

darstellen. Darüber hinaus stellt sich die Frage, wie global eine Energiegeschichte der Rohstoffmacht Russland sein kann. Eine globale Energiegeschichte würde die Berücksichtigung aller Kontinente erfordern, während russische Energieexporte fast ausschließlich für den eurasischen Raum relevant sind. Obwohl auch „Rohstoffmacht Russland“ von den aktuellen Ereignissen überholt wurde, erreicht das Buch doch sein Ziel, einer breiten Leserschaft einen spannenden Überblick über die russische Energiegeschichte des 20. und frühen 21. Jh.s zu geben.

Isabella Weber: *How China Escaped Shock Therapy: The Market Reform Debate* (= Routledge Studies on the Chinese Economy), London/New York: Routledge, 2021, 320 pp.

Reviewed by
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Isabella Weber's award-winning book *How China Escaped Shock Therapy* was one of the key publications of 2021 in the fields of political economy, China studies, contemporary history, and beyond. The book received praise widely beyond the expert circles of sinologists, contemporary historians, social scientist, and (political) economists. With an interdisciplinary – but at the same time distinctively historiographical – approach, Weber analyses the debate over price reform in China in the 1980s. The book provides new insights into China's economic reforms and the

development of the Chinese government's strategy of gradualism, as opposed to overnight economic liberalization. On a meta-level, Weber raises the question of what constitutes good economic policy-making and challenges the “neoliberal” zeitgeist of the 1990s and 2000s, which led to shock therapy economic reforms in some Eastern European post-socialist countries in the early 1990s.

China's re-emergence as a global player and economic powerhouse today is rooted in the policy of “reform and opening up” of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), implemented under Deng Xiaoping since 1978. In the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, China was among the poorest countries of the world. Reform of a strictly planned economy meant the reintroduction of market principles in many sectors and the opening of the Chinese market to the world. Without exaggeration, one can state that the Chinese reform process was crucial in constituting our global economic system today.

To date, scholars have mostly analysed the reform process from economists' or social scientists' perspectives.[1] Others centred their narrative around the life of the CCP's principal leader in the 1980s: Deng Xiaoping.[2] In recent years, younger scholars have started to approach the topic from a (global) historian's angle, shifting the focus to the minds and ideas behind reform and analysing intellectual exchange processes between Chinese, Western European, and Eastern European economists.[3] Weber can be regarded as a member of this new cohort of researchers: she understands China's economic transformation as a global process driven by intellectuals and their ideas.

Weber's research brings new depth to the research debate: focusing on a specific aspect of the economic reforms – price liberalization – she argues that reformers agreed on the need for China to reform but disagreed over how to do so, with the greatest divisions between advocates of gradualism or those of shock therapy. In taking up this line, Weber develops a new narrative going beyond stories of the “China miracle” or a diffusion of key economic thought from the West to China. Rather, she examines a variety of sources that influenced Chinese reform-minded economists' debates and eventually economic policy-making in the China of the 1980s. Hence, her research not only offers a compelling answer as to why China did not implement a shock therapy approach to price reform but also shines a light on the manifold inspirational sources of Chinese reform thinkers.

How China Escaped Shock Therapy consists of two parts: in the first section, Weber delivers a more general overview on the wider inspirational sources of reform thought; in the second section, the text turns to the price debate itself, ending with explaining how and why China did not implement overnight price reform at the end of the 1980s. Remarkably, Weber summarizes US war economics and Chinese ancient economic thought in the early chapters. The connection with the price debate of the 1980s at times remains unclear. This changes in the second part of the book, where the author discusses the price reform debate among Chinese economists and reformers. Weber traces the World Bank's role in bringing Eastern European émigré economists and social scientists to China for the so-called Moganshan meeting in 1982. She looks further afield, fol-

lowing the Chinese search for inspiration in unlikely places such as Brazil. A strength of the book lies in giving voice to an overlooked group of reformers who faced suppression in China post-1989. Ironically, this group around the young scholar Chen Yizi had argued against overnight price reform after a research trip to Hungary and Yugoslavia, where they studied the problems with economic reform in the respective countries. They were instrumental in leading to what Weber coins as China's “escape” from shock therapy.

The distorted price mechanism, caused by state-led price controls, was one of the key issues of economic reform throughout the socialist world. Hence, Weber's focus on the price debate makes sense and adds analytical depth. However, this also leads to the impression of other fields of reform being of lesser importance, such as enterprise reform, labour market reform, and technological advancement.

Based on primary source material from Eastern Europe, one can conclude that this surely was not the case. Both shock therapy and gradualist approaches focus on more than one field of economic reform. Weber actually does narrate how China did not implement shock price reform. On a more general level, one also wonders what China actually “escaped” from. It seems as if the CCP has always prioritized economic and political stability above anything else, with considerable human cost, posing the question whether this was actually an escape.

The success of this book should encourage scholars to study other aspects of the Chinese reform, opening up from a historical angle, seeking to understand the roots of the Chinese system we witness today, and eventually leading to the key question of

the book: Does Weber describe the reform of a socialist system, the transformation of China into a state capitalist system, or the early days of the development of a new socioeconomic system? *How China Escaped Shock Therapy* adds a new depth to this debate and opens a field of research for years to come.

Notes:

- 1 B. Naughton, *The Chinese Economy: Transitions and Growth*, Cambridge, MA 2007; J. Fewsmith, *Dilemmas of Reform in China: Political Conflict and Economic Debate*, Armonk, NY 1994.
- 2 E. F. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, Cambridge, MA 2011.
- 3 J. Gewirtz, *Unlikely Partners: Chinese Reformers, Western Economists, and the Making of Global China*, Cambridge, MA 2017; F. Wemheuer (ed.), *Machterhalt durch Wirtschaftsreformen. Chinas Einfluss auf die sozialistische Welt* (Jahrbuch für historische Kommunismusforschung), Berlin 2020.

Jan Lucassen: *The Story of Work: A New History of Humankind*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021, 544 pp.

Reviewed by
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Jan Lucassen – in *The Story of Work: A New History of Humankind* – offers us an exciting history of humanity, with human work as its central point. The intention is to place work as the central place – that is to say, its *vital protoform* – of both history and humanization of humans themselves, in a truly global, multinational, and transchronological perspective. But all knowledge, as Professor Gaston Bachelard once said, is the answer to a question. In this case, the author asks us point-blank: “what does the historical record suggest about what needs to be done — in order for us to better control our collective future” (p. 423).

In an attempt to answer this, Lucassen – who was the director of the International Institute of Social History (Amsterdam) and one of the founding exponents, together with Marcel van der Linden, of the *Global Labour History*[1] – systematizes his exposition throughout history (with abundant concrete examples and case studies from around the whole world) of forms of work and production. He argues that, contrary to prevailing theories in the field (Adam Smith, Max Weber, Karl Marx, and even authors such as Alexander Chayanov