that of Gurus Har Rai and Tegh Bahadur in the orthodox Sikh line. The succeeding chapter then deals at fitting length with the innovative writings of Guru Gobind Singh in which a new 'public philosophy' for the Sikhs in Mughal India is elaborated with reference to a creative reading of Indic mythology with a poetic virtuosity to which the later Mina leaders were unable to formulate a significant response.

The conclusion reflects further on the lessons to be drawn from the contrasting philosophies of the Sikh and Mina Gurus. Even though the latter ultimately failed, Syan's book is a valuable demonstration of what he terms the 'supple dialogue' between them, and all readers with an interest in the period should learn much from the way in which his discussion of this dialogue, in his own concluding words, "undermines the coherent grand narratives of a homogenous community suffering at the whims of despotic kings". <chrsh2@hotmail.com>

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A Story of Ruins: Presence and Absence in Chinese Art and Visual Culture. By Hung Wu. pp. 293. Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2012.
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Conscious that the architecture of the Third Reich might not endure for all eternity, Albert Speer articulated his goal of Ruinenwert, namely, that his buildings would have aesthetic value and convey the message of their Roman past even in a state of decay. Every civilisation that holds its place in history to be important must grapple with this subject. China, of course, is one of those civilisations. Yet so much of its architecture is made of perishable materials, it is especially challenging to articulate the impact of ruined buildings on China. In his newest and perhaps most ambitious and far-reaching book, Wu Hung expounds on this subject, the remains of human construction and other artisanship in China. Using painting, poetry, and photography, as well as buildings, the author addresses the question three ways: through traditional Chinese media; in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when Europeans first confronted ruins in China; and in contemporary China.

Wu Hung begins with the compelling reasons for this study: why does China have no "modern cult of monuments" of the kind described for Europe by German art historian and theorist Alois Riegl in 1903, or, stated another way, why do ancient buildings appear in excellent condition in Chinese paintings? Buildings exist in ruins as often as they do in Europe, so if they are neither described in words nor depicted in painting, can ruins be considered evocative in China in the sense they are in the West? If so, what do they evoke? And, why are ruined buildings so rarely referenced even in the form of poetry known as *huaigu*, or "lamenting the past?"

Wu Hung first confronts the questions with terminology. He distinguishes between *qiu*, remains or ruins, including of buildings, and *xu*, a slightly later term that can refer to a site with no remains but that elicits historical memory or an emotional response. In painting, he points out, the closest one comes to the concept of ruins are withering trees, and the work called *Reading the Stele*. Yet the stele in the picture has no inscription, nor does it show signs of decay. To understand it as a ruin requires memory and a sense of history. Withered and dying trees are the subjects of other paintings associated with ruins, as is, according to Wu Hung, a self-portrait of the painter Shitao (1642–1707) as a withered man among withering trees. The stele, however, is in its own class because a rubbing of it can give it an independent life.

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Discussion of the stele is cause for a deeper search for how the Chinese name and thereby understand ruins. *Yiwu* is the name Wu considers most important. It is an object that points to the past or a surviving portion of something. In situ ruins are called *gu ji*, *gu* meaning ancient and *ji* meaning footprint. Another name is *shen ji*, divine trace. Alongside these names is human recognition of ruins. Here Wu points to Li Daoyuan (d. 527)'s *Shuijing zhu* (Classic of mountains and waterways). Wu Hung calls the author of this book about ancient remains on the Chinese landscape, China's first cultural geographer. More recently, Huang Yi (1744–1802) attained fame for his journey in search of ancient ruins that led him to the Wu Family shrines. Wu Hung then turns to the painted fans and poetry of Wu Li (1632–1718), a man whose tragic *oeuvre* resonates in what Wu calls "remnant sites", evocative of the fall from Ming to Qing that consumed Wu Li's life.

By the end of the chapter Wu Hung has distinguished: remnant traces, or symbols of things recently dead; divine traces, or supernatural events; and historical traces, specific moments in China's past. Each, according to him, produced a kind of ruins, real, described, and depicted. They plus *sheng ji*, that is renowned places that become ruins but also become topographical paintings, are what premodern China left us. An understanding of ruins in the manner so long a part of Western civilisation occurred only when Europeans began to write about what they saw in China in the eighteenth century.

Part Two, in which Wu Hung argues that the concept of ruins was crucial to the invention of modern visual culture in China, begins with the British visit to the Qianlong emperor known as the Macartney Embassy (1792–1794) and William Alexander's paintings and engravings of China made on that journey. Images by Europeans who painted or drew the China they saw in the nineteenth century were of buildings crumbling and in decay. Wu Hung juxtaposes them with visions of Classical Greece and war photographer Felice Beato's 1850s records of the fall of Sebastopol. Beato would go on to photograph China after the Opium Wars. Wu convincingly argues that, through Western photographs of war, China in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries became a place where ruins brought forth the kinds of images and messages long associated with ruins in the West. He further argues that even as these pictures of war ruins appeared in photographs by Europeans, illustrations in the Chinese media offered artistic interpretations that, as products of the calligrapher's brush, never had the horrific power of the photographs of someone like Beato. Only in the twentieth century as Chinese photographers and journalists covered the Russo-Japanese War, First World War, and Sino-Japanese War did Chinese photography finally capture ruins. Thereafter, as illustrations and text in the second half of Part Two show, painting did, as well. In the last part of the chapter, Wu Hung returns to perhaps China's most famous ruins, the imperial garden Yuanmingyuan destroyed by Europeans in 1860 during the second Opium War. He emphasizes that it is a unique place where both Europeans and Chinese depicted ruins the same way.

Part Three surveys representations of ruins in China after the Sino-Japanese War. Realistic paintings and drawings of the aftermath of war in the second half of the 1940s were depictions of China that expressed what Europeans had captured in their images of China nearly a century earlier. Empty rooms, bombed buildings, springtime (which lacks depictions of lush growth or optimism) and partial walls (in the homeland of those known for millennia as the builders of Great Walls). Expressed, writes Wu Hung, was the temporality of a ruined image (p. 172). The passage of time, and by extension expectations about future time and what would be necessary to bring back a glorious past, were for the first time subjects of Chinese pictorial arts. From the imagery of the late 1940s there followed political images of the 1960s and state-sponsored art during the Cultural Revolution. When the post-Cultural Revolution spring came to China, the exhibition *Stars* and the magazine *Today* both freely published literature and illustrations whose subjects were ruins. Actual ruins such as Yuanmingyuan became themes and settings for performance. Bei Dao's story "On Ruins", Yang Lian's "Apologia—To a Ruin", and Yin Xiuzhen's painting *Ruined City* were products of the post-1976 era. By the 1990s as China's cities

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rebuilt more quickly than ruins could be cleared away, neighbourhoods in transition because subjects of painting and photography. Graffiti became the subject of debate, as did historical memory.

In the coda, entitled State Legacy, Wu Hung touches again the questions he raised in his introduction. Focusing on artists and Beijing, he sees a city of ruins that will be rejuvenated in a twenty-first-century city as an opportunity for artists; and this city includes specific locations that are renovated for artists. He notes that city wall ruins are now the focus of a Beijing park, and that part of the destroyed Yuanmingyuan has been rebuilt. The last word, however, is history. Wu Hung laments these new interpretations, turning to the words a monk said to him at Songyue Monastery, that if one piece is old, say a tree, then the one standing there knows he is amid history. Ironically, the location of this story is that of China's oldest pagoda, dated 523, which has been so restored that all the original bricks of the façade have been covered with smooth, new plaster. Wu Hung's interpretation perhaps is that China did not require European intervention to reinterpret the meaning of ruins, for anyone standing next to something old, knows it is on some level a *gu ji*. Perhaps, but perhaps an understanding that something old is underneath new plaster, is beyond what can be expected of a witness to ruins without an explanation. Perhaps contemporary artists know that an image like *Reading the Stele* leaves too much to the viewer. Perhaps that is why spring in the late 1940s and again after 1976 brought forth graphic and sometimes horrific images of ruins, images that would have come forth from artists through experience even if Europeans had not photographed China in the nineteenth century.

A Story of Ruins is a powerful book, made more powerful by the many, haunting illustrations. It challenges a reader to think and feel as she reads. nssteinh@sas.upenn.edu

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