

Editorial

Sam Whimster

Max Weber Studies was one of the joint sponsors of the conference 'Max Weber and China: Culture, Law and Capitalism' held at London's School of Oriental and African Studies in September 2013. Many of the papers from the conference will be published as articles over the course of 2014. A joint editorial by the organizing committee will be published in 14.2. Here only brief mention of the articles will be undertaken.

The journal also instituted the Annual Max Weber Studies Lecture at the SOAS conference. It was a great honour for the journal and the conference that Wolfgang Schluchter, Emeritus Professor in Sociology at the University of Heidelberg, agreed to give the annual lecture. He placed Weber's study on Confucianism and Buddhism within the larger framework and chronology of the 'Economic Ethics of World Religions' project. Confucianism, for Weber, provides the counter-case to ascetic Protestantism in his sociology of religious rationalism. Schluchter's main concern is that the study is not interpreted as a contemporary analysis of why imperial China did not achieve Western-style modernity.

Don Zang notes that despite Schluchter's plea for a contextual understanding of Confucianism, Chinese sociologists in the People's Republic now regard the study as iconic for a Western interpretation of China's backward development. This more aggressive stance to Weber seemingly might have taken over from the freeing up of Chinese intellectual life in the 1980s, where Max Weber was read with avidity, taking over the slot previously occupied by Karl Marx.

Po-Fang Tsai, based at the National Taiwan University, opens up the complexities of Weber's account of Chinese officials in their law-giving and administrative functions. Confucian ideology in many ways considered itself superior to everyday business of grievances that required legal redress. Tsai profiles the occupational careers of

private secretaries and litigation masters in local legal practice, showing how these diverged from the perspective of Confucian officials.

Christopher Adair-Totefff provides a clear and expository analysis of the contrast between Weber's account of Protestantism and Confucianism. This takes in recent publications, frequently critical, of Weber's account of China. He also includes Weber's economic and political sociology, where Weber extended the range of differences between China and the Protestant West.

Evangelical Protestantism is a fast growing church in S. America today and church services explicitly cater for the magical-emotional outpouring as an attracting religious sentiment. As Weber noted of Pietism, in the Protestant Ethic study, it also contains elements of sentimentality, as an emotional pull for the congregation. John Williamson Nevin condemned such emotional exploitation in early 19th century American Protestantism in his book *The Anxious Bench*. Weber also noted this phenomenon, though readers of Parsons' translation of the *Protestant Ethic* will be hard pressed to find the reference, which got lost in translation. Mariana Côrtes, in a Note, restores the reference and explains its significance.

Sam Whimster catches up with Piketty fever in his review essay of *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Piketty devotes considerable attention to the long historical record of inequality as measured by wealth, the return on wealth, and the ratio of income to wealth. Indeed his empirical data is incomparable. It is on this basis that he has announced a new law of capitalism. The rate of return on capital, which he defines more generally as all wealth, tends over the long term to be greater than the rate of growth. While the latter was to the fore in the short twentieth century, capitalism has now returned to type, favouring the rentier over the innovative and productive capitalist who provides new income-earning opportunities. Many of the categories used by Piketty appear in Weber's economic sociology and Weber was very sensible of the distinction between rentier and productive capitalist; also of the inequality generating nature of late 19th century capitalism. Piketty rejects Karl Marx's law of capital (accumulation of capital deliberately forces down wages). Weber saw that by the end of the nineteenth century this was no longer true. Expanding working class and middle class occupations were commanding rising wages. Piketty stimulates a re-reading of Weber on inequality. Here Weber sides closer to Marx, explaining the patterns of inequality by the structure of ownership classes, which is generated by the (ever-changing) division of labour. Whimster concludes

that this is still a viable explanation for inequality, and one ignored by Piketty whose analysis is constrained by his statistical categories. Whimster also reviews Ralph Schroeder's *An Age of Limits*, which among its comprehensive identification of the structural issues for the 21st century, also targets the likely trend to growing inequality caused by autonomy of disembedded markets.

Those looking for a closer reading of Weber's economic sociology will be heartened by the appearance in the Max Weber Gesamtausgabe of the volumes *Economy and Society* in its final but incomplete revision and the *General Economic History*—or to give it its correct title *Abriss der universalen Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*. As Adair-Toteff in his comprehensive review of all the newly appearing MWG volumes makes clear, the students at Munich demanded he give the course on economic history just as those students were far less keen to sit through the exposition of basic sociological concepts. *Wirtschaft and Gesellschaft* comes with a full scholarly apparatus and the *Abriss*, unlike the English translation, comes with its 'Begriffliche Vorbemerkung'. (This has been translated by Keith Tribe in the Beiheft of *Max Weber Studies*.) Students and scholars will now be able to get a far better sense of Weber's economic sociology, especially since his lectures on economy from the Freiburg and Heidelberg days have also been published in Section III of the MWG. The five volumes of Weber's lectures, published to date, is an immense achievement of the MWG. The editions had to be put together from Weber's own lecture notes and from the notes of his students. Finally, to note, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft I/23* has acquired a new sub-title: *Soziologie*.

The MWG volumes in scholarly weight and thoroughness are replacing the original compilations of Weber's writings by Marianne Weber. But, as the scholarly issues involved become clearer, one's admiration for Marianne's efforts grows. The extent of the vagaries of how Weber was received after his death can be expressed in the equation: Reception = Compilation of texts + Disseminators and their prevailing schools of thought + Translations (their date of publication and their conceptual vocabulary). Joshua Derman's book on Weber reception is a fascinating account of the twists and turns in this history, noting that Weber was at times interpreted in entirely opposite ways. Likewise, Uta Gerhardt's book on Talcott Parsons, reviewed by Sven Eliaeson, shows the full extent of Parson's influence on the reception of Max Weber into American sociology—and back into the German Federal Republic. Keith Tribe in his review

notes of Derman's chapter on charisma: 'This last chapter is a welcome case study of how one of Weber's ideas was picked up and done to death by a thousand citations, so that a word that originally meant nothing to a referee for the *American Political Science Review* in 1936 ended up meaning very little in general.'