrow sense” of classical revival, but “justified” in its “true,” wider, “meaning of new life.”⁷ Robin Cormack concluded his chapter on “Middle Byzantine Art” by calling for a “clear vision” of the “renaissance” concept’s “strengths and weaknesses as a frame for understanding.”⁸ In one science-fiction novel, a cardinal in the Borgia Apartments in the thirty-second century still insists that “we are in the midst of a renaissance every bit as real” as the original.⁹

This volume, the first in a new series of “Critical Readings in Global Intellectual History,” is striking in a variety of ways. It is history, philosophy of history, and history of the philosophy of history. It is a dialogue—one well aware of the intellectual and rhetorical importance of dialogue in Chinese and Western traditions—between a sinologist and a Renaissance historian. The cover illustration is a collage of Foyin and Aristotle in dialogue, a radical juxtaposition of two philosophers some 1,300 years apart, and two images some

450 years apart. This is a book well chosen to launch this series on its quest for debates from different regions, and for new genres. Beyond the titular question, it asks how to do global history in a way unobstructed by Eurocentric norms, and how to use dialogue as a new old way to think through intellectual problems.

I had picked up *Why China* expecting an investigation of Chinese history that searches for Renaissance-approximate periods, evaluates whether they count, and explains why in social, cultural, and economic terms. Such an enterprise would complement a recent *Journal of World History* article arguing that many of the “breakthroughs” associated with the Italian Renaissance were anticipated in China by several centuries.¹⁰

Instead, this work focuses on early-twentieth-century China, and spends most of its time discussing whether the Renaissance translates into other contexts. Can the Renaissance be abstracted and globalized? Each author has a distinct position. Thomas Maissen argues that historiographical teleologies cannot migrate, for the Renaissance, like the Zhou Dynasty, is too rooted in particularity (p. 53). In contrast, Barbara Mittler counters that the very mobility of the Italian Renaissance shows that it “must be understood as a translatable” (p. 111).

The book’s dialogic structure is unusual. After a brief, jointly written prologue, each author writes a short, separate introduction. Part I consists of each writing a short (shorter than the introduction) chapter on “teleological models” that looks at the theory and history of periodization in their respective regions.

Part II is more substantial, with two journal-article-length studies. Treating the original Renaissance, Maissen looks at both the modern conceptions of the Italian Renaissance, with their focus on individuality and modernity, as well as the Renaissance’s self-image, which instead emphasizes rebirth and the arts. This history of the Renaissance shows a great deal of Italy-rooted detail, and it does not surprise that he is wary of reduction and simplification. He similarly does not like multiplying “holocaust” into new contexts (p. 125).

Less familiar to most readers will be the focus of Mittler’s chapter: the New Culture Movement and its similarities to the Italian Renaissance, similarities that the New Culture Movement authors were themselves aware of, through Edith Sichel and Jacob Burkhardt, and exploited. The critical and democratizing Movement enjoyed seeing the Italian Renaissance as progressive, perhaps an echo of Michelet’s pioneering conceptualization of it. Mittler then traces the appearance of the Renaissance in Chinese thought into the twentieth century. Admittedly, the lack of capital letters in Chinese creates ambiguity as to whether these references are to Renaissance, renaissance, or revival. Keen to present the voice of the historical actor (p. 133), Mittler shows that the New

Cultural Movement did indeed appeal to, and find inspiration in, the Italian Renaissance.

Neither history provides direct evidence for or against the proposal that historians can (i.e., should) export the Renaissance. Maissen's philosophical stance against generalizing proper nouns discounts a much-used tool of creative thought. Perhaps the burden of proof is on Mittler to show the value in using "Renaissance" in a new context, but her demonstration that the New Cultural Movement did use the term does not prove that this was a historiographically useful move.

Two conclusions follow these lengthy chapters, before a jointly written three-page epilogue that sums up both positions succinctly.

The last quarter of the book is a collection of sources from the Italian Renaissance, the New Cultural History, and the historiography of the Italian Renaissance in China. This welcome addition allows readers to explore different faces of the discussion in depth, and could make the volume a useful tool in the classroom—although the students would need to be keen philosophers, and the source passages are not explicitly keyed to the main text. Page 91, for example, repeats a long passage verbatim instead of referencing its inclusion in the appendix.

Not many books have two introductions, two conclusions, prologue, and epilogue, but this structure has its advantages. The format allows them to go back and forth with regular frequency. Occasional direct comparisons help make our understanding more precise, as does, for example, a comparison of Greek cyclical history to the Chinese dynastic model (p. 39). At times, the authors appear to talk past each other—they have, in fact, very different understandings of what "Renaissance" means (p. 30). Some readers will prefer that they had sorted out these kinds of issues before beginning the book; others will find the greatest value in the sorting itself.

The philosophical discussions are wide-ranging and exploratory. The conversation is sometimes about whether historians can translate "renaissance," and at other times about whether the New Cultural Movement legitimately did (p. 110). The clearest statement of the real problem comes from Maissen, rather deep into the volume: "whether such naming . . . could become a contribution to historiographical research" (p. 123). The dialogue leaps from truisms (for example, that historical circumstances are particular) to unjustified assertions (on the "purpose" of historical research, p. 31). There is, though, little to disagree with; I nod in some places, and shrug agnostically in others, perhaps blushing at the authors' confidence.

In the end, the titular question, why China did not have a Renaissance, fits the book poorly. One of its authors, Mittler, asserts that China did have a Renaissance, while the other, Maissen, insists that it cannot, but for reasons that have nothing to do with China: Such historical periods are particular,

and there can never be another Renaissance, nor a Holocaust, nor a Zhou Dynasty. I knew before reading the book that the question's answer depends on how strictly renaissance is defined, and that there were advantages and disadvantages for applying the term in new contexts. My belief was not changed or improved by reading the book, but spending two hundred pages listening to the authors' musings has been thought provoking.

A decade ago I heard sinologists in Belgium using a Chinese dynasty name to refer to a medieval European church, and that provocation was useful to me as a historian. Perhaps as the Chinese economy rises, and it becomes a global intellectual centre, we may see histories of "Zhou Europe," either the direct contemporary of Zhou China, or another European historical epoch that shares characteristics with the original Zhou. Perhaps the coming century will see very different works grappling with the same question. *Why China* does not solve the question of the potential of the Renaissance concept, but instead takes its place on the shelf with a distinguished line of other scholarly works, like those of Suzuki, Munro, and Nesbit, that have used and wrestled with it.

Luke Clossey

Luke Clossey is an associate professor of history at Simon Fraser University specializing in the global history of ideas.

NOTES

1. Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, "A Brief History of Early Chinese Philosophy," *The Monist* 17 (1907): 415–450, 18 (1908): 242–285, 481–509, at 17.417–8.
2. Robert Brown, *The Story of Africa and Its Explorers*, vol. 3 (London: Cassell, 1894), p. 266.
3. Dana Carelton Munro, "The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association* 1 (1906): 45–49.
4. William Marsiglia Nesbit, *Sumerian Records from Drehem* (New York: Columbia UP, 1914), p. 4.
5. *The Architect and Engineer of California* 52 (1918): 107.
6. Lucien Bouvat, "L'Empire mongol (2eme phase)," in *Histoire du monde*, ed. E. Cavaignac (Paris: 1927), p. 201; Jean Aubin, "Timurid renaissance," *Studia Islamica* 8 (1957): 72.
7. Munro, 45.
8. Cormack, *Byzantine Art* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2018), p. 129.
9. Dan Simmons, *Endymion* (New York: Bantam, 1995), p. 438.
10. Peter Burke, Luke Clossey, and Felipe Fernández-Armesto, "The Global Renaissance," *Journal of World History* 28 (2017): 1–30.