

## **Confusing Confucianism With Capitalism: Culture As Impediment And/Or Stimulus To Chinese Economic Development**

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### **Abstract:**

This paper focuses on how Confucianism has been perceived by China scholars in the past and in the present as either an impediment or a stimulus to the development of capitalism in China. The former outlook was popular with post-World War II modernization specialists such as the Harvard University-based sociologist Talcott Parsons who had great influence on his contemporary, John K. Fairbank, the founder of modern China studies in the USA. Fairbank's preoccupation with China's 'failure' to respond in the nineteenth century to stimuli associated with Western nations' presence there reflected Parsons' premise of the centrality of cultural determinism. Fairbank linked China's inability to modernize to Confucian static traditional values that inhibited change. In contrast, the 'Confucianism as stimulus' viewpoint has been favoured by late twentieth century social scientists and historians eager to explain the success of East Asian economies in the 1980s and 1990s as attributable to 'core' Confucian values of hard work and thrift, the so-called 'Confucian ethic'. Turning Weber's theory of religious inner worldliness on its head, scholars such as Yu Yingshi have argued that the Confucian ethic has nurtured the triumph of successful business enterprise since the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). This paper explores the boundaries by which both views of the culture factor to the Chinese economy have abstracted Confucianism and argues that neither reductionism nor the timeless mystification of cultural traits is an effective means to differentiate the intricacies and complexities of China's experiences with the particular habits and practices ascribed to capitalism.

## **Introduction: The Problem of a Cultural Legacy**

Since the 1980s when East Asian economic achievement became something of a media sensation, social theorists and historians in both sides of the Pacific Ocean have analysed, and to a certain extent debated, the significance of Confucianism to that success story. Among the first observers to communicate in the press about this cultural factor was the distinguished China scholar Roderick Macfarquhar who wrote an article in *The Economist* (February 9, 1980) entitled "The Post-Confucian Challenge." Like other social scientists, including Peter Berger and Herman Kahn, witnessing the phenomenal economic growth in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and South Korea by the end of the 1970s, he suggested here that there was some connection between ideological/religious doctrine, i.e. Confucianism, and economic activity, i.e. capitalism. This evaluation of Confucianism as a positive factor in economic development was certainly a major intellectual shift from earlier opinions that dismissed Confucian teaching's relevance to modernization, and more commonly, viewed the creed as an impediment to the development of industrial capitalism.

The endorsement of Confucianism, or more precisely cultural values associated with the Confucian doctrine, became a global movement. In the late 1970s, a number of North American academics who were former students of Neo-Confucian philosophy masters in Hong Kong and Taiwan, seized the opportunity of the People's Republic of China's (PRC) newly-instituted *gaige kaifang* (reform and opening up) strategy to cultivate and promote an historical genealogy which tied that current policy to commercial practices of sixteenth-century China (Yü 1984; cf. Brook 1997; Zurndorfer 1997). In the 1980s, the governments of Taiwan, Singapore, and South Korea gave official approval of Confucian values as a collective guide to economic practices, and by the 1990s, the PRC authorities sanctioned historical Confucianism a major

component of China's intellectual tradition and modern-day economic progress. It became common during that decade to find in the PRC's official newspaper, the *People's Daily*, articles praising business leaders as *rushang* (Confucian entrepreneurs). On the occasion of the PRC's forty-fifth anniversary, in October 1994, an international conference was held in Beijing where various official and semi-official organizations from Singapore, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, the United States, and Germany were invited. This meeting inaugurated a new organization, the International Society of Confucianism, with the former Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and Gu Mu, a former Chinese vice premier, elected honorary president, and vice-president, respectively. Thus, it would seem that by the end of the twentieth century the PRC had aligned itself with traditional anti-communist ideologues in a purportedly non-political discourse that ultimately linked present-day economic initiative in a globalized capitalist world with a 2000-year old cultural legacy.

Such a reversal leads one to ask how could Confucianism become the object of celebration as a force for change? Before answering this question, one needs to distinguish what is meant by Confucianism, an expression which itself is a Western invention traceable to the Jesuits in late imperial China (Jensen 1998). Historically, Confucianism served as a set of political ideals exercised within a hierarchy of ethical obligations to family and community. Nowadays, in its 'born-again' version, Confucianism has taken on other attributes which may recall the doctrine's original texts, but it is not the mirror replica of historical Confucianism. Looking for motivational factors to account for the East Asian 'miracle', the revisionists assess Confucianism as 'this worldly' and link particular concepts from the historical variant to economic behaviour, e.g. *xin* (trustfulness), *cheng* (sincerity), and *ren* (humaneness), or *zhong* (loyalty), qualities that aid the business person's standing and efficacy.

They apply the label 'Confucian' to a whole range of cultural values primarily on the basis that these traits have a certain 'Chineseness', e.g. pragmatism, harmony, reverence for one's family, acceptance of hierarchical social structures, concern with shame and 'face'.

In this way a number of concepts associated with historical Confucianism have become major components in the explication of regional economic dynamism. Some observers have written about a new doctrine, 'capitalist Confucianism' or 'Confucian capitalism' (*rujiao ziben zhuyi*) to describe the association of Confucianism with East Asia's free-market economy. The irony of this recent reappraisal of Confucian values is that it is these same qualities such as loyalty to one's family which made historians, social scientists, and not least Chinese intellectuals themselves, in the past regard Confucianism as an impediment in the modern transformation of the Chinese economy and the process of institutionalising capitalism. In sum, one is left confused about the relationship between Confucianism and capitalism. In this paper, we shall attempt to unravel the cultural ties which seemed to bind Confucianism to capitalism.

### **The Flip-Flop History of Confucianism and Capitalism**

As noted above, there is a sharp contrast between what is said about Confucianism and economic dynamism nowadays and those pronouncements made about this matter in the middle of the last century. During the 1950s and early 60s, PRC historians attributed China's faltering development in the face of Western encroachment before the twentieth century to a 'feudal, backward, complacent society' which could nurture only nascent capitalist tendencies, the so-called 'sprouts of capitalism'. In the Western academy it was common then to associate

Confucianism with the 'inertia' of Qing China. Harvard University-based John K. Fairbank, the leading authority on the history of modern China, considered institutions associated with Confucianism a major obstacle to the country's advancement. In a well-known article, written in collaboration with two economic historians, Fairbank characterized the Chinese economy in the early nineteenth century as being in a stage of 'traditional equilibrium' at which time "minor growth, innovation and technological change may occur but...not sufficient to break the rigid and inhibiting bonds of the traditional framework of social and economic institutions" (Eckstein, Yang, and Fairbank 1960:1). He saw the absence of social and economic dynamism in nineteenth century China as a 'cultural problem'. According to Fairbank, because the scholar-official elite invariably endorsed the Confucian view of China as central, superior, and self-sufficient, it could not avail itself of the West's ideals of commercial freedom and diplomatic equality. Fairbank was not alone in his assessment of the relationship between Confucian values and economic progress. Albert Feuerwerker's path breaking study, *China's Early Industrialization: Sheng Hsuan-huai (1844-1916) and Mandarin Enterprise* (1958) also addressed Chinese values and institutions as obstacles, as 'barriers' that in the long run inhibited China's economic modernization. The 'fetters of kinship ties and overriding obligation to family and clan' were incompatible with rational economic performance.

Fifty years on, we may view the writings of Fairbank and his cohort in the specific context in which they researched and wrote about China. In the aftermath of World War II, he and other East Asia scholars created a genuine field of historical instruction which transcended the insularity of traditional sinology, a methodology which may be defined as learning about China through philological and literary study. To achieve this task, Fairbank purposely turned to the contemporary social sciences. As he

recalled in his autobiography *Chinabound* (1982:326-27), his Harvard colleague, the sociologist Talcott Parsons had equipped him with an "analytical framework" for organizing empirical data. Parsons' structural-functional theory projected the concept of culture as fundamental to the explanation of the evolution of the modern economy and society. Building upon Max Weber's sociological theories dealing with economic phenomena, Parsons regarded cultural values the basis of rational business and investment practices. Parsons asserted that individual actors, with particular cultural orientations, assumed the basis for action within a social system, but that a social system could be transformed by another cultural orientation. Such idealism furnished Fairbank with the theoretical conditions to demonstrate in his many publications that Confucian 'traditional' and authoritarian values had become a kind of 'strait-jacket' which inevitably inhibited China from appreciating modern innovating forces. In that way, China had 'failed' to respond to the West.

In the 1950s, Fairbank had been influenced by another scholar who too had relied upon Max Weber's publications, Paris-based Étienne Balazs (1905-63) (Zurndorfer, forthcoming). After Balazs' untimely death, Fairbank along with the Yale University historian Arthur Wright, arranged for the translation and publication of Balazs' major essays in the one volume compilation, *Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy* (1964; hereafter, CCB). In these articles, many of which were written in the decade before his death, Balazs specified Weber's study 'Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen: Konfuzianismus and Taoismus' (The Economic Ethics of World Religions: Confucianism and Taoism; first translated and published in English as *The Religion of China* in 1951 by Hans Gerth), to problems of Chinese economic and social development. Weber's query why imperial China -- with its unified government, and highly developed craftsmanship in textile and porcelain manufacture -- did

not develop capitalism also became the major preoccupation of Balazs' own intellectual life.

Many of the essays in CCB echo Weber's observations on China's economic history. Like Weber, Balazs viewed 'officialism', i.e. the uninterrupted continuity of the ruling class of Confucian-schooled scholar-officials, the greatest encumbrance to Chinese development in the imperial era (CCB 3-12). And also, like Weber, he saw the 'despotic power of scholar-officials' as the most significant hindrance to the advancement of private enterprise which ultimately meant that China would lack a bourgeoisie, and that Chinese towns would never serve 'the role of social catalyst' (CCB 66-78). In his well-known essay, "The Birth of Capitalism in China" (CCB 34-54), Balazs also invoked Weberian ideas on the connection between the Puritan tradition of thrift and early capitalism. Balazs wrote that Chinese merchants did not foster capitalism because they diverted their profits to the purchase of land (for reasons of security and prestige), and to non-economic uses, such as entertaining the scholar-elite, building pleasure gardens, collecting art and books, and not least, preparing their own sons to participate in the imperial examination system for gaining entry into officialdom.

Given the impact that the Weberian cultural explanation had on leading China scholars in Euro-America until the end of the 1960s, it does seem perplexing that these ideational factors should now become part of any interpretation of East Asia's modern day prosperity. Certainly, there are sufficient published empirical studies which attribute the economic success of Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore, and Hong Kong during the 1970s and 1980s, and more recently, the PRC to specific economic strategy policies, such as those concerning price incentives, internal market regulation, low wages, low taxation, promotion of rapid technology catch-up, etc. (Papanek 1988; Amsden 2001). Nevertheless,

given the fact that all these East Asian locations, with the exception of China, lack natural resources, their economic advancement may also seem unique and phenomenal. Thus, the tendency to divert attention away from strict economic indicators and to look for common cultural characteristics has become a feature of discussions about the 'East Asian development model'.

Probably the most influential of these explorations has been that by the Princeton-based scholar Yü Ying-shih (Yu Yingshi). His book *Zhongguo jinshi zongjiao lunli yu shangren jingshen* (The Modern Chinese Religious Ethic and the Spirit of Merchants; Taipei, 1987) [also published as a part of a collection of his writings in the same year in Shanghai, under the title *Shi yu Zhongguo wenhua* (Scholars and Chinese Culture), and also in Japanese in 1991] turned Weber's theory on its head. In this study, he argues that there is a connection between Chinese religions' turn to inner-worldliness from about the time of the Tang dynasty (618-907) and the extraordinary development of Chinese commerce from the sixteenth century. According to Yü, in the Tang era both the doctrines of Buddhism and Daoism had set the basis for the affirmation of secular society and the positive valuation of worldly work (similar to the Protestant ethic). And during the Song (960-1279), Neo-Confucianism, itself incorporating many of the tenets of the revised Buddhist and Daoist canons, formalized ideals of reforming the social order. With the broad self-enlightening teachings of Wang Yangming (1472-1528), Yü claims, Neo-Confucian philosophy had filtered down through the structure of the society, and Neo-Confucian ethics had penetrated all social levels. Moreover, he asserts that by the sixteenth century as the population expanded, and competition in the examination system increased, there were ever more failed candidates who turned to commercial occupations.



For Yü, 'merchants, being the second best educated class of society' had the ability to translate knowledge of Confucian teachings into an ethical code. As a result, he believes, the merchant profession in late imperial China had acquired a *dao* (way) of its own which endowed it with religious meaning. Merchants also had attained a sense of virtue (*de*), connotating reliability and trustworthiness, which functioned for them in the same way these traits exemplified Protestant merchants. Yü also maintains that Chinese merchants practised logical methods of marketing and distribution, and increasingly rationalized their business methods. In other words, the Confucian ethic nurtured the triumph of successful business enterprise in China since the Ming dynasty! Finally, Yü writes that by the eighteenth century, the Chinese scholar-elite endorsed the material extravagance and luxurious living mores associated with wealthy merchants because the goods which they produced and prized also provided employment for the population.

One should not underestimate the impact of Yü's study on contemporary historical writing: it has been commonplace for the last twenty years across the Sinic world to find the expression *ruguguan* (Confucian mercantile outlook) or *rushang* (Confucian merchants) in Chinese language publications on Ming and Qing history. Already in 1984, the PRC historians Tang Lixing and Zhang Haipeng were writing about 'Huizhou merchants' peculiar combination of commerce and classical scholarship' in the well-known journal *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* (The Investigation of Chinese History). And nowadays, it seems almost every publication concerning Huizhou merchants, who were among the most important commercial groups in Ming and China (Zurndorfer 1989), contains the expression (or a variant thereof) *gu wei louli, ru wei minggao* (commerce for profit and scholarship for personal reputation). The implication of this phrase is that these Huizhou men despite their

involvement in business, were also moral men because of their Confucian education. Such is the euphoria over the moral rectitude of these Huizhou traders that the life histories of a number of these 'merchant princes' were made into a movie (!): in 1994, the film 'Stories of Huizhou Merchants' was released, much to the acclaim of both the local Anhui provincial government and the general populace (Oakes 2000:678).

But outside East Asia, Yü's use of the spirit-of-capitalism logic to Ming-Qing China remains controversial. For one thing, Yü's argumentation relies upon only one variant of Neo-Confucianism, i.e. the Wang Yangming school that esteemed the self-cultivation of the individual, and the potentially transformative effect that such self-cultivation could have in the realm of action. Yü oversimplifies the Neo-Confucian record as a unified and 'unfolding' discourse, and so he avoids the doctrines more complicated history as invariably tied to political decisions favouring inclusion or exclusion at any given time (Wilson 1995). Moreover, Yü misrepresents particular facets of Confucian theory in order to accommodate his presentation. For example, one of the core commitments of historical Confucianism is the denigration of profit as a vehicle of moral improvement. As Pierre-Étienne Will remarks - when Qing statecraft writers wrote about *shengcai* (production of wealth), they did not mean to even advocate profit: 'What is meant is the production of wealth indispensable for maintaining a general equilibrium, not the Faustian ambition of making such an individual (or each family unit) ever richer' (Will 1994:881). Yü's translation of the spirit-of-capitalism logic slights the Confucian conception of economic morality which imposes limits on profit. The rhetoric of literary writing on successful merchants that became popular from the mid-Ming period preferred to praise moral reciprocity over profit taking (Brook 1997). Also, Yü's assertion that merchants operated within an institutional framework in which Confucian

teachings were the norm may be true, but it is probably just as true that these same persons gambled, cheated, depended on fortune-tellers, treated their less-fortunate inferiors with contempt, and prayed to a variety of local deities -- not just those within the Confucian pantheon -- in order to conduct their business activities. As individuals, they might have also been unreliable, sloth, timid, selfish, and ostentatious (Zurndorfer 2003:367). Finally, one may point out the central flaw of Yü's argument, i.e. the elevation of the status of merchants came about, not in spite of Confucianism, but because of it: Yü 's contention contradicts the obvious that whatever Confucianism's potential for commercial enterprise, it did not generate capitalism in China (Brook 1997:41). Thus, Yü's idealization of entrepreneurial initiative in imperial China defies the historical record.

### **Confusing Consumerism, Familism, and the Institutionalization of Capitalism in East Asia: More Flip-Flop**

Yü's theory whatever its academic worth does offer a tool to those eager to construct a narrative of meaning between China's past and present; it lends a long-term perspective to those seeking some kind of philosophical justification for the PRC's imposition of a market-based economy and the ever-greater admiration for the hegemony of pure wealth throughout East Asia. Moreover, it helps to unseat the Euro-centric discourse of modernity, displacing its 'master narrative' of progress and enrichment, and furnishing East Asia with historical legitimacy in its recent achievement of having secured a well-defined place in the expanding global economy, a position that is 'culturally more fluid and complex than the more Euro-centric capitalism of the past' (Greenhalgh 1994:747). Although the rhetoric of this new counter-hegemonic self-assertiveness has certain emancipating implications, it

also demarcates--binding economic success with 'traditional' Confucian cultural values, and in particular those related to the centrality of family in that discourse. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the recent history of mass consumerism in the PRC.

Following consumer patterns first established in other parts of East and Southeast Asia in the 1960s, the post-1978 reform government encouraged a new ethic of consumption, i.e. the acquisition of consumer durables closely associated with the family, i.e. *jiayong dianqi* (electronic appliances for the family). Thus, from the late 1970s, the purchase of black-and-white television sets became a common goal of families everywhere in the PRC. This aspiration was quickly displaced by the mid-to-late 1980s when the acquisition of the 'four major consumer items', i.e. colour televisions, refrigerators, washing machines, and hi-fi systems became everyone's ambition. The will to possess such consumer goods mirrored the official goals of the Communist Party's then national development strategy of the 'four modernizations' (Zhao 1997). At present, as ever more consumer items become more widely available, the family-centred orientation of this consumer drive has not wavered. The goal of owning a family car, along with home modernization (*jiating xiandai hua*) are further evidence of post-Mao China's disavowal of puritan communism and its promotion of consumer capitalism.

Not only with regard to consumption, but also in the matter of production has the role of the family become central in official economic policy. Since de-collectivization in the 1980s, the family farm has become the predominant unit of production in rural areas, and in both the countryside and the city, the private family-operated firm dominates the form of business organization. Not surprisingly, among the many scholars assessing the success of the PRC's post-reform economy, there has been a certain tendency to emphasize Confucian values associated

with the family such as collectivism and loyalty as integral to the thriving performance of these enterprises. For example, the well-known Hong Kong-based sociologist S.L. Wong claims it is the incentive to provide for the mutual benefit of many persons that these family-organized businesses organize the mobilization of a wide range of related kin (from grandparents to young children) and pool their material and financial resources together. This kind of analysis idealizes 'Confucian families' as the 'fuel of the motor of development' (Wong 1988:146) while it also challenges the critiques of the role of family in China's modernization that have overshadowed studies of Chinese economic history in the past. These two contrasting images of the Confucian-orientated family as an obstacle or stimulus to the institutionalisation of capitalism elicit further examination of cultural values and the social milieu in which they have operated in Chinese history.

Ever since Max Weber identified 'sib-fetters' as the principal impediment to China developing capitalism, generations of sociologists, anthropologists, and to a lesser extent, historians made the Chinese family an object of intense scrutiny. Marion J. Levy in his study *The Family Revolution in Modern China* (1949) set the tone for the kind of attempt to explain how the institution of family accounted for the failure of Qing China, and the success of Meiji Japan, to modernize. Levy's contention that in feudal Japan a person's loyalty to his overlord took clear precedence over his loyalty to his family contrasted the situation in imperial China where loyalty to one's family was more, and, most important. In his vision, Japanese society was characterized by countervailing loyalties to larger units than families (originally feudal domains, later companies), and so, once the Japanese emperor in the nineteenth century decided upon modernization, there were no particularistic family forces to curb the process. Interestingly, Levy's

assessment of the role of familism in late Qing China reflected the same opinion of a number of May Fourth thinkers in the 1920s that traditional family values formed a major hindrance to China becoming a dynamic and modern society. For many of these Chinese intellectuals the vibrancy and individualism of the West were in strong contrast to the static and more collectivist China (Glosser 2003).

Levy's ideas were popular in the 1960s when modernization theory was in its heyday. Modernization theory dichotomized societies into either 'traditional' or 'modern', and assumed a linear progression that all regions in the world pass through on the way to industrial development and into modern capitalist economies like those of the USA and western Europe. Other works written around the same time also took a negative viewpoint toward China's chances for industrialization. For example, *Industrialism and Industrial Man* (1960) by Clark Kerr et. al. voiced the accepted wisdom that family firms, like those in Republican China, were an 'outmoded organization form', not suitable for a modern industrial society. According to Kerr and his co-authors: '[There] family loyalty and obligations took precedence over other loyalties and obligations. Thus, the extended family tends to dilute individual incentives to work, save, and invest' (quoted in Wong 1988:134). The influential business history historian Alfred D. Chandler's arguments about the inability to family firms to undertake the full range of transformation needed for mass production and mass marketing were the basis for further critique of Chinese small-scale entrepreneurship. In his best-known book, *The Visible Hand* (1977), Chandler demonstrated how the development of modern bureaucratic corporations run by professional managers and innovating technology heralded the triumph of modern industrialization. Chandler's analysis of business history pointed to specialized single-function firms as the big loser since the start of the industrial revolution. The success story

was the capital-intensive, vertically organized, industrial corporation which 'used mass production techniques to turn out standardized products cheaply to meet relatively slowly shifting consumer demands' (quoted in Whyte 1996:19). The implication of the Chandler perspective is that doing business meant 'big business' and that the small Chinese family firm which dominated Taiwan and Hong Kong enterprises in the 1960s was nothing more than a remnant of the pre-industrial world. Ironically, it was the state socialist economies of the Soviet Union and the PRC before the 1970s in which the vertically integrated form of production predominated.

### **Some Concluding Observations**

The transition of the four 'tiger economies' (Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and South Korea) into industrial giants and capitalist entrepôts by the end of the 1970s, preceded by that of Japan, defied what then were the standard expectations of modernization theory or business history analysis. And now, with the PRC becoming a global economic superpower, the deficiency of these older kinds of studies seems even more than inadequate. As we have discussed, to explain the phenomenon of this triumph, post-Confucianists claimed that certain elements of traditional Chinese culture, to which the label Confucian may be applied, was the defining ammunition, or 'fuel', behind East Asia's development. In their cultural analysis, the post-Confucianists viewed the economic system of this region as a product of the social order: economic institutions emerged from these societies which celebrated a set of common beliefs and shared a number of cognitive structures.

But this cultural analysis is unsatisfactory for several reasons. For one thing, the idea of an 'elective affinity' between Confucianism and

capitalism is over-deterministic: not all economic actions in the East Asian arena are propelled by the same values and social pressures. Even one of the prime movers of the post-Confucian thesis, Peter Berger, has admitted that values associated with East Asia's transformation may in fact be rooted in folk traditions rather than in any 'great tradition' such as Confucianism or Buddhism (Berger 1988:9). That Confucianism may be connected to *both* negative influences on the development of the Chinese economy, such as particularism or collectivism, and positive influences like group cooperation demonstrates how inadequate this cultural analysis is to understanding economic and social change.

The worth of any theory is that it can account for differences without reducing cases to unique instances. The advantage of the cultural explanation of East Asia's rapid economic transformation is that it probes the non-rational, subjective aspects of organizational life while it links these organizations to cultural practices of the larger society. But therein lies its weakness too: the cultural explanation tends to assume that cultural forces are unchanging while the social structures which express these cultural values can, and do change. The dramatic shift in economic behaviour in China requires an explanation that is dynamic, rather than one that assumes a continuity of enduring cultural values. And one may expect that an unexpected turn in China's fortunes may result in the same kind of analysis that occurred in the case of Japan. After several decades of euphoria over the Japanese economy, the pundits shifted their explanations why Japan was 'number one' to how the bubble economy burst. One day the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) and the Japanese government were working miracles in partnership, and the next, they were accused of creating protected sectors of the economy that could not withstand international competition.



The post-Confucian cultural explanation of China's developing capitalism originates out of the concept of difference. Just as Fairbank and his followers sought to explain modern Chinese history in terms of its social and cultural distinctions from the West, so the post-Confucianists endeavour to rationalize East Asian's recent development of capitalism from the viewpoint of exceptionality. The problem with the 'Fairbankian' notion of socio-cultural contrast with its focus on China's 'intrinsic nature' was its static sense of the Chinese past: in this view, imperial China fostered a Confucian culture of authoritarianism, hierarchy, insularity, ethnocentrism, and not least, resentment of the more technologically advanced West.

Likewise, the post-Confucian cultural explanation for the success of capitalism in East Asia also 'Orientalizes'. It differentiates East Asia's developmental experience from that of the West, while it essentializes particular qualities of historical Confucianism and attributes these values as the motor behind China's success. In the process, whatever vital forces responsible for this development are subsumed into the discourse, and one is left with no explanation to account for China's great leap forward into the small circle of capitalist superpowers. However, what one can reckon with this post-Confucian exegesis is a means for Chinese rulers 'to justify authority, motivate action, and urge compliance' (Brook 1997:42). Only time will tell how effective the 'Confucian strategy' will be to a regime 'that was built on the rejection of capitalism as imperialist' (Brook 1997:44).

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