

第十一周 讲座：韦伯的比较宗教研究（2021.5.20）

I thought an interesting question from the final chapter of Weber's *The Religion of China* might be whether he constructs a 'law of Sino-Confucian inertia', the same way Lieberman describes a 'law of Southeast Asian inertia' in 20th Century western scholarship of Southeast Asia. Weber describes an unchanging scene and Confucianism as instilling a lack of tension with the world, 'the right path to salvation consisted in adjustment to the eternal and supra-divine orders of the world, Tao, and hence to the requirements of social life, which followed from cosmic harmony... all tension between the imperatives of a supra-mundane God and a creatural world, all orientation toward a goal in the beyond, and all conception of radical evil were absent. He writes of how, in a Confucian bureaucracy 'nothing was allowed that might bring the psyche out of equilibrium...Confucian rationalism meant rational adjustment to the world; Puritan rationalism meant rational mastery of the world.' Reading Weber I was curious if his work which was published as *Konfuzianismus und Taoismus* in Germany in 1915 was received in Surabaya or Peking by young revolutionaries, Lu Xun's 'A Madman's Diary' was written in 1918, the madman seeing the words 'eat people 吃人 written between the lines of old Confucian texts holds parallels of Weber's critique. I was also curious in what way Weber's thesis and argument of inertia served revolutionary ideals of breaking with a feudal past and was in this way utilised by Chinese revolutionaries. Karl Marx's argument against religion as the opiate of the masses interestingly collides with Weber's text where he writes of how opium in China led to apathetic ecstasy, a straight continuation of the line of wu-wei and not in the direction of heroic frenzy or the unchaining of active passions, and of a bureaucracy in which 'nothing was allowed that might bring the psyche out of its equilibrium.'

When did Weber visit China? I read how in 1905, as his widow and biographer reported, 'he followed for months in breathless tension the Russian drama of 1905.' It was intimately connected to the future of Germany and the future of free society. Mommsen, in *Max Weber and the Regeneration of Russia*, writes that 'Russian affairs probably first came to his attention with the news of the stunning naval defeats that Czarist Russia suffered from the Japanese in 1904; at that time Weber had been travelling in the United States after attending the Congress of Arts and Sciences in St. Louis. I was curious in what ways Weber's thinking was informed by the chronology of his travels? Did he lionise the 'Puritan' American spirit as a high ideal relative to his experiences and fears for Europe? I found a book by Lawrence A. Scaff, Max Weber in America, which describes his visit to the United States in 1904 and how his experiences profoundly influenced his thought on immigration, capitalism, science and culture, Romanticism, race, diversity, Protestantism, and modernity. Scaff traces Weber's impact on the development of the social sciences in the United States following his death in 1920, examining how Weber's ideas were interpreted, translated, and disseminated by American scholars such as Talcott Parsons and Frank Knight, and how the Weberian canon, codified in America, was reintroduced into Europe after World War II. I was interested in the gap between the German publication *Konfuzianismus und Taoismus* in 1915 and its English translation in 1951. Similarly, Weber's *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*) was published in 1905, around the time of his Russia mania, but was only translated into English for the first time by Talcott Parsons in 1930.

I found there was an international conference on 'Max Weber and China: Culture, Law and Capitalism' at SOAS University in London in 2013 bringing together scholars from China, Europe and the U.S. In *Weber Fever: An Intellectual History of Max Weber in Reform China*, Angeline Baecker explores the reception of Max Weber's works in the 1980s and 1990s, 'a period of great historical transition and ideological rupture in which Weber's writings came to function as a cornerstone of post-socialist rhetoric of liberal reform. Baecker writes: 'focusing on two Chinese translations of 'The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (Sichuan People's Press, 1986; Sanlian Publisher, 1987), Chinese scholars quickly identified "two Webers," one an Americanised version promoted by Talcott Parsons, the prominent sociologist and first English translator of The Protestant Ethic; the second a "German Weber" truer to Weber as a historical figure

and political creature of his times. Believing Weber's work to be intimately relevant to the future of China's development, scholars such as Su Guoxun, Gan Yang, Yu Xiao, Wang Rongfen, Wei Zhangling, and Xu Hongbin championed the German thinker to academic audiences, inspiring an eponymous passion for his works ("Weibo re," or Weber fever). Through close analysis of their writings and translations, this paper will define Weber's influence in Reform-era re-evaluations of the relationship between culture, capitalism, and political economy, while also arguing that Weber's anti-Marxist view of the role that culture plays in the rise of capitalist societies ultimately came to function as a vehicle for the ideologies of capitalist modernization that characterise China's political economy today. I thought it was also interesting how this week's reading elided with a talk by Professor John Alekna last week who questioned the orthodox belief of China's technological backwardness under the Qing empire'. At the end he asked a question on optics that might also apply to Weber in 1915: 'if we are living in a spring of Chinese science, then what was the winter like? And how many winters have we gone through? If someone is asking us to forget the winter then why? And who does that serve? Is Weber asking us to forget prior 'springs' of Chinese science such as those documented extensively by Joseph Needham in *Science and Civilisation in China*.

Needham himself has been critiqued for framing the West and East as essentialist categories rather than exploring the transmission lines of ideas and ideals between them but I thought it was interesting to question whether Weber's polemical style generalises single types. Another question mark resides over why science flourished in the medieval Islamic world? Astronomy, rather than suffering from religious piety, flourished out of its application to determining the Qibla, the direction to face during prayer. A different argument from Weber might ask, was Weber's 'true Christian' type and a 'true Muslim' enjoined by 'an other-worldly and inner-worldly asceticism in contradistinction to Taoist enchantment with and adjustment to the world. In describing Confucian China in organicist terms, is there also a vein of Herbert Spencer's social Darwinist ideas in Weber. I was curious in what ways Weber's thought drew into Marxist ideas of the five stages of development and in the idea of the magical state as explored by Fernando Coronil. On page 142, Weber writes, the Chinese "soul" has never been revolutionised by a prophet.' Weber's polemical style searches for a single type, I was curious of how Liang Shuming in the Republican period would also write of China's soul lying in the countryside, Sun Yat Sen on a spirit, how in Surabaya were revolutionaries imagining Islamic socialism and where would such a movement fit in Weber's Puritan v. Confucian schema. Like Geertz's *The Religion of Java*, *The Religion of China* is interesting to locate in a lateral history questioning whether the author misses autonomous sequences or other surges of change outside the frame of his own eyes. Weber died in 1920 from influenza. Edvard Munch who would survive the pandemic would paint *The Scream*. He describes the inspiration for painting it as walking at sunset one night when he heard the enormous infinite scream of nature. In what way too did Weber describe a psychological fire at sunset opens out the question of the Puritan ideal, the supra-mundane God, the creaturely wicked, ethically irrational world in revolutionary circles shortly following his passing.

