

Secular ethics and socialist spirit
Reflections on *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*

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Looking back at the achievements of Max Weber, I will approach this in terms of the rise of great powers. The international community often compares China today with Germany in Wilhelm II's period as emperor. This, of course, is basically misleading because China is the mother of its own civilization and has been a unified country since the Qin Dynasty, whereas Germany was a mixed protestant and catholic country that was not unified until the second half of the 19th century. However, in terms of breaking through the existing discourse system, the two are somewhat similar.

Pushing back the history of Germany's rise may help move beyond Western-centric logic. Germany first realized the spiritual enlightenment and then realized the political nation-building, and the political nation-building was finally completed because of the spiritual nation-building. In Europe, 'civilization' is the patent of advanced and developed countries such as Britain and France -- Britain and France are only civilized, others are barbaric in contrast. Germany was the first to rebel against this view of Western civilization. Up to that point Germany was seen as a semi-barbaric region, the battlefield of Europe and religious wars, and always dependent on the western civilised part of Europe. Although the frantic advance of the cultural conscious movement mainly occurred in the field of literature, its essence was a war of thought patterns. German cultural uniqueness was sparked by a new sense of patriotism following Prussia's invasion by the armies of Napoleon, in the recovery of the German language by the Grimm brothers, the patriotic songs of Arndt, and Fichte's lectures on the German nation at the newly founded University of Berlin. In a strong spirit of resistance, writers and historians re-stated German culture and the celebrations of the ancient Germanic hero Hermann and the Battle of Teutonic Forest. This is the cultural roots of the German nation on the surface, but it is a metaphor for the resistance to western Europe-centric theory.

As Collingwood puts it, Germans are 'trying to find achievements in the past, and to discern the spirit of their past from their past achievements'. In the philosophical Concept of Human History, Held puts forward the concept of culture as opposed to civilization, which emphasizes the nationality of the cultural subject and the limitation of the boundary. Held's definition comprehensively broke through the concept that only Britain and France were civilized and the others were barbaric, which laid the conditions for the rise of Germany. Spengler's *The Decline of the West* had defined

culture as spiritual and civilization as material. He divided the history of every high culture in the world into "cultural stage" and "civilization stage". He believed that western civilization had entered the stage of civilization and lost its original cultural creativity, leaving only the possibility of external expansion.

Therefore, 'civilization is the self-proclaimed precursors of the first nations, which monopolize the voice of what is "good"'. In this way, the *Decline of the West* deconstructs civilization with culture and replaces the 'Westcentric theory' with the 'Germanic theory', successfully making Germans stand up spiritually. As we know Max Weber opposed Spengler's theory of history, arguing that there is no inherent logic to history or inevitability of stages of history. But what is striking to a Chinese perspective is the emphasis both authors give to the idea of spirit. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber revealed the mystery of the ideal core of capitalism leading to an all conquering spirit of capitalist world mastery, whose origins lay in Protestantism.

How do we place the approaches of Spengler and Weber in respect of China? In other words, how does China's current rise create a new form of human civilization, not just a national Renaissance? This is a problem that China's academic confidence and academic consciousness must solve. I made a preliminary discussion in the book *Hai Shang? -- Revelations of European Civilization*.¹ However, more questions remain to be answered.

To sum up, the key word of the Chinese Renaissance is rejuvenation. Three questions remain to be clarified: First, to what extent is rejuvenation enough? Does it develop after the revival? If we fail to make clear the logic that China's sustainable development can stand for the sustainable development of human civilization, that is, the rationality of the Chinese dream, we cannot convince the world. Second, why is China reviving? Without a clear explanation of why a resurgent China is tolerant of the West and will not repeat the tragedy of binary opposition, namely the legitimacy of the Chinese dream, the world will not be convinced. Third, apart from the countries defeated by the West in recent times, we should also ask about the conditions of the West's own revival and sustainability. The international community will not be pleased if we fail to explain clearly how China's rejuvenation will help other countries' rejuvenation and contribute back to the world, namely, the rational purpose of the Chinese dream.

¹ Wang Yiwei, *Haishang: Revelations of European Civilization*. SCPG Publishing

This shows that the Chinese dream is based on self-reliance and self-improvement through self-esteem, and through debate seeking future development prospect of domestic consensus. This will create a new international identity, aiding international recognition of China's development. Its historical mission depends on the following three aspects: one is the source, which is to answer questions of the origins of Chinese Renaissance. The original Chinese civilization is an inexhaustible source of the Chinese dream, and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is also a process of reviving and surpassing the achievements of the Chinese civilization of 5,000 years. The second is to solve the question of why China should be revived. China is the only ancient civilization that has not been colonized by the West. The great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is the only great revival of secular civilization in history. The ultimate goal of the Chinese dream is to create a new civilization -- a socialist civilization. Third, the right path, that is, how will China treat the revival of other countries? We welcome the flourishing of all countries and their inhabitants. The value of the Chinese dream lies in the provision of goods, institutions and spiritual public goods 'originating in China and belonging to the world' for the world's transformation. The Chinese dream is not only trumpeting the rejuvenation of Chinese civilization, but also ushering in a new era of human dream, as indicated in the concept of Community of Shared Future for Humankind.

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