

CHINESE RESPONSES TO MAX WEBER'S STUDY
OF CONFUCIANISM AND DAOISM:
YÜ YING-SHIH AS A SIGNIFICANT EXAMPLE*

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1 Introduction

An editorial in *Max Weber Studies* (2014) sets forth Thomas Metzger's criticisms of Weber's judgment about Confucianism.¹ By highlighting changes in Confucianism during the Song era when Confucians focused on tensions within oneself and with the status quo in the world, Metzger rightly pointed out that Weber had overlooked Confucian developments during the Song period (960–1279). Metzger even claimed that Confucians sought control of the cosmos. His assertion centered on a quotation from the most influential Song Confucian, Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200):

Even more, the theme of power over the cosmos was clear, at least in Zhu Xi: "Man is the mind of heaven and earth." This sense of cosmic power, as already indicated was connected to the desire for "mastery," and in Zhu Xi's thought it was also related to the image of the sage who was not only pure of heart but really does bring political harmony and economic well-being to the empire.²

The original quotation from Zhu Xi ("人者天地之心; 沒這人時, 天地沒人管") is his comment on *Lunyu* 15.28, and would be more aptly translated as, "Humans are the mind of heaven and earth; when there are no people, there is no one to be concerned about or to care for heaven and earth."³ The conference committee might have used this published correction of Metzger's translation and interpretation to counter his critique and to illustrate how easy it is for critics of Weber to twist historical sources in their own efforts to rectify Weber's understanding of history. However, the committee articulated a larger purpose. It highlighted the point that for both Weber and his critics, a significant question, which

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1 Conference Publishing Committee (Caldwell, et. al.) 2014.

2 Metzger 1977, 78. Spelling changed to *pinyin* in quotation.

3 Tillman 1978, 506.

needs to be addressed, is, “To what extent these written sources were grounded in the main classes and groups whose collective behavior pattered the course of history.”⁴ My article will demonstrate that Yü Ying-shih (Yu Yingshi) 余英時 provides a more convincing account of Zhu Xi’s inner tensions than Metzger did. Furthermore, the primary source materials and observations that Yü provides – as if in anticipation of this challenging question – are among the reasons that discussions of Chinese receptions of Max Weber should not neglect Yü Ying-shih’s 1987 monograph, *Zhongguo jinshi zongjiao yu shangren jingshen* 中国近世宗教伦理与商人精神 (*The Religious Ethic and Mercantile Spirit in Early Modern China*).⁵ My short article will only highlight some representative examples of the rich documentation in his book.

Yü Ying-shih’s book has not been included in the standard overview articles on the reception of Max Weber in China and Taiwan. For example, in Don S. Zang’s insightful survey, the author characterizes the years from 1985 through 1992 as a period during which reading Weber was crucial, especially to Chinese seeking an alternative to Marxism in China’s modernization project, but the years from 1993 to 2013 as a period in which reactionary interpretations of Weber made him an Orientalist. Those who rejected Weber utilized postmodern jargon to criticize him; moreover, this tide arose from nationalistic impulses encouraged by the Communist Party. Although Su Guoxuan’s 蘇國勛 work in the first period had been central to the crest of “Weber fever” in the 1980s, Su insisted in the second period on the need to reread Weber from a Chinese perspective; furthermore, he even asserted the reductionist claim that it was impossible for the West to understand Confucianism.⁶ Tsai Po-fang (Cai Bofang) 蔡博方 contextualizes the period before 1980 as preparatory for the Weber fever of the 1980s and points to the role of Weberian studies in the indigenization of the social sciences in the 1980s. Moreover, Tsai also contrasts the emphasis on the economic history of capitalism and on the comparative analyses of modernizing culture in the 1980s on the one hand, to the critical reevaluations of Weber after the early 1990s on the other hand. Tsai juxtaposes interpretations by sociologists and (mere) translations by

4 Conference Publishing Committee (Caldwell, et. al.) 2014, 139.

5 Yü Ying-shih, 1987. I am currently revising an English translation of this text by Yim-tze Kwong that will be published as part of David Wang’s edited series from Columbia University Press, which also published two volumes of Yü Ying-shih’s English essays in 2016. All translations of quotations from the Chinese book that appear in this article are thus drawn from my editing of Yim-tze Kwong’s manuscript. Regarding which versions of Weber’s texts Yü Ying-shih used in the mid-1980s, he cites the English translations then standard (very little of Weber was available in Chinese by the mid-1980s). Moreover, his research was surely a factor in the decision of his former PhD student Kang Le (and of Jian Huimei) to focus on greatly expanding the corpus of Weber’s writings available in Chinese translation.

6 Zang 2014.

historians, such as Kang Le 康樂 (1950–2007) and Jian Huimei 簡惠美 in Taiwan. Of special interest, Tsai highlights Su Guoxuan's interest during the 1980s in using Weberian insights to enable Chinese sociologists to correct Marxist deficiencies and to guard against the negative effects of modernization in the West, but Su's 2007 and 2011 publications criticized Weber's neglect of the syncretism of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism. Furthermore, Su charged that Weber's construction of "ideal types," based upon his contrast between anthropocentric and theocentric religions, started with a flawed methodology.⁷ Since Su's concerns mirror ones articulated in Yü Ying-shih's 1987 monograph, the work of intellectual historians and scholars of China studies might well complement the standard focus on sociologists for interpretative and analytical contributions to understanding Chinese receptions of Weber's work and methodology.

2 Yü Ying-shih on New Religious Ethics and the Mercantile Spirit in China

Although Yü Ying-shih is arguably the most highly regarded intellectual historian among China scholars, his is not a familiar name to non-Chinese readers in the West because almost all of his over three dozen books and over 500 articles are available only in Chinese-language editions. Born in the city of Tianjin in 1930, his family was a scholarly one from Qianshan County 潛山縣 in rural Anhui. Living there from childhood into his mid-teens during World War II, he utilized the family's library to educate himself. With admission into Yen-ching University, he stayed behind in the family's Shanghai home after his parents fled the advancing Communist army; thus, he has said that he was "liberated in Shanghai." During his first college year in Beijing, he obtained a travel permit to Jiulong 九龍 for the Chinese New Year; therefore, he was able to legally exit the mainland and join his family in Hong Kong. Studying with Qian Mu (Ch'ien Mu) 錢穆 (1895–1990), Yü became the first graduate of New Asia College in 1952. Although admitted to Harvard University's PhD program, he was initially unable to go to the United States, because the Nationalist government in Taiwan classified him as a radical activist and convinced US officials to deny him an American visa. Eventually, a representative of Yale-in-China helped persuade American officials to issue him a one-time-only entry document that required annual renewals in the United States. Only after earning his PhD at Harvard with Yang Liansheng (Yang Lien-sheng) 楊聯陞 (1914–1990) in 1962 and teaching at the University of Michigan before becoming a full professor at Harvard in 1966, did he finally cease to be stateless and was able to travel abroad with an American passport, even visiting Taiwan for the first time in 1971. Academia Sinica elected him as an Academician in 1974, and he became a chaired professor at Yale in 1977 and at Princeton in 1987. In 2006 he became the first historian of Asia to receive, from

7 Tsai 2016; see also the continued focus on Taiwan sociologists in Tsai 2018.

the Library of Congress, the John W. Kluge Prize for Lifetime Achievement in the Study of Humanity. When awarded the Kluge Prize, the citation proclaimed, “Dr. Yü’s scholarship has been remarkably deep and widespread. His impact on the study of Chinese history, thought, and culture has reached across many disciplines, time periods and issues, examining in a profound way major questions and deeper truths about human nature.”⁸ Among the factors that probably attracted the Kluge Prize committee’s attention was Yü’s role as host at Princeton for refugee intellectuals who fled the June 4th crackdown of student protests at Tiananmen Square in Beijing. When chosen for the first Tang Prize Laureate in Sinology in 2014, he used the podium to praise the recent student protest demonstrations in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Even though the Beijing government had long been unreceptive to Yü’s critical scholarship and advocacy of human rights anyway, Beijing further reacted to his comments by banning his publications in the People’s Republic of China. His “refugee” experience as a “stateless” person for so many years surely not only enhanced his commitments to democracy and human rights, but also gave him a profound appreciation for cultural traditions and comparative history.

Overall, the structure of Yü Ying-shih’s book, exploring the influence of China’s new religious ethics upon the mercantile spirit in early modern China, has three parts: (1) on new Chan 禪 (Zen in Japanese) Buddhism and new Religious Daoism; (2) on new Confucianism; and (3) on the new religious ethic’s influence on merchants and their personal behavior and business practices. He first discusses new Chan Buddhism and new Religious Daoism to set the stage for his larger exploration of Confucian ethics in the thinking and business activities of merchants from the sixteenth to the end of the eighteenth century. In his exploration of the “inner-worldly” character of Chinese religions, Professor Yü does not linger on the well-known “this-world” orientation of ancient Confucianism, but rather traces the augmented attention to the “inner-worldly asceticism” (*rushi kuxing* 入世苦行) that began in new Chan Buddhism, developed in new Confucianism, and spread through new Daoist religions. Although he traces these developments during the Tang (618–907), Song, Yuan (1260–1367), Ming (1368–1644), and into the Qing (1644–1911) periods, his ultimate, principal focus is how these three teachings or “religions” in China embraced an ethic that everyone should labor as a crucial component to their enlightenment and their duty to society. All three new religions had to overcome traditional elitist biases and moral concerns about working for individual material results. To overcome traditional assumptions and practices, as well as to embrace the priority of working for one’s livelihood, required the religious practitioners to resolve tensions within their own minds and often with precepts of earlier forms of their religious tradition. In the longer, third section of the book, Yü focuses on the changing social status of merchants, their enhanced self-confidence in their identity

8 See <https://www.loc.gov/item/n81075681/yu-ying-shih-1930/> [last accessed: April 24, 2018]; Tian Hao 2009a.

and profession as merchants, and the manifestation of the new religious ethics in their mercantile activities, especially from 1500 to 1820. Reflections on Weber's ideas and methods appear quite often, both implicitly and explicitly, throughout the section but usually to clarify or communicate specific points that Yü is making about Chinese religious ethics and mercantile spirit. The book's introductory and concluding chapters highlight the aspects of Weber's insights and methods that Yü regards as most important. In this section, I will follow Yü's structure to set forth his line of argument; moreover, Section 3 of this article will be devoted to Yü's use of Weber and his differences from the German thinker. However, I will first summarize Yü's core thesis and illustrate it with brief reference to some of his crucial documentary evidence.

Despite Buddhism's famous world-renouncing character, the new Chan School during the Tang made a breakthrough to embrace the ordinary labor of working people in Chinese society. Huineng 慧能 (638–713) broke new ground when he advocated spiritual practice at home, rather than in a monastery, and setting aside words once one grasped the meaning; thus, he took a bold step in freeing Buddhism from world-renouncing monasteries and even from sacred sutras. Thus, in a way similar to Martin Luther and John Calvin, Huineng negated monasticism and saw that even the corrupt world and its trials had a positive role in one's process of deliverance. Yet, instead of the Protestant focus on the individual's communication with God, Chan Buddhism sought "immanent transcendence" through comprehending one's original mind. Moreover, whereas Calvin had to address questions of applying his vision and doctrines to everyday life because Christianity already deeply penetrated European society, Chan was not at that time deeply rooted in quotidian society in China. Hence, it took almost a century for Chan to apply its breakthrough to its monastic system and to offer an economic ethic when Baizhang Huaihai 百丈懷海 (749–814) set forth his "monastic rules." Moreover, Buddhism originally required monks to rely on mendicancy, not farm laboring, to eat. However, after the economic devastation of the An Lushan 安祿山 rebellion (751–764), patronage from aristocrats and the government plummeted, so Baizhang instituted the rule of "collective participation" (*puqing* 普請) in labor, which became a slogan: "one day no work, one day no food." Baizhang's rule produced intense tension in the minds of some monks because agricultural work occasioned the killing of insects, which was considered bad karma or a sinful act. Baizhang responded that there was no karmic retribution as long as one did not become entangled (i.e., calculatingly engaged) in one's activity, but maintained a transcendent religious perspective.⁹

The new Daoist religion, especially the Complete Truth sect (Quanzhen jiao 全真教) that arose in the twelfth century, further developed Baizhang's emphasis on industry and frugality. According to Yuan Haowen 元好問 (1190–1257), the Complete Truth sect

9 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 16–26.

本於淵靜之說，而無黃冠襪履之妄；參以禪定之習，而無頭陀縛律之苦。畊田鑿井，從身以自養，推有餘以及之人。

roots itself in the [Daoist] teachings of profundity and quietude, without such preposterous absurdities as praying in yellow caps to allay sickness and avert misfortunes; it incorporates the practices of Chan Buddhism, without the afflictions of mendicancy and fetters of discipline. Adherents of the sect cultivate the fields and dig wells, and by supporting themselves extend any surplus they have to other people.¹⁰

Moreover, in their inner-worldly asceticism, other early sources show that they engaged in “dusty labor” (*da chenlao* 打塵勞) to support themselves and gave any surplus to wider society, all “in the hope of improving social mores.” Because their dusty labor was balanced with “understanding the mind and seeing into the nature,” they could “engage in activity (*youwei* 有為) while preserving the traditional spirit of non-activity (*wuwei* 無為).”¹¹ As Professor Yü observes, this notion is compatible with the Calvinist idea of the “combination of practical sense and cool utilitarianism with an other-worldly aim.” Citing this stress on diligent labor in new Daoist asceticism, Professor Yü counters Weber’s claim of the uniqueness of the Puritan ethic of “labor” as a method of ascetic cultivation. Professor Yü even draws the methodological lesson that adequate empirical knowledge is crucial to avoid pitfalls using the “ideal-type” method of research.¹² Returning to his main purpose in discussing new sects of Daoism, Yü argues that since religious Daoism was originally more inner-worldly than Chan Buddhism, the influence of this Complete Truth sect’s view of work penetrated Chinese society more profoundly than Chan had. All new Daoist sects were a reaction against the older forms of religious Daoism, which used occult arts to attract patronage from Tang and Song emperors. Moreover, in morality tracts that were widely distributed, the new Daoist sects also advocated Confucian family and social virtues. Furthermore, the emphasis on the need to confront situations in order to test the mind’s attainments and failings eventually contributed to the notion that traditional Daoist immortals had to descend to the quotidian world to undergo trials and establish their merit. In many such ways, the new Daoist sects invested social duty and daily work with religious significance, which suggests some similarity with the Calvinist notion of having a “calling” (*tianzhi* 天職) or what Chinese would refer to as “where one’s duty lies” (*yi zhi suozai* 義之所在).¹³

10 Yuan Haowen, quoted in Yü Ying-shih 1987, 28. Characters are provided only for Yü’s quotations from premodern texts, but not for his own statements in modern colloquial Chinese.

11 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 30–31.

12 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 32–33.

13 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 34–40, esp. 40.

Even though Professor Yü sees the evolution of the inner-worldly asceticism as going from Chan to Confucianism and then to Daoism, he discussed Daoism before Confucianism in order to culminate his narrative with new developments in Confucianism. The evolution from Chan Buddhism during the Tang, to Confucianism during the Song, is what many Chinese and foreign scholars today commonly designate as “Neo-Confucianism.” Yim-tze Kwong’s 龐夔子 draft translation of Yü’s book in the late 1980s followed this conventional practice of glossing “new Confucianism” 新儒學 as “Neo-Confucianism.” Nevertheless, as I reread much of the Chinese text and edited the translation, I became convinced that the conventional gloss detracted from Professor Yü’s highlighting of the evolution from new Chan Buddhism during the Tang to new Confucianism in the Song and new Daoism during the Song and Jin. In addition to Professor Yü’s emphasis on “new” (*xin* 新) in the significant turn in all three traditions, he distinguishes each of these new traditions from older versions. For instance, besides his focus on how “new Daoist religion” differed fundamentally from the Daoist religion of the late Han that became established and state sponsored especially in the Tang and Northern Song, he is also distinguishing the new religious Daoism from what we refer to as “Neo-Daoism,” i.e., the philosophy of the “Neo-Daoists” (such as Wang Bi 王弼, 226–249). That difference is so pronounced that one would obviously not gloss “new” Daoism as “Neo-Daoism.”

It is also problematic to use the term “Neo-Confucianism” to gloss Professor Yü’s discussion here of “new Confucianism.” Since various scholars use the common term “Neo-Confucianism” in diverse ways to point to various divergent circles whose ideas were often opposed to one another, it is worth noting that Professor Yü’s usage of the term “new Confucianism” explicitly includes not only the School of Principle 理學 (culminating in Zhu Xi) and the School of Mind 心學 (culminating in Wang Yangming 王陽明, 1472–1529), but also Wang Anshi’s 王安石 (1021–1086) School of New Learning 新學, as well as Su Song 蘇頌 (1020–1101), and even Chen Liang’s 陳亮 (1143–1194) utilitarian penchant. Thus, his usage of the term includes schools or circles that opposed not only the school of thought directly tied to Zhu Xi but also the one that would culminate in Wang Yangming.¹⁴ Therefore, Yü’s usage is quite distinct from Wing-tsit Chan 陳榮捷 (1901–1994) with his narrow focus on the philosophy of the Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–1085), Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107), and Zhu Xi, but is rather closer to the usage claimed by Wm. Theodore de Bary (1919–2017), who included virtually any and all Confucians from the mid Tang to the late Qing – regardless of the depth of the differences among these Confucians during those centuries. De Bary regarded “Neo-Confucianism” as broader than the modern Chinese general rubric of *lixue* 理學, which is already far broader than what Yü refers to as the

14 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 43.

Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi School of Principle (also conventionally called *lixue*).¹⁵ However, Professor Yü is highlighting what is new in Song Confucianism not only to distinguish it from Tang Confucianism but also from those “conventional Confucians” (*shi ru* 世儒) in the Song who opposed “Song Confucian” departures from Han and Tang Confucian ideas and priorities.

After working through the whole translation and reflecting on these problems, I asked Professor Yü about this issue, and he agreed that “new Confucianism” was the better translation (rather than Neo-Confucianism) to convey his meaning. In addition to agreeing with me that the label, “new Confucianism,” was far more appropriate for expressing his meaning, he also emphasized that the “Neo-Confucianism” label is primarily used to focus on philosophical issues, but he is focused on a different and broader range of thinking and social practices. Nevertheless, I would caution that there is a pitfall with the rubric, “new Confucianism” and “*xin ruxue*”: modern scholars often use this term with “New” capitalized to refer to the rebirth of Confucian philosophy, since the early twentieth century, especially by such philosophers as Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909–1995) in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Some Confucian philosophers in the People’s Republic of China refer to themselves as “Contemporary Confucians” (*dangdai ruzhe* 當代儒者) to distinguish themselves from those “New Confucians.” Despite all that complexity, I trust that usage in the twentieth century with a capital N for New Confucians is distinct enough in its context that it will not impinge upon our usage of “new Confucianism” in our discussion of Yü’s book. Indeed, the significance of the evolution from Chan Buddhism to “new Confucianism” is evident in Professor Yü’s suggestion that this development in China approximately corresponds to Weber’s focus on the reforms that produced the “Protestant ethic.”

In part two, Professor Yü’s first explains why there was a significant turn in Confucianism during the late Tang under the influence of Chan Buddhism. As Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072) declared in his *Xin Tangshi* 新唐書 (*New History of the Tang Dynasty*), Confucianism had historically focused on rites and music, but these had become “empty” or devoid of connections to real life,¹⁶ especially after An Lushan’s rebellion diminished Tang aristocratic families. In response to this crisis, Han Yu’s 韓愈 (768–824) essay on the origins of the “Way” (*Dao* 道) called for the restoration of vitality to Confucianism so that it could guide social life. Although Han Yu zealously criticized Buddhism for undermining social order by refusing to embrace loyalty to the emperor and to fathers, he was himself influenced by Chan to turn away from ritual studies and textual details to develop practical, human ethics for everyday life. Moreover, his focus on self-cultivation of the mind, his in-

15 For the debate over terms see Tillman 1992, 455–474; de Bary 1993, 541–555; Tian Hao 2009b; Tillman 1994, 135–142.

16 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 44.

sistence on the transmission of the Way from generation to generation, his elevated importance of the role of teachers in transmitting the Way and resolving perplexities, and so forth, were all inspired by the Chan transformation of Buddhism. One of the concrete examples that Professor Yü gives for showing the direct inspiration that Confucians received from Chan is Cheng Hao's observation of ritual propriety and self-cultivation practiced in Chan monasteries. Cheng Hao exclaimed, "The dignity of the [golden age of the] Three Dynasties is all here" 三代威儀,盡在是矣!¹⁷

In distinguishing Confucianism from Chan Buddhism, Professor Yü elaborates on Song Confucians' regarding Heaven's principles or normative patterns (*tianli* 天理) as a kind of transcendent "other world." What the ancient Confucian this-worldly orientation lacked and needed to develop, in response to Chan Buddhism, was a theory of mind and human nature. This was not achieved until Song Confucians adapted Chan mental practices to develop a Confucian discipline of "driving with a whip so that one may get nearer to the inside" (*bianbi jinli* 鞭辟近裏) that enhanced Confucian awareness of inner tensions. From Buddhist imagery of "this shore" (i.e., this world) and the "other shore" (other world), Tang and Song Buddhists belittled Confucians for dealing with events but not principles, or function but not substance. In response, Cheng Yi declared that a clear distinction between themselves and Buddhists was that the Confucian sage regarded Heaven, not the mind, as the basis: "Heaven has correct principles. When the sage follows them and acts accordingly, it is the Way. The sage bases himself on Heaven, while the Buddhist bases himself on the mind."¹⁸ Thus, Confucians reaffirmed the objective world and its principles against the Buddhist ultimate preference for the "other shore" in contrast to the "emptiness" of this world. Nonetheless, the new Confucian contrasting worlds of *qi* 氣 (material objects and energy) and Heaven's principles were grounded in the struggle to comprehend Heaven's principles and weed out (excessive) human desires. Zhu Xi articulated this heightened sense of inner tension:

人只有個天理人欲。此勝則彼退，彼勝則此退，無中立不進退之理[...]. 初學者則要牢筭定腳，與它捱。捱得一毫去，則遂旋捱將去。此心莫退，終須有勝時。時甚氣象！

People only have Heaven's principles and human desires. When this one wins, that other one retreats, and when that one wins, this one retreats; there is no possible state of neutrality where there is neither advancing nor retreating [...]. The novice must hold his ground firmly, and bear up with perseverance. If he can sustain himself through the first moments, he will be able to bear up well in due course. If he does not give way in his mind, there will be a time when he finally prevails. How heroic it is when he does win!¹⁹

17 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 44–51, esp. 51.

18 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 52–55, esp. 55.

19 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 59.

This struggle was intense because the *qi* was stronger than principle.

Professor Yü further explains how Confucians in the intellectual lineage of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi developed the Chan emphasis on quietude and activity to push the new inner-worldly spirit to its utmost limit. Whereas the Chan approach still set quietude and activity as moving in opposite directions, Confucians transcended this oppositional barrier by setting tranquility and activity in one cooperative direction, bringing Heaven's principles into one's inner-worldly management of worldly matters. As Zhu Xi asserted, "Only when one accords with principle while in activity can one rest in quietude when matters are finished. Only if one can preserve oneself while in quietude, will one be forceful in activity" 惟動時能順理, 則無事時能靜; 靜時能存, 則動時得力.²⁰ The key to removing the barrier between transcendent principles of Heaven and this-worldly matters was what Sinologists usually gloss as "seriousness," "reverence," or "inner mental attentiveness" (*jing* 敬). Zhu characterized this mental and spiritual discipline: "*jing* is not what is referred to as taking a break from everything, but is being collected and focused in dealing with matters, and being apprehensive and careful without giving free reign to oneself" 敬不是萬事休置之謂, 只是隨事專一, 謹畏不放逸耳.²¹ Professor Yü thus presents *jing* as "an inner state of spiritual concentration" that Chinese society would later emphasize as one's "vocation" (*jing ye* 敬業).

Thus, Professor Yü compares "seriousness in vocation" to one's "calling" in Calvinism. Although cherishing time and being industrious and thrifty were ancient Confucian virtues, Confucians during the aristocratic era of the Sui and Tang dynasties did not emphasize these virtues, so Song Confucians were inspired to enhanced moral effort by the discipline displayed by Chan monks. Similar to a Calvinist's disdain of "sloth" and "ease," Zhu Xi admonished his son against indolence and negligence, and encouraged him to be persistently studious and "rise early and rest late, and not be unworthy of me" 夙興夜寐, 無忝爾所生. Moreover, similar to the Chan and Puritan notions of "no work, no food," Zhu Xi proclaimed, "It is against principle for anyone living in this world to refuse to do any work after eating a meal" 在世間喫了飯後, 全不做得些子事, 無道理.²² Nonetheless, whereas the basis of Calvinist inner-worldly asceticism was accepting God's command in the hope of gaining eternal life in Heaven, the Cheng-Zhu school's basis was the Dao or Heaven's principles that one must realize while doing one's work and fulfilling one's role in society. Since Zhu Xi claimed that this world could be destroyed if people lost all moral principles, one had a moral burden even for the continued existence of the world itself. Thus, a person should strive to achieve in this world, for establishing virtue, merit, and words was the way to achieve "immortality."

20 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 66.

21 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 67.

22 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 70, 71.

Along with such comparable points in inner-worldly asceticism, Professor Yü also emphasizes cultural differences between Confucianism and Calvinism. First, he emphasizes that in Confucianism, “The ‘other world’ lies within and not without; one rises to paradise if one feels peaceful in mind and justified in principle, and sinks to hell if one’s mind is not at peace.” Second, another difference was the Puritan notion of “predestination,” which could be seen as projecting worldly success to be an authentication or sign of virtue.²³ This idea was similar to the Chinese idea of “where success is achieved there lies virtue” 功到成處，便是有德, which was used to characterize Chen Liang’s utilitarian Confucian philosophy. Although Chen’s idea had some influence, Zhu Xi condemned it in their debate, and Chen’s view never eclipsed Zhu’s in the orthodox mainstream. Third, the concept of predestination encouraged some Calvinists to confidently regard themselves as “chosen people” and thus beyond the need for constant vigilance and cultivation of their character. Confucian self-confidence was less elitist in that Confucians perceived themselves as the “early awakened among Heaven’s subjects” 天民之先覺 with a need for continuous self-cultivation in order to “take the burden of the world upon themselves” 自任以天下之重²⁴

Professor Yü further elaborates on the inner-worldly asceticism of “regarding the world as one’s responsibility.” Zhu Xi praised Fan Zhongyan 范仲淹 (989–1052) as a model scholar-official. This eleventh-century scholar-official gained recognition for the spirit expressed in his slogan: “A scholar should be the first to be concerned about the world’s problems and the last to enjoy its pleasures” 士當先天下之憂為憂，後天下之樂為樂.²⁵ Moreover, Professor Yü takes the reverberations of this slogan among Song Confucians – not as an evaluation or description of every Confucian, but as a “collective overview” or a “holistic approach,” comparable to Weber’s “ideal type” that also pointed to Calvinists as possessing a sense of immeasurable responsibility. The Song Confucian “rediscovery” of this spirit of responsibility in ancient Confucianism probably was inspired, in part, by the Buddhist ideal of the bodhisattva, which prioritized the salvation of others before one’s own. For instance, Wang Anshi asserted that he served as prime minister because he reflected upon the Chan inner-worldly transformation of that ideal, “What has this old chap done for other sentient beings” 這老子嘗為眾生作什麼?²⁶ Song Confucians extended their sense of responsibility to all people in society, as expressed in Zhang Zai’s 張載 (1020–1077) *Western Inscription* (*Ximing* 西銘), “all people are my brothers and sisters” 民吾同胞.²⁷ Moreover, in order to compete with Chan Buddhism, Confucianism had to

23 Weber, 1964, 245; Yü Ying-shih 1987, 72.

24 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 72–74.

25 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 74.

26 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 75–81, esp. 78.

27 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 81.

reach out to the masses and give Confucianism greater universal import. In the new Confucian impetus to reconstruct the social order and reform the world, Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi even altered the classic *Great Learning* phrase, “being affectionate to the people” (*qinmin* 親民), to read, “renewing the people” (*xinmin* 新民), in order to highlight their commitment to reform society. Thus, according to Professor Yü, the new Song Confucian goal of “assisting the world” was close in spirit to the Calvinist one of reconstructing the “holy community”; however, the specific content of the visions differed.²⁸

To explore the progressive extension of the new Confucian ethic into society and especially among the merchant class, Yü turns to the transitions from Zhu Xi to Wang Yang-ming. Although Zhu Xi’s ideal encompassed all of society, his teachings focused on the scholarly elite and the method of studying and fathoming principles (especially in texts), but his contemporary Lu Xiangshan 陸象山 (i.e., Lu Jiuyuan 陸九淵) (1139–1193) simplified and redirected his own teachings when he addressed the general population more directly. Lu even criticized Zhu for “pursuing learning without seeing the Dao, wasting effort and energy to no purpose” 學不見道, 枉費精神, which reminds Professor Yü of Luther’s concerns about Erasmus.²⁹ Differences between Zhu and Lu reflected their family backgrounds and social experiences. Instead of coming from a scholar-official family, Lu’s family were merchants, and he had worked in their pharmacy for three years. Moreover, this blurring of lines between scholars and merchants increased from the Song to the Ming to the point that the scholar-official Wang Yangming explicitly included even the illiterate local firewood vendor in proclamations that everyone had access to an innate knowledge of the good. Thus, Wang Yangming, and especially his radical disciples in Zhejiang, consummated the socialization of Confucian teachings among all strata of society, and especially the merchant class. According to Wang, securing a livelihood was a worthy pursuit that did not negatively influence one’s self-cultivation as long as personal profit was not one’s top priority. With the proper inner-worldly ascetic, “if you can so balance yourself here that neither your mind nor your body becomes weary, then not even engagement in trade all day long will stand in the way of becoming a sage or a worthy” 果能於此處調停得心體無累, 雖終日做買賣, 不害其為聖為賢.³⁰

In part three, Yü Ying-shih explores the development of a new spirit among Chinese merchants. In the first section, he focuses on how the traditional boundaries between scholars and merchants had become progressively less demarcated since the Song as increasing numbers of scholars came from merchant families and sought to secure their own livelihoods. As commerce became increasingly prominent, families also encouraged talented

28 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 83–84.

29 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 87–88.

30 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 93–94.

sons to enter the commercial realm. By the Yuan period, the prominent Confucian scholar-official Xu Heng 許衡 (1209–1281) accepted “securing a livelihood” as “the first priority” for scholars and their families, a view increasingly embraced by Confucians in the Ming and Qing periods.³¹ For instance, Chen Que 陳確 (1607–1677) cited one’s responsibility for taking care of one’s family as the grounds for proclaiming:

仰事俯育，決不可責之他人，則勤儉治生洵是學人本事[...] 確嘗以讀書、治生為對，謂二者真學人之本事，而治生尤切於讀書。

Since serving parents above and bringing up children below must not be entrusted to others, the securing of a livelihood with industry and frugality is indeed the primary duty of a scholar [...]. I have taken reading books and securing a livelihood as a pair in the belief that both constitute the primary duties of a man who truly seeks to learn. I even consider securing a livelihood to be more urgent than reading books.³²

Furthermore, instead of following the penchant, from Zhu Xi to Wang Yangming, regarding Heaven’s principles and human desires as contending opposites, Chen Que boldly announced, “Human desires, so long as they are legitimate and proper, are none other than Heaven’s principle” 人欲正當處即天理也.³³ Moreover, instead of condemning *si* (私) as selfishness and as the opposite of the public good (*gong* 公), Chen Que presented *si* as a sense of self and self-interest that was a Confucian value. Chen also proclaimed the fulfillment of individual self-interest a prerequisite for achieving the common or public good.³⁴ Chen was not expressing a fringe view because major Qing-period thinkers made similar statements. Professor Yü even concludes that such seventeenth-century breakthroughs to embrace the legitimacy of individual self-interest and economic protection “facilitated the Chinese acceptance of the Western concept of ‘rights’ at the end of the Qing dynasty” by Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929) and others.³⁵

To show how Confucians projected an equivalence between merchants and scholar-officials, Yü Ying-shih documents examples of Ming and Qing Confucians setting forth a new view of the traditional four categories of people by their occupations. For instance, in a tomb inscription to the merchant Fang Lin 方麟, Wang Yangming wrote in 1525:

古者四民異業而同道，其盡心焉，一也。士以修治，農以具養，工以利器，商以通貨，各就其資之所近，力之所及者而業焉，以求盡其心。其歸要在於有益於生人之道，則一而已。

31 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 97–100.

32 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 101.

33 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 102.

34 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 102–103.

35 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 103–104.

In olden times, the four categories of people were engaged in different occupations, but followed the same Dao; they were at one in giving full realization to their minds. Scholars maintained governmental services, farmers provided for subsistence needs, artisans prepared tools and implements, and merchants facilitated commodity flow. Each person chose his vocation according to the inclination of his talent and the level of his capacity, each seeking to give full realization to his mind. Hence, in terms of the final objective of advancing the way of human life, their vocations were the same.³⁶

This expression of a new perspective three years before Wang's death echoed his proclamation (quoted above) that even engaging in trade all day was not an obstacle to becoming a sage; moreover, his radical disciples in Zhejiang further emphasized this standpoint. Other sources affirm that ascribing to the Dao a relatively equal status between scholars and merchants was also a social phenomenon. Crucially, merchants themselves by the sixteenth century were confidently asserting their consciousness of equal status with scholars. Social reality indicated a general rise in merchant status, especially when one compares the late Ming and Qing situations to that of the Song period. For instance, Yuan Cai's 袁采 (1140–1195) model precepts for family conduct had dismissed becoming a merchant as a desperate resort, only slightly better than becoming a beggar or a bandit.³⁷ Although Professor Yü acknowledges that one can ferret out evidence of noteworthy merchants in earlier centuries, as well as continuing prejudice against merchants in later centuries, he holds that the historical significance of the increasing emergence of Confucian social views about merchant status is undeniable.³⁸

The remainder of part three on merchant ethics and spirit will be discussed in Section 3 of this article since it is directly linked to Yü's response to Weber. I will end this section with a brief highlight from the concluding chapter of Yü's book. Therein, Yü credits the merchants' "amiable and philanthropic spirit" for the Qing government's relaxing of controls over merchants because the state needed their philanthropic contributions to help it build or repair academies, monasteries, temples, roads, and bridges. Such service to society contributed to the "commingling of scholars and merchants" and even to scholars speaking on behalf of merchants' interests or quotations from merchants appearing in scholars' writings. Despite the limitations of Weber's sources on Confucianism and Daoism, and thus on his understanding of China's religions, Weber's questions about the possible influence of religious beliefs on merchant ethics and practices "remain extremely meaningful."³⁹ Thus Professor Yü utilizes Weber in his own exploration of the "spiritual resources" of Chinese merchants.

36 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 104.

37 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 116–117.

38 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 121.

39 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 161.

3 Yü Ying-shih's Use of Weber's Methods and Some Differences from Weber

In his introduction, Yü Ying-shih remarks that Max Weber's importance in the social sciences resembles that of Immanuel Kant in the field of philosophy. In contrast to those who impose Karl Marx's stages of European historical development onto China and claim that capitalism is a necessary stage of Chinese historical development, Weber-influenced historians do not assume that China had to pass through a capitalist stage of social development, but explore why the modern Western version of capitalism did not develop in China. Although Weber's work cannot be reduced to a refutation of Marx, it is generally seen as providing an alternative to the Marxist analysis of history. According to Yü, the most relevant aspects of Weber's thesis in *The Protestant Ethic* are:

Firstly, Weber is against any single-cause explanation of history, and consequently out of sympathy with a theory of economic determinism. Secondly, in exact opposition to the Marxist view of history, which is a most rigid expression of the theory of social evolution, Weber does not subscribe to any theory of social evolution at all. He does not believe in any necessary developmental stage in the unfolding of history; still less, of course, can he accept the five-stage theory upheld by historical materialism. Thirdly, while historical materialism basically holds that political and cultural superstructures are determined by the underlying economic infrastructure, Weber insists that the same underlying basis may result in different superstructures. Furthermore, he clearly maintains that cultural factors – such as thought – can propel changes in the economic formation, and herein the principal thesis of *The Protestant Ethic* lies.⁴⁰

One observes here Yü's appreciation of Weber as an alternative to historical materialism and determinism. Moreover, although acknowledging that later Marxists sought to assign a more active function to thought, Yü points out that they could never concede that thought has the degree of influence that Weber argued for in *The Protestant Ethic*. Just as there are inherent difficulties encountered by those superimposing Marx's European stages of development onto China's history, Yü cautions that there would be similar problems in rigidly applying Weber's thesis to China.

Yü Ying-shih emphasizes that Weber himself recognized cultural and other factors shaping different varieties of capitalism. Specifically, Weber distinguished commercial capitalism in traditional societies from the modern bourgeois capitalism that emerged from the Industrial Revolution in areas of Western Europe and North America. Moreover, this new bourgeois capitalism arose not only from economic factors, but also cultural factors; that is,

40 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 4.

the “Protestant ethic,” which Weber more aptly also labeled an “inner-worldly asceticism.” In addition to such virtues as being industrious, frugal, honest and faithful, the crucial component was the transcendental and irrational discipline to devote oneself totally to profit-making without grasping any of the acquired wealth for personal gratification. Thus, this inner-worldly asceticism was a strict discipline, duty or sacred “calling” that yielded great wealth, which one could only reinvest in productive enterprises and industries. Driven by this sacred calling, the Calvinist sought and implemented the most rational methods to achieve objectives that excluded personal luxury or comfort. Some observers, such as Jin Yaoji (Ambrose Y. C. King) 金耀基 and Yu Zongxian (Yu Tzong-shian) 于宗先, suggest that East Asian economic development since the 1960s shows that Weber’s judgments about Confucianism and Chinese culture need to be fundamentally revised.⁴¹ However, Professor Yü points out that these developments were sustained “by a capitalist mode of operation transplanted from the West, rather than by one indigenously originated.”⁴²

Although Weber did not have a theory of history applicable to all societies, his perspectives and methodology are useful in research on other cultures. Yü highlights aspects of Weber’s points. Weber demonstrated that ideas played a role, but he did not make an “idealist” claim that the Reformation caused modern capitalism. Rather, he perceived three interdependent factors: economic basis, social and political organization, and current religious ideas. *The Protestant Ethic* queried, “the role played by religious concepts in the total process of the qualitative formation and quantitative expansion of the spirit of capitalism.”⁴³ Weber’s exploration of the transformation of “other-worldly” to “inner-worldly” religious orientations inspires Asian scholars because other religions have experienced similar “secularization.” At most, the Weberian perspective enables a Chinese historian to ask, “Is there any idea or concept in the ethical-religious tradition of China which shows a certain parallel in function to the notion of predestination, and yet is also fundamentally different from it?”⁴⁴ Thus, even though the specific content of Weber’s thesis and case studies are “fundamentally irrelevant to Chinese history,” Weberian questions remain relevant.

Professor Yü only occasionally and briefly draws attention to Weber’s “highly problematic” judgments about Confucianism and Daoism, but rather focuses on the usefulness of Weber’s attention to the influence that religious “inner-worldly reorientations” could have in the development of a work ethic and spirit of mercantile development. Indeed, Yü states that Weber “is certainly to be exonerated for his misapprehensions, because he was limited by the standard of Western Sinological studies at the time.”⁴⁵ For instance, Weber

41 Jin Yaoji 1985; Yu Zongxian 1985; see Yü Ying-shih 1987, 1–2.

42 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 7–8.

43 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 8.

44 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 9.

45 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 13.

did not perceive Confucian inner tension with the world because the Sinology of his day focused on ancient China and paid scant attention to the transformation of Confucianism during the Song and Ming eras. Thus, Weber simply concluded that Confucians innocently believed that human nature tends naturally to goodness, advocated passive adjustment to the world, and accepted this world as the best of all possible worlds. He overlooked Confucian recognition of the duty to overcome evil or excessive desires, as well as the duty to do good and remove evil in order to transform this world to accord with Heaven's principles.⁴⁶ Yü's purpose here is not to criticize Weber but to help clarify the significance of his own emphasis on the intense inner tension in Song and Ming Confucians. Moreover, Yü's exposition of this inner tension and the influence of Chan Buddhism in raising Confucian awareness of tensions within the mind is more compelling. In addition to highlighting the enhanced sense of responsibility among Song Confucians to reform the human world, he even draws attention to their conviction that extreme human evil could destroy the world; however, he does not repeat Thomas Metzger's overstated claims that Zhu Xi sought to control Heaven and Earth. Thus, Professor Yü provides a corrective to both traditional and modern Sinologists about the spiritual tensions within Song Confucians.

Now, we have finally reached the point of directly addressing the challenge set forth in the 2014 *Max Weber Studies* editorial by the Conference Publishing Committee for "Max Weber and China: Culture, Law and Capitalism," a committee of four led by Professor Ernest Caldwell of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. Therein, referring to key historical writings by thinkers since the end of the nineteenth century, Professor Caldwell and his colleagues declared that both defenders and critics of Weber still needed to address the fundamental question: "To what extent these written sources were grounded in the main classes and groups whose collective behavior patterned the course of history." In my introductory paragraph to the present article, I claimed that the Professor Yü Ying-shih's published work in the mid-1980s remains probably our best example – at least in the case of China – of providing documented evidence and reflections on this issue with which Dr. Caldwell challenged the field of Weberian studies in 2014. To illustrate Professor Yü's contribution, we now turn to the last three sections of part three of his monograph to summarize his array of materials and reflections.

In part three of Yü's book, he provides diverse accounts of merchants incorporating Confucian learning in their personal lives and business activities. For example, extant commercial handbooks reveal the spectrum of practical knowledge that merchants utilized, especially when travelling on business. Such handbooks, as well as fictional literature, contained popularized Confucian moral thinking. For instance, one sixteenth-century epitaph

46 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 60–65.

lauded a merchant named Zhang Jinsong 張近送, who “gave up his scholarly career and became a merchant and infused the principles of accumulation with a Confucian flair” 捨儒就商, 用以儒意通積著之理; thus, the account pointed not merely to Confucian morality but also to the application of rational knowledge to merchant life.⁴⁷ As expressed in a seventeenth-century epitaph, when Confucian values of wisdom, humaneness, valor, and strength “applied to commercial activities, the important things lie in choosing the right people and making good use of opportune moments in consolidating one’s base and exerting oneself industriously, all of which could only be managed by those who are stepped in learning.” Professor Yü glosses this application of Confucian moral thought to business as, “the objective of acquiring riches through the most rational means,” which he notes reflects “instrumental rationality” in Weberian terms.⁴⁸ Although more highly educated merchants, such as those from Huizhou, disseminated Zhu Xi’s concepts and rituals within their families, less educated merchants focused on slogans and mottos to inspire their self-cultivation and to guide their application of Confucian principles to the commercial world.⁴⁹

Yü’s fourth section queries the actual moral praxis of merchants. Especially for early historical periods, there is no way to authenticate quantitatively the moral practice of diverse individuals – a difficulty that he notes applies equally to Weber’s study of the Protestant ethic. Secondary considerations, such as the flourishing of China’s merchant class from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, indirectly supports qualitative examples of an ethic disciplining the behavior of merchants. Being industrious and frugal, which Weber highlighted in the Protestant ethic, were also ancient Confucian values that penetrated deeper into society through the new religions, especially the new Daoist “engagement in dusty labor” and Confucian injunctions to be industrious, not slothful. Although some sources comment on the extravagance of Huizhou merchants, such lavish spending was concentrated on entertaining officials in order to counter the government’s bias against them vis-à-vis Shanxi merchants. Whereas twentieth-century Chinese and Japanese researchers have affirmed the honesty and trustworthiness of Chinese merchants between the sixteenth and eighteenth century, Weber had complained about “dishonesty” and “mutual distrust” among Chinese merchants, and credited Western influence for the honesty of the Co-hong merchants in nineteenth-century Canton. Professor Yü blames Weber’s misconception of Chinese merchant ethics on his characterization of Chinese as devoid of a sense of an inward core, or an autonomous value position, because of the Chinese lack of faith in any transcendent religious morality. In response, Yü first expounds on sincerity (*cheng* 誠), trustworthiness (*chengxin*

47 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 126.

48 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 128.

49 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 129–136.

誠信), and honesty or non-deception (*buqi* 不欺) as major Confucian virtues, especially since the eleventh century. Second, he quotes examples of merchants not only manifesting these virtues, but also doing so because of faith in Heaven and Heaven's principles, or out of fear of punishment from Heaven and spirits.⁵⁰

The fifth section portrays "the Way of business" (*gu dao* 賈道), a term used by Ming merchants that involved not only ethics but also "how to employ the most effective methods to achieve the business objective," which Yü Ying-shih suggests is functionally equivalent to "the process of rationalization" in Weberian terms. Despite not having a concept of a "calling" or "predestination," some Chinese merchants "manifested a transcendent spirit" and were confident of "the solemn significance and objective value of their vocation." With enhanced pride in their management of extensive enterprises, historical sources even characterized merchants as having "founded an enterprise and handed down tradition" (*chuangye chuitong* 創業垂統), language that had earlier been reserved to describe the founding emperors of imperial dynasties.⁵¹ With their enhanced self-respect and esteem for their work in commerce, merchants increasingly focused on preserving their virtue and good name; moreover, they emphasized being sincere and honest as the way to become wealthy. Their preferred way to develop and expand enterprises was through "partner-assistants" (*huoji* 伙計), where a wealthy merchant provided the capital for junior partners to expand the enterprise and their own expertise. Because these partner-assistants were often poorer members of the clan, this type of organization would bring to mind Weber's contrast between Chinese family-based businesses and the Protestant ethic, which broke the fetters of kinship and separated business from the household. For Weber, cultural emphasis on individual relationships among family or extended clan members inhibited the concept of functional tasks in enterprises. Raising doubts about Weber's claim, Professor Yü cites Kurt Samuelson's discussion of T. S. Ashton's research findings to draw attention to the Darby family's dominance of the British iron and steel industry during the early eighteenth century.⁵² As an example of Chinese functional enterprises, Yü quotes sources relating how Xi Benzhen 席本禎 (1601–1653) could efficiently and effectively use only his "letters" (*he ti* 赫蹠) to direct his subsidiaries.⁵³ Although Yü acknowledges that Chinese enterprises did not have modern Western double-entry bookkeeping, he argues that China's commercial arithmetic was equal to that in the West in the same early modern period. Other aspects of "rationalization" included implementing maxims, such as "one bit bought, one bit sold" 買一分, 賣一分; that is, "with small unit profit but swift turnover –

50 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 136–146.

51 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 148.

52 Discussion of Ashton 1951 in Samuelson 1961, 122–123.

53 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 153–156. See esp. Weber 1964, 236–237; Weber 1976, 21–22.

a principle that is equivalent to what Weber has called the ‘principle of low prices and large turnover.’”⁵⁴

Despite their material success, the extensiveness of their enterprises, and the “rationalization” of their Dao of business, what was the principal obstruction preventing Chinese business culture from making a breakthrough into fully modern capitalism during the late Ming to mid-Qing? Although Yü acknowledges how multifaceted this question is, he turns again to Weber to raise a crucial element of the answer: While free commerce could develop in “city-state republics,” bureaucratic systems of absolute monarchies often suppressed commercial freedoms because maintenance of political stability was the priority of such absolutist governments.⁵⁵ Therefore, Yü is not surprised that in an effort to protect commercial interests, Huizhou merchants spent extravagantly to entertain officials, which Weber and others simply regarded as rampant waste or corruption. Imperial China’s suspicion and exploitation of merchants remained a real and present danger to the full rationalization and development of modern capitalism in China.⁵⁶ Unlike Weber, who studied imperial China to highlight why modern capitalism developed only in Western Europe and thus did not pay much attention to contemporary Chinese developments, Yü Ying-shih is ultimately concerned with developments in modern China.

Yü Ying-shih’s monograph is an expanded version of an essay he published the previous year in the journal, *Zhishifenzi* 知識分子.⁵⁷ Moreover, he previewed his essay in a special lecture at Taiwan’s Tsing-hua University and published an appendix in June of 1985, “Weber’s Perspective and ‘Confucian Ethics’, an Explanatory Preface” 韋伯觀點與「儒家倫理」序說, primarily to distinguish his inquiry from Weber’s.⁵⁸ In *The Religion of China*, Weber questioned why Western bourgeois capitalism was unable to appear in China, but Yü asserts that it would be more appropriate to pursue inquiries with a grounding in Chinese history. Professor Yü asks a series of questions: In the successful adoption of Western capitalism in East Asia, are there any cultural factors beyond those that are economic and institutional? If so, are these cultural factors related to Confucianism? If the answer to this question is also positive, what specific aspects are mutually functional or compatible with economic development? Since Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism were interconnected and mutually influenced one another to a degree that is vastly different from the more distinct sects in the West, are “Confucian ethics” purely Confucian, or have

54 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 157–158. See also Weber 1976, 68.

55 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 164. See also Roth 1978, 1: liv.

56 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 164–166.

57 Yü Ying-shih 1986, 3–45.

58 Yü Ying-shih 1985.

they been influenced by the other two religions? Returning later to the basic question, Professor Yü asks, what have Chinese in the last decades of the twentieth century relied upon to adapt Western capitalism into East Asia so successfully? Is the form of capitalism in East Asia different from that in the West? If so, what is the reason? To address such questions, we first need to attain greater clarity about traditional Chinese business practices and merchant ethics. In other words, we must first be clear about native commercial traditions before evaluating the modern changes under Western influence.⁵⁹

In May of 1986, Professor Yü inserted another preface before sending the monograph for eventual publication in January 1987; moreover, this preface elaborated upon the relationship of his work to Weber's and to trends in Chinese and Japanese scholarship. He acknowledged that without the extensive historical materials collected by mainland Chinese and Japanese scholars, he would have been unable to complete his monograph; however, their scholarship generally paid inadequate attention to the self-consciousness and value consciousness of the merchant class, especially the influence of Confucian ethics and efforts to promote these ethics among merchants. For this aspect, he consulted Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Since he pursued a Weberian inquiry, but without following Weber's specific questions, Professor Yü sought to clarify his relationship to Weber's work. He particularly appreciates Weber for not establishing any universal laws for historical societies or a set methodology; moreover, he shares Weber's opposition to viewing history as having a single cause. He also finds inspiration in Weber's point that religious ideas can serve as one influence on economic development and that thought in certain circumstances can serve as a catalyst in historical development.⁶⁰

Although not the first to use the term "ideal type" (*lixiangxing* 理想型), Weber was the one who made it a special method when characterizing the Protestant ethic. As Clifford Geertz pointed out, Weber is elusive, but his work and thought also contain some things of significance; therefore, scholars need to reformulate Weber in order to use him.⁶¹ In addition to its comparisons of Chinese and Protestant religions, Yü also focused on *The Protestant Ethic* because Weber asked why China did not produce Western capitalism. Weber acknowledged Chinese rationalism and that Confucianism was a religion focused on this world; nonetheless, he argued that it differed from Calvinism and thus could not produce the spirit of capitalism. Yü replies that although Weber's conclusion might be correct, his reasoning was not. Here, Yü focuses on one key element, that of the problem arising from Weber's ideal types. Weber claimed that inner-worldly asceticism was unique to the West and developed to the highest level in Calvinism. Yü notes that Weber's ideal type was widely

59 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 167–173, esp. 170–173.

60 Yü Ying-shih 1987, lix–lxi.

61 Yü Ying-shih 1987, lxii–lxiii. Also Geertz 1968, 309–310.

criticized in the West by historians, as well as by specialists on religion, economics, and society. Yü read a spectrum of Weber's critics and defenders from Kurt Samuelson to Gordon Marshall. Although he acknowledges that he is not a specialist on Weber or on theology, he concludes that Weber had difficulty grasping Calvin's original doctrines or later Puritan perspectives. Still, Yü is willing to accept Weber's point that Calvinism manifested inner-worldly asceticism. What caught Yü's interest was whether or not Weber was right in his conclusion that Confucian ethics were the opposite to Calvinist ethics and for that reason China could not produce the foundation for a similar spirit. According to Yü's analysis of Weber's method, we should say that Chinese religious ethic was largely an inner-worldly asceticism. Yü cautions that he is not claiming that the Chinese ethic and the Protestant ethic are basically the same. Substantial differences exist on various levels. However, he argues that if one uses Weber's ideal-type methodology, one should conclude that China also possessed inner-worldly asceticism. Compared to the case of China, Calvinist asceticism was even stronger and more distinct, so the Calvinist became the representative or model case. Furthermore, Professor Yü suggests that unless we reformulate Weber's ideal type, we cannot utilize his original concept of inner-worldly asceticism as an effective standard to distinguish Confucians and Protestants.⁶²

Although Yü affirms that the Chinese religious ethic was an inner-worldly asceticism, he does not use this to assert that Western-style capitalism could have appeared earlier in China. So, does his research shake the foundations of Weber's theory of the Protestant ethic? Actually not. He proposes two ways of resolving the difficulty with Weber's theory. The first way would be to reconstruct Weber's ideal typology so that the Protestant ethic's benefit to the spirit of capitalism would be more highlighted and central in a way that would have to promote what is unique to the West and absent in China. The second way would be to diminish the explanatory power of thought and acknowledge that inner-worldly asceticism had to be joined with other objective factors before the spirit of capitalism could appear. Weber himself actually provides support for this second option. His *General Economic History* set forth six prerequisites for the establishment of capitalism: a rational accounting system, a free market, rational techniques, reliable laws, free labor, and the commercialization of economic life. Thus, Weber did not regard inner-worldly asceticism as the sole and sufficient force to produce the spirit of capitalism. Therefore, with only minor modification, Weber's basic theory would still stand. This alternative would highlight China's special cultural characteristics. Although the Chinese religious ethic possessed an inner-worldly asceticism and rationalism, such asceticism and rationalism never deeply penetrated the political and legal realm. China never had a reliable legal system, and some scholars regard China's "nation of officials" as the biggest obstacle to modern capitalism. Thus,

62 Yü Ying-shih 1987, lxvii–lxix.

if we address Weber's question of what China lacked, we could say it was definitely not an ethic of inner-worldly asceticism, but rather that its government and laws have never undergone the process of rationalization. Thus, Yü acknowledges that his answer is a "Weberian" one.⁶³

Yü cautions that his book is a research study of intellectual and social history, and not Weberian historical sociology. Although he acknowledges the inspiration he took from Weber's *Protestant Ethic*, he was never motivated to set forth any model of social development. His goal was to utilize Weberian concepts to clarify the historical relationship and connecting veins between the redirection of China's religions and the rise of the merchant class in the early modern period. Therefore, he relied upon evidence from historical documents, rather differently from *The Protestant Ethic*. Gordon Marshall, a Weberian specialist, acknowledged that *The Protestant Ethic* relied upon the discussion of theologians and writers, but did not utilize the record of a single entrepreneur.⁶⁴ Thus, Yü points out that Weber's book did not demonstrate how merchants utilized the writings of theologians. This would be adequate for historical sociologists, but not for historians. He notes that it is best to use historical documentation to support or to negate this kind of case, especially in his own book written from an historian's perspective. This is even truer when one considers differences between Chinese and Western religions. Since doctrine and sects are far more distinct in the West, Weber could rely more heavily upon theological writings. In the Chinese case, extensive and careful use of historical sources is imperative. Even though Professor Yü acknowledges that historians sometimes make mistakes reading ancient sources, he pledges to provide historical documentation and evidence for his points.⁶⁵ Here again, in his own documentation and his observation of Weber's lack of evidence from entrepreneurs, we could well say that Yü foreshadowed (or provided an earlier response to what would become) the fundamental challenge set forth by the 2014 editorial in *Max Weber Studies*.

4 Conclusion

Yü Ying-shih's presents several succinct and Weberian questions to explore through Chinese historical materials: "Before the importation of modern Western capitalism into China, did the traditional religious ethic exert any influence on indigenously developed commercial activities? And if so, what was the specific import of such influence?"⁶⁶ In writing his monograph, the purpose was not to debate Weber or to disprove dated data and

63 Yü Ying-shih 1987, lxx–lxxi.

64 Marshall 1982; Yü Ying-shih 1987, lxxii.

65 Yü Ying-shih 1987, lxxi–lxxiii.

66 Yü Ying-shih 1987, 9.

impressions. Rather, Yü claims that the aim of his “occasional retorts” is to make his own points clearer. Yet, quite significantly, Yü acknowledges that he probably would not have written his monograph had he not been inspired by certain of Weber’s pertinent insights.

Professor Yü distilled Weberian questions to explore changes in religious ethics and merchant culture in imperial China. He plumbed historical sources for the spiritual resources of merchants and changes in business practices, as well as merchants’ attitudes about their status in Chinese society. During the late Ming to the mid-Qing, merchants became increasingly important to the government’s public projects, such as constructing bridges and maintaining roads. Utilizing historical materials, such as stories about merchants and writings from merchants, Yü is able to show the development of consciousness among merchants. Merchants became more self-confident in their status and no longer saw themselves as inferior to scholars. Thus, Yü shows how merchant status changed over time and how merchants applied Confucian principles and ethics to the business world – long before the forceful entry of modern Western capitalism into nineteenth-century China. Yet, despite considerable parallels in the practices and behavior of Confucian merchants and their Protestant counterparts in Western Europe, there remained cultural and doctrinal differences in inner-worldly asceticism between its Confucian and Calvinist variants. Economic, institutional, and political environments also played a more positive role in the full development of modern capitalism in areas of Western Europe than such factors did in China. Among the primary factors, Yü, somewhat like Weber, cites the restrictive environment of an imperial bureaucratic system and its obsession with social stability and political order. In short, contrary to what some might imagine, Yü does not disagree with Weber’s point that the unique religious, cultural, social, and political environment of areas of Western Europe facilitated the rise of the spirit of bourgeois capitalism. Moreover, he does not claim that China was actually developing the spirit or institutions of modern capitalism *per se*.

Yü has elsewhere provided a contemporary demonstration of his analysis of the Confucian ethic in the business world, not least in his December 1986 eulogy to Taiwanese entrepreneur, Wu Ho-su (Wu Huoshi) 吳火獅 (1919–1986), the founder of the Shinkong (Xinguang) 新光 conglomerate. In the eulogy one hears echoes of virtues and actions that Yü’s monograph had highlighted and that had considerable parallels with Weber’s discussion of the Protestant ethic and spirit of capitalism. This Weberian tone also implicitly infused Wu’s oral recordings of his life, which Huang Chin-shing (Huang Jinxing) 黃進興 fashioned into Wu’s autobiography; therefore, Huang changed Wu’s Chinese book title, “My Half-century of Struggle” (*Banshiji de fendou* 半世紀的奮鬥), into the English title, *Business as a Vocation*. Since Professor Yü’s eulogy in Chinese, as well as my English translation, are available in print,⁶⁷ I will only mention some examples. Wu’s self-discipline and

67 Huang Chin-shing 1992; 2002, 239–243. The original eulogy is printed in Huang’s 1992 biography of Wu and included as an appendix to my 2002 translation of Huang’s book.

dedication to his vocation reflected a Confucian scholar's commitment to learning; moreover, his learning enabled him to be broad-minded and flexible in response to changes in time and circumstances. Wu also extended the harmonious relationships learned within the family to people in society and business. His interactions with his business associates and employees demonstrated Confucian virtues such as honesty, wisdom, humaneness, courage, and strength. Once he had secured his family's livelihood, he turned greater attention to the public good of society. In addition to his philanthropy, he did what he could diplomatically to encourage better foreign relations for Taiwan. In his enterprises, he strove to enhance efficiency and rational processes; however, he also declared that such modern methods of scientific management needed to be supplemented with Chinese ethical principles and bonds of human feeling. Thus, he combined traditional values and religious practices together with the advanced technology and modern business practices that he introduced to Taiwan. Altogether, the eulogy paints a portrait of a Chinese work ethic and ascetic self-control that rendered Wu a driven workaholic, but one who strove for Confucian harmony and solidarity with employees through the cultivation of human feelings and respect.

This eulogy further reinforces the nuance of Professor Yü's response to, or utilization of, Weber. On the one hand, reading Weber helped turn Yü's attention to the influence of ethics and ideas on mercantile thinking and activity. Yü was attentive to similarities or functional equivalences between Confucian and Protestant conceptions of virtues, behaviors, and their application in the mercantile world. Moreover, since Weber and Yü appreciated diverse historical causation or historical contingencies, as well as the uniqueness of the Calvinist worldview and its early role in the development of modern bourgeois capitalism, both scholars rejected the notion that China required a modern capitalist phase or an imported Protestant ethic. They also recognized that once modern capitalism fully developed, it functioned independently of its roots in Protestant Christianity; furthermore, independent modern capitalism's invasive roots had extended around the world. Thus, the presence of capitalist ideas, practices, and customs in East Asia did not require, or totally depend upon, indigenous roots. On the other hand, Professor Yü focused on how reformations within Chinese religions led to new versions of Chan Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism with enhanced inner-worldly asceticism that set Chinese merchants and business practices to evidence significant parallels to what Weber described as unique to Western Europe and North America. What is more, these religious and historical changes took place in China long before modern Western capitalism and imperialism forcefully penetrated China in the nineteenth century.

Yü Ying-shih's monograph on Chinese religions is a Chinese example of a mature and nuanced appropriation of Weber. Having explored Weberian scholarship to the point that he could fathom the logic behind its specific examples and the significance of its fundamental questions, Yü could formulate Weber's work into specific questions that inspired and

gave considerable guidance to his study on China. As a result, Yü was able to make major breakthroughs in the conventional understanding of the reforms in Chinese religions and their impact on changes to the self-image, ethics, and behavior of Chinese merchants in the Ming and Qing prior to the intrusion of the Western imperialism. Thus the chief target of Yü's monograph on the spiritual resources of merchants is not Weber, but rather those Chinese Marxists, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, who trumpeted the "sprouts of capitalism" during the late Ming to the mid-Qing. Not only did Yü focus on the same historical period, he explicitly argued against their reductionist tendencies regarding historical causation and class stratum. This issue within Chinese scholarship elicited Yü's utilization of Weber's rejection of economic determinism in favor of considering multifaceted, interacting factors to explain historical situations and changes. In other words, we could even say that Weber was to Yü more of a sounding board than a research object. Yü's own research and cultural agenda remain prominent. For instance, he concludes his monograph using Weber to strengthen his own theme that excesses of bureaucratic control and obsessions with maintaining political stability have impeded progress in China, especially in areas of individual liberties and freedoms. The quality of his historical research and insights, as well as his commitment to his principles and to China's culture, have given him a significant voice for six decades in East Asia. At times, his distinctive voice is only begrudgingly received, or even blocked; however, regardless of whether or not one agrees with him, his is a voice, like Weber's, that is hard to ignore.

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