



# Weberian Propositions Revisited Based on The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

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**Abstract.** As a sociologist on par with Karl Marx and Emile Dürkheim, Max Weber was particularly concerned with the relationship between religious thought and economic ethics, and his masterpiece *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* has attracted the attention of many scholars since its introduction to China in the 1980s. Weber's ideas have faced much controversy since their inception. Many scholars' studies and interpretations of the text based on the current economic situation in East Asia have given rise to heated discussions on the 'Weberian proposition' and many misunderstandings and criticisms based on the position. As time progressed, there emerged a Weberian-like doctrine of religious economic ethics. This article is intended to avoid following the crowd, but rather to reduce to zero the interpretations covered by later scholars using the method of 'subtraction'. We focus on the original text of the Protestant Ethic for a most essential analysis. We begin with a methodological reflection on the scholarly study of the 'Weberian proposition'. Secondly, we identify the process of spiritual transformation at the heart of the Protestant Ethic and argue for it. Finally, we examine and academically reflect on the logical misconceptions of such Weberian propositions, using "Confucian capitalism" as an example.

**Keywords:** Max Weber, Protestant ethics and the spirit of capitalism, Weber's proposition, Confucian capitalism

## 1 Introduction

All arguments in the world are arguments over nouns. The philosopher Popper once lamented: "Never argue about the principle of words and their meaning, for such an argument is specious and irrelevant" [1] It is almost an ironclad rule in academia that research is preceded by a definition of the object of study before subsequent research is undertaken. But scholars such as Wittgenstein have expressed the view that 'grand concepts' are difficult to define. Weber also expressed his view in *The Protestant Ethic* that it might be more appropriate to arrive at this definition at the end of the study: "However, such a historical concept, because it concerns a phenomenon that is significant only because of its unique individuality, cannot be defined according to the 'ge-

nus plus species difference' formula. ' formula, it must be defined in a step-by-step manner by constituting as a whole those individual parts which have been extracted from historical reality, thus forming the concept. A definitive concept of finality cannot, therefore, appear at the beginning of the study, but must come at the end of it"[2] Minerva's owl takes off at dusk. Yu Ying-shih, a Taiwanese scholar who studied Weber, once said that although "thinking" passes with time, "scholarship" (or doctrine) never becomes obsolete. In sorting through the research discourse on Weber's proposition, we have witnessed the ebb and flow of the doctrine over the decades since its introduction to China, with praise pouring in when it was new and criticism pouring out when it was not. Weber's own style of argumentation is loose and diffuse, with a large margin of interpretation. In addition, the logic of the argumentation within Weber's Propositions was unique, and Weber himself wrote works on the comparative study of religion. These complex reasons have led to the dissemination of different interpretations and reproductions based on different positions.

Let us re-examine this issue with the example of Confucian capitalism. The take-off of the "Four Asian Tigers" was so exciting for scholars that the economic contribution of religious thought (or spirituality) [3] was singled out for amplification, while a financial crisis that swept through Asia caused the doctrine to lose its credibility and to recede into obscurity. Confucian capitalism can be said to be an extension of Weber's proposition, in that it is based on it, but at the same time attacks it. Does this logic of "Protestant ethics and the spirit of capitalism" apply to other doctrines as well? Can the analysis of individual cases be raised to a holistic meaning?

## **2 Reflections on the approach of later scholars to the study of Weber's proposition**

The interpretation of Weber has always been mixed and ambiguous. The phrase "people exaggerate their inferences about Weber in order to better destroy him" by Brodeur indicates the norm in the history of many Weber studies. Whether one is against or for Weber, one amplifies Weber's views. Thus, whether you want to express a novel perspective or a completely opposite critique, you are unconsciously extending Weber. The obscurity of Weber's original lines, the vagueness of his argumentation and the open-endedness of his conclusions are all factors that reinforce this tendency. But it is also possible to argue that it is because of these factors that Weber's ideas have remained so durable and have endured in academic circles. However, the consequence of the layers of interpretation and debate has been to take Weber further and further away from us. Thus, whether you want to express a novel perspective or a completely opposite critique, you are unconsciously extending Weber. The obscurity of Weber's original lines, the vagueness of his argumentation and the open-endedness of his conclusions are all factors that reinforce this tendency. But it is also possible to argue that it is because of these factors that Weber's ideas have remained so durable and have endured in academic circles. However, the consequence of the layers of interpretation and debate has been to take Weber further and further away from us. However, the consequence of the layers of interpretation and debate has been

to take Weber further and further away from us. The coverage of Weber's original text by later interpretations has gradually constituted a kind of oblivion.

Where there is a difference in the text, there is a part of it that can be justified. It is difficult to say with certainty "what Weber was". If later scholars were to rush into the debate, they would be overwhelmed and lost in the noise. It is therefore a convenient way of deliberately avoiding the debate, i.e. to go against the grain of Weber's many studies. Whereas the mainstream of research has been to exaggerate views and to add to them, this article uses the 'subtractive' method of retracing and reducing Weber's views to their intuitive core, just as the Chinese Confucianists of the Song dynasty read the scriptures, choosing to bypass the voluminous commentaries and arguments in the volumes and thus get straight to the heart.

In many studies, the existence of Weber's proposition is an unquestionable, unprovable precondition, not even a presupposition, accepted without thinking about it. To use the subtraction method, we begin with an extreme, reduced-to-zero argument: Weber's proposition is a nullity because it was not formulated in any of Weber's original works. This statement is logically placed before the starting point of any discussion of Weber's Propositions, but this would be inconsistent with academic fact. For whether the Weberian proposition actually exists or not, it can be studied as long as numerous scholars believe that it exists. It is for this reason that we further argue that Weber's proposition was formed historically, out of the orientation of certain national social value systems and academic power structures, or at least gradually expanded, if not to the extent of "creating something out of nothing".

The Chinese scholar Professor Luo Rongqu has summarised Weber's proposition in this way: the modernisation of capitalism in the West was linked to a uniquely Western Protestant ethic, while the ethics and basic social structure of Chinese Confucianism and Taoism prevented the rise of capitalism. According to the Japanese scholar Keizuki Hasegawa, the so-called Weberian proposition that modern capitalist society arose solely in the West for reasons unique to it, and that it was never possible for other cultural spheres to arise elsewhere.

It can be seen that, although there are many different formulations of Weber's proposition as interpreted by later scholars, they are all similar. What they have in common is that, firstly, Weber's proposition concerns the relationship between the emergence (or modernisation) and development of the Protestant Christian ethic and capitalism. Secondly, it concerns the contrast between Protestant Christianity and other regional religions: the Protestant ethic gave rise to capitalism, whereas no other religion (in the case of China alone, Confucianism and Taoism) did so. Summing up these two points of convergence, we can see that Weber's proposition has a major premise - the law that 'there is a spiritual force behind any cause' - which is the thread running through Weber's social doctrine. This 'spiritual force' (or Western culture) is a trait. In the expression that appears in Weber's original text, this quality is "rationalism" [4]. Secondly, there is the uncommon use of a contrasting, positive and negative structure - the symmetrical sentence "There is xx in the West, but there is no xx anywhere else but the West". Finally, it is natural to use the first two general formulas to apply to understanding the rest of Weber's (e.g. Confucianism and Taoism, etc.) work.

"Behind modernity (or capitalism) is the spirit of rationalism" amplifies Weber's proposition, and when the Protestant Ethic is studied under this later understanding of "Weber's proposition", scholars have interpreted the original text as "Protestant ethics - capitalist spirit - rationalism - capitalist system". This customary broad understanding is contrary to the 'narrowing' approach of this paper. In this paper, there is a slight trace of "orchestration" in doing so. It is natural and normal for one's later views to be influenced by the views of one's earlier writings, but evidence is needed that earlier writings were dominated by a later consciousness.

Understanding Weber requires presuppositions, and when Weber wrote *The Protestant Ethic* he said that he did not make actual visits to non-Western societies: "To what extent one can approach this ideal as a non-expert, the author has no pre-conceived ideas. Obviously, if one has to rely on translated literature, one has to rely on a highly debated monograph without being able to judge its merits accurately, and such an author must view the value of his work with humility." [5] Is it then misleading to understand the Protestant Ethic in the context of the scholars' formulaic 'east-west contrast' of Weber's proposition? Is this an amplification? Perhaps we should ask a further question: is the Protestant Ethic 'rationalist' at its core or not?

Looking through the original text of the Protestant Ethic, this article finds that Weber does not make many direct references to rationalism, except in the last paragraph of the book, where he says: "..... Our purely historical discussion need not carry such a heavy burden. The next task should be to go on to show the enormous significance of ascetic rationalism - which has been touched upon only slightly in the previous article - for the content of a pragmatic social ethic, and thus for the types of organisation and functions of social groups from religious secret societies to the state, etc.". The great significance that this has for the types of organisation and functions of social groups from religious secret assemblies to the state and so on". Thus, we can understand Weber's 'next task' as the problem that the book *Protestant Ethics* has not yet solved, and we can therefore prove that rationalism is not at the heart of the book *Protestant Ethics*. In this way, this commonly understood chain of cause and effect "Protestant ethics - capitalist spirit - rationalism - capitalist system" "The chain of cause and effect would have to be revised, leaving the book with its original title, "The Protestant Ethic - the Spirit of Capitalism", and thus we find that it is a purely spiritual relationship between two spiritual phenomena.

### **3 The core of The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism**

We have deduced above that the core of the Protestant Ethic is not so much rationalism, but the relationship between the two spiritual phenomena, the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. It can also be described as a spiritual transformation. What is the reason for this transformation and how does it take place? In addition, the Protestant Ethic has been read with a lot of "cultural determinism", is it biased or not?

Firstly, it is important to clarify the difference between 'capitalism' in Weber's context and 'capitalism' in our usual context. Capitalism, as it is commonly used today, is

defined in terms of economics and political economy and refers primarily to an economic and social system based on the appropriation of the means of production by the bourgeoisie and the use and exploitation of wage labour. Weber, however, understands 'capitalism' more as a civilisation, as a sociological and cultural category, and therefore defines capitalism in spiritual terms. It is also important to make clear that Weber did not oppose the idea that 'capitalism can determine its own superstructure'. In the Protestant Ethic it is written that "capitalism today, having shaped economic life, is in fact educating and selecting the economic subjects it needs through the process of survival of the fittest in the economic world." [6] Capitalism in Weber's time was powerful enough to force society as a whole to accept its spiritual codes and to 'choose' what it needed. But Weber believed that the capitalism of history, that is, before his time, was not necessarily able to make such easy "choices", and that there were limits to the application of the concept of choice to history. So we can understand that in those days when capitalism was new, a fragile capitalism could hardly be said to have chosen the spirit it needed as autonomously as it does today, and that it did not take hold as soon as it came to power in history. It is not easy to perceive today, but back then "the spirit of capitalism had to wrestle with a world of hostile forces in order to achieve dominance"[7]. One of the most stubborn psychological obstacles it has encountered is "traditionalism". "The most important enemy with which it has been struggling is what we might call the traditionalist attitude and reaction to new situations" "At that time, in the view of 'traditionalism', the 'spirit of capitalism' was so incomprehensible, mysterious, obscene, nasty, hateful and despicable." [8]

Secondly, let us define what traditionalism is. The Protestant Ethic refers to traditionalism without defining it at first, but we can get a sense of what the term means from the example Weber gives. During the harvest season in modern agriculture, a piece-rate system of work was generally popular. This was when employers would raise the piece rate of labour again and again in order to speed up the harvest, thus giving the labourers the opportunity to earn a higher wage in order to encourage them to be more efficient. But employers often encounter a peculiar difficulty - the consequence of raising the piece rate is often that less, rather than more, work is done in the same time. This is because workers respond to higher rates not by increasing but by reducing their workload. For example, a man harvests 25 acres a day at DM 1 per acre and earns DM 25. Now, the price is raised to 125 marks per acre harvested. He could have easily harvested 3 acres and earned 375 marks. But he doesn't do this, he only harvests 2 acres and still earns the 25 marks he is used to getting. He doesn't ask: How much can I earn in a day if I do my best? What he is concerned about is: how much work do I have to do to earn the 25 marks that I used to earn? According to Weber, this is a classic example of what is called traditionalism: man does not inherently want to earn more money, but simply wants to live as he has become accustomed to, earning as much as is necessary for this purpose. Wherever, therefore, modern capitalism has begun to increase the productivity of human labour by making it more intensive, it has inevitably met with an extremely stubborn resistance to this key feature. Today, the more it encounters this resistance, the more backward labour becomes. In this way, it is possible to better understand the definition of traditionalism given in the introduction to Weber's later Economic Ethics of World Religions: "'Traditionalism'

should be called - a spiritual adaptation to and belief in everyday as an immutable norm of action spiritual adaptation and belief in habit as an immutable norm of action"[9]

In the end Weber found a way to overcome "traditionalism" - the Protestant ethic - and it was a tortuous spiritual journey. At first, "with the collapse of tradition and the expansion of more or less free economic enterprise, this new thing (the "spirit of capitalism") was not universally accepted and encouraged ethically, but tolerated as a matter of fact". Still in the case of the example mentioned above, the high wage stimulus to the profit instinct does not work under the constraints of traditionalism, but what about lower wages? Weber argues that this method of reducing wages, which has been repeatedly adopted by capitalism from its beginnings, is apparently very effective, but its effectiveness is actually limited. For it may be conducive to the quantitative expansion of labour, but it retards its qualitative development. "If the goods produced require any kind of skilled labour, or the use of easily breakable machinery, or, in general, if a high degree of concentration and innovation is required, the low-wage method is bound to fail." [10] Capitalist mass production requires a worker in the modern sense, one who is highly committed and who should not be distracted, at least, from the content of his labour time "to calculate how best to earn the wages to which he has become accustomed with the least trouble and the least effort". Rather, "labour must be performed as an absolute end in itself, as a vocation" - an attitude called "capitalism". How can the spirit of capitalism, which cannot be stimulated by either low or high wages, overcome entrenched traditionalism? Weber turned to the spiritual factor.

The statistics provide the fact that the employers of the time often complained that German women workers were inclined towards tradition, unwilling to give up inherited or learned methods of work, unwilling to adapt to new methods of work, unwilling to learn and unwilling to pool their talents, or even to use them at all. Increasing the piece rate has never worked for them. But statistics from the survey confirm a surprise: "It is only for girls with a particular religious background, especially a devotional one, that the situation is different ..... These often have the best opportunities for economic education, the ability to concentrate, and the absolutely vital loyalty to duty sense of duty, which are most often combined with an economic outlook that strictly calculates the possibilities of a high income, with a greatly increased efficiency of self-control and frugality." [11] Weber argues that this was the situation in Germany at the time, but reveals that "it is necessary to ask how the adaptation to capitalism and the religious element were combined in the early days of capitalist development". In this way Weber logically proposed religion: "It is in the context of religious education that the triumph over traditionalism is most likely to take place." [12] Thus the Protestant ethic came on the scene, and it has played an immense and unparalleled lever for the expansion of the attitude to life of the capitalist spirit. Weber's contribution lies in his restoration and unearthing of the short-lived, and for time concealed, love affair between religious faith and the spirit of capitalism.

As a result, some people, grasping the theory of social development, from a discursive, historical-philosophical perspective, have finally put Weber in the camp of "cultural determinism" and "idealism". We have found many critiques by scholars in the

literature, so we will not repeat them here. From the above account of the book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, we can already taste that its most important feature is its historical nature. Weber's Protestant Ethic is a 'purely historical discussion', as the first part of this article concludes. The immense leverage that ascetic Protestantism played in the spiritual expansion of capitalism was time-bound and occurred at a certain point in history. So much so that later, the development of capitalism could further negate the Protestant spirit.

Weber's scholarly sensitivity was such that he was able to sort out the influence of the Protestant ethic in history even after it had receded into the background. He convincingly crawls through the ways in which the spirit of capitalism, which had been a disruptive force in the past, was able to take the lead in history through its marriage with the Protestant ethic before it took off. So when we understand the book, we can qualify its theoretical significance - Weber is talking about the role of the Protestant ethic at a certain historical stage (the period of capitalism) and in a certain geographical area (the Protestant areas of Western Europe), offering only historical examples of the proposition "the economic consequences of cultural ethics". To what extent can Weber's historical examination of Protestantism in its specific and microcosm be extrapolated to other historical periods and other geographical areas (e.g. East Asia)? Can the historical role of Protestantism be elevated from the level of a historical idiom to that of a historical law? Objectively speaking, at least within the book *The Protestant Ethic*, Weber does not make such a derivation of his conclusions. Weber's theory, which stops at this point, is indeed successful and convincing. However, can Weber-like propositions work equally well?

#### **4 Comparative Religious Studies--"Protestant Ethics - The Spirit of Capitalism" and "Confucian Ethics - Economic Development in East Asia"**

*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* opens up a possibility as a successful historical case study. But can this case study be elevated to overall significance? Can it gain universal significance as a link and example of a larger theory? In this paper we will compare the two doctrines in depth in terms of their theoretical core and method of argumentation.

Above we summarised the core of the Protestant Ethic in the simple schema of 'Protestant Ethic - Spirit of Capitalism', which in itself is equivalent to the title of the book. In this paper, we argue that the main content of *The Protestant Ethic* is simply a discussion of how the Protestant Ethic influences the formation of the latter and supports the triumph of the latter over the former in the process of spiritual transformation from 'traditionalism' to the 'spirit of capitalism', which is the more compelling. The core of Weber's doctrine. The way in which rationalism contributes to the development of the capitalist economy and regulates the capitalist system is not discussed in detail in *The Protestant Ethic*. *The Protestant Ethic* is not really a direct link between Protestant ethics and economic development, or at least not as far as Weber argues in detail in this book.

Next, let us look at the doctrine of Confucian capitalism. The rise of the doctrine of Confucian capitalism in Chinese-speaking scholarship began with Jin Yaoji's article 'Confucian Ethics and Economic Development'. Just as the title of *The Protestant Ethic* clearly indicates Weber's central concern, the title of Jin Yaoji's essay itself reveals that Confucian capitalism seeks to establish a theoretical link between Confucian ethics and economic development. It is clear that the Confucian capitalist doctrine seeks to transpose Weber's logic of argument. In our view, whether it is 'Protestant ethics - economic development' or 'Protestant ethics - capitalism' We believe that not only did Weber fail to argue for this, but that it is precisely this derivation of Weber that has been controversial in academic history. The doctrine of Confucian capitalism is attached to something that may not be Weber's original, something that is controversial in Weber's theory. The most successful part of Weber's argument, the "Protestant ethic - the spirit of capitalism", does not have a similarly brilliant part in Confucian capitalism. This is the reason why Confucian capitalism, which has always been compared to Weber, is much weaker than Weber's theory to begin with. Weber's theory has a solid core (the successful argument for the "Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism" mentioned above), but it is also open to development and can be derived and debated easily. Weber's success was no accident, and this is precisely what Confucian capitalism lacked.

This brings us to a more fundamental difference between the doctrine of Confucian capitalism and Weber's proposition. Weber's question is "How did capitalism begin in the West and how did modernity emerge?". The question for the Confucian doctrine of capitalism, on the other hand, is "How can capitalism be successfully borrowed from the West?" Weber himself repeatedly implies in his writings that the origination of capitalism is not the same as the borrowing of it. In Confucianism and Taoism, Weber explores why capitalism could not be originated in Chinese history and says: "From all indications, the Chinese are capable, even more than the Japanese, of assimilating a capitalism that is fully developed in the realm of modern culture, both technologically and economically. It is obviously not conceivable that the Chinese are inherently 'unattainable' to capitalism." [13] Precisely because borrowing is different from initiation, the so-called 'Weberian proposition' is actually of limited relevance to the Confucian doctrine of capitalism. There is, perhaps, a general sense of inspiration, but it is difficult to follow the same path in terms of concrete argumentation. Too much reliance on Weber's theory is inevitably accompanied by far-fetched analogies.

This analogy is fully reflected in one of the common methods of argumentation in Confucian capitalism: the comparison between East and West. A basic attempt of the Confucian capitalist doctrine is to find a 'functional equivalent' of the Protestant ethic in the Confucian ethic. They try to argue that such equivalences make Confucian ethics play a historical role in the economic development of East Asia that is analogous to that of Protestant ethics. Scholars have therefore often compared Weber's portrayal of the Protestant ethic in detail, attempting to cite from Confucian texts, folk sayings, Montessori readings, and the words of so-called Confucian merchants, past or present, a few words that are similar to the Protestant ethic in order to prove that 'what Weber said was present in the Protestant ethic was also present in the Confucian tradition'. The most frequent themes are hard work, frugality, punctuality, motivation



to achieve, vocation, etc., which are considered to be the main features of Weber's 'capitalist spirit'. However, one of the unique features of Weber's sociology of religion is that he is not concerned with the impact of Protestant doctrines on economic behaviour per se, but rather he does not cite precisely which doctrines are directly related to the economy.[14]

To look for a single word in the Confucian classics that 'supports business' is to stick to Weber's argument, to miss the point and to die in a sentence, a logic that is not unworkable for Catholicism either. Weber's picture of the relevance of the 'Protestant ethic to the spirit of capitalism' in a certain historical context is difficult to compare without a specific history. Weber's argument that the Protestant ethic gave birth to the spirit of modern capitalism is a diachronic historical examination, whereas the Confucian doctrine of capitalism is more of a textual comparison of the present with the past. If it is not detrimental to Weber's argument to find provisions in Protestant doctrine that are contrary to the spirit of capitalism, then it is not detrimental to Weber's argument to find only a few words in Confucian ethics that appear to be capitalist.

The inherent flaw of the enumeration method is that it does not lead to an overall conclusion. Confucianism, as we all know, is a vast heritage, and if it is fragmented and taken in pieces, it takes on a mixed appearance. If we browse through the monographs on Confucian capitalism, we find both theories of diligence and thrift and theories of extravagance, the theory of the motive for achievement and the view of providence. As the superstructure of an agrarian society, there are many more Confucian ethics that do not conform to the spirit of the modern economy than those that do. The key question is under what historical conditions this part of the Confucian ethic worked and why that part did not, and this is something for which the Confucian capitalist doctrine does not provide a good model of argument. It is this approach that is too superficial and is itself a one-way comparison without the completeness of a loopback, which could actually serve a different argument. Just as in the aftermath of the financial crisis, a great deal of evidence was unearthed in Confucian ethics that "Confucianism hinders economic development".

At a deeper level, the poverty of this approach may stem from the poverty of Confucianism. Whereas the Protestant ethic studied by Weber was a new belief system after the Reformation, the Confucian ethic celebrated by the Confucian capitalist doctrine is more like a 'wandering soul'. The accusations against Confucian ethics and Asian culture in the aftermath of the financial crisis are in many cases an emotional critique without any empirical basis - precisely the same as when the good things were said about Confucian ethics. Yesterday it was said that the collectivism of Confucian ethics promotes economic development, and today it is said that collectivism does more harm than good to the economy. There is no twist in the middle, and although the arguments are two-way, there are few tit-for-tat arguments to refute them. Yesterday some people opened the Confucian canon and looked for statements that resembled the "spirit of capitalism", while today others open the Confucian canon and look for statements that are contrary to modern economic ethics. Although the conclusions are opposite, they are not clear - there is no indication of the historical circumstances in which Confucian ethics had a positive effect and those in which it had a negative effect. The critique of the doctrine of Confucian capitalism repeats the logic

of the doctrine of Confucian capitalism. Within certain limits, they share the same blind spots, are governed by the same mechanisms of academic production, the laws of transmission, and follow the same path - only in different directions. As Hegel said, a road that leads east is also a road that leads west.

## 5 Conclusions

A closer look at the history of scholarship on Weber reveals that Weber's identity as a 'determinist of religious ideas' has been deeply rooted and remains so to this day. As we can see from our account of Weber above, this is a misinterpretation. But it is not clear enough that this is a misinterpretation; there must be reasons for the misinterpretation itself and for the scholarly fervour that it has generated.

On reflection, we believe that this misreading has its roots in a 'paradoxical penchant' for the development of Chinese scholarship itself. In Chinese thought, Marxism has long been the guiding ideology of the academy. While Chinese academics have made great achievements, they have also tended to become dogmatic and formulaic, with "economic determinism" forming the basis for deterministic thinking in academia, and a linear view of social development with a single cause and single effect taking root. Society is an interactive whole, and while we have long focused only on the economic dimension, and have gradually become aware of the flaws of this approach, Weber has cut into our theoretical blind spots and shown us that the role of cultural ethics can be so great.

The first love affair between the mainland academic community and Weber was in fact an extramarital one: they had been clinging to the rigid "Marx" (emphasis added: not the real Marx, but the dogmatic Marx) for too long, and they immediately fell in love with Weber, who was both familiar and new. And it is in Weber's reflection that vulgar interpretations of Marx's doctrine, such as productivityism, appear so crude. But this is not necessarily fortunate for the understanding of Weber, whose many misunderstandings constitute the reason for our choice of this title. What allows Weber and Marx to constitute this opposition is that the way of reading is the same. Many people dogmatise Weber in the same mode of thinking that dogmatises Marx. Out of inertia, a simple dichotomy of "first driving force" is abstracted: either economy or culture! This fixes the image of Weber's "cultural determinism". On the other hand, this dichotomy has given rise to an impulse for some people to refute it and to defend Marx with passion. The two sides, for and against, in fact conspire at a higher level to dominate the space for reflection and doubt. They both positioned Weber as a "cultural determinist", in opposition to Marx, and the issue was easily ideologised. The author has also been arguing that neither Weber nor Marx was a single determinist.

In the second part of the above article we made it clear that the terms "capitalism" and "capitalist spirit" in the book *The Protestant Ethic* have their own meanings and are not discussed in the context of Marx. It is natural that economic determinism should not be placed in opposition to Marx. The fact that so much effort has gone into arguing that Weber is not 'culturally determinist' or 'idealist' is itself an indication that

Weber is easily understood as 'culturally determinist'. The Protestant Ethic was not written specifically to refute Marx's view of history, but it does tend to be understood as the antithesis of Marxism. The Weberian doctrine is not culturally deterministic, but it does tend to be understood as such. These recessive genes, in themselves, harbour the possibility of its mutation in the Chinese academy. It is inevitable that a chopstick plunged into water will look askew.

And by extension, the fate of the Confucian capitalist doctrine, which identifies itself as a copy of Weber's theory, is also closely related to Weber's fate. First of all, the doctrine of Confucian capitalism was, together with Weber, framed as "cultural determinism", by which it was disseminated and understood. This simplistic understanding of Weber's theory directly contributes to the simplicity and poverty of the theoretical pillars of the popular Confucian capitalist doctrine. It is no exaggeration to say that much of Confucian capitalist doctrine has fallen into the trap of "cultural determinism". Secondly, the Confucian capitalist doctrine is not only disseminated and understood on the spectrum of Weberian cultural determinism, but is also refuted in this context. The opponents of the doctrine often use "cultural determinism" as a rope to tie Confucian capitalism to Weber's attack. When both sides view Weber and the doctrine of Confucian capitalism in terms of "cultural determinism", the debate only moves in this circle. Weber, considered the antithesis of Marxism, and Confucian capitalism, are both supported and criticised with the same bias and blind spots.

East and West, Europe and East Asia, have evolved different isms that map and prescribe each other, thus influencing the mutual perceptions of people from different regions. We are inevitably influenced by our positions, which evolve into disputes and arguments, and divide into countless discourses. It is at this point that the purpose of this article is to calmly reflect on the past and to walk in the middle path.

## References & notes

1. Karl Popper, *Autobiography of an Idea*, Fujian People's Publishing House, 1984, p. 12
2. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Yan Kewen, Shanghai People's Publishing House
3. It is not the intention of this paper to explore the question of whether Confucianism is a religion or not. We agree that "under certain conditions, Confucianism is not a religion". However, within Weber's scholarly context (e.g. Confucianism and Taoism), and based on certain premises and purposes of investigation, Confucianism can be called a religion.
4. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Preface to the *Sociology of Religion*, paragraph 18 "All of these relate to the problem of rationalism which is peculiar to Western culture alone ....."
5. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Preface to the *Sociology of Religion*, penultimate paragraph
6. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, p. 38
7. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, p. 39
8. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, p. 41
9. Max Weber, *Confucianism and Taoism* p.35
10. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* p.41
11. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* p.44

12. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* p.45
13. Max Weber, *Confucianism and Taoism*, The Commercial Press, 1999
14. It is important to note here that many people, in their rebuttals to Weber, often refer to specific Protestant doctrines as being contrary to the "spirit of capitalism". It is true that the religions of the time were not friendly to capitalism, and Calvinism even regarded "affluence" as a "common crime". Weber himself did not deny this, and he repeatedly stated that he had been aware of it for a long time. He has made it clear that true Protestants do not aim to engage in economic behaviour and the pursuit of wealth, and even goes further to argue that all salvation religions warn against the profit economy, and that the warnings against fetishism and fetishism push the rational approach to salvation to the point where wealth is considered taboo.

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