

inferiority; one outcome—not surprisingly—was the dominance of the Nordic Germans. Instrumental was Hans Günther’s *Rassenkunde* of 1924.

The brief final chapter (8) highlights Nazi prehistoric archaeology, for which Kossinna’s theory (who died in 1931) became a “dogma” (252). Nazi ideologists reduced his ideas to a format that fit the notion of German superiority rooted in a far past and justifying the German supremacy in Europe. Maner makes clear that institutions such as the SS-Ahnenerbe and Amt Rosenberg (a body for cultural policy within the Nazi party) were favorable in developing racist approaches to prehistory but also notes that various scholars tried to take a distance from this new trend. Schools had to instruct children and students about “Teutonic archaeology” as proof of German racial superiority, and archaeologists collaborated by writing propagandistic textbooks.

This volume is a fine addition to scholarship on prehistory in relation to political ideology and state formation. Maner displays great familiarity with German sources and publications over a long period, from the Enlightenment to modern times, and enlivens his narrative by portraying specific scholars to illustrate major developments. I only dislike the term “domestic archaeology” as applied to the discipline in Germany, since “domestic,” in current-day archaeology, usually implies a connection to household and family structures.

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Daniel Canaris, *Vico and China*. Oxford University Studies in the Enlightenment. Liverpool: Voltaire Foundation in association with Liverpool University Press, 2020. Pp. xv+273. £65.00 (paper).

Early eighteenth-century Naples was home to a small band of literate Chinese. They had been brought to Europe for their education as Catholic missionaries when the youngest was only eleven years old. In 1732 they were among the first students of the “Collegio dei Cinesi,” or Chinese College, which eventually became the oldest European institution for Asian studies—now the renowned “l’Orientale” University.

The names of four boys are known: Giambattista Ku, Filippo Maria Huan, Giovanni Evangelista In, and Lucio U, chaperoned by their teacher of literary Chinese, Gioacchino Wang. Otherwise, few traces of their European sojourn survive. Perhaps due to their youth, the impact of these foreigners on scholarship in Naples and in Europe more widely seems to have been very limited—in contrast to the occasion a half-century earlier when two other Chinese youngsters, traveling in the service of missionaries, attracted

the attention of humanists in London, Amsterdam, Vienna, and Rome in 1654 and 1684. In the subsequent few decades, a flurry of publications appeared on China's history and philosophy, including translations of Confucius's main works. Most optimistic was Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, whose hopes for the "commerce of light" between East and West inspired Voltaire's "Enlightened Sinophilia."

How tantalizing is it, therefore, to speculate on conversations the Chinese in Naples might have had with someone who lived and worked just a short walk from the Collegio, Giambattista Vico? Later scholarship has often appreciated Vico's writings for their sensitivity to cultural alterity and has connected them to a counter-Enlightenment and even to postcolonial critical theory. His philosophy of history has also been embraced in China, as a forerunner of some ideas in modern Chinese philosophy. Yet in fact, Vico himself never even makes reference to the Collegio's foreign inhabitants. As a handful of earlier studies have pointed out, the role of China in Vico's writings on history, theology, poetry, and law was limited to fragmentary statements, marked by wariness about the sinophilia of his scholarly peers.

Daniel Canaris has undertaken the first integrated study of these fragments, presenting an idiosyncratic and intricately crosshatched but ultimately propitious picture. By the eighteenth century, Confucius's original statements had morphed into various, sometimes spurious, neo-Confucian adaptations. These ideas arrived in Europe filtered through the lens of the Jesuits, who had devised a creative intellectual framework that ranged from orthodox scholasticism to abstruse esotericism, and who portrayed the Chinese as worthy converts who only had to be reminded of their primeval Christian origins. An unintended side effect of this enthusiasm for China was its embrace by libertines, who argued for a secular aesthetic of pleasure that accompanied the sipping of freshly imported tea from fashionable porcelain.

The Middle Kingdom presented European thinkers with a series of challenges. Chinese historical sources documented an antiquity that predated the Flood, suggesting that the first Chinese kings had shared in the primeval wisdom of Noah, or *prisca theologia*. Second, as this divine knowledge was seemingly untouched by the Babylonian Confusion, the Chinese managed to rule their multiethnic state as a Platonic republic, immune to European-style political and religious rifts. The absence of a centralized church in China suggested to some the possibility of natural religion or even "virtuous atheism." Finally, missionaries and libertines could agree on the superiority of East Asians—whose skin color they defined as white—above all other races.

Vico was not attracted to libertinism and recognized that missionary sinophilia was increasingly disqualified in orthodox quarters, most officially by Pope Clement XI in a bull of 1704. It is one of Canaris's insights, however, that Vico's interpretation of Chinese philosophy was based on the terms and concepts developed in the edition

of Confucius's main writings by a Flemish Jesuit, Philippe Couplet. This edition has received ample scholarly attention, including a recent translation into English by Thierry Meynard (Brill, 2015). Canaris adds to the state of research in observing that the book's valorization of Confucianism in terms of *prisca theologia* meant a European revival of the central tenets of Hermeticism. Antediluvian wisdom, first shared with the Egyptian sage Hermes Trismegistus, had purportedly migrated not only to the Hebrews and Rome but also farther eastward. This train of thought had greatly diminished in prestige following Isaac Casaubon's redating of the writings attributed to Trismegistus to the first centuries CE. Thus, "the richness of Chinese philosophy and its apparent ancient monotheism breathed new life into European Hermeticism" (112).

Vico, however, could not accept the compatibility between Christianity and Confucianism that the Jesuits presumed. His alternative conclusion, that the Chinese descended from the ancient Scythians, is probably his main addition to early European sinology. Since antiquity, a variety of ideas had been advanced concerning the inhabitants of the vast central Asian plains—Scythians, Tartars, Manchus, or "Cathayans"—and about the situation of the Chinese in regard to their lands. Vico thought that among the various populations descended from the Scythians—Germans, Goths, Vandals, Parthians, Huns, and Turks—the group who preserved most faithfully their virtues of justice and humanity were the Chinese.

In *Diritto universale* (1722), Vico presented the Scythians as one of three ancient peoples (with the Egyptians and Chaldaeans) who first emerged after the Flood, led by Scythes, a son of Hercules. *Scienza Nuova* (1725) presented a slightly different pedigree, dividing postdiluvian humanity into two proto-races, the "idoltrous Giants" versus the "non-Giants:" the Scythians were, with the Hebrews, in the latter category. Vico considered the Scythians closest to Noah because their mountainous habitat was nearest to Armenia, where the Ark had come to rest.

The "Scythian exception" meant that because of the limitless Eurasian fields at their disposal, this nomadic tribe never conceived of a distinction between nobility and commoners, thus avoiding the conflicts between patricians and plebeians that would haunt the Roman Republic. The Chinese, who uniquely inherited Scythian values, became the "Rome of the East:" the only gentile people besides the Romans to perfect a fully equitable legal system. This pedigree ultimately allowed Vico to arrive at a "radical valorization" of Confucianism. He thought that this "uncouth and clumsy philosophy" (*rozza e goffa filosofia*) had not arisen from diabolical or human malevolence but because of natural processes when the primitive mind, in a state of childlike ignorance, responded to sensory phenomena. Such an inclusive approach recognized the functional role of Asian religions in the formation of society and thus in the plan of Divine Providence. "The new hermeneutic for interpreting the origins and myths of primitive man . . . serve[d]

to integrate China into the providential metanarrative of Vico's *teologia civile ragionata*" (37).

Canaris provides welcome insights into the understanding of images of China that developed outside institutions in Rome, Paris, and London. In addition, his portrait of the intensity of Vico's struggle with history and religion beyond Europe contributes to decentralizing the canon of the humanities. Yet—through no fault of Canaris—one is also left with a sense of missed opportunity. The Middle Kingdom harbored the world's longest historiographical tradition, one that occupied the role of intellectual preeminence that in Europe was reserved for theology. It could surely have made a greater mark on Vico's philosophy of history—if only this armchair scholar had consulted his Chinese neighbors.

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Inga Pollman, *Cinematic Vitalism: Film Theory and the Question of Life*. Film Theory in Media History. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018. Pp. 324. €38.95 (paper). Open Access: <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv5nph05>.

In *Cinematic Vitalism*, Inga Pollman interweaves modernist concepts from the life sciences and philosophy with formative themes in the early development of continental film studies. The emphasis lies on German and French film theory and practice during the first half of the twentieth century, starting with early experiments in film form, and moves from abstract visual art and science films into Weimar cinema, concluding with postwar neorealism. With great theoretical precision, Pollman offers a comprehensive study of a discipline emerging from the joint fascination of artist and scientists: with movement and rhythm, duration and change, form and experience.

The book draws on a series of dilemmas in which two seemingly opposed tendencies influence each other: nature versus technology and art, formalism versus realism, cinema versus other arts, the body versus the environment, human versus animal, etcetera. Intending to bridge such dilemmas, Pollman invokes the notion of affiliations, which she describes as “never an essence, but an unstable, temporary state that seeks to name a fleeting state before it changes shape again” (45). While the first decades of film studies are traditionally characterized as essentialist and strictly formalist, the connection with vitalist lines of thought, as established in Pollman's work, illustrates that early film critics and practitioners already considered such instability to be fundamental to the medium of film. This way, *Cinematic Vitalism* contextualizes the earliest film