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PARTE II

EL CONFUCIANISMO Y SU INFLUENCIA EN LA ESTRATEGIA DEL DESARROLLO ECONÓMICO DE CHINA

A WEBERIAN, LONG-TERM APPROACH TO CONFUCIAN CULTURE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON CHINA'S "ECONOMIC MIRACLE"

Summary

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I. INTRODUCTION

The theme of how Confucianism has (and has not) influenced Modern China in different fronts has a practical importance that should not be underestimated. It is fitting that Confucianism should not remain the province of philologists or philosophers, but draw the attention of scholars from all fields of knowledge interested in mapping out how China's rise in the later XX Century matters to institutional change worldwide. Needless to say, Globalization has a pluralistic and ecumenical discourse which, in the last analysis, still remains dependent on how the West has effectively built a pattern of legitimation based on its socioeconomical prowess. China, however, claims that it has a multimillennial civilization, a claim that, influencing common-sense notions about what "modernization" means, is relevant beyond the circle of those who have to manage relations with China.

Confucianism, then, is the best argument that China has to back its allegedly unbroken traditions. That is a perplexing argument, though, in that the People's Republic of China (PRC) has taken a clearly different path from the millennia that came before. In the early XX Century, Chinese communist ideologists and policy-makers have shrewdly picked up and implemented Socialism, with its official atheism, with its materialist historical dialectics and with its goal of establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat through class struggle. All three were consciously aimed at vital elements of Confucianism, without which, it could not be. They understood that Confucianism was such a brilliantly coherent, self-justifying system of deep assumptions about China and the world, that they took the conclusion that it was best to cast it aside. Be it as it may, in the end of the second decade of the XXI Century, Confucianism

has returned, camouflaged, as an element of Chinese policy-making. It has found itself a growing, but still subordinate role, in the place that matters most: State ideology. As things are, there are already hints that a new grand narrative is in the way, which makes it necessary to trim inconsistencies out.

In this text, we will try to understand what was the influence that "Confucianism" may have played in China's "economic miracle", as an event in China's long-term modernization. That is a complex discussion since its conceptual foundations. Especially after Postmodernity, "Confucianism", like "Capitalism", may be construed to signify many things, and instrumentalized as such. A second problem, not unrelated to Postmodernity, is overspecialization in the humanities, which leads scholars to inflate microscopical conclusions to real-life, in consequential matters. A third problem is how to objectively and reliably understand the present, since we have to deal with things that remain in flux, normally part of a complex equation of biases and interests. Consequently, we will attempt to address these three problems. The first part will summarize how "culture" has been employed as a tool to explain China's rise in the later XX Century. The second part will try to give a straightforward explanation of what "Confucianism" means, in economic terms. The last section will discuss in what way it related to Chinese modernization and how such relationship has been changing in the last years.

II. SITUATING "CULTURE" WITHIN THE "CHINESE ECONOMIC MIRACLE": THE ROLE OF CHANGING PERCEPTIONS

Over the last three decades, China has (re)written world history through its success story at the economic front. Such story may fairly be styled as a "miracle", which in its process has transformed China into a growth dynamo for the Globe (Chi, 2024). Given that it has obtained comparable results, in terms of rapidness and efficiency, as Japan and the "Four Tigers" (Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea) –Vietnam is on its way, and given that such polities do share a similar, roughly defined, "Confucian", heritage, it is fair to inquire on whether such common cultural traits may, to some extent, play any role in the realm of economic performance. However, treating the issue mostly as a question of "values" that devolves into a debate framed as the "compatibility between Confucianism and Modernity", etc. perhaps cannot settle the issue unequivocally, above partisan disputes. Besides, without providing a clear historical background and conceptual framework for our discussion, we are put at the risk of falling into harmful post facto

rationalizations, since "culture" should never become more than one, albeit important, factor in a whole constellation of circumstances that may entail economic development or not.

That being said, the sheer pace, and intensity, of Chinese growth in such a short period should not overshadow the fact that Mainland China had been, for most of the XX Century, mired in relative poverty. It is also necessary to remember that, during the latter part of the XIX Century, China had become a familiar example of secular stagnation, dubbed by its Western adversaries as the so-called "Sick man of Asia". Excepted a certain tenor of racism, unacceptable in our times, the "Sick man" metaphor does reflect a meaningful geopolitical judgement, as the Ottoman Empire had been likewise branded the "Sick man of Europe". Indeed, during Ming dynasty, China had evoked a qualitatively different response from European powers, which considered the far-eastern empire worthy of selective emulation. By the late XIX Century, however, something had evidently changed: Chinese institutions, and its underlying "Confucian" culture, were now perceived as surpassed by the eyes of the very same countries who used to be admirers.

Such situation remained more or less unchanged until the "miracle" transformed China into a full-fledged World superpower at some time in the second decade of the XXI Century. Before then, Western observers were acutely aware of the Chinese potential for growth (and profit, to be sure), but China stubbornly continued to appear to be an unfulfilled promise, at the worst, or an effective follower of Neoliberal/Globalist recipes, at the best. Even when it became noticeable, in the mid-1990s, that China's GDP growth had been gaining a vigorous momentum, any acknowledgement of that fact remained conditioned to China's apparent "conversion" to Capitalism. And it was a condescending acknowledgment, since China's per capita GDP back then was still very low compared to core Global Economies. During such period, advocates for "Confucianism" could only blame Mainland China's Socialism for the country's ills, while uncommitted Western opinion-makers continued to treat "Chinese culture" as an obstacle to development.

In order to better illustrate our argument, we can consider the French politician Alain Peyrefitte's overall sympathetic approach to what he styled the "Chinese Awakening". A distinguished member of De Gaulle's technocracy, he may be taken as a representative example of how highly-educated, insightful Mainland European elite observers understood China in a crucial stage leading to the "miracle". Nostalgic of the international standing it enjoyed before the two World Wars, and more positively inclined to Socialism than the United States and Great Britain, France established relations with China

in 1964, fifteen years before the US, and played a major role in China's early technological breakthroughs. With four book-length works on China, Peyrefitte documented his observations during a quarter century, which stretch between US-China's rapprochement in the early 1970s and the Asian Financial Crisis' eve in the mid-1990s.

The first work, called Quand la Chine s'éveillera (Peyrefitte, 1980), is set in the Cultural Revolution's last years, motivated by impressions from Peyrefitte's long official visit to that country in 1971. Even if the visit program had been curated by the Chinese government as a tool of charm offensive, Peyrefitte's response prefigured the enthusiasm eventually manifested by Western entrepreneurs regarding Deng Xiaoping's "Reform and Opening-up". It is noteworthy that the book came out after Deng's visit to the United States in early 1979, which was not enough to spare Peyrefitte from criticism against his supposed disregard of Maoist policies.

That enthusiasm subsided after a nadir in China perceptions during the late 1980s, which is conveyed by two other books. La tragédie chinoise (Peyrefitte, 1989b) came out just in time to make its readers think of June 4th as the evidence of a deeper cultural malaise that, tellingly, seemed to condemn China to remain a peripherical, underdeveloped country. Aside from salvaging Peyrefitte's domestic image as a China critic, his denunciation aligned the author with an established current of Western public opinion, which consistently counterposed China's economic performance to its perceived human rights record, with strong undertones that "Chinese culture" (understood as values and modus operandi) was to blame.

In fact, Peyreffite had published L'empire immobile ou le choc des mondes (Peyrefitte, 1989a) in January of that same year, a book which had gone even deeper into the criticism that there were cultural constraints to China modernization. Although Peyrefitte had not been trained as a China specialist, he sponsored a group of sinologists to edit by then unpublished first-hand sources, reconstructing details from the first diplomatic tête-à-tête between Great Britain and the Qing empire –the notorious Macartney mission. Peyrefitte seized the opportunity to ponder upon China's inadequacy to function in the world heralded by the XIX century's rising superpower, despite China's past glories and venerable culture, and attributed a deep meaning to those events, as if "culture" alone could explicate underdevelopment. Anyway, it went before saying that "culture" was a negative legacy that burdened China's integration into world economy.

In a stunning about-face, the tetralogy was concluded by La Chine s'est éveillée (Peyrefitte, 1996), in which Peyrefitte claims that his impressions

from the 1970s were somehow vindicated, prognosticating that, after all, there had been a certain path to modernity and development in China. Yet, his previous, pessimistic ideas were not entirely recanted, as there was an important twist in the book's plot. China's resurgence was indeed happening, but despite its culture, a point that could be evidenced in two ways. Firstly, "Reform and Opening-up" was an ideological reversal, away from Maoism and, as it was commonplace in the beginning of the XXI century, even from textbook Socialism itself. Secondly, it was also a step away from China's deepest traditions, as the gap between Deng's experimental zones in the coastal Southern provinces and the countryside were portrayed as a tug of war between the new and the old, the backwards and the progressive, "Confucianism" and Globalism. Obviously, the enthusiasm for China opening itself to the world had pride of place and all but confirmed the breakthrough that Peyrefitte had augured in the late 1970s.

Peyrefitte's understanding of China, particularly of how its culture has influenced economic performance, may be criticized as the musings of a "non-specialist", but they come from a political insider and policymaker, someone who prefigures the Western bureaucrats and officials engaged in China relations, whose mindset has ostensibly been majority in the European establishment until reality started to set in after Brexit/the last stage of Merkel's era. Moreover, Peyrefitte is remarkable in that, as an intellectual, he is capable of articulating a cogent argument for his positions. In the most mature form, that argument can be found in La société de confiance (1995), which presses for the role of "trust(worthiness") as an essential value for economic development and a condition for freedom of initiative. He claims that it was the bonds of "Trust" that underpinned the institutions responsible for the "divergence" between part of the West and other civilizations during Modern times/Late Ming dynasty. Despite being fully aware of a deep crisis of "Trust" in the bosom of the contemporary "Developed West" (a term he is actually reluctant to use), Peyrefitte in compensation never toys with the idea that "Confucian" –or "Eastern" values– may become an alternative to a historically successful, mainly Western, experience, that he hypostasizes as "Societies of Trust". Indeed, on the very first page of La Société de Confiance, he brands China as a "Society of Distrust" since archaic times (Peyrefitte, 1995, p. 7). Considering that the book came out about a year before he published La Chine s'est éveillée, it is highly unlikely that he had changed his mind about this problem when he welcomed "Reform and Opening up's" early breakthroughs. To this type of China observers, "culture" was a burden

There was an alternative, weaponized, explication of "Confucianism" that reaffirmed its value based on the modernization of Japan and other countries/regions that possessed a Confucian tradition and managed to industrialize and develop themselves. It was somehow construed as at variance with "Socialism with Chinese characteristics", as a legacy from Cold War scholarship. In part, that distinction is ideological, since it was the People's Republic that incorporated with most conviction a Late Qing/Early Republican narrative that blamed "Confucianism" for Imperial China's backwardness. But another part made sense at the time, blaming instead the People's Republic lack of success and mistakes in its road to modernization, precisely for having abandoned "Confucianism", unlike Hong Kong, Singapore, etc. It gained academic respectability because of joint efforts of émigré Chinese intellectuals active especially in the United States and Western sinologists trained outside Mainland China, which propagated a sympathetic and ecumenic vision of (capitalist) "Confucianism", as something compatible not only with "modernity" but, even more important, with "democracy". An important example is the book Asian Values and Human Rights (de Bary, 1998). To our purposes, it matters that "successful" Chinese "Traditional Culture", thus legitimated by Japan, Korea and the "Four Tigers", became perceived as compatible with capitalism and human rights.

As far as we can ascertain, the Chinese official narrative that "Traditional Culture" has played a role in Chinese development has only gained real traction in mid-2000s. It was a period in which China could make a convincing case before Western powers that its ascension was a "Win-win situation" for all parts involved. A few years before, in December 2001, China had concluded successfully a long and difficult negotiation to join WTO, under the key guarantee that it should remain a "Non-market economy" for 15 years. Under the banner of "mutual complementarity", neither did China hurt the pride of its by then assumedly "developed partners", nor did it inspire fear in them. For China was still in the process of overtaking the largest European economies' GDP, but, in per capita terms, it remained far behind, a low-tier developing nation. Obviously, it did benefit more than ever, image-wise, from its enormous scale and the potential that remained to be harnessed under the unstoppable stride that Globalization had been making. Consequently, at this point, "Traditional Culture" could only play a qualified role, two aspects of which should be emphasized.

One, it is noteworthy that the word "Confucianism" is not spelled out, because it was still a term loaded enough to raise eyebrows in China's political elite. In due time, we will explain the reasons, but it is enough to stress

immediately that "Confucianism" became the open target of the mainstream Chinese intellectual trends in the end of Qing dynasty and remained a taboo subject in Mainland China during the XX Century, unquestionably until, at least, the end of Mao Zedong's era with the 3rd plenary session of the 11th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. During the "Reform and Opening-up" period, that we define as finishing with the 18th CPC in November 15th 2012, it is a well-known fact that attention has been turned away from "ideology", particularly in China's foreign discourse. However, since there had been no public rehabilitation of "Confucianism" by Deng Xiaoping, we can safely assume that the Mao era stance was maintained domestically. Two generations had been raised thinking that "Confucianism" was bad since the foundation of the PRC, and the one born in the late 1970s cared mostly about foreign "culture". Hence, granted that "Reform and Opening-up" was not as militant as the previous era, it remained nonetheless doctrinally hostile to "Confucianism", given that the debate about it could not be isolated from the malaises of "old society" and its "feudal order" – keywords of the official discourse that are still in use nowadays. Therefore, when "Confucianism" emerged in official discourse, it was under the vague, edulcorated label of "Traditional Culture".

Two, and, even more important than the first aspect, no links were established between "Traditional Culture" and Chinese economic performance at that time. As a matter of fact, the term was mostly instrumentalized as a source of soft power and legitimation outside China, with Prime Minister Wen Jiabao serving as a most enlightening illustration. He became the highest ranked Chinese Communist Party (CCP) member and Chinese official not only to make lavish use of quotes of Confucian and other ancient texts publicly, but also to give a positive connotation to "Traditional Culture". A telling example is his "Turn your eyes to China" speech during a visit to Harvard University in late 2003. To a foreign audience, he touches upon China multimillennial civilization as a source of pride and greatness. Revealingly, Confucianism is depicted (just) as first among the "Hundred Schools" from Pre-imperial times, a period in which China can claim to be as intellectually creative and "classical" as Greco-Roman Antiquity. As a whole, Wen frames China's culture as "source of popular and democratic ideas", whose patriotism and work ethic positively shape values in modern China. The second core idea in the speech is that "Traditional Culture" might well become again a source of soft power. Wen reminisces briefly about a recent meeting with Ji Xianlin, a famed Indologist who had studied in Germany, in order to make the point that just like China learned from the West, it was the West that had

learned from China first. He then reminds the audience that Ralph Waldo Emerson, an American luminary and Harvard alumnus, "fell for Chinese traditional culture". Finally, there is the idea that "Traditional Culture" at some juncture in history suffered a tragic setback. Wen insists that (Imperial) China, since its roots in Qin dynasty, is "a peace-loving country". In a sudden turn, he castigates "the ignorance, corruption and self-imposed seclusion of [recent] feudal dynasties [which] led China to prolonged social stagnation, declining national strength and repeated invasions by the foreign powers" (Wen, 2003) –stressing the double source of Modern China's predicament, domestic and foreign. All in all, we can safely conclude that official discourse then produced a certain distinction between "Traditional culture" and Late Imperial institutions/governance, giving leeway for a broader discussion and calibration of its policy implementation in the future.

Even though his speech was couched in personal terms, the Chinese premier was voicing an official line that would soon become written policy. Only two years later, in 2005, the State Council, which Wen headed, promulgated the White Book on China's Peaceful Development Road. It is a significant document that attempted, on one hand, to assuage criticism of Chinese management of internal affairs and, on the other, to signal that it would play a responsible and positive role in global governance, fostering harmony and promoting development. As far as our inquiry is concerned, the first chapter of the text refers to "Traditional Culture" as background, and justification, for Chinese claims. One paragraph before the reference, it is stated that, "more than one hundred years after the Opium Wars, China needs a peaceful international environment", for "it has a large population, its [social] basis is fragile, its development is unbalanced, it still is the world's largest developing country". Hence, based on "its historical and cultural tradition", it is a necessary choice that "China should decidedly take the road of peaceful development". As a counterpoint to the Opium Wars, the document mentions Zheng He's "seven maritime expeditions". During Ming dynasty, Zheng "led the strongest maritime fleet in the world", "without having caused the occupation of a single inch of foreign soil", and yet fostered trade "with more than 30 countries and regions in Asia and Africa" (State Council, 2005). It is clear that China styles itself as a benign guarantor of global trade during the golden age of its world hegemony. However, unfortunately, the white book does not elaborate on how "Traditional Culture" was conducive to Ming dynasty domestic economic greatness and, particularly, how it allowed for what we could, analogically, denominate an "international trade order".

Regardless of the motives, there was a very influential current of opinion in Western circles that was willing to repeat, and even amplify, China's official discourse regarding "Traditional Culture". Intriguingly, it was these foreign voices that took the step to make "Traditional Culture" a direct cause of Chinese success at the economic front. A notable document of such change is The Beijing Consensus, a policy paper published in March 2004 –that is, between Wen Jiabao's speech at Harvard and the white book on Peaceful Development. It is necessary to underline what were the interest groups behind The Beijing Consensus. The text was authorized by the Foreign Policy Centre, a think-tank linked to Britain's New Labour, under the auspices of Tony Blair, who was in the last years of his tenure as Prime Minister. The author, Joshua Ramo, had been an editor at the Time Group, international affairs analyst for CNN and had connections with the World Economic Forum and the Council on Foreign Relations. More importantly, at the time he wrote the paper, he was senior advisor for Goldman Sachs residing in Beijing and would became managing director at Kissinger Associates.

In the paper, Chinese "Traditional Culture" is invoked as a main reason for China not bending to the more famous and authoritative "Washington Consensus". With journalistic élan, "Traditional Culture" is superficially glossed over as a set of "values", that are wielded both against foreign adversaries and internal revisionism (such as the Cultural Revolution). Essentially, the separation between "Traditional Culture" and the secular revolutionary process that dealt away with Imperial institutions, already pointed out in Wen Jiabao's speech, is taken for granted. In the XXI century, it is these "values" that explicate why and how China would have its own way at the economic realm and beyond, both domestically, and internationally. Ramo understood that China's nativism put it at odds with (Western-led) "Globalization", and, given its overall political-economic performance, that its message was by then credible enough to arouse interest from middle-powers, including Latin American ones, which had followed Neoliberal recipes, much to their chagrin (Ramo, 2004, p. 31-34).

It is interesting to point out that thinkers further to the left agreed fundamentally with the Liberal-Globalist line expressed in The Beijing Consensus. David Harvey takes a relatively negative stance in A Brief History of Neoliberalism, stating that China had entered the Neoliberal fold without becoming a partner of established Capitalist powers. He recognizes the decisive pull given by China joining WTO, without going deep enough in the issue that, in our understanding, has catapulted it to superpower status: the prodigious transfer of technology and know-how from the "developed

economies" which, in the long run, certainly was much more decisive than any breakthrough in trade and investment flows. Be it as it may, Harvey concludes that China was treading towards the same social malaises as "Capitalist Neoliberal" countries, grounded on, as he defines it, the huge gap between rich and poor, domestically, and a place in global division of labor that makes China look more and more like an imperial power, internationally. It is likely that the conspicuous absence of "cultural" considerations, and personal judgments of value, leads him to conflate the Chinese ascent with already established Global structures of power and governance (Harvey, 2005, p. 140-151). In Adam Smith in Beijing, Giovanni Arrighi takes a more positive stance than Harvey and arrives at a different diagnostic, namely that China's ultimate goal was not to convert itself to textbook Neoliberalism, but to follow its own path. Through becoming what he argues is an "older" type of free trade power, China could well come to be a benevolent hegemon untainted by the ills of XIX century Imperialism. He is adamant that internal factors were the spark that caused the Chinese "economic miracle", especially the role of overseas Chinese networks, and internal factors of competitiveness, which could be explored as a broad nod to "Traditional culture". However, the Neomarxian gist of his analysis is similar to Harvey's. By working with world-systems analysis, the theory of imperialism and North-South dynamics, the peculiarities of Chinese "culture" end up very much ensconced in his rejection of the Capitalist/Western order (Arrighi, 2001, p. 351-378).

The newer Globalist argument, in its different ideological strands, tallies with a politicized, and nationalist way, of establishing a causal link between Asian "Traditional culture" –now defined unequivocally as "Confucianism" and economic development. A certain correlation between both may be noticed, for instance, from the fact that The Beijing Consensus appends an interview with Lee Kuan Yew, sharing his insights about 25 years of Chinese "Reform and Opening-up". One section refers to "the debates in the 1990s about the relationship between culture and development", in which Lee himself had played a role. Recapitulating a core tenet, he says that, in order to achieve their signature fast-paced, sustained growth, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore uniquely relied on a "strong Confucianist communitarian culture with the family as the basic unit and a certain cohesiveness in society plus a willingness to work hard and slog it out", while excusing the difficulties faced after reaching a certain level of affluence on "excessive Westernization" and its related micro-social issues, such as female emancipation (Ramo, 2004, p. 65-66). Even though Lee demonstrated his foresight in arguing that reform (i.e., shared economic prosperity) could preserve the Chinese regime's

legitimacy without recurring to ideology for "5-10 years, no difficulty here; 15 years, maybe" (Ramo, 2004, p. 64), there seems to be a tacit assumption that China would need to continue increasing transparency and its exchanges with the outside world to keep following the "Singaporean model" and achieve the so-called "Confucian" capitalism.

And so it happened that, after the 2007-2009 Global Financial Crisis and into the 2010s, a mainstream current of opinion abroad, left and right, still defended the possibility that China was actively advancing towards Capitalism. It was presumed that "Traditional Culture" at the very least was not an obstacle to such changes. As late as 2013, Conservative-Globalist interests were convinced, or wished to transmit that semblance, about China's capitalist prospects. How China became Capitalist, co-authored by 1991 Economics Nobel-prize awardee Ronald Coase (who was 102 years old at the time of publication) and Ning Wang, a senior fellow at Coase Institute, is a noticeable semi-academic effort in that line (Coase & Ning, 2013). More important than the book, which mostly gives a new twist to well-known facts, is the acclaim received from, for instance, The Cato Institute, a think-tank sponsored by the Koch brothers, well-known Republican donors. A review published on its website praises How China became Capitalist through many layers of equivocation. It alleges that there was wider popular support for free markets in China than in the US; that "Chinese traditions" (Medieval Silk Road's "trade order", Chinese inventions, industry, "Free Market elements" in Laozi's Daoism, etc.) helped the "pro-capitalist" reformers; that the "Chinese characteristics" of its Capitalism were "purely cultural factors" that did harm the advance of freedom, but did not prevent free market (Capitalism) from advancing, all things considered.

Some influential Left-wing intellectuals agreed reluctantly. Manuel Castell's admirable Neomarxian synthesis about the rise of Global/ Postmodern Culture boldly foresaw the rise of localism in China in The Power of Identity, where "power sharing and wealth distribution, managed by the Chinese Communist Party and arranged by Central/local government in the process of primitive accumulation would be the key mechanism in ensuring an orderly transition from statism to capitalism" (Castells, 2010a, p. 336-337), an argument more fully developed in End of Millenium (Castells, 2010b, 311-337). That prognostic, originally made in 1997-98, was kept in the books' second edition, although the 2010 preface to End of Millenium appears to rectify Castell's position, indicating that China (and Russia) were "new statist" political orders– a reductive term that begs for a deeper "cultural" explanation. Indeed, "culture" is unconsciously mobilized to justify

why "statism" would not be replaced by "capitalism", unfortunately conveyed through another generic term, "nationalism" (Castells, 2010b, xvi-xvii).

With hindsight, such a unilateral discussion about "culture" and "economic growth" was doomed to obsolescence. As far as one can tell, a clear downward trend for Chinese growth set in from 2013 on. Four years later, China would recognize that something had materially changed, beyond doubt, in the report of the 19th CPC Central Committee. Its point 5 stated that the Chinese economy "has moved away from a stage of high-speed growth to another of high-quality development". One more key aspect of Chinese ascent had also changed. Its relationship with the "developed countries" switched to a different mood, given that China had been adopting new regulations which had commercial impact over foreign businesses at home, not to mention that Chinese companies were competing also in cutting-edge technological sectors abroad. Most notably, the "Trade War" initiated by the United States in 2018 generated the prospect of a general economic "decoupling", against which China protested as "reversing the course of history", reclaiming for itself the role of legitimate defender of Globalization. The ensuing Covid pandemic only aggravated those dynamics and, as of 2025, that seems to be the status quo.

In conclusion, the high-speed growth that defined most of the "Reform and Opening-up period" –and the gilded years of unbridled Globalization– gave ground to a certain public debate about Chinese "Traditional Culture" and its influence over economic development. It rested firmly on two presumptions. The first was that the experience of "developed/advanced economies" over the last three centuries would be relevant to explain the Chinese "economic miracle". It used "culture" loosely, as some kind of "fetish" to make the preferred explanation (or judgment) of the day add up. The second is pragmatic: "culture" could help to reach any sort of accommodation between parties with deep differences, providing for a long-lasting "win-win" situation for all. However, since 2013, the situation has changed dramatically, both in China and abroad.

In order to examine the influence of "Traditional Culture"/"Confucianism" at this stage, maybe it is better to attempt a fresh start, concerning ourselves first with a working definition of "Confucianism" that bears upon not only the "economic miracle" per se, but upon the process that comprehends it. As John King Fairbank has aptly summarized, the Chinese Revolution is a long-term process that undid Imperial China and eventfully integrated it into what we can call the "World System". Written in the mid-1980s, the book finishes with a sobering admonition, that one should prioritize the long-lasting influence of deeply-embedded "cultural" factors, and toys with the idea that Communist

China was following an ancient pattern of its previous imperial tradition of governance (Fairbank, 1987, p. 361-368). It is a pity that our study cannot rely on "World-systems" analysis, despite it is, in our opinion, the best attempt at a coherent and consistent account of the long-term transformation from Western capitalism into Global Economy. The reason is simple. Given its debt to Marxian social theory, it is biased against any "culture"-based explanation. To give an example, Wallerstein's outstanding The Modern World System not only lacks a deep study of why Chinese "culture" was not able to prevent the advance of modern industrial powers' global hegemony, but also seems to discredit Western efforts to understand Chinese "culture" in the complex XIX Century as the poisoned fruits of its Imperialism and "Orientalism" (Wallerstein, 2011, 264-273).

III. What was "Confucian culture" in late imperial China? Another look at the Weberian insights

Given the need for a methodological approach that both focuses on the long-term and reckons "culture" as a meaningful analytical parameter, we understand that Max Weber's interpretation of "Confucian culture" remains useful, providing a straightforward and sufficiently accurate account of how it is relevant to economic life. Before summarizing our reading of Weber, though, it is worthwhile to briefly discuss two major objections to such an interpretive framework.

First, it is reasonable to question whether Max Weber's thought is outdated. He passed away more than a century ago. He did not witness the apogee of political radicalization that brought an end to the Weimar Republic, with the rule of right and left "totalitarian" regimes at home and abroad. He did not foresee the non-European bipolar order that ensued World War II, and could even less imagine these last few decades of Globalization, in which long-term geopolitical power dynamics has shifted decisively to Asia. In other words, Max Weber lived in a very different world from ours, before his native Europe becoming economically paralyzed under Spätkapitalismus/EU decision-making, losing its edge in the Information Revolution and suffering deep cultural changes under decades of intensive migration (Mayer, 1956). We would respond to such criticism by pointing out that Weber is most useful precisely as an insightful, contemporary spectator of Imperial China's final crisis at the apex of European hegemony. He managed to explain, impartially and objectively, how traditional, Confucian China differed from the modern,

industrial, mostly European societies which triumphed in his time– and were being emulated by China.

Second, a Weberian approach can also be objected on ideological grounds, since Globalist and Postmodern convictions do challenge and ultimately invalidate some fundamental assumptions presupposed by it. Globalism and Postmodernism both have declared, each in its peculiar way, the "End of History". The first affirms that the Globalized World has superseded (obsolescent) States, not only in economic terms, but also regarding governance, civil society and, ultimately, culture. Postmodernity goes even further, denying altogether the notion of progress and even the idea of "History" (Breisach, 2003, 3-25). Both Globalist and Postmodern agendas concur in that Western Hegemony was attained through reprehensible practices, which found legitimacy in its Eurocentric claim of possessing a superior intellectual –scientific, and religious– tradition. That justifies recasting Western tradition as one culture among others, in contrast with the utopia of a "universal universalism" that should fairly integrate contributions from each and every civilization (Wallerstein, 2006). Without taking sides in such debate, it seems necessary to stress the risks of merely changing a one-sided approach for another. Max Weber methodological strength lies in the comparative, value-free study of types of political organizations, and his analytical work is better when there is no narrowminded parti pris. In our inquiry, a naïve definition of "Confucian culture" that overdignifies it, especially erecting it into a remedy to Eurocentrism makes it easy to slide into revisionism, with post facto rationalizations based on what seems to be the trends of the day. As a powerful counter-example to such attitude, we can refer to Karl Marx himself, a central reference for Postmodernism and (left-wing) Globalism. He could repudiate British imperialism and its behavior in the Second Opium War (Marx, 1969, p. 508-524), while lambasting the Qing empire as a "living fossil" with "permanent immobility in its social structure" (Marx, 1964, p. 514-516).

That being said, "culture" is an important concept in Max Weber's methodology, yet carefully controlled to avoid analytical biases. In the essay "Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy", published in 1904, he argues that "cultures" are created by societies when they attribute meaning to reality. Such meaning is created through a certain set of values. Not always in conflict with objective and verifiable "scientific" facts, social meaning is typical in that it is inseparable from the values which remain valid, and enforceable, within the group. As one aspect of social relations, economic life should be understood authentically, through the values "as they were" in a

society during a determined period. It should never be exclusively interpreted in relation to abstract theories, even though certain theories are useful. Despite Weber being concerned with "nomothetical scientism", i.e. the use of interpretive "laws" to explain the past and predict the future, a practice more usual in his time (including Marxian sociology and political economy), we may safely postulate that ideologies with no basis in the social reality under study, and even a different cultural "epoch" of the same society, should also be excluded as explanatory devices. As a warning, Weber reminds cultural scientists against relying on any closed system of concepts, of the kind that led, in Weber's own words, to the "(Late Imperial) Chinese ossification of intellectual life". Hence, "culture" becomes one causal element in a whole constellation, that should be pondered in the analysis of specific phenomena. A "cultural" analysis is indeed performed on a basis of subjective data from a given object of inquiry, but it does not entail that an intellectual appraisal of the situations involved cannot be objective to impartial observers. (Weber, 1949, p. 49-112, esp. p. 76-85).

What, then, is "Confucianism" in the Weberian account? In the last chapter of Confucianism and Daoism (Weber, 1991, p. 193-208), Weber employs a comparative method to understand how Confucian and Protestant religious convictions, although sharing the same trend of "rationalization", diverged in terms of ethical, social and economic life. In Weber's terminology, "rationalization" was a prerequisite for the type of "capitalism" and "modernity" realized by Mainland European and Anglo-American societies– the success of Japanese Meiji reforms was not still evident enough to him. "Rational" social action means the one oriented by a matter-of-fact evaluation of means and ends, which de-transcendentalizes "ethics" to merge it with the "world". While not synonymous with secularization, it is a reorientation of life towards "this-worldly" goals. In the Western experience, as Weber knew it, "rationalization" culminated with the development of a number of institutions, that brought about "capitalism" and "modernity". Late Imperial China, however, did not develop the same set of institutions, despite sharing its own brand of "rationalization" (Weber, 1991, p. 96-99). Such an important example suffices to conclude that we are dealing with values embedded in a worldview that only make sense in a given social organization –Late Imperial China itself. In this sense, instead of looking for topical similarities and differences and arguing to what extent "Confucian China" could or could not devise its own path to "modernity" –"capitalistic" or of a new type, we should focus on the macrosocial dynamics that distinguish Late Imperial Confucianism and, subsequently, explain why Modern China has studiedly spurned such dynamics.

In our inquiry, "Confucianism" is defined as the main stratum and core of Chinese "Traditional (High) Culture", but is not the whole of it. Accordingly, Weber time and again distinguishes Confucianism (Orthodoxy) from the Daoist "Heterodoxy", on the one hand, and the "masses", on the other. He is also aware that there is a certain foreign, Buddhist stratum, although it was already completely sinified and had lost most of the sociopolitical relevance it had enjoyed about a thousand years before (Weber, 1991, p. 184-186). This is one indispensable interpretive key: one should depart from a clear understanding of what kind of social group represented "Confucianism". In a narrow sense, "Confucianism" is embodied by a small intellectual elite, the literati trained for bureaucratic work, who saw it as their exclusive calling to manage the Empire as the emperor's loyal servants. In a "programmatic statement" extremely relevant for Late Imperial Chinese society, Han Yu (768-824), a literatus-bureaucrat from mid-Tang dynasty, said that "In [Hallowed] Antiquity, there were four [groups] working [on governing] the people; in our [degenerate] times, there are six. In [Hallowed] Antiquity, there was one [group] indoctrinating the people; in our [degenerate] times, there are three. There is one [great] family of peasants, but there are six that eat the grain [they produce]; there is one [great] family of artisans, but there are six that use the objects [they make]. There is one [great] family of merchants, but there are six that obtain resources [from them]. No wonder the people has been impoverished and swindled!" (Han, 2019, p. 674). Hailing Antiquity as a model –the authority of choice, Han is advocating that only "Confucians" (his own group) should govern and indoctrinate the people, using bad arithmetic to make the point that Daoists and Buddhists put an excessive burden on the Empire's economy and "the people": peasants, artisans and merchants. In another level of the argument, this one based on (Ancient Chinese) common sense, Han claimed that "the people" would be better off having only one tightly-knit governing group than several (competing) ones. This another cherished argument by "Confucians": harmony through a certain type of consensus.

Mainland China's modern historiography sustains that the literati-bureaucrat ("Confucians") were an "(economic) class". That classification is not entirely accurate. They were primarily a status group, sandwiched between an even tinier elite of political insiders who created and inherited the dynasty, on the one hand, and almost the entire population, on the other. It is true that, especially with the expansion of the imperial exams and proselytization of Neoconfucian credo at the grassroots level in late Song dynasty, "Confucians" as a social group were potentially open to "new men" from ordinary families who managed to pass extremely selective official examinations. But that does

not really mean that the profound hierarchical divide between the "Confucian elite'" and "the people" was in any way bridged. As it should be expected, "bureaucrat-in-waiting" status took precedence over social background. Such a divide had been explained by Mencius (372-289 b.C.) since before Imperial unification, as he said that "some people work with their minds, some others with their bodies. The former govern; the latter are governed. Those who govern are fed; those who are govern feed. That is a commonsensical fact in All-Under-Heaven" (Mencius, 2000, p. 172-173).

In comparison, the distinction between literati-bureaucrats and the "aristocratic" elite was less radical than the one vis-à-vis "the people". The "aristocracy" counted the insiders of the current dynasty, including not only the oligarchy which founded it, but the more consequential newcomers who joined the inner-circle of power through links of marriage and patronage/clientelism, benefitting from privileges and exceptions. This is the template for the so-called "guanxi" practices that were mimicked by everyone else since immemorial times. In spite of the literati-bureaucrats highfalutin profession of moral truths, as a whole they tended to actually vie for becoming part of the "aristocracy" or, at least, to adhere to it, exerting a degree of soft influence, overtly through their "moral example", actually through their political skills (Weber, 1991, p. 132-135). Once again, we enlist the authority of Mencius, to show that such a social dynamic had been at work since pre-Imperial times: "there is the title of nobility bestowed by Heaven 天爵, and there is the one that man gives 人爵. Humanity, Duty, Loyalty, Trustfulness, finding happiness in doing good without becoming tired of it, that is Heavenly nobility. A dukedom, an office of minister, those who are born in the petty nobility 大夫, that is a mere human title. In [Hallowed] Antiquity, men cultivated their Heavenly nobility, and human nobility came as a result. In our [degenerate] times, men cultivate their Heavenly nobility, [using it as a means] to pursue human nobility" (Mencius, 2000, p. 371).

Since the basic political dynamics in history of the Chinese Empire has largely remained the top-down management of "the people" through a status group of literati-bureaucrats ("Confucians" in the narrow sense, for our purposes), we cannot dispense with the hypothesis that there must have been an overarching consensus about the role and legitimacy of such status group. Apologists, ancient and modern, like to stress the literati-bureaucrats' "moral credentials" and "wisdom" (problem-solving skills), but that is the voice of the converted, and held true only as long as such group was capable of enforcing such a consensus through their monopoly on education/indoctrination and the cooptation of provincial elites. Those conditions deteriorated and ostensibly

disappeared in the beginning of the XX Century, when the Imperial exams were cancelled. But that is not enough to explain the substance that gave long life to such consensus. Let us try to describe it objectively. In another of his deeper insights, Weber postulates that "rational ethics, as "Confucians" intended it, reduced tension against the "world" to a minimum, including both the religious devaluation and practical rejection of any such tension" (Weber, 1991, 194). Plainly said, "Confucians" pursued social harmony by instilling a broad acceptance of things as they were –starting from themselves. Even though it may be praised or criticized as a display of optimism or resignation, according to the case, Confucian reconciliation with the "world" is, more fundamentally, an ethic of obedience that works bottom-up, giving coherence to the top-down style of social management we have just referred.

Obedience is justified by Ancient China's structural veneration for hierarchy, on one hand, and by its basing social relations exclusively on duties, on the other. One of Confucius' (551-479 b.C.) famous sayings declares that "if you are not in charge of something, do not opine about how to manage its affairs". Notice that he addresses the issue of how literati-bureaucrats should behave regarding those ranked above themselves. Even though it does not preclude backstage maneuvering or factional competition, it advises against "public" debate beyond those directly involved within the small elite that was qualified in terms of rank and "erudition" to do so. The same kind of obedient detachment was expected of the masses, who, of course, could not possibly conceive of the inner workings of politico-bureaucratic affairs as their own business. Such an arrangement appealed to the masses self-interest, as passive stakeholders of the system. As the Mencius' quote above indicates, governance was in fact understood in a transactional manner. In its crude terms, the "brain workers" were supposed to manage institutions in order to guarantee a degree of stability, so that the "brawn workers" could mind their own business and "make ends meet", needless to say, obliging themselves to pay back the "brain workers" with their dues: "riches" and, even more importantly, "honor/face". From the "Confucian" point of view, and social practice as a whole, popular obedience also meant accepting their "teaching/indoctrination" 教 as a peaceable, and reasonable, way of doing things.

Let us first attempt to explain why and how it is peaceable. Another famous dictum of Confucius has him opposing the use of force to pacify social conflicts, reminding his superior that "if you want goodness, the people will be good. The 'Virtue' of a Noble Man 君子 is like the wind. The 'Virtue' of the Petty Man 小人 is like the grass. When the wind blows over the grass, it will bend accordingly" (Confucius, 2000a, p. 188). In this passage, "Noble Man"

can be read as a metonymy of "Government/Bureaucracy", whereas "Petty Man" can stand for the ruled, "the people". Between the lines, Confucius argues that "the people" will adjust their behavior according to the style of their leadership. More than wishful thinking, it is a critical evaluation of what is the customary behavior of "the people" –pursuing their self-interest in a calculated manner (as Weber would define, "rational in terms of ends and means"). For example, in one more passage of The Analects, "the people" are said to "reach below/understand lower things", which is traditionally explained as "pursuit of wealth and advantages". In order to harmonize society, Confucius recommends that the "Government/Bureaucracy" ought to altruistically "reach above/understand higher things", which is glossed by authoritative commentators as "Humanity/Sense of Duty", that is, moral perfection (Confucius, 2000a, p. 221-222). Once again, Confucius expresses his belief that social superiors should lead fostering a minimum of stability and perceived "justice", so that "the people" would act accordingly.

In reality as it was, even less enlightened, self-interested "Confucians" have traditionally flaunted their despise for the pursuit of advantages and profits characteristic of "the people". It was a sign of nobility that separated the highly literate from the commoners. However, from Late Song dynasty on, the same passage was reinterpreted by Neoconfucianism, hypostasizing "higher/lower things" into dogmatic truths, namely, the "Celestial Principle" and "Human Desires" (Confucius & Zhu, 2016, p. 156). It indicates that the social role of the literati-bureacrats was upgraded, on the one hand, to enforce ideological purity in its ranks, and, on the other, to see it as their task to convert "the people" to profess Confucian (as Weber prefers, "Orthodox") truths. It must be stressed that such an ideal about how to pacify social conflicts is valid under the terms of its own society and epoch. It is a "cultural truth" that would not make sense, for example, in the context of the "Conflict of the Orders" during the early stages of the Roman Republic. In contrast to "Confucian" "Rule by Virtue", it ultimately produced the Law of the XII Tables, with all its far-reaching political and legal implications in its own tradition (Livy, 1922, p. 192 ff.; Cicero, 1928, p. 166 ff.).

Second, let us attempt to explain why and how Chinese society as a whole ultimately acknowledged "Confucian" social "teaching/indoctrination" as reasonable. In that specific "cultural" context, accepting the world "as it is" meant elevating the natural pattern of affection between family members as an objective duty to be respected –even more because it was sacralized by ancestor worship. Consequently, correct management of family ties became a standard and universal obligation, to a level unparalleled in other world

civilizations. Although "Humaneness" 仁 was hailed by Confucius as the paramount of moral perfection, it was rarely attained to its highest degree and, as far as one can tell, remained an exclusive goal of those who wholeheartedly followed the "Confucian" discipline. In contrast, an element of it, "Filial Piety" 孝, could be universally demanded, and was indeed enforced by with ever increasing strength. Bluntly said, behaving "filially" meant "paying back" the parents for "giving life to oneself" (Confucius, 2000a, p. 275-277). While parents were alive, sons (and unmarried daughters) must serve them with unlimited obedience. After the parents died, their children were bound to observe a rigorous regime of mourning, being themselves "socially dead" as well –which means that even bureaucratic careers had to be interrupted, in principle, when someone went into mourning. After mourning duties were observed, regular sacrifices were necessary. The reasonability of the system was self-evident: children accepted it, under the expectation that they would be likewise served when came their turn to become parents. It was China's traditional system of "social security".

Imperial Chinese "Confucianism" presupposes a distinct social theory, according to which relations between the family and the State were seen both as contiguous and harmonious. It is a fact of undeniable significance that, in Ancient Chinese culture, "Filial Piety" uniquely lent itself as a template for political life. A very important passage of the Analects, edited as the second item of the entire compilation, claims that "someone who behaves 'filially' [as a son should behave towards his parents], and who behaves 'fraternally' [as a younger brother should behave towards his older brothers], he rarely violates [his duties] towards his social superiors" (Confucius, 2000a, p. 3-4). In Imperial China, this assumption was held as commonsensical. Indeed, "Confucian culture" had, at a very early stage, merged family and political hierarchies to become one, so that obligations towards one's parents should be, in theory, be the same towards one's ruler. A definitive evidence is the trope that the ruler is "Father and Mother of the People". "The Great Matrix" 洪範, a chapter of the authoritative Classic of Documents 書經, modernly dubbed "China's oldest constitutional document", proposes a set of "nine categories" 九疇, or standards of governance. The fifth is the "August Polarity" 皇極, which provides a certain explication about the nature of supreme political power. It concludes that "[when the] Son of Heaven behaves like Father and Mother of the People, [that is the way] through which he becomes King in All-Under-Heaven" (Confucius, 2000b, p. 364-369). In other words, the political office of Chinese Emperor was ideologically construed as that of someone who ruled his subjects patriarchally, providing for them not unlike the parents act towards

their children. Doubtlessly, once again, we are analyzing a particular "cultural truth", not found in other civilizations. For instance, the Roman Imperial title of "pater patriæ" and the medieval/pre-modern doctrine of "divine right of the kings", although similar with their Chinese counterpart at a first look, were in fact mostly ceremonial, lacking real consequences to how the masses conducted their private lives.

In Ancient China, however, there were material consequences for its style of governance. The Neoconfucian credo, that shaped Late Imperial values, instrumentalized the idea that the emperor is "Father and Mother of the People", transforming it into a premise of their worldview and, consequently, of political-bureaucratic work. The "Great Learning" 大學, a chapter of the canonical Record of the Rites 禮記, starts by spelling three grandiloquent means that must be mastered in order to undertake governmental work: "Understanding Virtue" 明德, "treating 'the people' as kin/renovating the People" 親民/新民, "abiding by The Highest Good" 止於至善. Then it states the ends, suggesting how "self-cultivation" 修身, "the ordering of the family" 齊家, "the government of the polity" 治國 and "pacification of All-Under-Heaven" 平天下 are connected as steps of a single process. Each step is essentially the same, but has a progressively wider circle of action. That is to say that there is no contradiction between the government of the self, the family, the bureaucracy and the Empire. The text then repeats basically the same series of steps again, but in reverse order, to suggest that the "Pacifier of All-Under-Heaven" also has to "govern the polity", "order his own family" and "cultivate himself" (Zeng & Zhu, 2016, p. 3-4). The text is not addressed exclusively to the emperor, regardless of its literal meaning, but to all who become involved in political-bureaucratic work. As this short Classic became compulsory reading to be memorized by anyone interested in taking imperial exams, it not only crystallized the elite's consensus, but also clearly "legislated" a moralized view of politics that mirrored family relations.

Seen as a whole, "Confucian" social theory is consistent, coherent and legitimate, once its "cultural truths" are objectively accounted for. However, that is not to say that, beyond its own particular environment, such a theory can aspire convincingly to universality. To give a brief example, Aristotle's (384-322 b.C.) Politics first book describes another type of social organization that is perceptibly inconsistent with "Confucianism". It surmises that both the family and the State are constituted from power relations (domination), but they differ in that, while families are governed by the pater-familias as a king is master over his subjects, citizens are "free" and "equal", being ruled for limited terms (1252a24ff). Given that men are "social beings", the

political community is "natural" and "precedes the family" (1253a18-20). Hence, "Economics" (household management by the pater-familias) follows a different pattern than "Politics" (collective management by citizens) (1255b18-20). Although Aristotle's discussion about the existence of masters and slaves "by nature" is dated, its "spirit" continues to make sense in Western culture: "economics" is a realm of exclusive particular interests, property is protected by law against other interests (1256a1-3). In another point that separates it from "Confucianism", Aristotle also does recognize a fundamental conflict of interests between the family and the State. On the one hand, there is the private urge to get rich that may encroach on the common good; on the other, there is a common need to guarantee a shared sense of "justice" or, to express it less dramatically, to establish a balance between private "enterprise" and public management (1257b32-35 and 1258a19-25).

This in an interesting backdrop to Chinese Imperial statecraft. The "Confucian" patriarchal moralization of politics would not have been feasible, had the Chinese Imperial polity not inherited a certain set of features from pre-Confucian times, that made the State a personal appanage of the ruling clan (and their partners). Mainland China's modern historiography defines such features with the term "Feudalism". For the same reasons that "Confucian" literati-bureaucrats are treated as an (economic) class, the term "Feudalism" is intended to approximate Ancient China's experience to the standard Marxist philosophy of history. Nonetheless, it remains an open question whether Marx's account of the development of "Modes of Production" is capable of reflecting the "Asiatic" economic experience in general, and, more specifically, that of the Chinese Empire –a question that has famously been framed by later Marxian theorists as the "Asiatic Mode of Production". A superficial reading of Foundations of the Critique of the Political Economy reveals that the conceptual framework adopted by Marx to interpret the development of "capitalism" does not meet Ancient China in its own terms. Marx does claim that his definition of "property" –a foundational concept on which depends the entire theory– applies to China (Marx, 1983, p. 403ff.), but neither he, nor Engels afterwards, devote much time to explicate how China in any way compares to the Western passage from Antiquity to Feudalism (Engels, 1962).

Conversely, Max Weber's theorization of "Bureaucratic Patrimonialism" is able to describe the Chinese Empire's power dynamics more faithfully (Weber, 1976, p. 580-611). Although the practice of infeudation existed in China, even having vestigial remains during the Late Empire, the fact that it was managed through an overarching patrimonial bureaucracy does differentiate it from the typically European form of Feudalism (decentralized administration based on

direct personal obligations between liege and vassal, mostly under the form of military service). All-Under-Heaven was treated as the ruling family's "oikos" and the Imperial bureaucracy was organized and legitimized as the Emperor's household administration. The palace was, at once, the Emperor's residence and the center of administration. Just like the famous couplet from the Classic of Poems 詩經 states, "All that is below the Heaven, there is no land that does not belong to the King/Along the shores of his land, there is no person who is not his servant" (Confucius, 2000c, p. 931-933). The authoritative Rites of Zhou 周禮 famously idealizes Chinese Ancient bureaucracy as the personal servants of the Son of Heaven, whose importance depends more on their physical proximity to their ruler than on their actual qualifications and attributions (Ji, 2000). Although the Imperial Bureaucracy would become more and more sophisticated, and that most officials would not serve the emperor in person and act in comparatively specialized offices, it does not invalidate the "cultural truth" that they were beholden, ritually, to imperial authority, as his servants 臣. In that sense, the entire bureaucracy, potentially, and "the people", actually, depended on their ruler's will, not necessarily in same guise as the Greco-Roman slaves being legally "disposable property" of their masters, but mirroring the situation of children regarding their parents under the frame of "Confucianism".

Of course, a higher degree of complexity is added when the bureaucracy acts as the intermediary between the emperor and his subjects. As wielders of imperial power, the literati-bureaucrats were supposed to govern by upholding strict standards of patriarchal morality, according to their credo. But nothing prevented such authority to be used to obtain patrimonial advantages, and here we arrive at a third feature of the Chinese Imperial polity, "Prebendalism". Indeed, there were features of "administrative rationalization": as a rule, bureaucratic office was non-hereditary; appointments were limited by terms and rotation; and, more importantly, salaries were based on an official's place in the hierarchy –that in Late Imperial China was organized as Nine Ranks and Eighteen Levels 九品十八正. Nonetheless, literati-bureaucrats adapted themselves to such situation, being fully aware that they should get the most out of their appointments while it lasted. The "Nine Ranks and Eighteen Levels" system was important to define "who is who" in bureaucratic life, but remained merely a reference to what every literatus-bureaucrat earned actually, as there were all sorts of emoluments linked to specific appointments– legitimate, grey area and illegitimate. Historical accounts and Confucian literature tended to emphasize the good, mentioning the bad only for didactic purposes, especially about someone or something which was to be seen as a counter-example.

But the reality must have been more mixed, since when literati-bureaucrats were posted away from the court as imperial magistrates, they were under a much slacker leash, even if we consider the existence of inspection bodies, because the main impediment to the enjoyment of bureaucratic power was social control among faction of bureaucrats competing against one another. When away from intrigues at the capital, not only were bureaucrats united through friendly relations and factions who looked after one another's interests, but, more decisively, local elites needed easy relations with imperial magistrates –hence the banquets, gifts, favors and marriage alliances. Even though "Confucian" edifying literature abhors such things and their "role-models" may actually have been true examples of incorruptibility, to their peers' eyes, it was a common-place that perquisites should be enjoined to a reasonable degree. In other words, the courtly practices known as "guanxi" were reproduced by literati-bureaucrats in office (Weber, 1991, p. 54-78).

The "patriarchal/patrimonial/prebendal" nature of the Chinese empire is the main source of the contradictions manifested in its economic life, which "Confucian" "teaching/indoctrination" could not solve. To get to the root of the issue, it was obviously much harder to make "the people" cultivate the same type of feelings towards their ruler as the ones they had "naturally" towards their biological parents. A simple example, endorsed by Confucius himself, is that children should shield their parents if they have committed a crime, protecting them against the authorities (Confucius, 2000a, p. 201). Even though it seems to have no apparent relation with economic behavior, one cannot deny that even Confucius admitted exceptions to the "law" –i.e. the will of the ruler. Consequently, the theory that the emperor is "Father and Mother of the People" is real and binding, until it is not anymore. This is something that "Confucianism" could never admit openly, because, in the last analysis, it provided legitimacy to the only system it recognized and was legitimized back by it. A classic example of this dilemma is Mencius' carefully dubious response to whether a reigning ruler could become the target of regicide or not (Mencius, 2000, p. 64-65).

Hence, there is a double pattern when it comes to economic behavior: one is dogmatic, prescribed by Confucian "teaching/indoctrination" and enforced through imperial institutions; the other is pragmatic, demonstrated by how "the people" responds to the first. Both aim at "getting rich". Confucius himself did not oppose "getting rich through proper means" as a bureaucrat, vouching for the dogmatic pattern, but, surprisingly, did concede that enriching oneself was not unconscionable outside a bureaucratic career, nodding coyly to the pragmatic way (Confucius, 2000a, p. 52-53 and 98).

Let us try to understand the dogmatic pattern first. To the "Confucian" elite, wealth was the unmentioned link among the three signs of success in life: prosperity, bureaucratic rank and long life 福祿壽. The means of choice to "get rich" was competition for prebends (Weber, 1991, p. 170). As a privileged small minority, the literati-bureaucrats could enjoy a certain stability and affluence in their jobs, as long as they were perceived as delivering their responsibilities, while remaining in good terms with whatever group controlled the threads of political power. Consequently, personal reputation and participation in a strong party were the main sources of protection, as a bureaucrat's patrimony could be confiscated if there was suspicion of missteps, either personal or of the network he belonged to. During the entire imperial era, land property (and rent) was the only kind of wealth that was socially respectable. Bluntly said, "Confucianism" did not encourage entrepreneurship, as understood modernly. To quote a basic principle, Mencius begins with a famous jeremiad against rulers who want to "seek advantages" 利 to their states, advocating, on the contrary, that they should do what was "dutiful" 義 (Mencius, 2000, p. 2-6). Leaving aside the philosophical minutiae, "duty" represented the moral obligations derived from social hierarchy, which promoted harmony in the State. "Advantages", contrariwise, were normally linked to private benefit 私 which harmed the "public good" 公. Needless to say, "private" is a derogatory term to "Confucianism". Interestingly, the modern Chinese words "profit" 利潤, "interest" 利息, "benefit" 利益 and even "right" 權利 share the character of "seeking (personal) advantage". That shows how Chinese culture has changed over the last hundred years, even though a certain brand of modern "Confucianism" equivocates the issue.

In contrast to rentier landholding, "Confucianism" looked down on "industry" and "trade", based on social and ideological reasons. In Ancient China's setting, the notion of "industry" concerns the work the artisans 工, a status as low as the peasants' in "Confucian" eyes. Literati-bureaucrats were not particularly interested in technical issues, which explains the small proportion of books about them and justifies why those who exist rank so low in Ancient Chinese bibliographical hierarchy, unless they were in any way linked to the management of the emperor's oikos. Therefore, any attempt to theorize about "the roots of Chinese industrialism" in the Late Empire, or even before, is bound to face severe headwinds: it had never been valued as a "Confucian" mainstream pursuit. The relationship between "Confucianism" and trade was much more complicated. No matter how useful they were to the State, merchants became very rich, causing jealousy among the literati-bureaucrats and, more dangerously, an enticing alternative to the "Confucian"

way of life, leading "the people" astray. That is why, like Buddhism (the main corporative competitor of the literati-bureaucrats for imperial prebends), merchants were the target of heavy-handed criticism and ceremonial punishment, when necessary. Overtly, "Confucianism" praised the peasants as "backbone of the State" 本 and the truly noble calling understandably, since they were the source of grain (i.e., money) and taxes for the State (and themselves). It did not matter that Confucius thought it below himself to study agricultural techniques and practice them (Confucius, 2000a, p. 194-196): the goal was to diminish and stigmatize the merchants. The historical precedent about how to keep traders under check can be found in the earliest treatment of the imperial economic life and institutions, the chapter "On Food and Wares" of the Book of Han. After giving them free rein to circulate (and accumulate) wealth in the beginning of the dynasty, Han bureaucracy singled merchants out for causing rising prices, scarcity of goods and land accumulation, justifying imperial intervention, regulation and price/stock controls (Jin, 1986, p. 81-91).

Although social prejudice against merchants remained a structural element in "Confucianism", the situation in Late Imperial China was even more complex than in Han times. On the one hand, while political power (as a rule) remained within the court in the North, the demographic and economic heart of the empire was in the South. For historical, geographical and institutional reasons, "the people" from the South was more open to trade and industry, thriving in the spirit of hard work and acquisitiveness that has characterized the Chinese people in many foreign eyes, including Max Weber's. That lends a certain substance to the argument defended by Mainland Chinese historiography, according to which, in the Late Empire, the Chinese economy advanced to a stage called "commodity economy" 商品經濟, based in the South. The same theory is aware of a new phenomenon, in which old bureaucratic elites entered in alliance with a new rising stratum, producing a "class" of "bureaucrat-merchants" 官商 sharing vested interests. Once again, there is truth to it, but the theory is misguided in that, when "culture" was accounted, the system was more an adaptation of "Confucianism", and its statecraft, than an advance towards something wholly new. A good evidence is that wealthy families and prosperous villages still focused their resources in training the most talented children to pass the exams and become literati-bureaucrats, instead of making them inherit the family business, which would be a stimulus to innovate its model. Of course, the calculus of having "in-house bureaucrats" ultimately was to protect their interests and wealth through guanxi networks. Proving our point, the newly drafted imperial servant had

to part ways with his family business, as he could not be seen practicing trade by his literati-bureaucrat peers. As one can imagine, the wealth he acquired was bound to be channeled to land (and rent).

Now we can take a closer look at the pragmatic pattern, that would have represented the best hope of a "modernizing" force. As argued above, "Confucianism" holds "the people" to lower moral standards, giving them leeway to engage in economic activities and practices deemed improper to the elite literati-bureaucrats. It is stimulating to think that, because of such permissiveness, it was "the people" that promoted Chinese economic success across the ages, despite "Confucianism", not because of it. But even if that is proved true, the "pragmatic" pattern should not be considered independent from its "dogmatic" counterpart. One reason is that "the people" merely reacts pragmatically to imperial policies, in its only chance to break barriers against joining the elite. As Weber tersely, and sharply, implies, "economic policy" in Imperial China alternated between two main outlooks: laissez-faire and fiscalism (Weber, 1991, p. 200-201). Even though the example provided comes from a short period between Early Han and Emperor Wu's reign, it can be fairly taken as representative for the entire imperial age, given that, in the Late Empire, there was nothing compatible with modern theory driven policy. A summary comparison of the chapters "On Food and Wares" from the Book of Han and from the History of Ming, the latter published in mid-XVIII century, makes it clear that the conceptual apparatus to describe economic life had not changed substantially. The order of subjects in the Ming treatise reveals that the so-called "commodity economy" was unable to influence the essentially patrimonial nature of the economic order: land/peasant register; taxation; granaries/canals; laws on salt and tea; coinage/mining; wood/coal/pearls/fabric (Li, 1982). It should be stressed that the main economic problem was how to provide for the needs of the court at the capital, presupposing its unbounded control over the entire territory and resources of the empire. It does not matter if reality was indeed more nuanced: the text defines a traditional ideal of governance.

Consequently, despite being opposite to each other, laissez-faire and fiscalism were two tools oriented towards the same patrimonial/prebendal goals and verbalized through the same "Confucian" paternalistic doctrine of statecraft. Accepting that framework, "the people" reacted pragmatically to either policies, seizing opportunities to "get rich" fast (laissez-faire) and finding ways to get away from "unreasonable" fiscal duties (fiscalism). We can safely imagine that wealth in the long run was secure only through guanxi ties, or, even better, a relative in a high position. Otherwise, in difficult times, both

policies could lead to either cut-throat competition or the whims of a greedy taxman. One stimulating evidence that supports our broad generalization, mentioned by Weber, is the proverbial mistrust among "the people", that could be explained by the popular reaction to "Confucianism". In his words: "there was universal distrust of all against all, a consequence of the official autocratic control of conventional dishonesty and the single-minded safeguarding of the Confucian sense of 'face'". At the same time, Weber remarks that when "the people" engaged in trade with partners abroad, they displayed exemplary integrity, as demanded by their interests (Weber, 1991, p. 200).

There is another reason to consider the "pragmatic" and the "dogmatic" patterns together. Max Weber apprehends the essence of "Confucian" social philosophy when he argues that the most consequential unit of economic action is neither the individual, nor the household, but the clan. The attempt to invalidate his judgment based on the fact that the clan was less relevant in the North is off the point. As mentioned above, the South not only was far better off than the North, but, most importantly, any hypothesis that China had an endogenous path to modernity relies on Southern dynamism and its openness to international trade. To our purposes, it matters that the clan absorbed "Confucian" doctrine and mutated it into familism. Unlike other "cultures", the Chinese clan complied to Imperial ideology –after all, the emperor was part of a clan himself– and payed lip service to the ideology of the "Father and Mother of the People". Key to such harmonious coexistence with "the imperial State" was the central tenet of "Filial Piety". Not unlike other "cultures", however, the Chinese clan pursued its own goals ferociously. The result is there were no "capitalistic" relations in China –as they were understood in the early XX Century. Inwardly, the clan had a strong sense of mutual loyalty based on blood ties and generational hierarchy, which allowed it to define and pursue collective goals. However, it was not, in any way, a corporative organization. The system was the culprit: The State could not, because of its patrimonial/prebendal nature, allow for an impersonal legal order– there were no true guarantees against the State, no limits to its power. And the clans, because of familism, could not coordinate themselves by reaching a broad consensus on rules, moving towards something analogous to a lex mercatoria (Weber, 1991, p. 96-110).

In conclusion, the imperial polity proved itself indispensable to keep order and harmony in China during more than two thousand years. This goal was attained through what we have defined as "Confucianism", a social system which did not differentiate between the realms of "politics" and "economics". If "morality" is perceived nowadays as mostly a set of values oriented to influence

human behavior, in Ancient China it was institutionalized, shaping not only the life of the family, but, most importantly, binding it to the functioning of the State. In hindsight, consequences of the wholesale dismounting of the imperial institutions were too deep to have "Confucianism" separated surgically from the statecraft model rejected by Chinese Nationalism and its relentless pursuit of Modernization during the XX century. Although it is possible to speak about "Confucianism" in a subdued, "philosophical" and "ecumenical" sense, in all likelihood, it is intellectually misleading. Consequently, we understand that it is necessary first come to terms with the reasons for which China has adopted a "republican" form of government and, as of today, for keeping Socialism as its official State ideology (Lin, 2022).

IV. WHAT IS THE PLACE OF "CONFUCIAN CULTURE" IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA? A SUMMARY DISCUSSION

Under the definition explored above, "Confucianism" ceased to exist when the link between imperial statecraft and social elites was shattered to pieces in the last two decades of the XIX Century. Of course, some other issues blur the problem, such as anti-Manchu resentment, foreign encroachment and domestic administrative inefficiencies, that seem to spare "Confucianism" as an "ideal" or, at least, as "thought", like modern Confucian thinkers tend to portray. Nevertheless, "Confucianism", understood as an entire social system, had managed to adapt and prevail against analogous challenges in the past, when previous dynasties faced their final crises and literati-bureaucrats were expelled from the Chinese heartland and/or became ruled by foreign peoples (whom they served, in the end). In Late Qing, it was the patriarchal/patrimonial/prebendal institutions that unraveled, erasing the status so much coveted by literati-bureaucrats, depriving them from their source of power and contradicting their worldview from its foundations. It is noticeable that the most influential progressive intellectuals born after 1880 –e.g. Lu Xun (1881-1936), Li Dazhao (1889-1927), Hu Shi (1891-1962), etc.– had a critical attitude towards Late Imperial "Confucianism" which was unintelligible even to their elders from the generation of the 1870s. The key differences were that those intellectuals who matured in the beginning of the Republican Period could not bet their future on the imperial exams; they were the first to study under a Westernized "middle school" curriculum; and they seized unprecedented opportunities for intellectuals in Chinese history: to live and study abroad.

These apparently "microhistorical" changes had far-reaching consequences to Chinese modernization. Firstly, intellectuals could not expect to make a living out of memorizing Confucian textbooks anymore, situation which effectively de-canonized the Five Orthodox (Confucian) Classics and, more deeply, precluded the entire system of ready-made truths and precedents on which literati-bureaucrats relied to get things going in All Under Heaven. Secondly, despite its flaws, the new curriculum imparted new modes of reasoning which were at odds with Confucian scholasticism. It is true that early Republican scholars in the "humanities" were heavily indebted to Qing dynasty "evidential scholarship" 考證 –the last blooming of Confucian erudition. But, in the long run, they had to come to terms with competition from new areas of thought, the social and hard sciences. Unlike the humanities, they had no easy parallel in Imperial China's intellectual "culture", thereby breaking through embedded assumptions of how to understand and deal with reality. Thirdly, it does not matter that Chinese intellectuals continued to speak in the old, familiar terms about their own "culture". The very fact that they took the difficult decision to go abroad demonstrated that "Confucian" learning was not the gold standard that separated civilization and barbarism anymore. It is understandable that most of these Chinese new intellectuals would attempt to rebuild their "culture" under the assumption that it had something that others lacked. But the battle-cry to "combine Chinese and foreign knowledge", departing from Western tools of methodology and science, also proves the opposite: that "Confucian culture" was found wanting something as well. One single thread runs through these three differences: the "Confucian" imperial state apparatus of old was not there to coopt Chinese intellectuals, preventing them from seeing things for themselves and experimenting with new paths to modernize their country.

That being said, millennia of "Confucian culture" could not, and did not, disappear in a century. We can summarize three essential forms through which it continued to exert influence:

Firstly, in a structural sense, the two fundamental features of the Chinese polity have remained untouched and, in our opinion, could not have been otherwise. On the one hand, the nature of its political power, characterized by concentration and centralization. On the other, the means through which the country is managed: bureaucratic government, that traditionally excels in the coordination of collective work on a grand scale. There were experiments and innovations, but we can say with confidence that they mostly built upon these two features. We must acknowledge that it was millennia of "Confucianism" that have made China a unique sociopolitical construct, a

civilization in itself, qualitatively different from the others. Still, modern China is unlike the "Confucian" empire, because its form of government, its method of political succession, the role of the Party vis-à-vis the bureaucracy in a narrow sense, the basic content and orientation of its ideology etc. have changed in decisive ways.

The second form of "Confucian" influence is intellectual, through "Confucian voices" in Chinese public debate. Early in the Republican period there were conservative voices that looked behind positively to an idealized "Confucianism", as a source of wisdom and "cultural" pride. Even then, it was rarely taken as a reference for policy and even less as a social model. Gu Hongming (1857-1928) was the exception that proved the rule. Later on, as the Kuomintang "turned right", important figures related to modern Confucianism, such as Liang Shuming (1893-1988), Feng Youlan (1895-1980), etc. did not achieve mainstream political recognition. Even if a Confucian thinker and his school were to be anointed as "official", though, such "Confucian revival" would be very limited indeed, without a set of Orthodox ("Confucian") Classics being authorized as equal or superior to the official State doctrine –which was highly unlikely.

The third form of "Confucian" influence was the real-life patterns of behavior and values. During the Early Republican period, such patterns were untouched in the countryside, which then meant almost the entire Chinese population. Peasants were more tenaciously attached to the old ways, in which their lives fitted well. But those behavior and values were precisely the "common enemy" of the emerging new intellectual elites, not properly because of their ingrained sense of superiority vis-à-vis the "uncultured", but mostly because it reminded them of what were considered the reasons for China's backwardness. To the "New Culture" movement, "Confucianism" was associated with foot-binding, arranged marriages, paternal/imperial autocracy, superstition and so on. What some considered the traditional "ethical" tenets of the Chinese people would be interpreted as the grounds, in the "New Culture's" parlance, for China lacking "science and democracy".

After these common-sense, general considerations, it is evident that, if "Confucian culture" has played any role in the early moments of Chinese modernization, it was preponderantly a negative role. That is easily evidenced by contemporary accounts. Despite the fact that there were several strands of though in the early 1920s, it is more useful to focus on the doctrine that ultimately prevailed: Socialism. Not only it was embraced by the most authoritative portion of the new Chinese intellectuals active in Mainland China during the late 1920s and after, but it was also extremely effective

in confirming itself as the heir of two largely urban movements: the "New Culture" and Sun Yat-Sen's Republicanism with Chinese characteristics. Besides, through Mao Zedong's organizational strategy, Socialism became the ideological orientation of the peasant masses, achieving a widely-shared support that compensated for CCP's disadvantages regarding the Kuomintang. This is the shorter explanation as to why the CCP managed to become the legitimate founder and ruler of the People's Republic of China (PRC), in the eyes of Mainland Chinese inhabitants. To return to our question: even before the CCP had enough organizational clout, leftist intellectuals had already made the "Confucian heritage" redundant, replacing it with a new view of society and culture that legitimated China's later pursuit of modernization.

The keyword to such change was "revolution". In imperial times, the "Confucian" term 革命 conveyed the passage of the "Mandate of Heaven" from a decadent dynasty to a new clan. It went without saying that the political and social order was bound to remain the same, because institutions inspired by the Orthodox ("Confucian") Classics were sacrosanct. In the early XX Century, however, the adoption of the Republican form was expected to mean a Western-style "revolution", modelled after the French events of 1789. In the end, the Xinhai Revolution of 1911 stayed below the expectations of the new intellectuals, as power turned to the Beiyang Regime that controlled the capital and its environs. Beiyang leaders were inacceptable because they were high officials of the imperial court and commanders of the modernized armed forces that the house of Qing had been organizing before its downfall shortly after Cixi dowager's death (1835-1908). In time, Socialism vindicated those repressed expectations through a radical doctrine inspired by Russian Anarcho-communists and oriented to the total transformation of social relations, which had been the nerve center of "Confucian culture" all along. Consequently, as a revolutionary movement, Socialism was hostile not only against the "Confucianism" of the Late Empire, but to its vestigial survival under the Republic too.

In order to illustrate our argument, we will summarize the CCP's attitude regarding China's "Confucian" heritage, describing the ideas that prepared its foundation and those that oriented policy in the first decades of the People's Republic of China. To this end, we will focus on two characters that have arguably played a pivotal role in the CCP's ideology and policy.

The first one is Chen Duxiu (1879-1942), who became the CCP's first Secretary after its foundation in July 1921. More a man of action than an intellectual, Chen was as an anti-Manchu radical agitator who began his career as a "community organizer" and then became a link in the coalition

of progressive forces that ultimately coalesced under Sun Yat-Sen (1866-1925). He accepted an invitation to join Peking University (PKU) as "dean of humanities" in 1917. The president, Cai Yuanpei (1868-1940), was a first echelon associate of Sun's, who took the mission of transforming Peking University into a united front for anti-Beiyang "new republicanism". Chen is known for instrumentalizing "New Youth", a "literary magazine" he had created two years before in the foreign-controlled Shanghai, to showcase modernizing ideas of social reform, at the same time that he attacked the conservative forces that backed Beiyang. Nevertheless, "New Youth's" editorial board would suffer a serious parting of ways in 1919, as Chen and a close ally, Li Dazhao, went on to introduce Marxism-Leninism and push for it with increasing strength, under the Komintern's orientation. That may be seen as the beginning of a rift between right and left in Chinese modern intellectual life.

Starting from October 1916, Chen wrote a number of articles and open letters that attacked "Confucianism". The context mattered. Yuan Shikai (1859-1916), the leader of a coalition of military groups collectively known as Beiyang who had been China's leader since the Xinhai Revolution, had died in June. He had attempted to reinstate monarchical rule a few months before his death, with support from conservative, "Confucian"-minded, forces. Although he never articulates it systematically, Chen Duxiu rejects "Confucianism" on three levels. In the first text of the series, he emphasizes that as unacceptable as restoring the "Confucian" monarchy was, there was no middle ground between a republican form of state and the old Chinese ideology, even if preserved as a system of "religious" observances. But not only, he was also categorical about the incompatibility between modern needs and "Confucianism" as the "thought" recorded the Orthodox ("Confucian") Classics (Chen, 2012, p. 170-174). An even more devastating attack was delivered in December that year, in a famous text called "The Dao of Confucius and Modern Life". In it, Chen retrospectively blamed "Confucians" of the old frame for bringing catastrophe on China with the Sino-Japanese war of 1894, because of their clinging to old ideas. "Confucianism" was described as "teachings that do not advance with the times", which served to affirm, in contrary sense, the credo of evolutionism shared by the new Chinese intellectuals. He makes it clear that the conservative wing was wrong in believing that Confucius' ideas were still applicable to the XX Century. Modern life demanded knowledge that "Confucian" Imperial China lacked, such as in the fields of economics and ethics, capable of promoting the material development of the people. A long discussion around the issue of individualism puts it beyond doubt that "Confucianism" was useless even in its most cherished moral doctrine (Chen,

2012, p. 184-191). These two texts, which deal with wider, institutional, subjects are a convenient backdrop for the debate on social issues that occupied a considerable proportion of "New Youth". Among them, Chen and other collaborators largely agreed on the importance mass education through a new written language, female emancipation, filial independence, etc. It goes without saying that not only the theory, but also the practice of Late Imperial "Confucianism" was repudiated.

The second character is Mao Zedong (1893-1976), who needs no introductions. Born in the 1890s in a well-to-do provincial family which, allegedly, had no successful involvement in the imperial exams, he was similar to the "new intellectuals" of his generation for having received a mixed education –first letters under an old-style tutor and middle school under a Westernized curriculum. However, Mao differed from them in that he did not study abroad (and found an elite governmental job after he came back). Instead, he went to university at home, while becoming involved since early in political activism as a high-school teacher. Because of guanxi-networks, Mao made his way to PKU, where he approximated Li Dazhao, who was China's foremost scholar and believer in Marxism. Under such influences and guided by his own vision, he went back to his province where he commanded a node of the then underground network of communist branches. Ideologically, he went beyond Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao because he continued in the movement after the late 1920s –Li was executed in 1927 and Chen was expelled from the CCP in 1929. In hindsight, his epiphany of taking the revolution to the masses was the single most important contribution to Communist theory and to Chinese revolutionary practice.

It is under this framework that his attitude towards "Confucianism" should be assessed. Mao was the leader of the CCP for about forty years, being arguably one of protagonists of Chinese history in the XX Century and conspicuously the main policymaker during the first and most arduous stages of his country's modernization. There is no doubt that Marxism-Leninism, as he understood it, constituted his basic intellectual outlook. In order to study his ideas about "culture", it is useful to refer to his famous 1940's essay entitled "China's New Democracy", arguably the most important about the topic. It remained relevant to Chinese cultural life and was frequently quoted at least until the beginning of the "Reform and Opening-up" period. The central element of his vision of "culture" was that China also needed a revolution in that field. Since Mao believed that "culture" was the product of a certain arrangement of economic forces, that manifested themselves in its politics, it was necessary to extirpate the "old, reactionary elements", that he

linked to Chinese "feudal" (i.e. imperial) past. The solution, in a first stage, was to promote "a new democracy, with Chinese characteristics", that would benefit from being a part of USSR-led "World Revolution". It is worthwhile to notice the appeal to foreign elements, that would somehow be continued, in a different geopolitical setting, under "Reform and Opening-up". Mao then explains what social forces would have no place in his New China, one of which he names "the sect of the [capitalist] stubborns". Here is where he famously mentions that "the feudal system of thought and its social institutions are a thing for the museums", reaffirming the intellectual consensus from the "New Culture" movement. Conversely, when describing what the "culture" of "China's New Democracy" should be, he decries "Imperialist influences" that have infiltrated China since capitalism was forcibly introduced into the country. We surmise that the anti-foreign element is more than an atavism, because it tallies with the rejection of Chinese "old feudal culture". It was because of its weakness, that Late Imperial China fell pray to whom Mao denominates "Imperialist countries". As a conclusion, the essay determines that, in the future, Chinese culture should go beyond the lines defined by the Movement May 4th ("Science and Democracy"), to include the worldview of Communism and its cultural revolution, oriented at combatting both foreign imperialism and domestic "feudalism" (Mao, 1964, p. 655-702). References to "Confucianism" are nowhere to be found, which is not a simple omission. Mao's attitude can be inferred from the lavish praise he gives to Lu Xun as the model for China's cultural awakening. He lauds Lu for having not shirked from the task of writing about the shortcomings of the Chinese character, "with no hint of cowardice or sycophancy". Indeed, Lu Xun became famous for his open criticism of Chinese "feudal" society, with satirical attacks against institutional "Confucianism". As one can assert from spontaneous demands in the 1920s, it is not a paradox that "new intellectuals" wanted to get rid of the old, after having being trained in "Confucianism" as children.

After a decade of internal struggle, "Reform and Opening-up" toned down the revolutionary fervor of Mao Zedong's thought, but, as far as we could ascertain, there was no major reorientation in terms of the CCP's attitude regarding "Confucianism". Recently, there is a new trend to indicate that Deng Xiaoping's (1904-1997) emphasis on "with Chinese characteristics" is, somehow, an opening to the reassessment of autochthonous ideas. To be sure, as far as "Confucianism" is concerned, Deng does not seem to have offered much of an explanation about how it can be harmonized to Socialism (Kong & Kong, 2024). The only important adoption of a "Confucian" concept made by Deng seems to be his allusion to the concept of "moderately prosperous

society" 小康社會, that became a policy goal in the "Reform and Opening-up" era until the end of the XX Century and beginning of the new one, that is, a critical period for the "economic miracle". That concept is found in a chapter called "the uses of the Rites" 禮運, from the canonical Record of the Rites. Deng mentioned it for the first time during his meeting with then Japanese Prime-minister Ohara Masayoshi in 1979 (Le & Qin, 2016). Even so, it is necessary to stress that, unlike the original "Confucian" understanding, Deng uses the term regarding the future, as a policy. The Record of Rites quotes it as a narrative about a golden age lost in the past.

Since 2012, the PRC has entered another period of its history, whose features have become clearer after the Covid-19 Pandemic. In the economic realm, there are new dynamics that differentiate the "New Era" from the previous period. That being the case, we do not consider China's recent achievements as part of the "economic miracle", even if the target of national rejuvenation is one reasonable orientation to "Reform and Opening-up". Regarding our current discussion, it is interesting that "Traditional Culture" has become a hot topic in the CCP's recent discourse and policy. In 2017, Xi Jinping declared a new guideline, to undertake the "Two Transformations", which not only is a theoretical upgrade to the Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, but is also a means to adapt China to its new international and domestic realities. The two are broadly described as "Creative conversion and innovative development". It remains between the lines that the object of the first term ("creative conversion") is the originally foreign doctrine of Socialism, and of the second ("innovative development") is the originally autochthonous knowledges and practices still denominated "Traditional Culture". In any case, the "Two Transformations" 兩創 purport to make China a "Cultural Superpower" (Li, 2017). A few years later, in 2022, Xi complemented the previous guideline with a call to implement "Two Combinations" 兩個結合. Simply said, it means to combine Socialism with Chinese characteristics and "Traditional Culture", in order to "make Socialism become [entirely] Chinese and make 'Traditional Culture' become modern". Considered all the complexities narrated and discussed above, the "Two Combinations" is quite self-aware, since it stresses at every point that Socialism remains China's doctrine of State and that any input from "Traditional Culture" should be mostly utilitarian ("it must serve our present needs"), and subject to careful selection ("only the best part of it", "not those aspects that have become outdated") (Guo, 2023). At this juncture, it is useful to point out that a great re-elaboration of Chinese self-description, especially regarding its past, is in course. What elements should be rehabilitated, what should not, is a work in progress (Wong, 2024).

Prudence demands that nothing should be excluded in principle, as some of China's current challenges –particularly the demographic conundrum– may well demand some sort of piecemeal, creative "Confucian revival", not without its perplexities.

As a conclusion, it is fitting that we ask, what kind of role will be played by Confucianism, in terms of statecraft, on behalf of the "rejuvenation of the Chinese people"? Part of it is already visible: it will continue to be an argument for China's proud self-assertion at home, dubbed "cultural self-assurance" (Yang, 2023), and a claim to soft-power abroad through the "Harmony/Cooperation" duality (Liu, 2018). Evidently, this has little to do with a strategy for economic development per se. Beyond that, we humbly recognize that we do not know. What we do know is that, until recently, Chinese modernization could be explained as a reaction against "Confucianism", if we define it as a concrete set of institutions, as a social system, as a historical product of Chinese "culture" –before it clashed with Western-led, capitalist World System.

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