

## Book Reviews

### *Germany and China: Transnational Encounters since the Eighteenth Century*

By Joanne Miyang CHO and David M. CROWE  
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This admirable edited volume rests on one central claim: ever since the Enlightenment, the Germans and the Chinese have enjoyed a “special relationship.” The editors have collected fourteen thought-provoking articles to show that since the eighteenth century, the Chinese and the Germans have engaged in substantial diplomatic, economic, cultural, intellectual, and religious interactions.

One thread, in particular, emerges from this wide-ranging collection: all of the articles illustrate how broader intellectual, cultural, and political currents nurtured, at times, mutual cultural admiration, and at others, cultural repulsion. As Peter K. J. Park shows, early German Enlightenment figures like G. W. Leibniz and Christian Wolff were broadly Sinophilic—they admired Confucian philosophy. But by the late eighteenth century, Nicholas A. Germana argues, Sinophilia gave way to Sinophobia—philosophers like G. W. Hegel saw the “family-state” of China as the antithesis of

the modern, constitutional Prussian state. Sinophobic thinking ran in wide circles—Martin Rosenstock illustrates how the influential missionary Karl Gützlaff's disdain for Chinese culture fueled both his evangelism and support for European imperialism.

Feelings of ambivalence continued after German unification in 1871. David Crowe offers an account of how initially promising diplomatic relations between China and Germany—exemplified by mutual admiration between Li Hongzhang and Otto von Bismarck—broke down when Kaiser Wilhelm II decided to pounce on Chinese weakness after the Sino-Japanese War by carving out a leasehold in Jiaozhou Bay. Yet Jiaozhou was not just a site for the demonstration of German imperial might: Lydia Gerber uses the figure of a Chinese doctor who worked with Richard Wilhelm's Weimar Mission to illustrate how it was a space of cultural contact and cooperation.

The First World War ended German colonial ambitions in China, and further, as Christine Swanson and David Crowe argue, bound Germany and China together, as both countries felt betrayed by the settlement at the Paris Peace Conferences. Examples of mutual cultural and intellectual admiration abounded in the period after the war. In an excellent article—the only one that draws primarily on Chinese sources in the volume—Shellen Xiao Wu shows how a circle of Chinese intellectuals used German ideas to formulate their view of Chinese geopolitics, and their visions of empire continue to have a lasting, albeit invisible, legacy today. In Germany, Sinophilia was all the rage. Volker Wehdeking explores how Hermann Hesse drew on Chinese philosophy to compose his most important works. In Albert Schweitzer, Joanne Miyang Cho finds a man hoping to use Chinese philosophy to revitalize a Europe in decline. Yet not all Germans were “Sinophilic.” Lee Roberts illustrates how the discourse of the “Yellow Peril,” which portrayed China as “corrupt, confusing, and chaotic,” continued to hold sway in interwar German writings of China, contributing to reluctance among European Jewish refugees to leave for Shanghai.

After 1945, both German states continued to cultivate a “special relationship” with China. David Tompkins shows how in the 1950s, the East German leadership openly courted PRC officials and portrayed China as a model in its official propaganda. As the Sino-Soviet split confused the relationship between the GDR and the PRC, Sebastian Gehrig examines how West German conservatives and left-wing radicals tried to use the split to undercut the influence of Soviet Russia during the period of *détente*. Min Zhou brings the story further into the early 1980s, exploring how writers such as Max Frisch, Günter Grass, Adolf Muschg traveled to China as a way to reflect on the nature of modernity and civilizational crises. Michael Mayer's article ends the volume in 1990, showing how both German states and China navigated a series of diplomatic crises: the crackdown at Tiananmen square in June of 1989, and the fall of the Berlin Wall several months later.

Read together, the articles certainly prove that the history of Sino-German relations is filled with fascinating episodes and ample material for further scholarly interest. Yet the rich readings in the volume raise questions of comparison—what was particularly “special” about the relationship between China and Germany? Did *Sinophilia* and *Sinophobia*, for example, take on a different tenor in Germany than it did in the United States or in Britain? And what of Germany's other close partner in the region, Japan? How was the relationship between Germany and Japan different from that of Germany and China? The volume points to the possibility of situating bi-national relations in different comparative and yet more transnational frames.

These questions are, of course, outside of the purview of one single volume, and it is credit to the articles that they have raised these broad and important questions. For those interested in an overview of the history of Sino-German relations, as well as an insight into interdisciplinary approaches to transnational history, one could do well by beginning with this volume.