

Rethinking Max Weber's Study of Chinese Religions in a Modern Scope

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Abstract

On November 11, 2018, China's annual online shopping festival Singles' Day hit 213.5 billion RMB (approximately 30.8 billion USD) in sales within 24 hours (Chong, 2018), increasing by 27% compared to 2017 (Davidson, 2018). This whopping number is much bigger than Black Friday and Cyber Monday combined (Chong, 2018). On a worldwide scale, Singles' Day can be seen as the biggest capitalistic event that happened online; however, to witness the upheaval of Singles' Day was an illusion tracking back to Max Weber's time during the 1910s. In the book *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism* that was published in 1915, Weber asserted that capitalism cannot grow in China due to its irrational religious ethics. Taking on this conflict, a review of Weber's studies on Chinese religions will be drawn into account to evaluate Weber's findings' in a modern scope through an examination of "ideal types" of three dominant religions in China including Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. The discussion will be guided by the research question: *Do Weber's studies of religious ethics of Chinese religions still apply in modern China after the 20th century?* Document analysis will be employed as the research method to help unpack issues we encounter by following this research question as it pertains to Weber's book *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*.

Keywords: Max Weber; Chinese religions; religious ethics; modern capitalism, Confucianism; Taoism; Buddhism; ideal types

1. Introduction

This research paper offers a discussion of German sociologist Max Weber's study of Chinese religions, including Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, as well as how their ethics changed over time within China's social and economic institutions. As we can see, starting from the 20th century, China entered into a new phase whereby a series of social and economic transitions began to happen. Consider, for example, Deng Xiaoping's 1978 "reform and opening-up policy" whereby China began permitting foreign investment. Since then, China has become more open to embracing all sorts of transformations that contribute to reshaping the spirit of modern China. Perhaps at its most crucial levels is the reconsideration of old social norms and values like religious ethics.

Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism are three ancient yet still active religions that once played dominant roles in Chinese history. They have all co-existed with one another at some point, but also flourished in their own style of preaching and representing different religious sensibilities in interpreting and shaping people's political ideas and social lives. To achieve that, the ethics of each of these religions mobilized to organize cultural actions in an institutional and meaningful way. The religious ethics of Chinese religions fostered a sense of kinship that divided Chinese society into sibs, within which the capitalistic merchant system failed to exist. Such a phenomenon caught Weber's attention. As he explicated in his writings, China was a nation that was surely capable of developing capitalism since the mercantile spirit grew early, but the truth was the sprout of capitalism wilted and Weber believed the answer to this phenomenon was closely bound to the ethics of Chinese religions. This could be an inspirational point of view as we do not normally seem to consider Chinese religions and their relations with the capitalistic economy. For this reason, reviewing Weber's study of religious ethics and its inner connections between the economic and political climate of imperial China until the Qing Dynasty will not only help in gaining a clearer

insight into the country's historical, economic and political issues, but also bring clarity to whether these connections still have resonance in modern China.

Although Weber's works are better known in the fields of economy, sociology and political science, his religious studies draw on ideas that range from communication studies should not be overlooked. For example, Weber takes his China study as a case in point to address how religious ethics function in the Chinese community either as an ethical standard to guide in people's secular lives, or as a mystical instruction to persuade people pursuing a transcendental life to cut off all secular (material) attachments. Put aside the divergent effects of religious ethics being produced in different types of religions, we should talk about the power of information transmission within cultural communities first. To be sure, in communication studies, the transmission of information is constantly discussed as long as it directly relates to the quality of communication. To a broader extent, the quality of communication not only helps in shaping public discourse, but also serves to solidify the essential elements of culture. Carey (2009) claims the transmission of information is the commonest sense as we consider the function of communication (p. 12). Indeed, if we deem religious ethics as the information (or messages) that require to be imparted, sent and transmitted in different cultural communities as Carey emphasized what conventional view of communication stands for, then the evaluation of religious ethics as Weber does in his China study is well-suited in this communication-as-transmission paradigm because, the goal of the China study in Weber's opinion is to figure out how religious ethics of Chinese religions cause the failure of capitalism in imperial China. Surprisingly, our research not only fits in the transmission view of communication, but Carey's ritual view of communication also applies. Generally speaking, the ritual view of communication seeks to extend the efficacy of communication by surpassing the bound of space and time. It implies that the activity of sharing information in space does not matter the most as

we saw in the view of communication as transmission. Instead, through adopting the ritual view of communication, a society could maintain the interiority of its culture in time by sharing common beliefs. As Carey (2009) states: “If a transmission view of communication centers on the extension of messages across geography for purposes of control, a ritual view centers on the sacred ceremony that draws persons together in fellowship and commonality” (p. 33). In this point, religious ethics as the carrier of faith, having great power in creating an ordered and systematic reality in which people’s cultural experience and behaviour could be understood, altered and shared. Thus, the ritual view of communication provides the way of thinking communication studies inspired by religions, which bridges this research into the benign integration between communication studies and Weberian sociology, across the boundary of space and time to sustain the dynamic discussion of religious ethics both in imperial and modern China.

The development of electronic commerce in China is a good starting point to highlight the central conflict that clashes with Weber’s assertions, although until the present day, China still claims that capitalism was excluded from its dominant economic structure. The economic model that is usually called “a socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics” has been inclined to absorb many elements of capitalism--the exponential growth in e-commerce is one of the most notable examples. E-commerce as a new business model has emerged with the popularity of the Internet since the late 20th century in China. After two decades, it has grown to become the most common shopping option for sellers and consumers. A Royal Mail’s report about China’s e-commerce in 2017 shows that 88% of shoppers have purchased online in the past three months, and 3 shoppers in 4 claim the rate of online shopping has increased. If China’s e-commerce keeps on growing like this, the online market of China will be larger than the US, Japan, Germany, the UK, and France combined by 2020 (Royal Mail, 2017, p. 2). Obviously, online stores are more

time and space-efficient compared to actual stores, which means buyers can access products, place and manage orders more easily through several clicks with no need of a physical presence in stores. The rest of the work will be done by the seller and the express company. As for sellers, online transactions are also more manageable. They can process several orders at the same time as long as they have well-prepared customer services to respond to questions regarding the orders. Besides that, online shopping also facilitates the advancement of delivery services in China, in order to satisfy the increasing demand for fast shipping, more job opportunities are provided, which helps mitigate employment pressure. According to statistics in 2015, there are 2.5 million people that are employed by e-commerce firms and 18 million are working in e-commerce-related businesses (Zuo, 2015). Thus, at a primary level, the rapid growth of e-commerce becomes a compelling and irresistible force that leads China into a new stage of development across multiple fields such as information technology, digital media and public transportation. All these cross-disciplinary transfers can be seen as a result of technological fusion and enrichment (Schwab, 2016).

Indeed, in this rising trend of e-commerce, the rapid growth of Singles' Day reveals the deep shift in economic, political and social systems. Singles' Day is an online shopping carnival held by Alibaba, which has taken place on November 11 every year since 2009. This particular date is also called "double 11" or "bare sticks festival", which is meant to celebrate singledom (Barrett, 2018), but its target customers actually has no limitations of age, gender, marital status and nationality. Wu et al. (2016) conducted a study on Singles' Day attempting to figure out what factors drive the huge success of this event. They found Alibaba used the synergetic cooperations of IT platforms, implementing five strategies including identifying merchants and pricing, marketing and sales, payments, and outbound logistics to optimize efficiency and expand their market base as a result (p. 193). This study found the intention of companies like Alibaba to

integrate different business sectors including consumer, merchant, and service provider into a regulated consolidation to surpass boundaries between physical and virtual ways of consuming, with more instant and effective communication and payment systems such as AliWangWang and AliPay (Wu et al., 2016). By using these methods Alibaba is able to capitalize on accelerating the chain of production and reproduction, which is crucial for keeping itself in an advantageous loop of competition.

The example of Single's Day was the initial motivation that encouraged this review of Weber's China study of religious ethics. Although these subjects seem not to have a strong correlation to each other, the online shopping carnival destabilizes the core diagnosis that Weber (1951) gave in the book by saying that China lacked the systematic and rational spirit in religions, and that contributed to the extinction of capitalism. However, we should not simply conclude that Weber's findings are challenged by modern circumstances like the rise of e-commerce because, even though some concepts of his studies may not be in favour of drawing the panoramic picture of modern China since it is no longer an imperial country after the Qing Dynasty, the theoretical and critical influence they leave could still be of use to create new forms of knowledge and wisdom upon the modern contexts that this research lies. For that reason, this paper will review Weber's writing on three Chinese religions through an examination of ideal types--a sociological construct that Weber came up with to contour the key characteristics of the research subject. In doing so, the goal is to not only obtain a framework of each religion's ethical essence during its time of dominance, but more importantly to adopt these concepts to a more modern way of thinking. Another objective of this paper is to see which of these features have been preserved over time and may require further explorations in the future.

2. Research Question

Do Weber's studies of religious ethics of Chinese religions still apply in modern China after the 20th century?

3. Research Methodology

This paper will apply document analysis as the research method. According to Bowen (2009), document analysis is a systematic procedure in qualitative research used to review and evaluate documents. The major function of document analysis is to help in gaining understanding toward the selected documents and developing empirical knowledge. In general, document analysis examines a wide variety of content such as advertisements, manuals, books, journals, program proposals and television scripts. However, not only are text-based materials as listed above examined, but photo-based sources like scrapbooks and photo albums are also included in document analysis for specific research purposes. The type of documents being analyzed can either be printed or electronic, acquired from libraries, archives and organizational or institutional files (p. 27-28). Document analysis can be used alone but is more often combined with other qualitative research methods like surveys and interviews throughout the research process to corroborate and verify the collected data for enhancing the credibility of the research; this mixed-method is called triangulation (Patton, 2001). The rationale of triangulation according to O'Leary (2017) is to avoid data source generated from a sole approach, which may weaken the overall robustness of the research (p. 320). In this sense, bringing up the importance of combining document analysis with other methods actually illustrates the concern for the integrity and accuracy of research since a single method sometimes is not convincing enough to represent as the carrier of quality in qualitative research, whereby the analysis largely relies on the researchers' interpretation. Indeed,

a combination of methods is more likely to shed light on uncertainty, lowering risks to errors and bias in research (p. 556). Once the research method is decided, one of the key elements to always keep in mind for yielding high-quality data, as Patton (2001) suggests, is that researchers follow the method rigorously with specific attention to credibility when doing fieldwork like document gathering (p. 553). By saying that, Patton (2001) believes that qualitative research would be considered credible and consistent if it is built upon a systematic research design and constructed through organized evidence. To achieve that, triangulation needs to penetrate the whole process of the research across multiple data sources, methods, analysis and theories (p. 556). However, although document analysis in most cases is employed as a part of the methodology, supplementing the inquiry procedure via documentary reviews to strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings, it does not mean document analysis cannot be used as a stand-alone method. Like Bowen (2009) claimed, for historical and cross-cultural research, using document analysis alone is feasible because in these specific circumstances, “documents may simply be the only viable source” to undertake the research task (p. 29).

This latter perspective applies to this research project because it is based on Weber’s book *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*, which clearly deals with both historical and cross-cultural issues and investigates why China’s religious ethics are distinguished from others (Protestantism in particular as Weber empathized) in terms of reformation to pursue rationality in the economy. Besides that, this book is also the only available source that we can tackle from Weber.

To further justify document analysis as a suitable research method for this paper, we need to look at the five main functions of document analysis that Bowen (2009) discusses in his article. The first function not only helps researchers gain background information about the selected

documents but also creates useful insights, which would be in favour of acquiring a holistic and comprehensive understanding toward the research topic. The second function is to situate valuable questions and instances that have been raised from the documents. This is important in our case since we needed to compare Weber's findings with modern contexts by outlining the ideal types of three Chinese religions to determine what instances pertained to each of them respectively. The third function enables an expansion of knowledge through providing supplementary research data to issues that have been detected in materials. This function also fits the purpose of our research as we expect not merely contradictions but also joint ideas derived from Weber's works. The fourth and fifth functions are more advantageous when using document analysis alongside other research methods, or when there are multiple documents included. In this point, the fourth aims to offer a means for identifying changes while the fifth comes to verify and corroborate the findings until reaching a level of information convergence and consistency within documents (p. 29-30). Although our research is focused on one book, the last two functions can still be useful for reflecting on whether there are contradictory ideas that need to be mentioned. In addition, document analysis also absorbs the elements of content analysis and thematic analysis, the latter of which serves to facilitate pattern recognition through extracting themes from the documents, which requires the researcher to thoroughly read and re-read the document for category construction (Bowen, 2009, p. 32). In this regard, we have no need to mention again how crucial document analysis is for building themes in this research project since the ideal types of the three religions have already organized themselves through the capturing of their own unique characteristics. Moreover, due to religious ethics being an already complex subject that becomes even more complicated once coupled with a variety of sociological theories, using document analysis would guide us in identifying relevant terms and themes for the research project.

4. Literature Review

Unlike Weber's book of Protestantism, his study of Chinese religions is not as widely known, but this does not imply that the usefulness and academic value of Weber's latter study should be reduced because of that. Therefore, in this part, relevant ideas will be drawn from other scholars to see how they treat Weber's work on Chinese religions. Doing this will not only create a space for tracking changes and receiving useful insights from Weber's studies, but we may also expect to grasp an extrinsic overview as well as an addition to the knowledge base regarding our research topic.

After reading the selected literature, we can detect that there are two main trends that arose--rationality and modernity. Thus, this section can be divided into two parts, the first part will give a general introduction of Weber's China study, along with the conceptual clarity of rationality, and the second part will explore how this study channeled the concept of modernity. It is essential to obtain a clear view of rationality and modernity because they are fundamental concepts that are interweaving and useful for unpacking the meaning of culture and human experience in Weberian sociology. As far as Weber believes, rationality does not merely set down the humanity problems by offering people the methodical lifestyle as the solution, but it also allows the consideration of modernity to be addressed in the discussion about the "fate of humanity" (Mommsen & Jurgen, 2006, p. 25). That implies Weber attempts to reveal the connection between rationality and modernity, as well as their potency in disenchanting the myths of religions. In this point, according to Koshul (2005), modernity can be seen as an attached condition to rationality that enables the process of "secularization" which is driven by science to shatter the obstinacy of irrational religiosity. By saying that, science and religion are placed on opposing poles, and "the outcome of this polarization is that religion is gradually pushed out of the public (and rational) domain into

the private (and irrational) domain with the continued development of modernity” (p. 37). In this regard, rationality and modernity as two dominant themes in Weber’s religious studies are constantly bound together, striving to annihilate religious superstitions. In the following paragraphs, we will begin by looking at how Weber applies these two themes into his China study.

4.1 Weber’s China Study

Weber’s study of China is published in German in 1915 (the English version is published in 1951), adding to his multivolume research of world religions and religious ethics (Lebow, 2017, p. 12). One of the great contributions of this study is to make Chinese societies better known by the West, though it also generates controversies. For example, some scholars think Weber misinterpreted Chinese culture, turning it into an outgrowth of Eurocentrism. But we will put this aside for now and discuss it later in this section. First of all, we should take a look at Weber’s motivation for conducting religious studies. As Ringer (2004) notes, this is actually rooted in Weber’s strong interest of religions, although he is not a believer and “regarded himself as ‘unmusical’ in his relation to religion” (Turner, 1993, p. 17). Hence, it will not be surprising to see that although Weber’s research was closely associated with religion, he did not care too much about questions like how to operate religious rituals in different religions. Instead, he prioritized rationalization as the core notion in managing the process of production in capitalism. He writes:

Rationalism will be our task to find out whose intellectual child the particular concrete from a rational thought was, from which the idea of a calling and the devotion to labour in the calling has grown, which is, as we have seen, so irrational from the standpoint of purely eudaemonistic self-interest, but which has been and still is one of the most characteristic elements of our capitalistic culture (p. 38).

Weber adopts this concept and expands it into his subsequent research toward Chinese religions. This can also be used to demonstrate that Weber is only interested in the phenomena that religions bring about in the way of showing the different nature of human life and experience. For Weber, the meaningfulness of human life comes from two aspects: “interests (including their formation and the conflicts between them) and ideas (values on which the actions of the individual and the group are based and that are used to justify and legitimize institutions)” (Lepsius, 2013, p. 23). To be more specific, “interests” are concerned with social actions embedded under the parameters of reformation and conflict, while “ideas” relate to what values could orient social action in institutional speculation. By this logic, religion exists alongside other factors to express and interpret human experience, but is largely based on a sense of “irrationality” of actions and values (p. 33).

To be able to understand the dichotomous implications between rationality and irrationality in Weber’s religious studies, we need clarity on how he defines religious ethics and rationality as the measure of cultural and economic events. In a general view, religious ethics can be seen as a drawing-together of themes to remind us not to ignore the link between time, space and different groups of people when trying to make sense of a cultural phenomenon. Thus the virtue of religious ethics at this point is far beyond rigid tenets and rituals, but having pertinence to give meaning to specific cultural actions. This point of view speaks so much to the metaphysical demand of religions for creating an ordered theory of cosmology whereby people in the actual world can experience and process (Carey, p. 51). This idea can also be understood as what Weber called “rationality” that can guide people in secular matters. In Weberian sociology, the role of rationality is always being put forward at the cusp of thinking since it is concerned with the inherent existence of human beings and the conducts of their life. As Weber assumes, under the guidance of

rationality, individuals could assure a way of behaving and working which makes their lives worthy and meaningful. In Weber's analysis, rationality is sometimes an ambivalent and problematic term to define. In saying so, he notices the meaning of rationality varied according to different contexts and instances.

Thus he classifies rationality into four major types: practical rationality, theoretical rationality, formal rationality and substantive rationality, which is dedicated to dealing with issues surrounding reality and culture. These multiple variations of rationality help refine its vast scale into recognizable patterns even though they often intertwine with one another. As Kalberg (1980) argues, practical rationality can be deemed as a measurement to judge the relationship between secular activity and individual interests. Theoretical rationality seems to be afloat above the reality and conveys individuals' experience via abstract concepts instead of action. Substantive rationality directly aims to organize action into patterns and can be "considered to be a 'valid canon'; that is, a unique 'standard' against which reality's flow of unending empirical events may be selected, measured, and judged". And finally formal rationality concerns the main body of domination as well as its relation to the legal, social, political and bureaucratic aspects of modern life (p. 1151-1158). In general, practical rationality and substantive rationality share more commonalities than differences in use, as do theoretical rationality and formal rationality. Hence, some scholars also regulate these four concepts into a broader dichotomy--instrumental and value rationality. The former is more implicated in the scheme of pragmatism, the latter more actively responds to dogmatism (Fan, 2017). In order to give a more straightforward view, Fan (2017) addresses law and justice as an example. According to Fan (2017), if we perceive justice as the ends of structuring a legal society then we need laws (means) to help achieve it. In short, justice is an instrumental substance which can be reached through the formal practice of laws. No matter how they are

categorized, we should know that different types of rationality have their own intrinsic tensions and affinities with one another, and all of them cannot escape from the fundamental calculation between action and value on the bases of ends, means and consequence.

The conception of rationality reveals the truth of why Weber's study of Chinese religions takes on the longstanding dispute between religiosity and disenchantment, which is taken of the fact that we as human beings are constantly living in the midst of a whirl where the reality around us is fragmented and yet to be defined. Thus, the pivotal function of religion and religious ethics as Weber states is to conduct the life of individuals and create meaning for them (Schroeder, 1998, p. 38). The way of doing it is by structuring communities into religious unities, which hold the power to infiltrate the ideology into every facet of a believer's life. Remarkably, these thoughts sketch out not only the function but also the magic of religion in regulating and defining the meaning of culture. Based on that, Weber offers an in-depth analysis of how religious ethics operates in the systems of bureaucracy and judiciary and make them unable to attain rationality in ancient China (Chalcraft, 2016, p. 122).

During the reading, one notable commonality in the reviewed literature is that most scholars set out their inquiries of Weber's China study from the comparison to his best-known writing: *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. In general, the investigation of the Protestant ethic is led by Weber's profound interest in modern capitalism. This interest is turned into thematic conceptions based on specific methodological approaches to broaden the dimensions of research into China, India and ancient Judaism (Adair-Toteff, 2015). Both studies of Chinese religions and Protestantism situated a clear topic to grapple with key issues surrounding religious ethics as structured rationality to either facilitate or stifle the development of capitalism, which directly

attaches to the central theme that Weber is obsessed with, namely that Chinese religions fail to thrive in capitalism because they are often considered to be lacking in full-fledged rationalism.

This theme emerges from the book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, in which Weber reveals the correlation between the Protestant Reformation and the capitalistic ethos (spirit). As Weber explains, the Reformation plays an essential role in enabling the rise of capitalism because it produces an ideal conception of asceticism and then creates a new working class that attributes to what Benjamin Franklin describes as the workers who are not addicted to “the maximum of comfort and the minimum of exertion and instead performed labour as if it was an ‘absolute end in itself, a calling’” (Allen, 2004, p. 36). However, such correlation should not be seen as a causal effect since religion seems to have an elective affinity to the economic rationalism (Sadri, 1992). It indicates that “religious affiliation is not a cause of the economic conditions, but to a certain extent appears to be a result of them” (Weber, 1958, p. 4). The way of saying that also reflects on Weber’s intention to reject mono-causation and replace it with a multiple causal analysis, “in which particular events, changes, or outcomes are traced to their causally relevant antecedents” (Ringer, 2004, p. 77). This sets the precondition for evaluating the impacts that religious ethics place on identifying the ethos that adheres to a certain economic structure. Taking Protestantism as an example, Weber does not propose that the Protestant ethic is the only cause of capitalism, but rather an ideal type to foster it (Ringer, 2004). In that parallel, this argument is also well-suited in Weber’s China study even though the ethics of Chinese religions are different from the former. The commonality between them is that no matter what phenomenon is taken for analysis, there is nothing monocausal that could ultimately determine for all because “what is rational from one point of view may well be irrational from another” (cited in Albrow, 1990, p. 132). This is a necessary point to be emphasized since many people have misunderstood Weber’s

studies by thinking about religious ethics and the economic conditions in a monocausal relationship. In other words, Weber ponders his analysis of cultural phenomena without the universal sense of causality. This case-specific approach would favour the uniqueness of the chosen cultural phenomena in varying degrees through representing “an imaginative and fruitful attempt to chart a more rewarding path toward knowledge in what Weber, following Dilthey, called the ‘cultural sciences’” (Lebow, 2017, p. 40).

The writing on China became an important source of Weber’s religious studies shortly after its publication since a series of new visions uncover how Chinese religions generate their unique conduct-of-life, though, largely contradicting to the Protestant ethic in terms of stimulating modern capitalism. In the book *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*, Weber endorses this notion by claiming that the lack of rationalized religious ethics results in the prohibition of capitalism in China (Adair-Toteff, 2015, p. 5). To tackle this claim in the book, Weber firstly explains different sociological foundations like the genesis of the city and institutional bureaucracy, as well as how they connect to the ethics of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. In later chapters, Weber makes comparisons with Protestantism and Puritanism then shows his findings to answer why capitalism cannot grow in China. In Weber’s (1951) view, China is fully capable of acquiring and developing capitalism because it has a mercantile spirit, but it lacks the systematic rationality in science, jurisprudence and religions (p. 127). By this claim he means, for example, the Confucian ethic is more on an irrational side compared to the holy “calling” as vocation in Protestantism. In this sense, China’s patrimonial bureaucracy and anthropolatry (the worshipping of noble heroes, ancestors and the charismatic leaders such as the emperors) shape what we see in Confucianism as its ultimate enchantment (Weber, 1951, p. 31). Furthermore, this Confucian ethic not only represents the religious orthodoxy of China’s imperial family’s control over its people

but also exists as the essential carrier of Chinese culture through the delight of adjusting to the world (Lash &Whimster, 2007). The sense of adjustment appears as a Confucian ideal to make people believe in the inner-worldly affairs rather than the otherworldly contemplations (Barbalet, 2017, p. 67-68), allowing the ruling stratum to have better control to direct and alter people's behaviour and make them focus more on secular matters. For that reason, during the time of Confucianism's domination, prophetic religiosity like divination that was common in Taoism was constrained in Confucianism (Ertman, 2017, p. 11). Therefore, unlike Confucianism having the orthodox implications of bureaucratic administration in imperial China, Taoism and Buddhism were more heterodox due to their very relationships to anchoretism and world-rejection, namely, to persuade people to withdraw from secular matters and to pursue an anchoretic life that leaves all material attachment and desire behind. Weber (1951) discovers the teachings of Buddhism were in polar opposition to Confucianism, which is political, but Buddhism is a "specifically unpolitical and anti-political status religion, more precisely, a religious 'technology' of wandering and of intellectually-schooled mendicant monks" (p. 206). In short, Weber finds that the ethical endeavours in Taoism and Buddhism never rely on ethical duty, but it is more like an asocial mechanism working for preserving the sacrality outside of secular matters.

4.2 Weber's Modernity

Weber's China study can be seen as a confluence of his multivolume research of religions and religious ethics, which is not only salient for uncovering the features of Chinese religions but also evoking continuous inquiries toward modernity. As absorbed from the literature we have reviewed, Weber frequently reverts to the theme of modernity in his writings as he notices the importance of taking modern views into account for religious studies. For Weber, modernity entails the dualistic

relationship between the mundane world and cognitive cosmology that surpasses the common sense we perceive in real life (Whimster, 2007, p. 6). In saying so, Weber means that modern society has the characteristics of industrialized and standardized production that was driven by machines and control technologies, the role of individuals in this modern matrix was transformed into the subjects of control, and such implies modern society was built upon the belief of materialism instead of idealism (Allen, 2004, p. 73). But Weber did not wholly accept this vision and sought to find a more balanced ground between them as far as he believed material interests and ideal interests under certain circumstances took on the same weight in evaluating the quality of modern life (Adair-Toteff, 2015, p. 20). Religious studies thus as the fulcrum considerably synthesized these two distinct notions to help conceptualize them to fit in different contexts. This point of view reveals two ends that modernity serves. The former holds the meaning for making sense of the industrial human activity which is driven by the idea of rationality, while the latter underlies the religious sensibilities to nurture the social processes in a spiritual way. In addition, integrating the notion of modernity into religious studies would also open up the critical discussion to take on the questions about the implications of human experience and cultural phenomena, as well as what effects they produce to maintain the supplies for the growth of nascent capitalism (Ertman, 2017). Generally speaking, Weber's religious studies display different pathways to interpret the very relationship between modernity and rationality. Clearly, as what is explained through Weber's China study, Chinese religions are seen as the outsiders to repudiate capitalism since its religious ethics are presented as the evaders of rationality. For example, the mystical and traditional origins of Taoism are placed at the opposite pole against the ascetic rationalism we see in Protestantism (Barbalet, 2017, p. 6).

Moreover, among the reviewed articles, scholars discover the hidden terrain in politics which is also unseparated from modernity. Noticeably, Weber's longings for pursuing the links between rationality and modernity are seen frequently in his essays about religions and politics, in which Weber envisages the distinctiveness and boundedness between traditionalism and rationalism. From a perspective of traditionalism, one significant point Weber acknowledges in his China study is the incompatibility of rationality in charismatic leadership of Confucianism (Barbalet, 2017, p. 67). Such findings correspond to Weber's preassumption of China's intellectual strata "the literati", which has a strong tendency to adhere to traditionalism, standing as an impenetrable force to emanate the Confucian ideology (McCulloch, 2014, p. 9). Hence, to a vast extent of modernity, as long as the traditional ideal of Chinese religions exists, rationalism would be abolished by this traditionalized "mentality" of China. In this sense, rationality becomes a sort of peculiar feat of the West, which can also explain why modernity reaches out to the Occident earlier than the East.

However, the theoretical foundation of modernity seems to suit Protestantism much better than it does in Chinese religions and raises controversies toward the applicability and compatibility of this paradigm when applied to Eastern religions. To be more specific, scholars come to point out the allusion of Weber's China study as an exclusion of modernity. For example, Hobson (2001) points out that Weber treats the rational divide between the West and East as the ultimate reason for the prosperous development of the West. In saying that, Weber believes that because the systematic rationality forges ahead in the West, it establishes the superior position of Western society to activate the growth of capitalism. Hobson argues that Weber overemphasizes rationality as a virtue that can only be found in the West, but seems to ignore the Oriental origins that once influenced and helped the development of modern sciences in technological, medical and other aspects.

From Hobson's arguments, we can see it is worth a discussion of critiques and controversies that emerge from the reviewed literature--they not only give us a chance to delve deeper into Weber's texts of China, but also lay the critical groundwork for us to comprehend this work in a more holistic manner. According to Barbalet (2017), one of the more noteworthy issues in Weber's China study is the lack of identification of some specific dates and regions that he refers to in his writing, which leads to confusion and difficulty for subsequent scholars to develop further assessments. Ertman (2017) raises similar concerns with the overall reliability of Weber's studies of Hinduism and Buddhism in particular. For Ertman, the sources Weber relies on are inadequate since none of them are written from an empirical perspective by the scholars of the history of religions. The critiques above address the accuracy of Weber's works in academia, but at a more macro-level, these works face a harsher accusation of Eurocentrism. It is not rare to see the Eastern cultures are misread and misinterpreted in the texts written by white authors. Such may happen when the author is not well acquainted with the culture about which he/she wrote, or according to Hall (1995), a colonialist attempt is hidden under the texts to propagandize the attitude to dominate a non-white culture.

The traces of Eurocentrism can be further found in the book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. It contains the Calvinistic origins of predestination, the virtues of asceticism and hard work, which pulled-together engender rationalism at its ideal form which fosters the rise of capitalism. This notion profoundly influences Weber's texts of Protestantism, and later, is brought into the studies of modernity and world religions. Weber constantly returns to this theme and is accustomed to giving the diagnosis: the "stagnation in the non-West but which seems, nonetheless, to be in agreement with his evaluation of Western modernity as the fitting standard bearer of human progress" (Kho, 2014, p. 27). This shows Weber's Eurocentric predisposition to

negate the rational inwardness of the Oriental religions. By the same token, Adair-Toteff (2015) also notices that Weber fails to avoid misreading Eastern culture from a superior Western sight: “while the Chinese produced an exceptionally highly developed written history, it did not have the pragmatic aspect that Thucydides gave to the West” (p. 154). Here comes the second source of the Western rationalism, which is rooted in the ancient Greeks, with the very goal of pursuing freedom and self-determination, which renders the breadth to the value of truth and autonomy (Turner, 2005). This vision is in obvious conflict to the longstanding tradition as Weber discovers in China, a country whose goal is to conduct a harmonious and communal way of life.

This literature shows how modern China should not be seen as a static cultural totality since the 20th century, especially in the period of Mao Zedong, who is one of the most influential charismatic leaders in modern China (McCulloch, 2014). Mao consolidated China through a series of social and political revolutions, namely, to strive for a new world that unleashed it from the long-existing feudal and theocratic constraints. Confucian ethics during this period gets blamed for the “backwardness” of China as it is too weak to rival the Western imperialism since the Qing Dynasty (Ertman, 2017, p. 137). Until the post-Mao period, especially after Deng Xiaoping’s “reform and opening-up policy” achieves remarkable success in gaining China incremental developments in the realms of economy and diplomacy. This policy reflects China’s intent not only to advance through market reform but also to engage in the global economy. Deng once said: “It doesn’t matter whether the cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice” (cited in Barbalet, 2017, p. 195). This statement has a very clear theme with respect to how a market economy operates with no limitation as long as the socialist characteristics are guaranteed, which means this economic model would reconcile in part with traditional plan-dominated socialism but also take in the market-infused economy of capitalism (Barbalet, 2017, p. 195).

Under this marketized frame, optimizing the efficiency in the processes of production and reproduction becomes fatally important for companies to advance in the competition. Thus except for the state-owned and collectively-owned enterprises, there are more and more private-owned enterprises that come to “compete in the same market that had the effect of forcing producers to be attentive to consumers’ demands, of aligning production with social needs, and also, eliminating socially-costly enterprises and inferior products” (Barbalet, 2017, p. 196). In this sense, Alibaba’s Singles’ Day can be seen as a suitable example, since private enterprises do not have state subsidization as backup. They have to push themselves to provide better services and products in order to sustain their survival among other competitors. Such a business model is strongly inclined to capitalistic competition for the endless accumulation of capital and may explain why Singles’ Day is primarily operated in a capitalistic manner even though it happens in socialist China.

But no matter how you would call this combined model of China’s market economy, the prosperity of e-commerce at least reveals a truth that capitalism has emerged in modern China, with socialist characteristics embedded in it. It has been four decades since “the reform and opening-up policy” was enacted in 1978, and it would not be an exaggeration to say this forward-looking policy shapes the life that Chinese people live today from forty years ago (Moody, 2018). Here comes the main conflict to Weber’s assertions about China in the study that, again, the religious ethics of Chinese religions restrict the endogenous growth of capitalism in China. We have no idea about what Weber would comment if he were still alive, although we can acquire some insights from contemporary Weberian scholars. For example, Schluchter (2014) believes the reforms of modern China are primarily attributed to the leadership of the Communist Party which he deems “as ‘a form without spirit and without a carrier stratum that is able to promote a new

civil spirit based on freedom, calculated risk-taking, responsibility and sustainability”” (cited in Barbalet, 2017, p. 201).

5. Defining Relevant Terms

During this research, scholars who are interested in Weber’s studies would commonly situate their quest on the themes of Weber’s methodological approach; his concern of conceptual clarity on the studied cultural phenomena (Löwith, 1993, p. 18); as well as his endeavour to increase the theoretical justification. However, the considerations of the latter two are usually built upon the first, which requires us to thoroughly comprehend Weber’s methodological principles. In that regard, before we unfold the three themes extracted from *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*, relevant terms (including comparative analysis and ideal types, as well as value freedom/neutrality) will be given emphasis to justify their importance to understanding Weberian sociology as a coherent mechanism in dealing with cultural issues. Hence, this part will serve as a concise introduction to Weber’s methodological legacy.

5.1 Comparative Analysis and Ideal Types

Generally speaking, the comparative method is widely used in Weber’s studies to convey a sense of balance between the complexity of social lives and the generality of sociological analysis. Weber sees the comparative method as the solution to wipe off the barriers that traditional sociological analysis used to have in the lack of theoretical explanations and generalizations (Ragin & Zaret, 1983). To be sure, Weber is not the only one who advocates the use of comparative analysis in sociology. Unlike Durkheim, who is good at producing variable-based analysis for finding the general pattern among abstract variables, Weber’s preference is to conduct case-based analysis that could give value and meaning to a social and cultural event (p. 740). Such argument

can also justify Weber's treatment of sociology as a science to define social reality through ideal types which are one of the most essential concepts that Weber establishes.

We can consider ideal types to be a pure model constructed out of the key characteristics of the research object. Thus it usually does not appear to be seen in realities because the real situations are always too ambiguous to show in their pure form. Therefore, an ideal type will only be meaningful when it is attributed to the phenomenon where it comes from. Weber sets out ideal types as a standard for interpretation and comparison in his works. For example, he lists the type of great education respectively in Chinese (Confucian) and Japanese education systems. In ancient China, *chiin tzu* (the gentleman) is seen as an ideal type because *chiin tzu* indicates a man's uniformity of virtue (grace and dignity) both on the inside and the outside, while Japan highly honours samurai (the stylized knights) and deems samurai as the ideal type of man. From this comparison, it is clear to see an ideal type has to reconcile with the social stratum it serves for shaping and reinforcing the control over its people (Weber, 1951, p. 119). Putting aside the example of the educational ideal types that have been discussed, ideal types to a larger extent are a measure of how far the materials of research departed from the pure form, as well as of how many other causal factors are available to be considered. That is also why Weber suggested applying limited generality to the analysis because our understanding would vary from one cultural phenomenon to another as we know that one ideal type can never speak for all. In this regard, "the Weberian approach to social science regards generalizations as without merit unless they are explicitly rooted in particular cultural understandings" (Lebow, 2017, p. 56). Building upon this perspective, Weber also asserted that using comparative analysis and ideal types could favor research which seeks genetic causes and consequences that surrounding specific concrete cases (Ragin & Zaret, 1983, p. 741), such as those deeply concern with the historical uniqueness and

divergence of a concrete cultural event, in the way it is imparted to other related points of view (Liang, 2012).

5.2 Value-Freedom/Neutrality

Weber's comparative methodology and the concept of ideal types are frequently compared with Karl Marx's mono-causation paradigm, which reveals the irreversible relationship between the economic basis and the ideological superstructure. This implies that, in regards to Weber, a social phenomenon can have various genetic causes and consequences as long as they are one-sided, adequate and can be unified under the same analytical construct (Allen, 2004). However, the divergence between Weber and Marx does not make their methodologies completely incompatible. For example, they are both interested in figuring out under what condition(s) capitalistic economy could exist and develop. This can be treated as one of the central issues featuring the very process in forming a bourgeois civilization and personality cultivation in capitalistic societies, which Weber sees as driven by the effect of "rationalization", in contrast to Marx's claim that the capitalistic culture comes through "self-alienation" (Löwith, 1993, p. 49). Unlike Marx's focus on the relations of production, Weber cares more about social action and the ways it changes in shaping and constructing people's behaviours, such an activity that "occurs where 'the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to his behaviour'" (cited in Poggi, 1983, p. 9). According to Weber, the ideas of "action" and "behaviour" are inseparable. He believes understanding an individual's actions would make his/her behaviour more understandable and meaningful, which is key to opening up a wider comprehension of social phenomena in identifying social reality and tracing transformations that are made to the discourse of social power (Poggi, 1983).

But Weber's specific attention to social action and behaviour is found too subjective by some scholars since Weber does not give enough clarification in some instances, such will make the analyses that built upon Weber's works become largely inclined to a researcher's personal interpretations. Weber then comes up with the concept of value-freedom/neutrality, trying to minimize the value-preference (which could be the researcher's cultural customs and religious beliefs) in research. But before that, we should know in Weber's account, value is "a matter of personal choice in modern societies. Modern societies would be such that they do not impose prescribed values to social subjects, but propose to them to choose among many sets of values" (Koslowski, 1997, p. 5). Value in this description shows its close connection with individualism, rather than being forced to choose a certain value, an individual's choice of value should be free, ideally in any instance. Based on this thought, Weber believes science could be value-free and such would also function in the analytical task of sociology (p. 6). In a short description, value-freedom is a "principle of freedom from value judgments" (cited in Adair-Toteff, 2015, p. 11). It posits to assert Weber's commitment to value-neutrality (Turner, 1993) which aimed at separating fact from value (Löwith, 1993). This distinction signals Weber's wish of putting fact and value in its own realm, staying clear of the intersection with each other to overcome biases that may occur and affect the integrity of research. This also becomes a basic principle in the process of building any ideal types. Pulled together, Weber's methodologies illustrate his endeavour to make comparative analysis and ideal types institutional strategies that can stand as a conduit to channel several causal explanations in one analytical task.

But we should not overlook the issues that emerge from uncovering a contradictory stance of Weber's methodologies. On the one hand, Weber tries to take great care of research materials to assure that each key term is given enough conceptual clarity and to guarantee minimal prejudice.

But on the other hand, this goal is hard to reach because subjectivity will inevitably influence a researcher and challenge both researchers' and readers' perception about what should be taken into view and treated without bias and with complete seriousness.

6. The Rationale for Structuring the Three Themes

The purpose of this paper about reviewing Weber's China study will be operated through the examination of ideal types via three themes to summarize what important thematic conceptions arise from the book *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*. Such action will help us detect both resonance and dissonance of Weber's writing on Chinese religions when compared to their modern status for evaluating what parts of the analysis still apply. Patton (2001) points out that conducting thematic analysis should be grounded to form and identify core consistencies and meanings and to be in favour of pattern recognition in text-based qualitative research (p. 453). In connecting Patton's statement to our research, the thematic analysis will be beneficial to delineate the rational inwardness of China's three dominant religions via ideal types as far as they are treated as sense-making patterns to be picked out and compared with other factors. The three themes will mainly focus on three spheres of Chinese religions. The first one will start with an overview of Weber's ideal types of religions with either ascetic or mystical character. This theme attempts to clarify the meaning and implications of each kind, as well as why they demand much attention in Weber's China study. The second theme will try to articulate some useful visions on the types of religious redemption, which hovers between geist and rationality, through taking the dualistic analysis between body and spirit. The third theme will open the discussion of another important term that is frequently addressed from Weber's religious and political studies--charisma; considerably, Weber brings it to light as an essential quality to be considered in leadership and

authority. For that matter, charisma posits itself as a central role in evaluating the very relationship between manipulation and compliance in the Chinese community.

6.1 China's Sociological Foundations

Though the title of the selected book is *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*, instead of going straight to the analysis on Chinese religions, Weber first offers a sociological overview with respect to China's social, political and administrative structures. Religious issues are complex because of their connections across secular and transcendental dimensions of human life. Thus the sociological foundations, in this case, help bridge the knowledge gap for people who are not familiar with Chinese culture and also make this book more accessible and understandable.

The book is divided into three major parts. The first part mainly deals with a variety of sociological foundations through four sections: the first section introduces the genesis of the Chinese city, the concepts of princely administration and deity worship; the second section concentrates on dissecting the operation of feudal bureaucracy and the taxation system; the third section aims primarily to explain the legal administration and China's rural structure; and the last section touches on China's highly stable organization--the sib (kinship) and its relation to the absence of capitalism. The second part of this book addresses Confucianism as orthodoxy both in Chinese traditions and religious orientation by giving a detailed analysis on the role of the intellectual stratum--"the literati", Confucian education and examination system, as well as the core values of propriety and piety in maintaining a static relation of kinship. In the last part, Taoism and Buddhism as religious heterodoxies are taken into account for understanding their ethical and rational positions in ancient China. Weber finishes this book with a comparison between Confucianism and Puritanism by addressing their distinctive religious ethics, as well as how they

influence a nation's political, economic and bureaucratic administration. Considering the first part mentions some key terms that are in part closely associated with Chinese religions (even though they are not directly linked to the case of Singles' Day we address in this paper), short descriptions of them will still be given in the following paragraphs to help our understanding in the discussion of the three themes.

6.1.1 Patrimonial Bureaucracy and Officialdom

These two terms generated a correspondence to outline the orthodox relationship between domination and compliance in terms of China's traditionalism. Patrimonial bureaucracy played a fatally important role in stipulating the breadth of imperial domination, that was--the princes' monopolization of all kinds of possessions of the country including natural resources, material products and populations. This implied that the princes held the greatest power and centralized it to serve their personal needs. In return, they had to take the responsibility to protect their property, staying away from reduction and destruction, no matter from natural or personal forces. In this sense, the very primitive function of patrimonial bureaucracy appeared to defend against floods (Weber, 1951, p. 20) and invasions of the barbarians (p. 26). In general, this administrative regime showed that the authority came from the top of the social pyramid (the imperial family) and moved downward (to the imperial officials). In this type of administration, the imperial officials, as the closest beneficiaries, were always keen to show loyalty to the princes. Weber (1951) then mentions this "homogeneous strata" in which the members of the social pyramid were most likely dedicated to protecting their common privileges granted by the princes instead of striving to change for a better bureaucratic system (p. 41). Therefore, such strata had the characteristics of being highly

stable and impenetrable, only to most likely be torn apart from the inside since the outer attempts of revolution always seemed to fail.

6.1.2 Cities of China

In the book, Weber gives a comparison of cities between China and Europe in the Middle Ages. As he discovered, the divergences between them were obvious to detect. Unlike the cities in the Middle Ages that became a symbol of economic and political rationalization which fostered nascent capitalism, the cities of China lacked political autonomy in leading Chinese societies to build a money economy. Beyond that, Chinese cities also lacked military independence. As Weber (1951) states:

The oriental city was not a 'polis' in the sense of Antiquity, and it knew nothing of the 'city law' of the Middle Ages, for it was not a 'commune' with political privileges of its own. Nor was there a citizenry in the sense of a self-equipped military estate such as existed in occidental Antiquity (p. 13).

Moreover, at a domestic level, again, the lack of autonomy and monetary policies in Chinese cities were notable issues to Weber when compared to the rural structure. In that parallel, both political and financial functions of China's cities were lost due to the loose organizations in merchant and craft guilds. Also, since the income of the cities largely relied on the ground rent of peasants, official prebends (salary) and government's subsidization, the armed citizenry strata could not be established not only because the Chinese cities were operated in an administrative way but also because citizens were too powerless in structure to rival the princely administration (p. 14).

6.1.3 The Power of the Sib Associations

Other than the reasons mentioned above, Weber noticed that the sib association should also be considered as a crucial factor restraining the development of the cities in China. In Weber's account, China's cities and rural organizations were incredibly stable and held a static position in trade and other merchant activities. This phenomenon can be attributed to the cohesiveness and extensiveness of the patrimonial sibs with "unbroken vigour and omnipotence" (Weber, 1951, p. 96). Instead of saying patrimonial bureaucracy engendered the sib associations as its most sustainable creation, it seemed more reasonable to treat the sib organization as the seminal force that influenced the sense of communal unity within which the imperial family was the most unbreakable embodiment. The sibs had tremendous power to turn Chinese society into a unique totality, but based on Weber's analysis, such a sib organization was inherently irrational, and the missing component of developing its rationality was autonomy. In this point, the sibs could build new cities in the way of migrations, but none of these cities would exist in its autonomous independence like the Western communities which went far beyond a locus with the sole function of administration.

6.2 Theme #1 Ideal Types of Religion: Asceticism vs. Mysticism

Two terms, asceticism and mysticism, repeatedly appear in Weber's text to signal that extra attention should be given to their distinctive features in categorizing religions. Much of the ascetic and mystical conflict concentrates on the way these two types of religion delineate the mundane world and the position of the human as either the instrument of God or the container of spiritual reception (Weber, 1920, p.170). In the notion of asceticism, the world is given more secular implications and deemed as a changeable mechanism to be mastered through the "calling" which

encourages people to dedicate as much as they can to honouring God. In an ascetic ideal, human life inhabits the disenchanted space of exhaustive rationality with all the traces of magic and sorcery divested (Weber, 1951, p. 226). In contrast to this way of thinking, the mystical sense of the world overflows contemplation of the “self” both as a sentient living being and a transcendental vigour (spirit) that is unattached from the material world. As such, the moral standard applies distinctly in ascetic and mystic religions, with the former having strong inclinations to follow secular and rational rules in managing daily routines while the latter works harder to echo the soul in its manifold pathways to the ultimate truth of the universe. Weber treats asceticism and mysticism as two ideal types to characterize religions regarding their central doctrines and practices in secular matters. Hence, ascetic religions like Protestantism were usually more willing to prioritize rationality as the behavioural norm to better serve God, whereas mystic religions like Taoism and Buddhism were more likely to withdraw themselves from secular matters. However, although these two concepts are paradoxical on the theological provisions of defining reality, it does not mean that they have to turn against each other since residues of the empirical reality always exist outside the ideal types. To keep up with this, asceticism and mysticism as two ideal types are neither sufficient in covering all types of religions nor absolutely exclusive from each other. They are each not complete to live upon their own standard as a singular dimension, thus suggesting it could be useful to take other relevant dimensions into consideration.

Weber (1951) astutely noticed that simply defining religions as either ascetic or mystic would be far less convincing since this taxonomy was too arbitrary and vague to include the features of all types of religions. He thus invites another pair of terms “inner-worldly” and “world-flight” to compensate for this gap. Though the concepts of asceticism and mysticism are discussed with the distinctive orientations of inner-worldly and world-flight as early as the book *The Religion*

of China: Confucianism and Taoism (1915), it is not until the publication of *The Sociology of Religion* in 1920 that these four terms are first cross-combined as displayed in Table 1.

TABLE 1 IDEAL TYPES OF RELIGIOUS ORIENTATION

	Asceticism	Mysticism	Contemplation
Inner-Worldly	Inner-worldly Asceticism	Inner-worldly Mysticism	
World-flight	World-rejecting Asceticism		
World-fleeing			World-fleeing Contemplation

(Source: derived from Weber, 1920, p. 114-169)

It is unclear as to why Weber also uses the words “contemplation” and “world-fleeing” in his analysis since contemplation and mysticism denote similar meanings in describing Taoism and Buddhism in the book. Nevertheless, in order to rigorously reflect on Weber’s original work, all six criteria are structured to reflect the ways in which Weber classifies these religions in *The Sociology of Religion*. As you can see from Table 1, the four types of religions are: **inner-worldly asceticism**, **inner-worldly mysticism**, **world-fleeing contemplation** and **world-rejecting asceticism**, which present four ideal conducts of life. But in this paper, we will only tackle the first three since the fourth type of world-flight asceticism does not fit into any of the Chinese religions that we seek to examine.

The first of Weber’s type of religions is inner-worldly asceticism. The religious followers of this type would actively immerse themselves into the secular world and believe that working hard while maintaining a frugal lifestyle is the most honourable way to serve God (Weber, 1958).

Clearly, the Protestant ethic is in accordance with inner-worldly asceticism due to the immanent motive to drive them into rationalized capitalism as the exact sense of vocation. To live a secular life with a vocation to God not only requires people to work hard but also emphasizes a limitation of personal possessions, namely, an individual's possessions should not exceed what is "necessary", although "joy in possessions" (parigraha) was the objectional thing, but not possession or gain itself" (Weber, 1958, p. 200).

Unlike inner-worldly ascetic religions, the religions of inner-worldly mysticism mean to live a contemplative life in a secular world. The biggest divergence between the religious orientations is thus the ethical code they each obey. The followers of inner-worldly mysticism never anticipate the mastery of the world like the Protestants did, but rather to **adjust to** it by reducing tensions "to an absolute minimum" with it as the ultimate goal to achieve (Weber, 1951, p.227). Indeed, the Confucian ethic is highly inner-worldly as the goal is to be a humble practitioner of this-worldly rationalism, namely, to do the ethical duty by following the secular rules. Yet, its ethical implications are more conservative compared to the Protestant rationalism in which individuals have the capacity to change the world. In this point, Confucianism at varying degrees satisfies the first half to be considered inner-worldly as it advocates a pacifist and harmonious way of life (Weber, 1951, p. 169). But, noticeably, Confucianism seems not much to reconcile with the other half of mysticism, which places a critical quest on justifying whether a mystical frame could be applied to Confucianism. In the Confucian standard, ethical reasoning predominates a significant role in unifying and strengthening the sib associations for thousands of years. The idea of "benevolence" (kindness/mercy) as the heart of morality is promoted in the way of handling the relationship between self and the other. To be sure, the "other" in the Confucian culture involves both tangibles and spirits; for example, in order to perpetuate the value of piety,

sacrificial rituals are accepted and practiced in Confucianism. This case implies the rigid belief in this-worldliness has ceded a part of its power to mysticism and signified an intersubjective consciousness shared between the living and the dead. In this point, although what is different from the conventional view of mysticism is in Confucian rituals, the role of mediumistic force is not as necessary as in Taoism and Buddhism. In other words, the communication between the living and the deceased ancestors in Confucianism is not mediated through a trained proxy like a Taoist or a monk. To a broader extent, all Confucian rituals are covered by the natural law (or the Heaven Lord), conveying pious messages to animistic beings. But to be clear, here we are not talking about the interactivity of communication between the living and the dead, which means the living sends the messages but holds no expectation to be responded to. In this point, to sense the invisible others is not a goal of the Confucian culture. Thus we can see the mutated use of mystical traditions in the Confucian culture is rooted in its deep skepticism toward ghosts and the afterlife. Pulled together, Confucianism can be justified as an inner-worldly mystical religion in the point of the motive to immerse itself into the secularization of the world but meanwhile the spiritual engagement with other beings cannot be completely eliminated from its rational attempt to disenchant the magic. Therefore, considering Confucianism as a peculiar existence which inherits the ethical-mystical in-betweenness might be the most appropriate way to go.

Taoism and Buddhism are treated as two religious heterodoxies in Weber's account since the influence of these two religions are not penetrated too thoroughly like Confucianism in the ruling strata. Taoism and Buddhism can be categorized into world-fleeing contemplation, despite some obvious distinctions between them. The world-fleeing category of religion is neither interested in secular affairs, nor does it insist on this-worldly values; instead, world-fleeing mystic religions pour the thought of other-worldliness and describe the material world where we live in

as the tawdriness and impermanence. Indeed, “only withdrawal from the ‘world’ gave time and strength for ‘thinking’ as well as for mystic feeling” (Weber, 1951, p. 178). Thus, world-fleeing contemplative religions aim to cultivate people to leave desire and enjoyment behind and move beyond to search for self-awakened divinity. Though both Taoism and Buddhism advocate for evading the world, the Buddhist ethic holds a much more intense sense of world-rejection by treating death as a threshold to enter another life, by saying that, death is an end but also a start that makes “samsara” (the circle of reincarnation which is a kind of transference from one body to another) continue. However, this phenomenon is not a favourable sign in Buddhism because samsara means you have not relieved from the “three poisons” --desire, hatred and ignorance, as they are the ultimate reason to blind you from recognizing your true nature as Buddha--the enlightened one (Charles, 2005, p. 32). In contrast to Buddhism, Taoism has a totally different perspective on death, in which Taoists see death as an irreducible calamity because one’s body and spirit are inseparably coupled--once the body decays, the spirit will soon perish. Such can explain why macrobiotics (the technique for reaching longevity) in Taoism played a fundamental role in defying death. In this point, the fear of death haunts both religions. At their most crucial level, fear then turns to be the strivings against it: Taoists seek help from the life-extending techniques like macrobiotic medicaments (a type of medicine that can extend one’s life into eternity) and magic while Buddhists endeavour to cast off themselves from the circle of samsara by realizing that all conditioned things are transient and subject to suffering and destruction. In sum, the different meanings of death yield further inquiries about how to deal with it. Thus in the next theme, we will keep up with exploring what kinds of redemption that ascetic and mystic religions aim to bring to people.

6.2 Theme #2 Ideal Types of Religious Redemption: Inner-worldly Ascetic Salvation vs. World-fleeing Mystic/Contemplative Salvation

In a broad sense, the critical thinking of suffering and death sets the precondition to treat religion as a means of providing refuge and redemption to its followers. Thus, religious redemption stands as the conduit to bridge the distance between the physical and spiritual world and leads people to the path of salvation. This implies that both ascetic or mystic concepts can be absorbed into this dualistic framework through the typology of Weber's religious studies, in which he convenes a series of empirical phenomena from different religions to refine the key features of each kind. In doing so, we can observe the inner driver that facilitates and alters the followers' behaviours in shaping the rationalized behavioural pattern. Although Weber does not draw on a dualism between body and spirit when investigating their relations to redemption, after a careful review of his work, it seems feasible to situate them as the two ends of redemption because the book shows us that all three Chinese religions are concerned with the transfers between body and spirit and place them at different levels of mutuality as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2 THE BODY-SPIRIT DUALISM

	Body	Spirit
Protestantism	Dominating	Dominating
Confucianism	Dominating	Subordinate
Taoism	Dominating	Subordinate
Buddhism	Subordinate	Dominating

(Source: derived from Weber, 1951, p. 173-224)

For inner-worldly ascetic religions like Protestantism, the dominant redemptive orientation requires the followers to live an ascetic life while working hard in gaining possessions for God. This mode of salvation demonstrates an embodiment of God's commandment to be carried out in real life, or more specifically, the movements have taken to bring the oath of vocation into action. In this case, the human's physical existence, as an important instrument not only brings honour to God but also wins itself a reward to enter heaven after death. Hence, the inner-worldly ascetic redemption positions body and spirit in a mutual and reciprocal relationship, taking on the same weight and compensating each other for attaining salvation.

Confucianism as an inner-worldly mystic religion emphasizes the role of body more than spirit, which can be traced back to its solidified traditions on ethical obligations. Although Protestantism and Confucianism both have a penchant for creating a sober world, namely, a space constituted by rational social relations, Weber still believes that by comparison, the Confucian ethic "lacked rational matter-of-factness, impersonal rationalism, and the nature of an abstract, impersonal purpose association" (cited in Alexander, 1983, p. 39). This statement reveals a central critique of Weber about the Confucian culture. Specifically, Chinese society is bound by the stable cohesion of kinship relations, alongside the conventional teachings of propriety and piety, which become the main cause to exert the negative effects on establishing the autonomous political and economic organizations as was mentioned about Chinese cities in the earlier section. Such a reified social system unexpectedly impedes the growth of rationalized and objectified merchant economy (Weber, 1951, p. 238).

But since modern China abolished the sib culture to manifest the sense of communality which emphasizes people are equal in the social stratum, namely, the hierarchical differentiation was eliminated. Thus the Confucian ethic that we see in Weber's account, insofar as the main

factor that restrains the development of economic rationality is not very applicable in a modern context. If we take this argument into the case of Singles' Day, we will find that once the feudal norms in Confucianism do not hinder the pursuit of a rationalized economy, it will not be astonishing to see the rise of a series of business activities that are guided by rationality in modern China, whereby Singles' Day is only one of the most notable examples.

Back to Weber's analysis, the collateral influence of the sib relations can also be reflected on its refusal of redemptory religiosity. By saying that, Weber means that there is no such thing called "salvation" in Confucianism, or at least not in an original sense of it. In short, this point of view cuts off the speculation of pursuing other-worldly redemption in the Confucian ethic. Hence, in connecting it to the body-spirit dualism as proposed, the role of body is always superior to spirit since only the physical existence can enjoy the blissful reward of "long life, health, and wealth in this world and beyond death the retention of his good name" that granted by the "Heaven Lord" (p. 228). This statement brings us back to the paradoxical circumstance that we confronted in theme one about justifying Confucianism as a mystical religion. Indeed, Confucianism, on the one hand, rejects being inscribed on the scroll of redemptory religiosity since it is considered unholy and barbaric, but on the other hand, "this ethic of unconditional affirmation of and adjustment to the world presupposed the unbroken and continued existence of purely magical religion" (p. 229).

Although both Taoism and Confucianism are emphatic that body is privileged in the scale of self-perfection through living a virtuous and dignified life, the implication of self-perfection in Confucianism points to the "highest qualification certified by examination" (p. 132). Conversely, in Taoism the objective is to cultivate one's humility through contemplation to achieve the absolute void (*wu wei*, or *Tao*) (p. 182). In both instances, body is the dominating medium to resonate with the ideal conducts of life which advocate in Confucianism and Taoism respectively. Buddhism

shares the opposite vision with respect to Taoism regarding the dialectical connection between body and spirit. In Buddhist doctrines, body is always subordinated to spirit since the former is ephemeral and the latter is imperishable. Such can relate to Buddhism's configurations of time and space, in which the periodical nature of time was emphasized as infinite circles with endless repetition of birth and death. Within this cycle, all sorts of existence that must be built upon their inherent relevance with others through cyclic orders; and besides that, the "uniqueness" of the world is also not accepted due to Buddhists' unshakable belief in the unlimited worlds "as numerous as the sands of the Ganges" (Charles, 2005, p. 27).

Under this grandiose cosmology, the human's physical existence would have easily encroached into oblivion, and so the only way of salvation is to self-awaken by improving the wisdom to understand the law of karma. In general, karma can be deemed as moral retribution which is rooted in the motivations and actions that you put beforehand: "not only does every cause have an effect, but he who also puts the cause in action suffers the effect" (Christmas, 2005, p. 13). Thus, we can consider it as moral judgment based on merit (good) and demerit (evil). However, the perception of karma should not be simply regarded as an accumulation of good and evil because the inner consequences of karma go far beyond the scale of this-worldly morality. By the same token, we cannot simply consider body as a carrier to sustain our social activity, but also as a vehicle to drive our karma into the next life. Thus, in this sense, body is only a temporary residence to carry the spirit around. This is why the ultimate goal for all Buddhists is to leave the circle of samsara and never return to the material world that our body inhabits.

In sharp contrast to this point of view, the Taoist ethic values the body to an extreme by thinking of death as the evil symbol to signify a person's unvirtuousness and imperfections. Hence, death is an absolute taboo in Taoism, "for when rightly considered death should be avoidable for

a truly perfect man. The truly perfect man (*chen, ching, hsin*) must be endowed with invulnerability and magical powers” (Weber, 1951, p. 191).

6.3 Theme #3 Ideal Types of Charismatic Leader: Ethical Prophets vs. Exemplary Prophets

The last theme we seek to explore is the different types of charismatic leadership in Chinese religions. In his writing, Weber articulates a series of noteworthy visions on charisma and charismatic leadership. Charisma is usually regarded as a heavenly power or personality that is endowed onto leaders (sorcerers and heroes) to legitimate sanctity and dominance (Weber, 1951, p. 29). Charismatic leadership, then, can be seen as the ruling authority engendered by charisma. In the early records of charismatic leaders, sorcerers who have magical powers and heroes who have accomplished extraordinary feats are considered to have charismatic qualities (p. 30). Later, these charismatic personalities are rendered into two main types: priests and prophets. The charismatic power of priests is closely associated with their office in an ordered organization. For example, the emperors are usually the high priests in Chinese society because they hold the essential position in national rituals, praying for the cultural cohesion and longevity of the country (p. 26). Differently, the role of prophets in Chinese history is “for correctly ordering the internal administration and the charismatically correct life conduct of the prince, ritually and politically” (p. 110). These descriptions show, although both priests and prophets are the pioneers to propel Chinese society into an institutionalized structure, the function of the former concentrates more on cementing Chinese communities into the unity for stabilizing and consolidating the imperial administration, whereas the latter encourages the imperial lord to adjust existing regulations to accommodate the changing contexts. In short, priests want the nation to remain in a static status but prophets have hope of bringing more revolutionary dynamics.

In line with categorizing religions into asceticism or mysticism, Weber introduces two types of prophets with ethical or exemplary characteristics to supplement the understanding of ascetic and mystical religions. In this notion, “ethical prophet” is the instrument on behalf of a god to proclaim his commandment and will, in order to guide people to follow them as an ethical duty; “exemplary prophet” refers to a person who demonstrates the path to salvation by his personal experiences (Weber, 1920, p. 56). In general, ethical prophets are more likely to appear in ascetic religions as the moral imperative to stipulate the conduct of life. In other words, ethical prophets are devised to maintain control over the individual’s secular life; similarly, exemplary prophets come to serve this motive of control as well, but differently, their prophecy exerts more influences in mystic religions, as the sorcerers show magic directly in front of others. In this sense, the magic is the metaphor of power to embody the other-worldly spectacle into our mundane world. Such power is incredible not only because exemplary prophets solve the puzzle of redemption by their own endeavours, but also because they bring up the answer equally to everyone. The establishment of ethical prophets is through a logical deduction to presume the sole existence of God, which is rooted in the belief of monotheism. In this theological setting, the particularism and primacy of God are strengthened and worshipped as the only salvation of mortal beings fighting against demons “through the human incarnation of a divinity” (Weber, 1920, p. 21). Ethical prophets, in this case, can be deemed as the incarnation of God, helping conquer the ethical irrationality by offering the rationalized behavioural guide to stimulate individual’s interests in living an ascetic life. To achieve that, ethical prophets bear the responsibility to transform God’s proclamation and will into a systematic ethical standard which includes the instructions of doctrines, tenets and ethical duties that followers should obey. Unlike ethical prophets, exemplary prophets take the form of personal narrative to show the nature of mortal beings as the container of deities (animism).

This insight delves into the mystical contemplation as well as its chasm to the secular world. That means in the theology of mysticism, the notion of this-worldliness is in the opposite direction to the truth of salvation which can only be found by the revelation of self-enlightenment. The followers of mystic religions insist that immersing oneself into the inner-worldly delusion could incur the devaluation of the other-worldly religiosity. For that matter, they believe secular life can only bring illusionary and temporary joy, but there is no help at all to lead people to any redemptory action. Hence, a wise man should never have too deep an attachment with this wasteland of wisdom. In this case, the role of exemplary prophets, acting as the messenger and practitioner who have witnessed the spectacularity of heaven, returns to inform the others that they live in a world with rampant afflictions; thus, they have to drop the illusion about this world immediately and aim for a pure land with a pure virtuous mind. Critically, the theological framework of mysticism is usually derived from exemplary prophets' personal experiences through contemplation and meditation. Thus some people would critique the possibility of exemplary prophets in grasping the truth of the existence of pure land. It is also why, compared to ethical prophets in ascetic religions, exemplary prophets are more likely to be considered irrational because a solid logic deduction is absent from proving the mystical substance truly exists, and so potentially causing the inconsistency between doctrines and actual action.

When applying these two types of prophets to Chinese religion, we can see that Confucianism seems to have a resonance with ethical prophets, though as Weber alleged, ethical prophets are more often in ascetic religions. But impressively, Confucianism as an inner-worldly mystic religion has well-accommodated ethical prophets in its tradition. The most significant case would be Confucius, whose feats go beyond initiating the philosophical school of Confucianism, but more considerably, he is apotheosized as an ethical deity. After Confucius's death, temples to

him are built as memorial objects to spread his teachings. In Chinese history, temples are treated as “objects of worship” (Weber, 1951, p. 33), and only ancestral spirits and deities are qualified to own temples and receive tributes from descendants and followers. For that matter, we can see the temples of Confucius convey at least two meanings. One is attached to the orthodox role of Confucianism in Chinese society. In this sense, Confucius as the initiator is eligible to be worshipped as the ancestral spirit of Confucianism; the second meaning addresses from the charismatic personality of Confucius, the philosophical system he opened up, is the epoch of a frontier intellectual theory in which it is stated the principles of being a morally virtuous man. Hence, we can justify the double salience of Confucius of being the founder of Confucianism and the ethical prophet at the same time.

Taoism and Buddhism are religions that have exemplary prophets in their doctrines. To understand that, we need to take a closer look at Lao-tzu, the initiator of Taoism. As we know, Confucius developed the system of Confucian examination, where the percentage of people who fail the examination is very high. Thus, people who pass the examination are usually considered to have a “magical-charismatic qualification” and had their names “in the village” to honour the sibs (p. 135). In contrast, Lao-tzu rejected this feudal examination along with other Confucian rules of ceremony and rituals because they were worthless in attaining *wu wei*--to drop active passions and to enter a realm with “absolutely void of worldly interests” (p. 182). Lao-tzu exemplified himself with the practices of macrobiotics and *wu wei* to expose the real *Tao* in Taoism--gaining immortality, and as recorded in Taoist myth, Lao-tzu became *shen* (deity) and lived a permanent life. The narrative of Lao-tzu gives us the sense to know what exemplary prophets should look like. In this notion, Buddha is another notable case in featuring exemplary prophets. The name of Buddha is Siddhartha, a noble prince of India. He leaves the palace at the

age of 29 to pursue the true nature of suffering. He attains enlightenment when he is 35. In the following 45 years, Buddha disseminates his sermons to people who pled for emancipation. In pointing to exemplary prophets, Siddhartha incarnates himself as Buddha, meaning there is no difference between Siddhartha and Buddha. By claiming that, he wants to let us know, every one of us is given rise to a Buddhahood, the only obstacle being we have yet to discover this awakening.

7. Result

This research paper started with an inquiry of Weber's assertions about Chinese religions by stating they lacked rationalized ethics which is the main cause of the perishing of modern capitalism. However, the rapid rise of China's e-commerce fosters the largest capitalistic event-- Singles' Day. Since 2009, this online shopping carnival has broken the sale records every year. In 2018, it hit 30.8 billion USD in sales within 24 hours, which is larger than the amount from Black Friday and Cyber Monday combined. Clearly, such a phenomenon conflicts with Weber's findings. In order to explore what parts of Weber's work still apply in modern China, a document analysis of his book *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism* is provided as the research document for leading a critical discussion about Chinese religions. To be mentioned, this research paper is guided by the research question: **Do Weber's studies of religious ethics of Chinese religions still apply in modern China after the 20th century?** To tackle this question in a more precise manner, this book is reviewed by the extraction of the ideal types including religious types (asceticism and mysticism), the redemptive orientation (inner-worldly and world-fleeing), and charismatic leader (ethical prophets and exemplary prophets), to demonstrate why China failed to develop capitalism as a rationalized economic system. In a general view, the major reason that rivals capitalism is China's traditional patrimonial bureaucracy. At a macro-level, the Chinese community is

administrated under a pyramid hierarchy, in which the top layer is the prince and imperial family. The orders come from them then move down to officials and lastly to the citizenry. Moreover, aside from the hierarchical social strata, the strong cohesion of the sibs is another essential element to empower patrimonial bureaucracy. In such a rigid feudal relationship of dominance and obedience, people can hardly ever challenge the ancestral and imperial power. For that reason, democratic and mutual communications are almost impossible between the elderly and the young, “this tremendous power of the strictly patriarchal sib was, in truth, the carrier of the much discussed ‘democracy’ of China, which had nothing whatsoever in common with ‘modern’ democracy” (Weber, 1951, p. 96). If we take a look from a religious perspective, Confucianism as the orthodoxy in Chinese tradition does not help alleviate the tension brought about by patrimonial bureaucracy, but rather to emphasize the importance of piety and propriety and set them as the social norm and moral duty to be followed by everyone. Taoism and Buddhism do not play a major role in Chinese society due to Taoist and Buddhist advocacy being largely world-fleeing to encourage the universal withdrawal from the secular world, which means they could not impose too much power on the stratum of intellectuals, who they believe mystical activities like divination and macrobiotics are superstition and would degrade the virtuousness of *the literati* (the gentleman). This can also explain why Taoism and Buddhism are more popular among the lower-strata.

In answering the research question, indeed, Weber lays out many considerable arguments about Chinese religions and the descriptions of them in a large part are accurate and honest, but due to the language barrier and lack of enough reliable documents back to Weber’s time, there are some faulty interpretations and misreadings about Chinese culture. More than that, Weber cannot completely avoid the Eurocentric tendencies in his writing as well. For example, in the discussions

of Chinese religions, he always sets out his opinions on the comparison with Protestantism, and arrives at his conclusions by addressing a comparative analysis between Confucianism and Puritanism. Such makes this book unlikely to be a true study of China and more like a supplementary reading of the Protestant ethic.

Back to the research question, since we attempt to analyze whether Weber's work still applies in modern China, the answer is not as positive as expected. With the enactment of "the reform and opening-up policy" in 1978, China entered a new epoch to embrace new opportunities brought about by modernity. In order to accommodate this fast-changing environment, the first thing was to get rid of the outdated social norms and acquire a systematic administration across every facet of social life. This articulates the truth that China decided to shake off the chains enforced by traditionalism. Hence, a series of anti-Confucianism campaigns were held, the most famous being "'Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius' in 1973. Mao Zedong indicated that the criticism of Lin Biao and his followers should be combined with a thorough criticism of Confucius" (Chinese posters, 1974). However, this does not mean the Confucian culture is eliminated in China. Instead, the essential teachings are preserved and readapted to serve the ruling class--the Communist Party. For example, the key feature of conventional Confucianism is the adjustment of the world, but now, Chinese people abandon the role as passive spectators and choose to actively participate in the global market. This modified usage of Confucianism can be traced from President Xi's advocacy--The Chinese Dream. As he states: "The Chinese dream, after all, is the dream of people. We must realize it by closely depending on the people. We must increasingly bring benefits to people" (Xinhuanet, 2019). From this statement, we can detect the hereditary element of the sibs, in which: "the individual's mystic or ascetic quest for salvation was an interest entirely alien to (classical) Confucianism" (Weber, 1951, p. 177). Pulled together, in Weber's China study, the

arguments of Confucianism in a large part still resonate in modern China, but since China has become a “people’s republic”, Weber’s findings especially those based on traditionalism and feudalism seem not too applicable in the current context.

8. Discussion

In this section, we will draw on the ultimate dispute over the religiosity (irrationality) and the disenchantment of the world (rationality). According to Weber (1951), there are two degrees to evaluate whether a religion is inclined to rationalism: “one is the degree to which the religion has divested itself of magic; the other is the degree to which it has systematically unified the relation between God and the world and therewith its own ethical relationship to the world” (p. 226). In Weber’s view, the sobriety of the world to make it leave the phantasms of the sorcery and irrational religiosity should be prioritized in modern life. Doubtlessly, the development of sciences and technologies became the saviour to disenchant myths of religions. However, Weber soon noticed modern capitalism is not equated with rationalized capitalism; likewise, modernity does not guarantee to turn the world into wonderland. He further expressed his deep worries about technological advancements as an inexorable and inevitable consequence of modernization:

The technical and economic conditions of machine production which to-day determine the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism, not only those directly concerned with economic acquisition, with irresistible force. Perhaps it will so determine them until the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt (p. 123).

This pessimistic statement by Weber has no exaggeration to prophesize a forlorn pathos of human beings in their solitude of existential homelessness. Or by another expression, “an iron cage” (cited in Berman, 1982, p. 27), which is perhaps the best metaphor that concatenated to the very

notion of modernism in Weberian sociology. Marshall Berman (1982) gives his own interpretation of this metaphor by saying that our modern society is a cage, people who are insiders are trapped in its delusions of development, “those inside are devoid of inner freedom or dignity, the cage is not a prison; it merely furnishes a race of nullities with the emptiness they crave and need” (p. 28). This description may get reified easily in the case of Singles’ Day, which could be seen as a brand-new type of spectacle to define fashionable life. Such is even more convincing when you see thousands of people rejoicing in a shopping carnival that is driven by exponentially incremental advancements of technologies.

Taking the case of Singles’ Day and Weber’s China study in a modern context into account, we will find digital technologies that support the rapid growth of China’s e-commerce actually have no effect on making people’s life meaningful as Weber anticipates that modern capitalism could achieve. For one reason, what technologies do is to combine separate sections like media, transportation and payment services together and mix them into a composite product to be consumed. In this sense, your identity as a seller or as a shopper does not matter anymore because, in a virtual world, people are nothing different from a cluster of data, a subject of control, and a susceptible being to be taken advantage of by endless advertisements. When relating this argument to the three themes we discussed in the earlier section, we will further discover why Weber’s findings are not so applicable in modern China.

In theme one, Weber considers Confucianism an inner-worldly mystic religion, whereas Taoism and Buddhism are world-fleeing mystic religions. The biggest distinction between these two types of religions is rooted in the world view that they each hold. These three Chinese religions develop their own cosmological perspectives regarding time and space, as well as how the configurations of time and space affect people who live in the secular world. In pointing to the

secular world, we are actually talking about the inherent conflict between mystic religions' inner-worldly and other-worldly orientations in the way of treating faith. As to inner-worldly mystic religions like Confucianism, although the mystical traces can still be found in the Confucian tradition, ethical obligation plays an essential role in dealing with the relationship between faith and everyday life. This point of view triggers the critical consideration of how modern Confucianism correlates to the rise of Singles' Day. To be sure, the modern use of the Confucian ethic by the Communist Party has mutated in order to fit the ruling party's demand. By saying that, we should not think of Confucianism as it was in feudal China; instead, it is more appropriate to see it as a new formulation of administrative strategy used by the Communist Party, to persuade Chinese people to dedicate themselves to the secular life. In doing so, the Chinese Dream will come true and the benefit of it will be given to everyone who endeavoured to make this country wealthier and stronger. Obviously, Singles' Day satisfies the core value of the Chinese Dream about benefiting people. This view is implicated in two levels of benefiting. The first level is the operation mode (a blend of socialist and capitalistic market orientation) of Singles' Day favours the private-owned enterprises, which allows more freedom and autonomy during the competition (for example, sellers can decide the way to promote their products). The second level of benefiting comes from the huge success achieved by Singles' Day to facilitate the country's economy in a noticeable way. Indeed, the performance of Singles' Day at the economic aspect is astonishing, but a contemplative mystical mind that Taoism and Buddhism promote is absent from the financial breakthroughs that e-commerce creates. That means, Chinese people in the modern time are deeply stuck in the secular matrix that the dualism between material and spirit is split off, namely, the remoteness between body and soul is hard to be compensated as long as the pursuit of economic progress comes first. Therefore, if we say China before the "reform and opening-up policy" is a

country that worships the ancestral power and is closely bound by the sib's ethical duty, then China after this policy converts to worshipping science and technology and whatever makes this country an economic titan in the global market.

Theme two is built upon the first theme and deals with the salvation problems that always accompany the transmission of religious ethics. As Weber points out, Confucianism mainly guides the path to salvation in a secular way, or you can even say there is no direct correlation between the Confucian ethic and redemption, which can be traced back to Confucianism's skepticism of the afterlife. In the Confucian ethic, people's physical existence is the holy embodiment to bring the ancestors' blessing (include health, wealth and charismatic personality) into life. Taoism shares this viewpoint in part by claiming that body is the valuable entity to extend one's life to eternity, but differently, Taoism as a world-fleeing mystic religion confirms the role of spirit as invisible energy to sustain the longevity of the body. In contrast to Confucianism and Taoism, Buddhism is emphatic that the role of spirit is superior to body in attaining salvation. Such an idea indicates the other-worldly cosmology in Buddhism, whereby a being's living body is transient and subject to destruction. In other words, from a Buddhist perspective, all phenomena we see and experience are illusions that can never be fixated in a permanent condition. Clearly, the ethics of Taoism and Buddhism seem abandoned in the case of Singles' Day because the other-worldly contemplation is lost, especially when people's desire toward materials (products) gets greatly provoked and satisfied through several clicks on their mobile devices.

Theme three introduces two types of prophets with ethical and exemplary character. Ethical prophets are those who pass on the will of God to other people. The main duty of ethical prophets is to set the God's will as the ethical standard to guide people in secular matters. Unlike ethical prophets who act as the moral imperative to make people believe that working hard and living an

ascetic life will honour God the most, exemplary prophets dedicate more to demonstrating the pathway of redemption through their own experiences. In Weber's account, although Confucianism is defined as an inner-worldly mystic religion, it is more likely to have ethical prophets since the Confucian ethic is deeply rooted in a secular world view, while world-fleeing mystic religions like Taoism and Buddhism have strong inclination to accept exemplary prophets in their tradition. In general, this theme has the least correlation to Singles' Day. There are two possible reasons for this, the first is attached to the disenchantment brought by science and technology. With science and technology, people feel they can decipher the myths left especially by the mystical religions and deem them as either superstitions, or irrational fictions because the logic deduction and evidence are insufficient to justify that the mystical narratives are real. The second reason reveals China is not a theocratic country, and since the Communist Party owns the highest power in managing domestic affairs, socialism becomes the main ethic in modern China that every Chinese should follow. Such action almost leaves no space for religions like Taoism and Buddhism to overturn the dominant position of socialism.

Pulled together, in a modern condition, the ultimate social expression of self that Weber devotes to pursuing may have already been deprived of its virtues as it used to have in religions and elsewhere. We may start to worry about our future, of whether or not it will be built upon phantoms that only belong to a historical past and losing its attraction as a whole when the "magic" endowed with those technological novelties quickly wears off. When that day comes, we may have already been dragged into the maelstrom of modernity and drowned by the open mesh of fragmented self. In this point, once we used science to sober the world, but one day we may lament and have to return to a recursive circle to disenchant the modern world with religion.

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