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CONTENTS

- 1** The Origins of Han-Dynasty Consort Kin Power
Brett Hinsch
- 25** Inventing the Romantic Kingdom: the Resurrection and Legitimization of the Shu Han Kingdom before the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*
Simon Shen
- 43** Illusions of Grandeur: Perceptions of Status and Wealth in Late-Ming Female Clothing and Ornamentation
Sarah Dauncey
- 69** The Legal and Social Status of Theatrical Performers in Beijing during the Qing
Ye Xiaoqing
- 85** In the Tang Mountains We Have a Big House
Michael Williams
- 113** The Eve of Park's Military Rule: the Intellectual Debate on National Reconstruction, 1960–61
Kim Hyung-A
- 141** Japanese Orphans from China: History and Identity in a 'Returning' Migrant Community
Li Narangoa
- 161** Sun-Facing Courtyards: Urban Communal Culture in Mid-1970s' Shanghai
Nicole Huang
- 183** Liu Dong and his Defence of Theory and Confucianism as Practice
Gloria Davies
- 191** The Weberian View and Confucianism
Liu Dong
—translated by Gloria Davies

Cover calligraphy Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿, Tang calligrapher and statesman

Cover illustration A memorial from the chief eunuch Bian Dekui — “The Legal and Social Status of Theatrical Performers in Beijing During the Qing” by Ye Xiaoqing, see p.81.

THE WEBERIAN VIEW AND CONFUCIANISM

史 Liu Dong 刘东—*translated by Gloria Davies* 黄乐嫣

Much discussion has taken place in contemporary mainland Chinese intellectual circles on the issue of what one might call the imbroglio between the Weberian view and Confucianism. Although it is well beyond the scope of this essay to provide a full account of this “dispute,” what I will attempt to do in the following is to trace some of its salient features through a series of recent unfortunate “encounters” between the Weberian view and Confucianism, and, more broadly, through the reception of Weber’s ideas in mainland China since the 1980s. Although one could liken Weber, among other things, to a ghost who has long been laid to rest within the pages of scholarly tomes, what is remarkable is that the symbolic significance of his ideas, along with his intellectual “image,” have undergone no fewer than three major shifts within the short space of a dozen or more years in mainland China’s fast and ever-changing intellectual discursive domain. Moreover, each of these three shifts also suggests a readjustment of existing views on the relationship between Weber’s ideas and Confucianism. In this regard, it is crucial that we understand that the name Weber refers to those fluctuating impressions held by a bunch of Chinese academics rather than to the German thinker of canonical status [that is to say, the historical individual Max Weber *per se*].

The reception of Weber in contemporary mainland China shows all the hallmarks of recent Chinese aspirations to master Western knowledge. In this regard, we could say that engagement with Western knowledge in the mainland Chinese context has generally been turbulent. People have been hasty in passing judgement on the differences between the West and China and this has led, in turn, to numerous stagings of “collisions” between Western and Chinese forms of knowledge and to various attempts at transposing Western knowledge into a Chinese form, not to mention attempts at accommodating the differences between Western and Chinese modes of knowing. Indeed, the case of “the Weberian view versus Confucianism” provides us with a

[Translator’s note] The author first presented a draft version of this essay at a graduate workshop on Confucianism held at the Harvard-Yenching Institute in the autumn of 1998. He subsequently revised it for publication in 2001. In the course of preparing this text for publication, both author and translator discussed the implications of several sections of the text, and pondered the difficulties that the economy of the author’s Chinese prose style might pose for an Anglophone readership. Thus, the translation that appears here includes several modifications of the original Chinese, based on these discussions between the author and the translator. The very title of this essay has presented difficulties in translation. We finally settled on “the Weberian view” as the most appropriate way of translating *Weibo* 韦伯 since the author uses this name to refer to present-day scholarship based on or influenced by Weber’s writings. The translator has also added statements and phrases in square brackets for the purposes of textual clarification. Grateful thanks to Josephine Chiu-Duke for her helpful comments on the translation of this text.

Figure 1

An illustration of Confucius said to be based on a work by the Tang-dynasty painter Wu Daozi 吳道子, which appears online at <<http://www.confucius.org/picture/cmt013.htm>> (accessed 1 April 2003)



way of perceiving mis-fit between Chinese and Western forms of knowledge as well as a way of understanding the difficulties and pressures that would be brought to bear on any attempt at bridging the gaps between these two great civilizations.

It is worth emphasizing that in the complex discursive terrain of Sino-Western cultural interactions, the term *Rujia* [儒家 Confucian; Confucianism] is not merely a simple or straightforward signifier for traditional Chinese thought as most people are likely to assume. Indeed, the word “Confucianism,” which serves as the English “equivalent” of *Rujia*, refers in its most general sense to the doctrine of the Confucian School but we also know that the term *Kongzi zhuyi* (孔子主义, the literal translation of the Anglicized term “Confucianism,” which refers to the teachings of Confucius himself) does not exist in the Chinese language. “Confucianism” is an ambiguous and overly-generalized term as it carries a range of meanings that cannot be adequately distinguished, one from the other, in ordinary usage. At times, it refers to the ideas of the individual named Confucius while, at other times, it may refer to the entire intellectual tradition in which one finds Confucius, and the term may then include both his predecessors and his successors. It has also been used fairly sweepingly as a signifier for what one might call the Chinese “equivalent” or “counterpart” of European concepts such as “the Christian world” or “Christian civilization.” In this context, the term Confucianism should be understood as meaning “Confucian civilization” (or *Rujiawenming* 儒家文明, if one were to re-translate this concept into Chinese). It is a concept that has often been unthinkingly superimposed on the whole of China.

In addressing the question of Weber’s significance within the contemporary mainland Chinese intellectual scene, I face the same hazards of imprecise or inadequate translation. That is to say, I cannot state with any precision when the English term Confucianism, or the Chinese term *Rujia* for that matter, stops referring specifically to Confucius and his successors, to signal more broadly China itself or “Chinese reality.” The problems posed to scholarship by such imprecision, however, have been addressed through the designation of overlapping layers of meaning for conceptual categories like Confucianism or *Rujia*. Still, the persistence of semantic imprecision has not been so acute as to produce total confusion about what these terms mean.

Let us begin now with Max Weber's "incarnation" or "descent" [*jiangshi* 降世] into contemporary mainland China. In the 1980s, the majority of relatively young Chinese intellectuals, like myself, were unaware of the substantial scholarship on Weber produced by an earlier generation of Chinese scholars like He Lin 贺麟 (1902–92). As the 1980s progressed, we began to explore modern Chinese intellectual history for ourselves and chanced upon the scholarship of this earlier generation. This gap in our knowledge owed in part to the reluctance of this earlier generation of modern Chinese intellectuals to acknowledge their familiarity with Western ideas, since such acknowledgement would have placed them under suspicion of "deviant" thinking during the early decades of the People's Republic. Furthermore, there were practical difficulties in gaining access to this scholarship, since most of these early modern Chinese texts that both constitute and refer to modern Chinese intellectual history have yet to be properly archived. On the whole, Weber's writings or works on Weber published overseas in various European languages are much easier to find than Chinese-language scholarship on Weber published by this earlier generation of modern Chinese scholars. As a consequence, only when the reform era [from 1978] was already well underway did our generation of Chinese scholars learn that Max Weber's intellectual stature was no less than that of Karl Marx himself.¹

In the early years of the post-1978 reforms, most Chinese intellectuals sought ideological liberation by delving into Western works with which they were most familiar, namely, the writings of Marx. They sought to mine spiritual resources from the critical humanistic temper of Marx's early manuscripts in the hope that these early texts might provide them with the means to diagnose and then correct the historical causes of contemporary China's malaise [*zhenduan he gaizao dangdai Zhongguode lishi bingyin* 诊断和改造当代中国的历史病因]. It was not until controversial arguments arose around the time that the one hundredth anniversary of Karl Marx's death was being commemorated in China [in 1983], that this tendency to "learn from Marx" finally came to an end.²

To this day, I remain deeply saddened by the fact that "external pressures" [*wailide zuduan* 外力的阻断] can always be brought to bear on intellectual work in mainland China. In other words, a certain kind of political pragmatism has had the effect of stifling our intellectual engagement with Marxism. It has prevented us from reaching a level of understanding in our readings of Marx that would allow for the emergence of a critical dynamic relevant to contemporary Chinese social needs. Ironically, despite the emphasis that Marxism places on practice [as opposed to mere theorization], the kind of political pragmatism that dominates our intellectual life has effectively prevented us from dealing with the problems of our day in practical terms. Indeed, Chinese uses of Marxism are quite divorced from the realities of contemporary Chinese social life since they are largely devoid of the practical critical force that, I believe, should animate Marxist thought.

¹ The transliteration of "Max" as *Makesi* creates a homophonic effect with "Marx" which is also transliterated as *Makesi* in Chinese, although the last syllable *si* is represented by different characters for Max 马克斯 and Marx 马克思. Liu plays on this effect in this and several other places in the original Chinese text.

² [Translator's note] The author refers here to the activities of intellectuals such as the former Minister of Culture Zhou Yang 周扬 and *People's Daily* (Renmin ribao 人民日报) editor Wang Ruoshui 王若水 in promoting a form of Marxist humanism that would provide the ideological basis for implementing substantive political reform in the early years of the economic reform era. In 1983, this newly emergent form of Marxist humanism enjoyed a brief moment in the political limelight when a speech presented by Zhou Yang at an official symposium to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Marx's death was subsequently published in the 16 March 1983 issue of the *People's Daily*. In the months that followed, this form of Marxist humanism was increasingly subjected to political strictures and eventually lost all momentum when the party-state initiated a purge of "spiritual pollution" in late 1983 early 1984. Where Liu Dong refers to "external pressures," he implies that the Movement to Liberate Thinking of the early post-1978 years (in which Marxist humanism was a key feature) was ultimately brought to an end by an authoritarian party-state that regarded such activities as a threat to its political monopoly. See also Xu Jilin 许纪霖, "The fate of an enlightenment—twenty years in the Chinese intellectual sphere (1978–1998)," translated by Geremie R. Barmé with Gloria Davies, *East Asian History* 20 (Dec. 2000): 170–3.

In the preceding paragraph, I describe the re-discovery of Max Weber in contemporary China in quasi-religious terms as a “descent,” as if he had descended from the heavens into the world of human affairs. This conveys a sense of the tremendous promise that Chinese intellectuals perceived in Weber’s ideas during the heady days of the [mid to late 1980s] “Culture Fever” [*wenhua re* 文化热], in which I was an active participant. To this day, when I think back, I can still hear the fervent applause and chorus of cheers that accompanied the cultural events of that time, sounds that carried the intense yearning for liberation that infected us all. It was on one twilight evening in the summer of 1986 when we walked into the auditorium at Peking University that my former teacher, Li Zehou 李泽厚, and I experienced the kind of intoxicating euphoria that loud applause and clamorous cheering could produce. We had gone there to listen to a lecture on Max Weber. The lecture

Fig. 2

Source. “Max Weber as a Professor at Heidelberg, 1895 or 1897,” an illustration which appears in *Marianne Weber, Max Weber: a biography* (with a new introduction by Guenther Roth), translated and edited by Harry Zohn (Oxford [UK]: Transaction Books, 1988), p.347



was ostensibly no more than a discourse on social theory but it would be more accurate to liken that particular occasion to an evangelical sermon. The “preachers” were Professors Wang Rongfen 王容芬 and Su Guoxun 苏国勋. It would seem that the kind of enthusiasm for Weber that we witnessed on that occasion was characteristic of a Communist country undergoing market reform. It was as if, having embraced Weber, people assumed that Weber and modernization went together, hand-in-hand, and that wherever the movement for modernization had spread, Weber would surely have already “descended” there as well.

Naturally, things are much quieter now and we have come to learn that the kind of fever that gripped us back then brought a series of negative consequences in its wake. We have also gained perspective on the complex nature of Weber’s writings and we have learnt that he was faced with several intellectual dilemmas in the course of his career. But the hubbub of 1986 was such that the speakers and audience at the aforementioned event incited each other to ever-greater heights of excitement and anticipation. In that climate, it was very difficult to think in a sober and clear-headed way, let alone to imbibe a little of Weber’s own tentativeness. If my memory serves me correctly, the message that was being transmitted that evening from the rostrum to the cheering crowd was: just as we, in previous years, had no right to speak unless we knew our Marx, from now on, everyone in our line of work must quote from Weber. Many years later, in an interview published in *The Chinese Readers’ Gazette* (Zhonghua dushu bao 中华读书报), Professor Su Guoxun recalled the excitement and anticipation of those days when he said that “Weber’s ideas constitute a pinnacle in the development of the humanities and social sciences during the second half of the twentieth century. It has even been said, and not without a touch of sarcasm, that only someone who is an

authority on Weber has any hope of taking the bull of academic research by its horns [*shei zhangwole dui Weibode chanshi quan, shei yejiuyou wang zhi xueshu yanjiude niu'er* 谁掌握了对韦伯的阐释权, 谁也就有望执学术研究的牛耳].³

It is not hard to guess what it was that people sought with such earnestness in the intellectual fads of those heady days. A translation of Weber's *General Economic History* (Shijie jingji tongshi 世界经济通史), published by the Shanghai Translation Press (Shanghai Yiwén Chubanshe 上海译文出版社), had appeared in 1981. It attracted little interest except among a small circle of academics. Apart from this translation, the two earliest Chinese translations of Weber's writings were both of the same work, namely, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Xinjiao lunli yu zibenzhu yi jingshen 新教伦理与资本主义精神). The first translation was published in 1986 by the Sichuan People's Press (Sichuan Renmin Chubanshe 四川人民出版社) in a series [that included both foreign works in translation and new works by Chinese scholars] edited by the *Towards the Future* (Zouxianɡ weilai 走向未来) editorial team. The second translation appeared a year later, published by Beijing Joint Publishers (Beijing Sanlian Shudian 北京三联书店), in a similar book series edited by the *Culture: China and the World* (Wenhua: Zhongguo yu shijie 文化: 中国与世界) editorial team.⁴

The Protestant Ethic is arguably Weber's best known work but that two major book series in 1980s' mainland China should have, by coincidence, selected it as the seminal work in Weber's corpus for translation provides a clue as to just what kind of a thing it was that we all so desperately sought. Let me put it more simply. People were looking for another Marx! As luck would have it, we found a "Makesi" 马克思, Max [Weber], who was also from Germany and a social thinker whose erudition and innovative ideas easily rivaled those of that other "Makesi" 马克思, [Karl] Marx, whose death a hundred years earlier had just been commemorated. Weber's symbolic significance was, first and foremost, that of a herald for the liberation that we had all sought so fervently to achieve through our "Culture Fever." Thus, people believed that what Weber offered was totally unlike anything that they already knew. It was as if Weber's way of explaining things had the effect of making people more receptive to different ideas and this also had the secondary effect of freeing them from the once prevalent and simplistic notion that the invention of the steam engine constituted the sole motive force of modern history. In this regard, Weber's writings allowed contemporary Chinese intellectuals to consider anew the ways in which a certain cultural spirit might have nourished humanity's innate desire for progress and thereby played a dynamic role in the historical development of the modern world. Without putting too fine a point on it, this newly descended "Makesi" [Max] was, on a certain level, a stand-in for that "Makesi" [Marx] of the early manuscripts.

In my view, it was no coincidence that the enthusiastic reception of Weber among mainland Chinese intellectuals occurred around the time when the authorities had imposed a ban on the critical intellectual force of the youth-

³ The transcript of this interview appears in *Zhonghua dushu bao*, 15 April 1998.

⁴ [Translator's note: Both *Towards the Future* and *Culture: China and the World* were highly significant academic ventures launched in the mid-1980s by groups of enterprising academics and intellectuals based in Beijing. Both groups embarked on ambitious translation projects and launched book series that dealt with EuroAmerican scholarship on a range of issues. Within the mainland Chinese intellectual scene, their efforts were captioned in the late 1980s as "Culture Fever". For a substantive discussion of this socio-cultural phenomenon, see Chen Fong-ching, "The popular cultural movement of the 1980s" in Gloria Davies, ed., *Voicing concerns: contemporary Chinese critical inquiry* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), pp.71–86.

ful Marx [as advocated by certain Chinese intellectuals in the early post-Mao years] and judged it to be gravely erroneous. In this sense, we could say that Weber's popularity in the mainland Chinese intellectual scene of the 1980s was a "strategic" defense of the very same cultural-spiritual force and subjective will that many had newly discovered as positive qualities in Marx's early writings—writings that the authorities had deemed to be "immature" by comparison with the party-approved later Marx of dialectical historical materialism. In brief, by disseminating knowledge about Weber, Chinese intellectuals availed themselves of a means to advocate these qualities of cultural spirit and subjective will that the authorities had prevented them from celebrating in Marx's early works.

It is also worth pondering the considerable limitations that marked this intellectual turn from Marx to Weber in 1980s' mainland China, despite the outward jubilation that greeted the ensuing reversal of ideological direction. On the whole, Chinese intellectuals had become too accustomed to taking short cuts to modernization: if a certain once lucid historical narrative was judged to be no longer credible, then people simply abandoned it to embrace a different tale. Thus, for many, history took a simple linear form wherein a singular cause was presumed to lead to an equally singular effect. This kind of thinking also led people to assume that, by locating and properly grasping the historical "thread" that joined a certain cause to its perceived effect, the future itself could be as dexterously handled as if it were a puppet whose strings were being pulled by the historian as puppet master. In this context, it should come as no surprise that the first translations of *The Protestant Ethic* were so favorably received in the mainland Chinese intellectual scene of the 1980s.

It was precisely because the interconnecting threads of the argument that Weber advanced in this book were sufficiently simple to grasp that this Weberian paradigm itself conveniently acquired the form of a certain cultural-spiritual determinism that rather agreed with the appetite for theory that marked the Culture Fever era as a whole. Needless to say, Chinese scholars who later studied Weber's *Economy and Society* with some rigor found this kind of extreme simplification intolerable. This innocent appeal to the "primary motive force" of modern civilization that informed the reception of Weber in 1980s' China also brought about the first unfortunate encounter between the Weberian view and Confucianism. Indeed, one could say that in the Chinese quest for modernity, Confucius and his successors were judged as fit only for crucifixion. At the time, most Chinese intellectuals adopted a mode of thinking that tended towards cultural-spiritual determinism. This enabled them to explore the social ills brought about by political radicalism during China's twentieth century, beginning with the May Fourth Movement and continuing through to the Maoist era. But their causative explanation was inadequate for the purposes of pondering the affinity between their own mode of thinking and the political radicalism that they now disparaged. They were even less equipped to consider the ways in which the conservation

of their own [Confucian or cultural-spiritual] tradition might be regarded as an alternative and enduring motivating force in China's historical and future development.

Thus, the Weberian view, or more accurately, a highly simplified version of Weber's ideas, was invested with the power, as it were, to kill two birds with one stone. It was held to be effective in countering an increasingly vulgar sociological theory of productive forces with an alternative one that explored the dynamic effects a given cultural tradition and its spiritual temperament could produce in the course of modernization.⁵ It was also used to further undermine an already incoherent Confucian tradition that had long been subjected to political attack and ideological abuse. The outcome of this trend—which was not unexpected even though the verdict reached by such causative explanation was irrational—was that Confucianism had now acquired a new sin. Contrary to the previous charges that were laid against them, Confucian thinkers were now criticized for their excessively rational and sober-minded approach to things. They were seen to lack the kind of spirit that had once led Tutilaine to declare, “It is because it is absurd that I believe in it” and, by implication, to lack the capacity to provide the kind of spiritual sustenance that Protestant Christianity offered during the different historical stages that marked the development of Western industrialization and modernization. In short, many Chinese intellectuals saw Confucianism as lacking the innate tensions of the Protestant faith that they now credited, quoting Weber, with having produced the “rationalistic capitalism” of the West.

The effect of this form of cultural-spiritual determinism was to lead those Chinese intellectuals who advocated total Westernization to declare a new reason for worshipping the West. But this time, they went much further than their May Fourth predecessors. While May Fourth radicals promoted [and anthropomorphized] modernization in the form of Mr Democracy [*De xiansheng* 德先生] and Mr Science [*Sai xiansheng* 赛先生], the cultural-spiritual determinists of the 1980s made these figures the basis of a new faith that one might even go so far as to call superstition. Those who advanced an even more extreme version of this view argued that what the Chinese lacked most of all was the kind of religious disposition in the West that enabled people to cleave to a faith that transcends understanding. Thus, they argued, the most urgent task of the day was not “enlightenment” but “the gaining of faith.”⁶ In this way, a movement that began with the most secular and utilitarian of aims [namely, the bid for China's modernization and political-cultural liberalization] ended up, quite contrarily, with many of the participants acting as if they were on some lofty holy mission.

Equipped with a monistic and deterministic logic, they averred that the glorious riches produced under the patent of modernity, including science and democracy, were the result of a certain mystical aspect of Western civilization that the Chinese were least able to understand. Naturally, individual freedom and “rationalistic capitalism” were also included as part of these

⁵ [Translator's note] By “vulgar sociological theory of productive forces” Liu Dong refers somewhat elliptically to both Marxism-Leninism (as party orthodoxy) and ideas of rapid modernization that were introduced into and celebrated in the mainland Chinese intellectual scene (following the end of the Maoist era) and sanctioned by the party-state in its economic reformist moment in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The intellectual consequences of this mode of thinking in both its Maoist and post-Maoist forms are sensitively explored in Wang Hui's 汪晖 celebrated essay, “Contemporary Chinese thought and the question of modernity,” translated by Rebecca E. Karl in *Intellectual politics in post-Tiananmen China*: a special issue of *Social Text* 55, 16.2 (Summer 1998): 9–44.

⁶ [Translator's note] Here, Liu Dong draws a distinction between the “enlightenment” that historically developed out of Athens and the “faith” that has its source in Jerusalem. He bases his argument on the work of Lev Shestov, the Russian philosopher (1866–1938), and refers in particular to Shestov's *Athens and Jerusalem*, translated by Bernard Martin (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1966).

modern riches. From this, one can see that, despite the dramatic change in their critical approach [from invoking Marx to valorizing Weber], these cultural radicals remained trapped in a hidden critical dead-end. Weber's writings now conveniently provided the textual basis for those Chinese intellectuals, who were stridently critical of China's cultural-spiritual tradition, to claim that Chinese culture was skewed in its very foundations and that the five-thousand year old civilization that grew from these very foundations was nothing more than a protracted mistake.

Thus, when Chinese cultural radicals of the 1980s produced their negative re-evaluations of Chinese tradition based on their so-called Weberian tenets, they did so imprudently and without any effective identification of the real challenges that our cultural-spiritual tradition has faced in modern times. To my mind, Weber's account of the Protestant ethic as an attitude of anticipating the grace of [a remote and unknown] God, based on a dour theory of predestination that historically impelled its believers to toil without rest and well in excess of their daily needs, suggests that the Protestant ethic could be read as an "aberration" [*jibian* 畸变] in the history of human spirituality. Furthermore, in his account of the Protestant ethic, Weber implies, whether wittingly or unwittingly, that the rise of "rationalistic capitalism" in the world could only be logically construed as a "fortuitous change" [*oubian* 偶变]. In other words, when Weber counter-posed the various major world religions of Confucianism, Buddhism, Islam and even, as it were, other "normal" forms of Christianity to the Protestant ethic that he had singled out as being pregnant with all kinds of possibilities for modern capitalism, he made the Protestant case an "anomaly" [*fanchang* 反常] in relation to these others.

It is worth noting that when Weber read into the "anomalous" case of the Protestant ethic an historical shift marked by the withering away of "value-rationality" [*jiazhi lixing* 价值理性] and the corresponding rise of "instrumental rationality" [*gongju lixing* 工具理性], he clearly did not mean to suggest that the Protestant ethic brought good tidings into the world. On the contrary, in his rather pessimistic analysis of the world's major religions in relation to the causes and effects of the modern world, Weber seems to be asking a fundamental question which I have formulated as follows: "What ultimately is the cause of the 'cancer' that afflicts non-Western civilizations and to which they appear to offer no resistance?"

In the preceding, I place words like "normal" [*zhengchang* 正常], "anomaly" [*fanchang*], "aberration" [*jibian*], and "fortuitous change" [*oubian*] within quotation marks to reflect the Kantian (as opposed to the Hegelian) character of Weber's writings. For the Neo-Kantian Weber, it would seem that the crux of the matter was to investigate the singularity of given historical phenomena among the infinite variety of things that could be found in the grand vista of world history. He clearly had no interest, as Hegel did, in deducing an inevitable law of history that could become a worthy substitute for the name of God. In this sense, the logic of Weber's historical analysis allows us to posit the following hypothetical statement: If Western civiliza-

tion had not undergone the passage of the Protestant “aberration” and the “fortuitous change” that it brought about, it might have never changed at all. Furthermore, if Western civilization had not spread its influence according to the framework of modernization that has endured to this day, then the fate of non-Western civilizations would also be quite different. I have stated elsewhere that:

There was no reason for Weber to suggest that the eventual “coincidence” between the spirit or temperament of “rationalistic capitalism” and existing institutional factors in certain parts of Europe was guaranteed by the prior existence of some dominant factor lurking in the darkness of the pre-modern age. On the contrary, one could argue that prior to the “sudden change” that was introduced into the history of the world’s civilizations by the “irrational rationality” [of the Protestant faith], there was the possibility that non-Western civilizations might never have had to suffer the calamitous “cancer” that became their lot. Similarly, the different civilizational forms forged by religions other than Protestant Christianity might have had the opportunity to be viewed [in the West and non-West alike] as “normal” modes of human existence and these might then have endured unchanged to the present-day.⁷

What the anti-traditionalists of 1980s’ mainland China failed to recognize was that the analytical framework Weber used to examine the world’s religions did not support their intense attack on Chinese tradition. Rather, the hypothesis implicit in Weber’s historical explanation could be read as a conservative appeal for an archaeology of civilizations. I do not mean to suggest by the argument I have advanced thus far that, without foreign intervention, Chinese civilization would have been free of crisis for clearly there have been several notable domestic crises in the history of its development. Indeed, we should make these domestic historical crises the subject of serious intellectual inquiry. Let me couch this in terms that mimic the Weberian discourse. If “rationalistic capitalism” had not made its “aberrant” appearance in the world, then humanity as a whole would not be facing the problems of “globalization” as it does today. As a consequence, the conduct of Sino-Western relations would be very different from that which obtains at the present time and Chinese civilization as such might have developed according to its own values and principles, unhindered by the fatal consequences of adverse foreign intervention.

What is ironical is that in their attempts to locate a singular historical cause for China’s problems, these anti-traditionalists of the 1980s [who had supposedly outgrown Marxism] were nonetheless unable to refute the Marxist explanation and revision of [the Hegelian] Spirit as an evolutionary process lodged in the material conditions of human social existence.⁸ It goes without saying that anyone who advances a linear evolutionary theory of historical development, wherein a singular cause is supposed to lead to an equally singular effect, will find himself going round and round in circles since this way of seeing things is no different to musing about whether the chicken or the egg came first. We know that Calvin’s earliest teachings were not in step

⁷ Liu Dong, *Liu Dong zixuan ji* [Selected works of Liu Dong] (Guilin: Guangxi Shifan Daxue Chubanshe, 1997), p.113.

⁸ [Translator’s note] Liu Dong is referring, in this instance, to Marx’s development and critique of Hegel’s philosophy of history. Where Hegel had regarded history as the becoming of spirit, the culmination of which would take the form of Absolute Reason, Marx argued that Hegel’s reading of spirit in terms of the progressive acquisition of rational consciousness was divorced from the material or socio-economic factors that grounded the work of thinking, and hence spirit. He thus proposed that spirit be mapped also in the form of an anticipation of Communism, to be achieved through a revolution that would liberate humanity from the alienating effects of social existence within a capitalist system.

⁹ [Translator's note] According to Strauss, this revolution in rational thought occurred in the sixteenth century, originating with Machiavelli's writings and followed by the views of Bacon and Hobbes. See Leo Strauss, *Natural right and history* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1965), p.60.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.61.

with "rationalistic capitalism." This is the "norm" of most religions or as the Bible puts it, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

But revisionists among Calvin's successors moved away from his original intention only to turn quite abruptly towards Puritanism, which promoted success and riches in this mortal existence as the means for entering the Kingdom of Heaven. If someone should argue that this sudden turnabout constitutes the primary cause of modern civilization as we know it, then we should counter with the question, "Is there a historical materialist cause for this ideological change?" In other words, if a flock of pastors should begin to preach in a way that differs greatly from the original teachings of their church, and if, as luck would have it, their new doctrine lends approval to and legitimizes the conduct of capitalism, then is it fair to say that the Reformation, which appears to have come about at just the "right" moment, must have been generated from within the Christian religion itself and for spiritual reasons alone? And what of those social factors that would have constrained the religion to take this particular form? Was it entirely free from a certain concealment and aestheticization of that class crime known as the extraction of "surplus value"? If Marx were still with us today, I am sure that he would have no problems in answering these questions in ways that would further advance his own view.

The questions I pose in the preceding paragraph echo the critical position of scholars like Leo Strauss who had already written [in the 1950s] that:

Weber took it for granted that the cause [of the capitalist spirit] must be sought in the transformation of the theological tradition, i.e., in the Reformation. But he did not succeed in tracing the capitalist spirit to the Reformation or, in particular, to Calvinism except by the use of "historical dialectics" or by means of questionable psychological constructions. The utmost one could say is that he traced the capitalist spirit to the corruption of Calvinism. [Richard H.] Tawney rightly pointed out that the capitalist Puritanism studied by Weber was late Puritanism or that it was the Puritanism that had already made its peace with "the world." This means that the Puritanism in question had made its peace with the capitalist world already in existence: the Puritanism in question was then not the cause of the capitalist world or of the capitalist spirit In brief Weber overestimated the importance of the revolution that had taken place on the plane of theology, and he underestimated the importance of the revolution that had taken place on the plane of rational thought.⁹ By paying more careful attention than he did to the purely secular development, one would also be able to restore the connection, arbitrarily severed by him, between the emergence of the capitalist spirit and the emergence of the science of economics.¹⁰

* * *

Bertrand Russell, who openly declared that he was not a Christian, used the following example in his book, *The Problem of China*, to demonstrate

why the concept of “rationalistic capitalism” is essentially irrational. He writes:

What we believe to be a love of progress is really, in nine cases out of ten, a love of power, an enjoyment of the feeling that by our fiat we can make things different. For the sake of this pleasure, a young American will work so hard that, by the time he has acquired his millions, he has become a victim of dyspepsia, compelled to live on toast and water, and to be a mere spectator of the feasts that he offers to his guests.¹¹

In relation to the this-worldly attitude of Confucian civilization, Bertrand Russell's example can be expanded as follows: What Weber describes in his account of the Protestant ethic is a kind of economic activity that had the effect of strengthening the “emotional intelligence quotient” [*qing shang* 情商] of society as a whole since it encouraged wealth accumulation and competition for purposes other than those of self-gratification. Such economic activity thus placed an effective restraint on unbridled consumerism of the kind that would have otherwise killed the goose that lays the golden eggs. But all the same, the Protestant ethic that Weber has described would lead a person, even if he had already amassed a mountain of gold through a lifetime's toil, to expend his last breath trying to add a few meaningless gold specks to an already existing fortune. Having forgotten that wealth should serve human needs, he would not have known how to spend any of what he had accumulated. Instead, he would always be looking to the future without so much as a glance backwards at what he had already achieved. In his book *My Country My People*, Lin Yutang 林语堂 observed that while the Chinese might well be inferior to others in creating wealth, however, they greatly exceeded others in making the most of their limited resources. The secular (or this-worldly) *Weltanschauung* of the Chinese people that this tendency represents is none other than a rational deduction from and an externalization of Confucian value-concepts.

My comments in this essay will attract widespread criticism in mainland Chinese intellectual circles by their very provocativeness [*zhefan* “*mao tianxia da buwei*” *de hua* 这番“冒天下大不韪”的话]. Few would have dared to utter them during the Culture Fever years. But these comments are not as easy to refute as my detractors might assume. In the 1980s, no one was terribly interested in this kind of metaphysical reflection. Instead there was a prevailing recklessness in our actions as people sought to effect instant modernization at any cost, to the extent that some even became, quite ludicrously, such zealous disciples of the Protestant faith that they no longer knew how to enjoy life. This recklessness and, indeed, impatience for modernization would have made overnight conversions of any kind commonplace. Naturally no one had any time to clarify the following problem in their readings of Weber: Even if there was, admittedly, a crucial historical relation between the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism in the West, would it be possible for this relation to produce the same results a second

¹¹ Bertrand Russell, *The problem of China* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1922), pp.202–3. [Translator's note] The Chinese translation of this work was published as Luosu, *Zhong-guo wenti*, translated by Qin Rui (Shanghai: Xuelin Chubanshe, 1996). Liu Dong quotes from p.160 of this text.

time, in a different spatio-temporal moment and within a different cultural environment? Indeed, even within the terms of Weber's own understanding of happy historical coincidences, one could only provide a negative response to this question. Since the time of Matteo Ricci [Li Madou 利马窦, 1552–1610], we have been familiar with the idea of Western missionaries using “marvels and curios” to entice the Chinese to listen to Christian sermons. Now it would appear that people are once again fixing their gaze on the hereafter in a bid to realize their own dreams of material prosperity.

In a cultural ambience like ours with its entrenched this-worldliness, one can do little more than to borrow the secular lure of Weber's view to promote a wholly mystical message. The only difference is that while European missionaries of yore laboured to convert their Chinese audience, some Chinese intellectuals of the present-day have sought to be reborn [in the Protestant spirit] entirely of their own accord. They have sought to do this long after Western thinkers have declared the death of God. The haste and impatience with which Chinese intellectuals rushed to embrace Western ideas in the 1980s was a trend that can best be illustrated by an encounter I had with a fellow postgraduate student. Despite his total lack of musical training, this student was nonetheless prepared to declare that the only work of Beethoven that he could bear listening to was the *Solemna Missa*, when he could not even tell the difference between Beethoven's Third and Sixth Symphonies!

That a scrupulously secular thinker like Max Weber could be posthumously assigned a “missionary” role in contemporary China and be made to inherit the mantle of Matteo Ricci, and that Weber should prove to be so successful in this undertaking, is surely one of the greatest jokes of our topsy-turvy times. The fad for all things Western witnessed in 1980s' mainland China soon brought us new difficulties. Even though Bertrand Russell might have had a good dig at those unfortunate toast-eating Americans, nonetheless one can see that if such individuals were to have a firm belief in the Protestant ethic, as Weber would argue, then they would always be equipped with a rationale that could provide them with a certain psychological balance. At the very least, they would never be bereft of a certain anticipation of spiritual rewards. But what of those Chinese anxious to be imbued with this same Protestant ethic? It seems to me that even the most conscientious advocates of Western theology or religious philosophy among our Chinese scholars cannot readily draw on the rich tapestry of images of “the Kingdom of Heaven” or “the one true God” that is part and parcel of Western civilization.

Although I state this on the basis of my personal encounters with such scholars, I am not criticizing any one individual; I merely seek to indicate what might constitute a distinct cultural difference between China and the West. To put this hypothetically, if the Chinese are capable of only embracing a this-worldly attitude (as a consequence of the Confucian tradition in which they were nurtured), wouldn't the Weberian argument be tantamount to saying that if others should strip the Chinese of the right to enjoy the benefits of this-world by force, then they will have absolutely nothing to fall back on?

This also begs the following question: If the Chinese have no means of ever truly embracing the Protestant faith, no matter the amount of soul-searching that they may undertake, then wouldn't the Weberian argument (as espoused by its Chinese advocates) be tantamount to the passing of a death sentence on Chinese culture? Alternatively, if the Chinese were able to shift their gaze successfully to the hereafter, then wouldn't this free everyone from the responsibility of having to consider the rights of the Chinese to enjoy the benefits of the modern world?

These seemingly nit-picking questions have always bothered me but I had little opportunity to pose them in previous years, let alone find a willing audience to hear them. In the *esprit de corps* of 1980s' China, the word *Rujia* [Confucianism] was like a punching bag that anyone could vent their anger on, for whatever reason they cared to name. Yet, most people were also vaguely aware that they were using Confucianism as a scapegoat. Let me put the problem this way: If thinking things through is always an individual or private endeavour, then speaking one's mind is always a public act. The latter is thus always subject to the constraints imposed by what Alfred North Whitehead calls "the climate of opinion." Even though the prevailing "climate of opinion" in 1980s' mainland China did not annihilate one's ability to think things through, nonetheless to a large extent, it did inhibit one's ability to speak one's mind. Even if one were to have been as bold as to speak one's mind, one's words would have fallen on deaf ears.

Nihilistic rejection of Chinese tradition [implicit in the 1980s' Weberian-style doctrine] might have sounded as if it was full of vim and vigour but it was also not difficult to disprove. Since it had been used to promote the idea of God in the most blasphemous of ways, that is, in order to serve practical economic goals (which also led its advocates to assume that they could simply pick and choose what they wanted from tradition), as soon as the economic facts contradicted the assessments produced by this doctrine, the "original sin" that Confucianism was charged with instantly disappeared. It would seem that those who promoted the Weberian-style doctrine were quite indifferent as to the question of whose teachings might comfort their souls better! Thus, when I discussed such matters with anti-traditionalists in those days, I would often bring up the case of the Four Little Dragons in East Asia as a prime example of Asian-style commercial success and would draw particular attention in this regard to Taiwan's relatively strong roots in the Confucian tradition. My argument ran along the following lines: In the case of the Four Little Dragons, not only was the Confucian tradition not a hindrance to economic success but, as some were beginning to argue, it had actually accelerated the rate of economic growth in several sites within the Confucian cultural realm, including those sites that were located on the outskirts of this realm. (It goes without saying that mainland China was historically the centre of this realm.) On the contrary, locations such as the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Vietnam and Cuba that, to varying degrees,

were culturally different from China have turned out to share our affliction! In this context, why should we put the blame entirely on our own indigenous cultural tradition without directing some of the blame at the foreign system that has been imposed on us?

The 1990s brought a significant change to the mainland Chinese intellectual landscape when this question that I had posed in the 1980s suddenly became the one that everyone was discussing. This kind of sudden shift in direction to which Chinese intellectual discourse is, from time to time, susceptible is truly quite breathtaking! Even though the East Asian economic miracle had benefited from neither public debate in mainland China nor thoroughgoing rational assessment [*lixingdeqingsuan* 理性的清算] on the part of mainland Chinese intellectuals, nonetheless it suddenly became the focus of everyone's attention. Moreover, there was a surge of interest in works by overseas-based ethnic Chinese scholars like Yü Ying-shih 余英时 and Ambrose Y. C. King [or Jin Yaoji 金耀基]. These works sought to demonstrate a correspondence (whether total or partial) between Confucianism and the spirit of capitalism—in Yu's case, from an historical perspective and in King's, a contemporary one. The Chinese translation of Robert Bellah's [1957] book, *Tokugawa Religion: The Cultural Roots of Modern Japan* was also in great demand. We know that these works all bear strong traces of Weber's influence and, to my mind, they rely too much on the Weberian thesis and deploy it inappropriately to explain the Asian case in more than a few places.

What I note with some amusement about this sea-change in the mainland Chinese intellectual scene is that those arbiters who passed the death sentence on Confucian culture from their Weberian vantage point in the 1980s were not the least bit embarrassed by their sudden change of heart. It was as if they had simply substituted a different reading for the same incontrovertible facts that were right under their very noses, in order to invoke yet another "incarnation" for Weber. Only this time, their Weberianism was one that sought to privilege (and not to debunk) the Confucian foundation that was presumed to underpin the economic miracle of the East Asian region and overseas Chinese societies. This time, they sought to derive from Weber's ideas an explanatory framework for the study of the economies and societies of East Asia that would enable them to incorporate cultural variables (such as the Confucian norms of industry, thrift, forbearance, emphasis on education, collective spirit and so on and so forth) into their charting of the Asian economic curve. And thus, the title of Weber's seminal work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* might as well have been changed to *Confucianism and the Spirit of Capitalism* as far as its Chinese readers of the 1990s were concerned.

This change in intellectual direction during the 1990s can also be partially attributed to the influence of the German economist C. Herrmann-Pillath. In his many visits to China during this time, he spoke with Chinese academics from many different disciplines, and I recall that a number of us who

pursued national studies and who studied classical Chinese texts found ourselves in agreement with him on one fundamental issue.¹² If neo-classical economic theory now appears to be overly “one-dimensional” even in relation to the economic experience of the West (on which this theory was based in the first place and then “purified” by extrapolation into a case for “rational choice”), then there is every reason for us to now pay adequate attention to the “non-standard constraints” or “non-economic elements” that have exercised certain practical normative effects on the economies of East Asia, with particular reference to the so-called “economic miracle” of the Confucian cultural realm.

This kind of problem-consciousness, evidently applicable across cultures, subsequently led us to pursue our inquiry along the two fundamental axes of the economy and culture. From the perspective of humanities scholars, the increasing importance of [the free market mode of] economic life within present-day Chinese culture was such that expressions of this new economic mode came to be regarded as a cultural phenomenon in itself, one to which we now paid particular attention in our intellectual inquiry. Equally, economists now also recognized that certain cultural elements have historically exercised a range of effects (of both a conducive and a restrictive nature) on the economic development of East Asian countries. They now sought to factor these elements into their economic formulations as variables, in order that these variables might provide a necessary corrective to their otherwise abstract calculations. From this time onwards, although Chinese scholars began to differ from each other in the degree to which they defended Weber’s ideas, nonetheless, most of them did subscribe to the following statements: A purely Confucian system is not only incapable of producing “rationalistic capitalism” in and of itself but the values produced out of this pure Confucian system will invariably pose a challenge to this so-called “rationality.” Conversely, a fragmented Confucian society, whose [modern] secularization was the result of “foreign aid,” has the potential to be transformed into a hybrid entity onto which “rationalistic capitalism” can be grafted and in which the latter can thrive.

It should then come as no surprise that, just as the Weberian argument underwent a shift in the intellectual discourse of contemporary mainland China, the secular shape of Confucianism changed as well. Confucianism in 1990s’ mainland China was no longer regarded as the deadly rival of modernity. Furthermore, people now seemed to think that the “challenge-response” thesis (of John K. Fairbank) or the “tradition *vs.* modernity” thesis (of Joseph Levenson) provided them with the necessary means to argue that the fragmentary remains of an already disintegrated indigenous Chinese tradition should be subjected to forces of modernization aimed at propelling China forward in its time of economic transition. They saw this push towards modernization as one that would rely, in part, on forces prevalent in the Confucian cultural realm of present-day East Asia. One intellectual formulation

¹² [Translator’s note] National studies or *guoxue* 国学 refers to scholarship on Chinese history, culture and traditional philosophy, with a particular emphasis on Confucianism. First promoted and institutionalized in the 1910s by early twentieth-century Chinese intellectuals such as Zhang Taiyan 章太炎, national studies was regarded as the cultural basis for a modern Chinese nation. It was a significant part of the curriculum in the modern Chinese humanities but underwent a decline during the Maoist era. In the 1990s, the notable resurgence of interest in national studies was quickly referred to in mainland Chinese intellectual circles as a “National Studies Craze” (*guoxue re*). The rising fortunes of Confucianism, associated with both the popularity of national studies and the party-state’s support for Confucian values as a cultural bulwark for China in the economic reform era, constitutes an important context for Liu Dong’s critique of the uses and abuses of Confucianism in the 1990s.

¹³ [Translator's note] The author refers in this context to Michael Polanyi's notion of "charismatic support" as used by Lin Yü-sheng in his well-known study of May Fourth intellectual trends, *The crisis of Chinese consciousness: radical anti-traditionalism in the May Fourth era* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979). According to Liu Dong, Lin uses this notion inappropriately to support the unfounded claim that "creative transformation" from within the "minor" Confucian tradition has provided the impetus for China's modern development. Liu is highly critical of what he regards as Lin's attempt at "legitimizing" Chinese tradition using terms derived from recent Western academic discourse, as if these were the only terms worth considering and as if Chinese tradition lacked its own intellectual validity. Liu regards this as a blatant distortion of Chinese historical reality, read through the lens of Western academic interests.

of the time that was even more of an empty boast than the preceding is as follows: The cultural mentality that constitutes the "minor" Confucian tradition is capable of providing an essential albeit limited form of "charismatic support" [*kalisima zhichi* 卡理斯玛支持] for what is commonly regarded as the historical inevitability of "creative transformation" [*chuangzaoxing zhuanhua* 创造性转化].¹³

This dramatic shift in perspective constitutes the second unhappy encounter between the Weberian view and Confucianism within the short space of a decade. The relationship between these two culturally distinct paradigms, which had previously been regarded as one of incommensurable difference, was now seen as manifesting a certain family resemblance. Confucianism thus came to be seen as an essential component of economic development in East Asia and there was no more talk of having it eradicated; it was no longer held to be a hindrance to the forces that would propel China into the future.

* * *

The story does not end here. Other things were in store for Confucianism as time passed. Despite the evident shift in intellectual orientation of the 1990s, things had not changed all that much in the mainland Chinese intellectual world. Even though Confucianism as the Chinese tradition had ostensibly been granted a pardon and was saved, as it were, from the gallows of intellectual rejection and condemnation, this turned out to be no more than a brief stay of execution.

On the surface, people appeared to have changed their minds about Confucianism in the 1990s and were even using it for a time to fill a perceived void in social values. But their evaluative criteria and theoretical assumptions remained fundamentally unchanged. That is to say, people cared little whether the Confucian tradition was good or bad, and the risk of its destruction did not greatly concern them. Nor did they strive to preserve it at all costs. It was as if what was at stake in the ostensible "turn" towards Confucianism had nothing to do with the principles and concepts of Confucianism *per se*. It was as if the importance of Confucianism was being judged solely in relation to the goals of modernization. Indeed, many regarded Confucianism as lacking the necessary legitimacy to provide an independent resource for China's modernization. Thus, Confucianism was held to be incapable of mounting a counter-discourse that would effectively challenge the dominant discourse of modernity as "rationalistic capitalism."

As a consequence, the value-rationality within our indigenous tradition which had once provided our forebears with a sense of belonging to a certain time and place, and which had enabled them to get on with their lives, was now demoted to a merely instrumental form of rationality that served a temporary purpose in a time of cultural transition. In other words, Confucianism became no more than a makeshift bridge that people believed they could easily dispense with once they had crossed the turbulent waters to the

other shore [as representative of the goals of modernization]. Indeed, this [wrong-headed] view is at the very heart of the argument that Lin Yü-sheng 林毓生 has reproduced in a variety of ways for several decades.¹⁴ In interrogating what he calls the “totalistic iconoclasm” of the May Fourth era, Lin implicitly tells his readers that the May Fourth strategy of opposing tradition was self-defeating. Furthermore, he seems to suggest that if only the May Fourth activists had put a temporary halt to their acts of negating tradition, they would have ultimately achieved their goal of its thoroughgoing negation. Moreover, Lin’s notion of “creative transformation” as a kind of strategy for the practical implementation of modern goals evidently runs counter to the findings of empirically-minded social thinkers. He seems to assume that the activation of forces in relation to tradition is no more than the result of a rational strategy adopted and implemented by an elite minority. One is thus left with the impression that his thesis confounds even the basic difference between history and values.¹⁵ Even if we were to accept that history can be deduced from an assigned cause or developed according to a given direction, the projected impetus for modernization derived from such calculations may not be one that conforms to our chosen values, nor one with which “the subject of history” as such should necessarily agree.

If the translation of *The Protestant Ethic* is a signal feature of the reception of Weber in mainland China of the 1980s, then the translation of Weber’s work on *Confucianism and Daoism* constitutes an equally striking feature of the Chinese intellectual world of the early 1990s. Two different translations of Weber’s Confucianism and Daoism were published in 1993 and 1995, by the Jiangsu People’s Press (Jiangsu Renmin Chubanshe 江苏人民出版社) and Beijing Commercial Press (Beijing Shangwu Yinshuguan 北京商务印书馆), respectively. I do not doubt in the least the significance of Weber’s unique perspective on the Chinese tradition for it has surely provided us with productive ways of examining our own indigenous culture in relation to various structural features that have impeded its development. But this German thinker was nonetheless no more than “a great layperson” (*weidade waihang* 伟大的外行). Many people have since come to realize this fact.

What is most interesting in this context is that the intellectual conditions peculiar to mainland China of the early 1990s were such that people might disagree with the conclusion that Weber reached in *Confucianism and Daoism* and yet still adhere to the argument that Weber advanced in *The Protestant Ethic*. In other words, not only were they unable to break with Weber, their disagreement with Weber’s conclusion in *Confucianism and Daoism* led only to a reinforcement of their belief in *The Protestant Ethic*, notwithstanding the fact that mainland scholars are generally rather nitpicking about the consistency and coherence of the sources from which they draw their ideas. People’s dependence on Weber was such that it was as if they were all trying to prove that they had undertaken an ongoing revision of Weber’s thesis in their own

¹⁴ [Translator’s note] Here, Liu Dong expresses his criticism of Lin Yü-sheng’s elaboration of modern Chinese radicalism and iconoclasm in writings by Lin published over the last two decades or more. See also Liu Dong, “Beware of designer pidgin scholarship,” translated by Gloria Davies with Li Kaiyu in Gloria Davies, *Voicing concerns*, pp.100-2.

¹⁵ [Translator’s note] By this, Liu Dong suggests that Lin Yü-sheng has focused far too narrowly on the choices made by certain historical individuals in relation to China’s transition from tradition to modernity, thus confounding the movement of history itself with the selection of values on the part of a minority.

¹⁶ [Translator's note] The statement 德之不修, 学之不讲 appears in chapter 7 paragraph 3 of *The Analects* 论语. Among existing translations of this text, Simon Leys's is arguably the most evocative:

The Master said, "Failure to cultivate moral power, failure to explore what I have learned, incapacity to stand by what I know to be right, incapacity to reform what is not good—these are my worries" 子曰: “德之不修, 学之不讲, 闻义不能徙, 不善不能改, 是吾忧也”

See *The Analects of Confucius*, translation and notes by Simon Leys (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1997), p.29.

¹⁷ See Arif Dirlik, "Confucius in the borderlands: Global capitalism and the reinvention of Confucianism," *Boundary 2*, 22.3 (1995): 229–73.

work. By this means they sought to affirm their own "post-Weberian" status as if this was something to which all modern scholars should aspire.

At around the same time, the Chinese translation of Thomas A. Metzger's *Escape from Predicament: Neo-Confucianism and China's Evolving Political Culture* was published by Jiangsu People's Press in 1995. In this work, Metzger provides an account of the Chinese cultural-intellectual tradition that, in some ways, forcibly reproduces the contours of something akin to the innate tensions that Weber had read into the Protestant ethic. Metzger interprets the Neo-Confucian anxiety over knowledge gained in the absence of the proper cultivation of virtue (*de zhi buxiu, xue zhi bujiang de jiaoliu* 德之不修, 学之不讲 的焦虑)¹⁶ as a homology for the Protestant anxiety over one's state of grace. By doing so, he risks turning China into a pseudo- or inferior version of the West since his Weberian paradigm lends itself to this kind of reading.

If this is supposed to be the only response that Confucianism can produce in relation to "rationalistic capitalism," then I must express a preference for Arif Dirlik's assessment of Confucianism's misfortunes over the latter half of the twentieth century.¹⁷ In his satirical observation of the gaining ascendancy of Confucianism in 1980s' mainland China and the enthusiasm for Confucian themes in Chinese intellectual circles of the early 1990s, Dirlik refers to Confucianism as a sign of "global postcolonial discourse" in East Asia. He avers that there is a clear and direct relationship between Confucianism and power structures in contemporary East Asia and further argues that the rise of Confucianism is the ideological legacy of certain minority élites who have reaped the benefits of global capitalism. Confucianism, as Dirlik sees it, has thus contributed to the growth of global capitalism.

In my view, Dirlik's argument as summarized in the above does not represent the overall situation surrounding the resurgence of interest in Confucianism. He does not deal with the *substance* of Confucianism's contemporary appeal or with its intellectual significance. It should be acknowledged that economic progress in the East Asian region was, to some extent, a catalyst for the renewed transmission of Confucian doctrine in mainland Chinese society. In this sense alone, one could say that there is a superficial relationship between the rise of Confucianism and the rapid growth of East Asian capitalism. It is not hard to argue on the basis of this superficial relation that Confucianism lends itself to being easily accommodated within the global capitalist system. One could even go so far as to suggest that there is some kind of mutual conspiracy between Confucianism and capitalism. But to argue in this manner is to view Chinese tradition in extremely narrow terms.

The problem with Dirlik's critique of contemporary Confucianism is that he fails to engage in a substantial and meticulous way with the circumstances of Confucianism's decline prior to the 1980s. One could say that although he recognizes the "lonely" situation in which Confucianism found itself during the 1980s, he fails to see that there has always been an undercurrent of Confucianism that has nurtured this cultural-spiritual tradition throughout the

modern century of its relative isolation. In this regard, one could suggest that, had he been alert to this enduring aspect of Confucianism, it would have been impossible for him to confine his narrative to Confucianism of merely the 1980s and 1990s. In brief, he fails to appreciate the ways in which new Confucianism took shape during the earlier decades of its decline in the twentieth century, in response to and as a form of resistance against the challenges of the West. The vitality of New Confucianism can be discerned in the work of representative twentieth-century Chinese thinkers like Xiong Shili 熊十力, Liang Shuming 梁漱溟, Feng Youlan 冯友兰, Mou Zongsan 牟宗三, Tang Junyi 唐君毅 and Xu Fuguan 徐复观. These individuals sought to re-define our indigenous value-norms in ways that were appropriate for the modern era. They also developed comparative cultural frameworks for discussing Confucianism that helped us to define civilizational differences between China and the West. Without the defense of Chinese tradition mounted by these new Confucians and their creative renewal of this tradition, Confucianism simply could not have risen again in our time.

The writings of these New Confucian thinkers are particularly useful as a framework against which we can think through the various implications of the “China-centered approach” favoured by a new generation of Western Sinologists. There is now a distinct possibility that Western Sinologists may have grown so accustomed to the Weberian constraints imposed on their thinking as to take these constraints as the given state of things. If this is so, their work may risk being guided by vacuous questions like “Are the Chinese capable of producing ‘rationalistic capitalism?’” If scholarship constitutive of the China-centered approach is focused on exploring China’s so-called “endogenous development” in terms of questions such as the preceding, then it will accord no greater dignity to the actualities of modern Chinese history than those accounts that such scholarship sets out to critique (such as those of the “impact-response” variety). Indeed, a China-centered approach that does not examine its own Western assumptions simply reinforces the already prevalent idea of China’s history as an inverted image of the West.

Thus, these Sinologists who favour the China-centered approach become unwitting victims not to mention legitimizers of the very Eurocentrism that they despise. Because of this risk, it is crucial that these sinologists ponder the following question: It cannot be denied that there is a basic incommensurability between Confucian value-concepts and modernization which makes the latter appear irrational in the terms of the former. This is why Chinese society

Figure 3

Source: A portrait of Confucius by the Hong Kong artist Peter Mong (1984), which appears online at <<http://www.confucius.org/picture/cmt011.htm>> (accessed 1 April 2003)



could not have produced modernization on its own, and to this day, those who adhere to traditional Chinese values remain wary of modernization. In this sense, Confucianism is that very thing which has served as the innate motive force of pre-modern Chinese history. Confucian values provide the very fulcrum upon which one can gain purchase on what constitutes the larger reality of China.

In discussing this matter with fellow academics overseas, I have emphasized the fundamental importance of attending not only to the question of “discovering history in China” (as Paul Cohen puts it) but to the question of “discovering civilization and values in China” as well. Otherwise, one fails to see the splendours of ancient China as a diversity of civilizational resources that could be utilized for freeing present-day China from its complex predicament.

I now turn to the third unfortunate encounter between the Weberian view and Confucianism, one that turned out to be dramatically different from the previous two. This time, Weber and the Weberians were the ones to be subjected to the same tortuous interrogation that Confucianism had undergone in the previous encounters. As luck would have it, this third encounter (which took place less than twenty years after the first) coincided with the arrival of Michel Foucault’s and Edward Said’s subversive readings of Western ideas at the pier of Chinese intellectual practice.

In the late 1990s, many seized upon Said’s argument in *Orientalism* and the critique of Eurocentrism that he had developed from within the system of Western knowledge, to re-examine what they had previously valorized as Weber’s enlightened and inspired sociological research. Reading Weber via Said, they quickly discovered limitations and prejudices resulting from what they now saw as a lack of self-reflection on Weber’s part—a shortcoming that he proved unable to overcome—notwithstanding the intense excitement of their earlier encounters with his works. Admittedly, the case-studies of China undertaken by this great sociologist belong to that category of Orientalist scholarship produced by an earlier generation of Occidentals but it is hardly necessary for us to criticize him for this. Indeed, it was not possible for Weber to have been stirred to write about China as Chinese intellectuals do, for China was a life-world that was strange to him. It was Weber’s quest for the truth about the Protestant ethic that led him to write about Confucianism and Daoism and thus he approached these latter traditions with certain preconceptions; in one sense, the case presented by “the other” served no purpose other than to confirm what Weber had set out to prove all along.

The limitations and prejudices inherent in the Weberian view are the very things that prevented Weber, and which now prevent his latter-day Chinese and Western sinological advocates alike, from providing a satisfactory analysis of China. Moreover, these latter-day advocates of the Weberian view have not even been able to fully grasp the brilliance of Weber’s ideas. For instance, Weber’s view that “rationalistic capitalism” was facilitated by the coincidence of structural and normative factors within Western society is relatively even-

handed insofar as it proposes at least two contributing factors to the making of modern history. In this regard, Weber was clearly a good deal more thorough in his analysis than his latter-day advocates who have invoked his name to preach a kind of cultural-spiritual determinism. Unlike what some of these people think, Weber's theoretical framework is not something that can be used willy-nilly to suggest any one historical cause for the advent of the modern world. Naturally, the complexity of historical events is such that any "coincidence" so identified can only assume the form of an "ideal type" [*lixiang xing* 理想型]; it cannot be proven as fact. Weber's notion of an historical "coincidence"¹⁸ is no more than an attempt at determining the ways in which the positive aspects of a given historical phenomenon might have outweighed the negative aspects. As a theoretical model of historical development, it is not entirely unjustifiable.

The problem with Weber, however, is that he was much too preoccupied with the question of how the West came to have what was always in its possession and, by the same token, how the East came to lack what it had always lacked. Thus, in using his framework, one is always confronted with the problem of the significance that Weber has assigned to specific historical factors but not to others. In this regard, Weber ignored the positive elements inherent in societies of the East while exaggerating the positive elements of the West. This is clearly a case of forcing the facts of history to fit a given theoretical premise.

The critique of Weber that I have put forward here is not my invention. Scholars of Weber such as Frank Parkin have explained Weber's reading of the asymmetry between the East and the West in the following way:

One of the reasons why Weber went to such unusual lengths to try and show the failure of the capitalist spirit to develop properly in the Orient was to demonstrate that in the absence of a motivational drive even the most promising institutional conditions would not be employed for rational economic ends. Capitalism of the modern variety could only make headway if both substance and spirit—the structural and normative supports—were present. In his comparative studies, Weber understood the point that in places like India and China the substance was present in sufficient degree to give capitalism a fighting chance. [...] Weber thus underscores the point that east and west could not be said to have differed profoundly in their preparedness for capitalism. Each in their different way had sufficiently strong institutional and material foundations to support rational economic action on the grand scale. The fact that the new system arose exclusively in the west must therefore be explained by the additive effect of something that was present in the west alone. This extra something was the spirit of capitalism. And the reason it was missing everywhere else was because none of these other places had a set of beliefs equivalent to the Protestant ethic.¹⁹

Similarly, Fernand Braudel has noted that, in providing a definition of capitalism from the vantage point of modernity as nothing more or less than

¹⁸ [Translator's note] Here, Liu Dong refers to Weber's explanation of the parallel rise of capitalism and the Protestant faith as constituting one such historical "coincidence." Liu is also referring in this context to what he regards as the universalistic pretensions of Weber's *Economy and society*.

¹⁹ Frank Parkin, *Max Weber* (London and New York: Tavistock, 1982), pp.65–6. [Translator's note] Parkin's work was translated into Chinese by Liu Dong and others as part of their collective venture to introduce Western social and political theory into the mainland Chinese intellectual world in the late 1980s. The Chinese translation was published by the Sichuan People's Press in 1987.

²⁰ See the published Chinese translation of Fernand Braudel's *Dynamique du capitalisme* (Fei'ernan Buluodaier, *Zibenzhuyi dedongli*, translated by Yang Qi [Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1993], p.39).

²¹ Liu, *Liu dong zixuan ji*, p.114.

the product of the Protestant faith, Weber was referring more precisely to capitalism as the product of Puritanism.²⁰ One wonders whether those scholars who believe that they are the “true interpreters” of Weber would be outraged by concise summations like those by Parkin and Braudel quoted in the above. In all fairness, we should say that even though Weber's argument has found “reinforcement” in contemporary forms of cultural-spiritual determinism, this should not give us cause to point the finger of blame solely at him. Yet, even though Weber's latter-day acolytes may have somewhat exaggerated Weber's thesis in their own interests to see things in a certain light, we cannot deny that he should also shoulder some of the responsibility for facilitating this reductive view of China in the first place.

The significance of Weber's legacy is something to which I have given a good deal of thought. As I have written previously:

By taking one step back from the “typological comparisons” of the world's religions that this great master of sociology has bequeathed to us, I can claim that Weber has given me a language of cultural relativism from which vantage point I am able to restore the original appearance of Chinese civilization. Similarly, by taking one step beyond Weber's “causal analysis” of the world's religions, scholars have been able to gain perspective on the cultural absolutism of the ancient life-world and to free themselves from its constraints. The so-called “instrumental rationality” which Weber uncovered in modern capitalist society is of particular significance in this regard. Weber saw this form of rationality as a “justification of the ends” based solely on economically-driven calculations and predictions, and from which all other forms of value-judgement were excluded.²¹

If we should choose this “instrumental rationality”—based on the lived historical reality of the West—as the grid upon which to examine Chinese historical sources and, even worse, if we make it the standard by which we judge “progress” in Confucian society, then those criteria for evaluating historical progress that have emerged out of and are innate to Chinese civilization will be voted obsolete and thus be rendered invisible. Some years ago, I wrote about the need to scrutinize Weber's theoretical framework for basic flaws. In this context, there is a striking asymmetry between the diverse accounts that he provides for “value-rationality” and the singular account that he offers for “instrumental rationality”:

Even though [Weber] acknowledged the diversity of “value-rationality” within an international context, he did not develop a self-reflective mode of cognition from within the logic of his argument to explore this issue further. He was thus unable to derive correspondingly different types of “instrumental rationality.” On the contrary, he went so far in the direction of simplification as to determine “instrumental rationality” solely in terms of modern capitalism. This was to assume that, regardless of the different value-concerns that may inform a diverse range of human actions, the “rules of the game” developed by different civilizations should all, somehow, spur people on to make purely “one-dimensional” choices, to borrow Marcuse's term, in ac-

cordance with the conduct of “economic man” alone. It is absolutely crucial that we remain attentive to this extreme simplification of Chinese civilization’s complex historical experience.²²

²² Ibid., p.115.

The critique of Weber that I have outlined in the above can only be sustained by means of an innovatively open and transparent clarification of Confucianism’s cultural stance. Here, one should add that, just as Weber did not reflect on the basic limitations of the methodology that he developed for his “interpretive sociology,” he appears to have been equally oblivious to the basic limitations of his comparative analysis of religions. More specifically, Weber did not reflect on his own inability to transfer his empathy for the Protestant faith to the faiths of other civilizations such as Confucianism, Hinduism, Judaism and so on and so forth. Nor was he able to relate affectively to the genesis [*yuanchu fenwei* 原初氛围] of these faiths. Thus he was incapable of understanding the inherently different meanings that ancient peoples assigned to different types of social action. To put the problem in these terms is not necessarily to suggest that I have resolved to adopt a Confucian value-stance in living my life. Rather, what my formulation of the problem suggests is that one cannot pay due respect to the realities of China’s historical development unless one recognizes the necessity of this value-stance within the ancient Chinese life-world.

In the absence of such recognition, any number of misguided approaches to modernity can be proposed, ranging from indiscriminate appropriations of Marx to plant “the seeds of capitalism” in China [first proposed in the early twentieth century], to Ray Huang’s (Huang Renyu 黄仁宇) late twentieth-century critique of Confucianism’s “mathematical management,” based on Huang’s crude borrowings from Weber. All such approaches lead to the wrong-headed view that, no matter what the ways in which modernity might exceed human calculation may be, it remains, nonetheless, a universal phenomenon towards which the whole of humanity (and all civilizations) must inevitably make their way. In one sense, this view can thus be seen to constitute a pitfall for everyone. If this wrong-headed view were to be taken as given, not only would the misfortunes and disasters that have befallen colonized and semi-colonized peoples be subject to evaluation solely in the heartless terms of certain “immutable laws” of history but the West itself would lose any capacity for reflecting on its own modernity in both logical and moral-ethical terms.

* * *

The effects of this series of unfortunate encounters between the Weberian view and Confucianism reverberate to this day in the mainland Chinese intellectual scene. If one considers that Weber formulated his argument for an already “disenchanted” modern world in which he saw the demand for rationality as leading necessarily to the displacement of religious ethics [and the empty moralizing it facilitates] by the [secular] ethics of consequence and

²³ [Translator's note] Among other things, Max Weber wrote the following in *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*: "In Baxter's view, the care for external goods should only lie on the shoulders of the 'saint like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment'. But fate decreed that the cloak should become an iron cage." See Max Weber, *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*, translated by Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p.181.

responsibility especially in the realm of political control, then it is somewhat ironic that not only has his work demonstrated its manifest inability to put an end to the "war of the gods" almost a century after his death, but that he has posthumously become, as it were, one "warring god" among many.

In hindsight, it would seem that history has played a joke on those who were intensely opposed to tradition in China's modern era. People mistook history for a very long fuse that they thought could be lit with the Protestant faith as its crucial spark. They thought that China's myriad of problems would be solved by this means and thus, under the gratifying rubrics of liberty and freedom, they made every effort to explode and to destroy a Confucian society that has proven to be far more unyielding and indestructible than even the Bastille. No doubt, such ideas represent an extreme distortion of Weber, because he seems to have anticipated the coming of a truly modern rational world in which divine forces that exceed human experience would have become very remote from our lives. In this regard, we have discovered to our amazement that the cultural resources many people currently utilize in their attempts to free themselves from the shackles of modernity and to cope with modern alienation from their own human nature are derived from none other than the core-values of non-European civilizations. Included among these are the core-values of our much maligned Confucian tradition which has been, and continues to be, subjected to endless attacks of a deterministic nature.

Yet, despite these negative assessments, the Confucian tradition has sustained the development of a "surplus space" [*shengyu kongjian* 剩余空间] for the diversity of choice. It has also provided a certain resistance to the colonizing force of globalization, which manifests as prolonged tension between itself and the latter. One could argue that the Confucian tradition has, in these ways, helped to secure a measure of intellectual freedom for us and it has thus also prevented us from being held captive in the "iron cage" [of modern bureaucracy, materialism and alienation that Weber describes].²³ In this context, one should note that even though Confucian thought in previous times did not enable people to attain freedom, Confucianism of the present-day is entirely capable of suggesting that we have reached a turning-point in relation to the idea of freedom. In other words, it has the potential to provide an alternative value stance from which reflection on Western modernity as well as on the nature of freedom can begin anew.

Contrary to Weber, I believe that this turning point is none other than the outcome of what one might call the "war of the gods" among the major civilizations of the world. Indeed, the primary aim of this essay is to exhort my readers to acquire a sense of awareness about the ways in which changes, turning-points and clashes have occurred in the historical development of the world's civilizations. In the changing landscape of contemporary Chinese intellectual discourse, the rapid metamorphosis that Weber's ideas have undergone over the last two decades is not unrelated to the different readings that can be produced out of his work. One could even argue that there are several ambiguities in Weber's writings. If the reception of Weber in China

provides us with a typical example of cultural appropriation in contemporary intellectual practice, the persistence of Confucian thought as the ground of Chinese culture is equally evident in the ways that Confucianism has gradually developed its intellectual potential and gained in vitality throughout the course of its many intense conflicts with ideas shipped from abroad.

Thus, the reception of Weber in China should not be viewed entirely in terms of an experience of cultural misreading: rather, the series of recent events in the evolving “spirit” of China’s cultural-intellectual history as narrated thus far, allows us to gain perspective on the progress that has been achieved in mainland Chinese intellectual life. It also indicates that there is increasing self-confidence among Chinese intellectuals about their own scholarship. Scholars in previous eras were wont to pay the greatest heed to what they regarded as the pure history of Spirit [*chuncuide jingshen shi* 纯粹的精神史] since this approach to history was, self-evidently, of immense importance. But if one were to perform this work badly, then the difference between a correct and an incorrect interpretation would be glibly reduced to a fatal error on the part of the latter, or else be attributed to “intelligence” and “stupidity” respectively on the part of the authors. A history of ideas which takes into consideration the conditions under which the spirit of a civilization has evolved and which includes some reflection on public opinion, intellectual life and invisible ideological constraints as experienced by the author of such a history would allow us to have a better awareness of the limits of our current wisdom. While we may not be able fully to exceed these limits, we can, nonetheless, become more aware of their existence and this will then lead us to exercise greater vigilance in our knowledge production.

As our intellectual history continues to unfold, will there be a fourth encounter between Weber’s ideas and Confucianism? This question is inextricably linked to what might be called our ardent desire for “theoretical innovation” [*lilun chuangxin* 理论创新]. The international academic world has always been skeptical of teary-eyed debates among intellectuals.²⁴ If we are unable to produce intellectual styles or approaches of our own that are appropriate for the Chinese reality that we inhabit, then we will be forced to rely solely on our suspicion of the inappropriateness of a given theoretical paradigm imposed on our reality, to put an end to fruitless attempts at bringing about a convergence between it and our own indigenous experience. In this context, we must recognize that the Weberian mode of interpreting China utilized by numerous Western sinologists and our fellow Chinese intellectuals shows no sign of decline. On the contrary, this Weberian mode of interpretation has proliferated in knowledge production about China in various guises, whether explicitly or implicitly. And it will continue to thrive as long as we fail to produce a more effective theoretical approach of our own to address Chinese problems. For instance, we could start by questioning the basic flaw in the distinction that Weber makes between value rationality and instrumental rationality. We could counter Weber’s distinction with the elucidation of an

²⁴ [Translator’s note] The author’s reference to “teary-eyed debates” is an allusion to Vladimir Menshov’s famous 1979 Soviet Russian film *Moscow does not believe in tears* [Mosike bu xiangxin yanlei 莫斯科不相信眼泪]. Liu Dong reads this film as a parable about the need for self-possession and self-reliance on the part of the individual. He further observes that the film could be read as suggesting that Chinese intellectuals should not rely solely on what others have deemed to be “political correct” to mount a defense of their own intellectual tradition. He sees this kind of defense as leading to pathetic and unproductive “teary-eyed debates.” In communication with the translator, Liu proposed that “the Chinese intellectual tradition be regarded as one contender among many in the fiercely competitive global academic scene of the present time,” in which different styles of thinking and different intellectual traditions jostle for privilege and authority.

alternative instrumental rationality that operated within pre-modern Chinese society, one that accorded with the criteria of Confucian values. In this way, we would produce a form of knowledge that restores and recaptures the structure and function of our own civilization prior to the interference of foreign ideas and discourses.

If we are able to achieve this intellectual ambition, it would not spell the end of our engagement with issues arising out of the difference between Weber's ideas and Confucianism. After all, our intellectual duty is not merely to interpret the past but, more importantly, to provide guidance for the present and to illuminate a pathway into the future. Thus, as long as the Confucian tradition has not been pronounced dead, there will remain a group of Confucian thinkers who are deeply engaged with the problems of our time and who will continue to ponder the precarious plight of "freedom" in modern society from their specific research perspective, in the same way that Weber pondered over the problems of his time. While their forms of expression and conclusions may bear little resemblance to Weber's, nonetheless, they are occupied with the same range of issues that guided Weber's work.

One needs to remember that previous unfortunate encounters between Weber's ideas and Confucianism have resulted from the burdensome pressure of social Darwinism on contemporary Chinese thought: people simply lacked the equanimity to read properly and explore Weber's ideas. But as the "modernization" project that was once unquestioningly valorized progressively gives way to a sense of hesitation about "modernity," questions of a deeper and more complex nature that troubled Weber [which had not previously been taken up by his Chinese advocates] will gradually become part of Chinese intellectual discourse and perhaps even public cultural discourse in mainland China. Once this has happened, Confucian thought, as one of the intellectual "gods" of our time, will also be able to respond in its own way to the various problems that bedevil modern society and thereby fulfill its crucial intellectual duty. In this way, the relationship between Weber's ideas and Confucianism will become one of inter-dependence and mutual influence.

I am prepared to go so far as to suggest that when we finally achieve this equality between Weber's ideas and Confucianism, we will begin to see that, despite the numerous instances of confusion and distortion that have occurred in the reception of Weber in China, Weber's ideas and the Confucian mode of thinking do share some points of commonality. I base this supposition on certain experiences that I have had of negotiating foreign ideas from within my *Weltanschauung*, which is deeply anchored in Confucian thought. These Confucian underpinnings in my thinking have allowed me to see that, in some ways, Weber's work and Confucianism inhabit the same problem-consciousness. Indeed, it was through reading and translating Weber as well as through organizing translations of Weber for publication that I came to develop an abiding interest in social theory.

The writings of this great master of sociology are strikingly original and the unending debates to which they have given rise have led me to appreci-

ate fully the value of intellectual innovation and intellectual independence. It was through Weber that I discovered a mode of thinking that was not constrained by the presuppositions of a given ontological or epistemological framework: this kind of intellectual reflection has the capacity to satisfy what we most keenly imagine as well as to give free rein to our critical potential. Most importantly, reflective critical engagement of this kind places our ultimate concerns squarely within (rather than beyond) lived experience, while also enabling us to consolidate these concerns in the form of a spiritual quest that exceeds the merely material aspect of human existence. As such, it ensures that we remain constantly attentive to the complexity of the social problems of our time. One could say that this mode of thinking harmonizes well with the latent spiritual quest of the Confucian cultural tradition in which I have been nurtured and which profoundly guides my thinking. Thus, at least from my point of view, it is entirely possible for us to detect a certain formal resonance between Weberianism and Confucianism [*Weibozhuyi he Kongzizhuyi* 韦伯主义和孔子主义].

There is, however, something that I dare not hazard to guess: that is, how long it would take for us to muster enough confidence in ourselves to believe that we have thoroughly understood Weber. Reading Weber is a highly demanding task: we risk having our hearts filled with dewy promises and our heads clouded by foggy misconceptions. Perhaps, to a certain extent, it was Weber's intention to provoke his readers in this way: his writings are, after all, filled with both dew and vaporous mist. If we can begin to envisage the kind of proximity between Weber's ideas and those of Confucian thinkers that I have suggested in the preceding—after all, Confucianism is a mode of thinking that changes and develops over time—we may find a new vantage point from which to gain clarity on those aspects of Weber's writings that were previously unclear to us or that we had simply not noticed before. It is precisely because the relationship between the writer and the reader is a two-way street that Weber's ghost has never ceased to trouble us. I suppose that he will continue to incarnate in the realm of the living from time to time: after all, what better way than this is there for a thinker to ensure that he remains "immortal"?²⁵

²⁵ [Translator's note] In communication with the translator, Liu Dong provides the following gloss on his ironically-inflected use of the word "immortal": Weber's "immortality" can only be ensured if his writings achieve dialogue with Confucianism in ways that do not render Confucianism a mere object of inquiry for Weberian-style analysis. Confucianism has its own immortal principles of "establishing virtue, establishing merit, and establishing proper speech" within the human social realm. In this context, one would have to examine Weber's ideas not only in accordance with criteria that he has chosen, derived as these were from the Protestant faith, but in accordance with criteria that have evolved within Confucian thought as well.

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