

## Book review: สองยุคแห่งวัฒนธรรมเยอรมัน – ไวมาร์คลาสสิก และสาธารณรัฐไวมาร์ (*Die zwei Kulturen von Weimar*)

It is widely accepted that Germany is currently one of the world leaders, by being economic and industrial powerhouse of the European Union. Just like any other country, culture played a big part in shaping it into what it has become. However, German culture history is rarely explored in Thai academic community which is what prompted Prof. Dr. Pronsan Watanangura to write *Die zwei Kulturen von Weimar*.

The book focused on the two period that could be considered representations of German culture, “Classical Weimar (1775-1832 A.D.)” and “Weimar Republic (1919-1933 A.D.)”, going into detail of how these period came to be known as the golden age of German culture.

Personally I don't know whether it support or contradict any specific works as the book mostly contains facts from the periods and act mostly as biographies. While there are some part that contain the author opinion, they are few and far between.

The book is surprisingly easy to read and follow considering all the content that has to be fitted in. It greatly benefitted from an intuitive structure that the book is set up upon. It is mostly set in chronological order and with some pictures to provide interesting points. And like many academic book there are plenty footnotes that explain the content in further details. For example, German word translation will sometime has citation, showing which definition the author wanted to communicate.

However, as with many history book, there are many names that are mentioned which make it hard to keep track sometime. This and the terminology of philosophical concept and artistic movement are what reduced the accessibility of the book. Some concepts also feels

redundant after reading for some time which is why I would recommend reading in multiple session rather than going through all at once. This way, you will have more time to digest the material and understand the content better. The layout of content also has a flaw in this aspect as the book is setup almost like a linear story which make it hard to just skip some parts.

As for the summary of the book, there are four main chapter.

First one is Classical Weimar, the rise of Weimar from poor rural village into European cultural hub is explored. Weimar was chosen because it is the town that wasn't affected by French cultural influence or pre-existing traditional culture. While it was poor, its leader at the time, Duchess Anna Amalia, had sharp eyes for genius writer and artist who will contribute greatly to Germanic art such as Friedrich Schiller and Johann Wolfgang Goethe. The book focus heavily on the life and impacts of these two "philosopher" along with their works, in one example, Schiller studies on Kantian philosophy is connected to the writing of the *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Their life is also compared. The unique characteristics of Weimar is also listed such as being democratic working group under monarchy.

The next chapter talk about the fall of Wilhelm II and how the country transitioned from absolutism into republic. After delving into the transitional period after Classical Weimar, we go into Weimar Republic in the rises of Nazi party who based their stronghold in Weimar. The chapter tell the story in retrospect, showing multiple views on the story. For example, the common perception of German as those who would respond to violence and dissent with strict discipline stretch as far back into the past as the French revolution. The culture that flourishes from the two great minds Goethe and Schiller had almost no

effect on general public who would still listen to the ruling class and resist any changes.

From another point of view, the civilian living in Germany after World War I suffer from famine and live an uncertain life. Compared to the life under the previous system of monarchy, they at least still have a place to sleep and foods to eat but under the new “Republic” system where the leader struggle for power among each other rather than focusing on improving the economy of the country.

And of course it also talked about culture during the period, from the fact that culture such as the works of two great minds, Schiller and Goethe, were interpreted as work with the base in traditional German culture which directly contradict what was accomplished before. The rises of Avant-garde which usually contain leftist thought were forcefully suppressed.

The last chapter talk about the role of two period as a representative of the whole German culture, mostly providing overview of the part that were missing during the first three chapter while also bringing in other perspective as well.

In the end, the author said it best regarding who should read this book, any aspiring historian or artist should at least have a look through the book as it would build their experience to learn more. They will be able to understand more about how each European art relates to one another and see what goes behind each works. The first chapter provide good example of this by showing how the work of the two philosophers were affected by their environments and the events that happened around them. From a vacation to Italy to the French Revolution, all of them have some impact on some of their greatest works.

The book i should also be read by those who are interested in the rise of Nazi party. It has an interesting take on the event because the focus is on the effect culture had and vice versa. Personally, all of my question regarding how they came into power were answered after I read through the chapter.

I think that this book is unappealing and seems to be boring at first glance but when you start reading you will find some nuance that will make you want to continue reading. You will know whether this book is for you when you finish the introduction.