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On the importance of studying Late Qing economic and social history for the analysis of contemporary China or: Protecting sinology against social science

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**On the Importance of Studying Late Qing Economic and
Social History for the Analysis of Contemporary China
or:
Protecting Sinology Against Social Science**

by
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**This paper is for discussion only. Its English has not been edited.
Comments are welcome.**

1. Introduction:¹

The Elimination of Sinology by Means of General Methodology

In recent times we observe a strong tendency in Chinese studies leading to the conceptual fusion of sinology and social science in broader terms and, perhaps, to abolish "sinology" as an autonomous intellectual endeavour eventually. The latter means that a clear-cut distinction is made between general methodology and methods of social science on the one hand and the different objects of their application on the other hand.² The assumption is taken for granted that methodology is completely independent from its special field of application like, for instance, the "area" in "area studies". Hence there is only a certain need to get access to the peculiar empirical data in that field in order to be able to apply those general methods deemed to be the most effective and fruitful ones regarding the class of problems under which that special case is to be subsumed.

For sinology this means that one should, of course, study the Chinese language and that one should be able to extract empirical data from Chinese sources. However, this does not imply that there are conceptual approaches needed to get access to those data which are specific to sinology. There is no longer the "Sinologist" but the "Social Scientist", e.g. "the economist", who is able to gather data under the peculiar conditions of the region and then to apply her tools which are not constrained by space and time.³ Basically, this means that there is no need for "Verstehen" in order to be able to "Erklären". The task of the scholar dealing with China is "Erklären" by means of theories which are universal. The special knowledge of sinology is only regarded to be instrumental for the application or te-

1 The subtitle of this paper has been adopted from Mirowski (1989) who wants to protect economics against science, meaning natural science in English usage. As I have argued in (1993), the problem is not whether natural or social science or what else but which structural type of a theory is set as normative standard.

2 A good introduction into the problem is provided by the different contributions to Buck (1991) under the heading of "Universalism versus Relativism". However, the collection is done with a certain prejudice towards "Universalism", i.e. general social science. Hence true relativists could not offer their point of view. Duara (1991) stands in between. The whole topic is a bestseller even in sinology or Asian studies in general and takes many disguises like the so-called "moral economy"-controversy (for another JAS symposium see Keyes, 1983).

3 For a very clear and tough approach in this direction see Krug (1991) who pushes the so-called "neoclassical institutionalism" in economics towards its limits. But eventually even she arrives at the infamous factor of "guanxi" as a special ingredient of Chinese social action, see my review Herrmann-Pillath (1994c).

translated back. The first way of empirical testing means that success in social action demonstrates that the translation made mutual understanding possible. The second way is the only possible way when translating texts, in particular from past times. It can be a daunting task because the single translation has to be put into a very broad range of other texts where usages of the term in question occur within another context. So we could also say that the second way of empirical testing means checking on internal consistency of context-dependent connotations. My footnote concludes with the observation that, of course, one can also translate Chinese expressions into the language of certain social sciences and vice versa. In that sense, "Erklären" is translating, too, because reference is established between theoretical terms of social science and certain concepts describing social phenomena in Chinese.⁶

Hence, in the following I want to write an essay in defence of sinology as translation. I will do this as a student of sinology and economics who is now in charge of managing courses in "Chinese economic studies" which means precisely applying a special social science on China. Of course, I am not an expert in the field I am going to talk about now, and I will simply draw on some well-known authors and contributions. At the same time, I would like to develop a framework for nine pieces of original scholarly work realized within a research project on China's modernization and which focus on Late Qing social and cultural history, in particular referring to the Weber hypothesis on China's failure to modernize endogenously. Our main aim was to get more detailed insights into the starting point of China's economic and cultural modernization as far as popular culture is concerned. I will refer to those works in the footnotes at the appropriate places.⁷

But I want to propose some substantial arguments why we do need an independent intellectual endeavour of "sinology" in order to be able to proceed with the other project of applying social science on China. More exactly, I want to discuss the issue whether our knowledge of late Imperial China and its social and economic history can help us to understand contemporary China. Acquiring knowledge about Imperial China is the task of sinology if simply because of the tough demands directed at the capability to read original sources. But as we shall see, there is something more.

⁶ An example of "sinology" in that sense is Thomas Metzger's (1977) famous book "Escape from Predicament" who also tries to establish linkages between social psychology and a sinological analysis in terms of translations. That the clash between "Erklären" and "Verstehen" may be an imaginary one, anyway, has been clarified already by Stegmüller's (1979) much-quoted paper on Quasars and Walther von der Vogelweide.

⁷ The papers are written by the Beijing scholars Chen Lai, Ge Zhaoguang, Lei Yi, Liang Zhiping, Liu Dong, Wang Yi, Yan Buke and the Taiwanese PhD researcher Sun Chi-pen in Germany and will be published in Chinese.

In that sense, Weber's idea of "rationality" is a phenomenological concept, and not an ontological one meaning that people "are" rational.¹⁰ If there are phenomena which cannot be reconstructed as being "rational" then this does not imply that they are not existent or that they are not important for social life. But it does imply that they are not a possible object of "science".¹¹ They can be an object of art, poetry, music and similar activities which are supposedly "irrational" and "unscientific", too. I should stress that this is not an evaluation, simply a basic epistemological difference.

From such a perspective one could, for instance, reach the conclusion that there would be a deep cleavage between "social science" and "sinology" if one were to argue that the former tries to apply a most general concept of "rational action" on social phenomena which is by definition completely independent from its peculiar object of application, whereas the latter tries to deal with the characteristic, singular features of the object which cannot be grasped by the general idea of rationality. Hence the former is science, the latter is art. Sinology would be no science.¹²

However, if we look at the way how Weber continued with the elaboration of his method then we realize immediately that he had to use conceptual tools which grasp both rational and irrational aspects of social action at the same time. The simple reason is that any treatment of history has to refer to certain historical phenomena as entire wholes, as when introducing a certain view of the system of rule in Confucian China. Otherwise the gap between the historical account and the general conceptual tools would be too large because the historical account would be fragmented into myriads of data just from the outset. Weber therefore introduced concepts on an intermediate level of analysis, the co-called "types" (whether real or ideal does not matter here).¹³ Types of social action serve to systematize the hi-

¹⁰ This kind of an "as if" argument is presented by many economists when being faced with certain empirical observations which might contradict rational choice-models of human behavior simply because the informational requirements for applying the models are not fulfilled. Phenomenological approaches underly the German tradition in economics, although this is rarely acknowledged, see Herrmann-Pillath (1994a)

¹¹ Therefore, Weber excluded very important social phenomena from his analysis, as power relations. On this point see Breuer (1990, p. 27).

¹² At this place I cannot deal with the question whether such a view is linked to a more fundamental approach to science in general which is still linked with a strong Aristotelian tradition which distinguishes between science as "metaphysics of the general" and "experience" as the practical knowledge of the individual, see Pieper (1973) and my Herrmann-Pillath (1993).

¹³ Weberian types, however, are general social types in the sense of Little's (1990), meaning that they refer to general characteristics of societies like certain systems of rule. For instance, Susan Mann's (1987) application of Weber's concept of "liturgical rule" tries to identify the relevant characteristics of that general social type on elite behavior and taxation in

Social types and contemporary Chinese statistics

Let us turn to the second example which will lead to the same topic starting out from the grassroots level in contemporary China. As an economist focusing on China's present one has the professional obligation to use statistical data from China in order to analyse her economic development. On the surface, we now have access to huge quantities of data, and many people argue that today our assessment can be founded on empirical observations of a quality which is much better than in other countries on the same level of development.

But just during 1994 doubts were raised regarding the quality of the data, and the Chinese government organized small-scale campaigns and dispatched many working groups in order to check the data and to ensure quality of statistical work on the local level.¹⁶ Indeed, if one really starts to deal with the data more seriously one meets many obstacles against a clear-cut interpretation. For instance, there are impressive national figures but, alas, they might be very different from the provincial ones, and if one tries to aggregate the national data starting out from the provincial ones, the result might be different from the official national figures.¹⁷ Continuing with similar exercises, it proves to be a nightmare reaching so-called "real" figures from the nominal figures on the provincial level because the deflators need to be different ones (given diverging provincial inflation rates). But in order to check the quality of deflators one already needs to know real figures e.g. on output. And the most pessimistic turn might take place if one gets insights about how the data are collected at the local level, with almost everybody cheating, acting unprofessionally, hiding, simply fulfilling tasks without diligence and so on. So I face a daunting contradiction between the clarity and quantity of the national statistics of China on the one hand and my knowledge about the process how those data are generated. Therefore many people invest a lot of effort into getting direct access to primary data, organizing samples, panels and case studies. But given

¹⁶ Some references are given in Herrmann-Pillath (1995a,d).

¹⁷ For a detailed discussion of data problems see the fourth part of my book on inflation (1991a) and the introduction in Herrmann-Pillath (1995c). Regarding the point on distinguishing between real and nominal figures one should bear in mind that, for instance, if there are mistakes in measuring inflation, say, of 3-5 percentage points on the provincial level, and if those mistakes occur with a different degree in the provinces and for different years, comparisons between the real growth rate of provinces become almost meaningless because this is just the magnitude of interest, namely detecting differences of the real growth rate of 3-5 per centage points. That is to say, noise possibly resulting from the statistical system covers all really relevant information contained in the statistical data. But we do not know the loudness of the noise.

managing statistics through the Central government sometimes seems to be akin to managing the symbolic universe of folk beliefs in Imperial China, an observation which might be helpful so put the data into the right proportions.²⁰

Thus, finally both our exemplary reflections meet each other since in the case of data one could argue that it might be useful to grasp the peculiar quality of the data by means of a typological feature along Weberian lines. "Chinese statistics" is a type of "statistics" with general features of statistical method and peculiar features of the statistical process taking place in China. In order to produce reliable statistical work on China one should know both, which means in the case of the latter that one should practise sinology at least as a laywoman. So we have an additional intermediate concept which belongs to the epistemological level neither of the figures nor of the tools of general statistics and econometrics. On the one hand, there are those general scientific tools of the realm of universal rationality, on the other hand our empirical data might belong to the specific realms of culturally and historically contingent social action.

This is a very basic and important issue because we realize that the clear-cut distinction between sinology and social science is in fact a naive positivistic attitude that presupposes that we can arrive at certain data without any theory, only in order to apply theory on the data in the next step of analysis, logically as well as temporally. That we cannot proceed in this way is a fact which has been acknowledged since the gone days of the "Vienna circle".²¹ But this is just done when, for example, econometrics is applied directly on data generated by the Chinese statistical authorities, without referring to any theory about the social action taking place on part of the Chinese statistical authorities. So the real problem is whether the "theory ladenness" of data means that "theory" proper is a universal concept like "rationality" in the Weberian meaning and like econometric method or whether it means that the process leading to the construction of data has to proceed with theories contingent in space and time, so that there are two different kinds of theories with different scope and range of application.²² In our example of stati-

²⁰ As Evelyn Rawski (1991, p. 97) has it with reference to traditional religion, "the essential ambiguity of Chinese symbols reflects the state's emphasis on standardization of structure, but not of content". This may be a good description of the contemporary statistical system as well. I elaborated on this observation in Herrmann-Pillath (1995d).

²¹ Popper (1984) was one of the first to recognize the dependence of data on theories. But for social science and the humanities the more radical shift produced by Wittgenstein's introduction of the idea of "language games" proved to be more influential and layed the foundation for most relativistic approaches towards analyzing human societies. According to my view this was one step too far because the Popperian fallibilist approach was for a long time too closely connected with natural science.

²² For economics, this is by no means a new idea and has been already proposed by Spiethoff in the twenties of our century, using the term "Wirtschaftstile" similar to our use of "type".

Let us try to make this general conclusion more explicit by means of a discussion of certain problems in interpreting recent Chinese history. But before doing that, I will consider some general pathways between history and present in China.

3. China's Past and Present: The Search for the Link

The assumption that we only need general social science in order to analyze China is also part and parcel of a certain view of modernization. Even if it may be necessary to use special views and "Verstehen" in order to understand, for instance, traditional Chinese religion, modernization as a process will eliminate all the peculiar features of China as compared with "modernity" and therefore will provide a firm foundation for applying general social science.²⁴ The market in modern times is not contingent on cultures and countries, hence we only need general economics to analyze the market in a modern China. Since general economics also takes part in designing the actual introduction of the market (e.g. through advice of the World Bank to the Chinese government) we might even say that social science, being a result of modernization, is a social force of its own quality which creates the conditions of its application by means of social action guided by social science. Hence sinology will eventually pass away as a result of universal modernization partly driven by applying general social science on social life.

But can we really dispense with history and hence with sinology even in the narrow meaning if we try to understand contemporary China? Let me give some brief examples which show the practical relevance of history.

First, structural change proceeds very slowly so that in order to explain certain problems of China today it will be helpful to know about their historical roots. That

stance, there is no general theory of "capitalism" but theoretical analysis of different "mechanisms" working within a special geographical and historical setting. This position is similar to the approach proposed by Elster (1989). Little (1990, p. 266) also rejects the so-called hypothetico-deductive model of scientific explanations because its application presupposes a clearly defined data base which is furthermore more or less independent from the theory to be tested. But as we have argued in the same vein, processing data is a very complex process in the human sciences and sometimes more important than testing general theories.

²⁴ Eisenstadt (1987) argues that "modernity" means the spread of Western civilization all over the world which is a particular tradition, too, and not simply a timeless phenomenon without regional boundaries. In that sense, social science is a cultural activity, too. We might draw the conclusion that the more unified the world in terms of Western civilization, the more successful the realization of that cultural activity.

present, e.g. regarding the funding of local governments.²⁷ Understanding the past will help to generate distinct hypotheses about the present. Those hypotheses might prove to be wrong, but it might be that the family resemblances help to get closer to the truth just from the outset because they serve as means to formulate "types" as hypothetical statements which can be checked empirically. Yet, this does by no means explain the reasons for those similarities.

Third, those reasons can be structural determinants mentioned at the beginning. For instance, we observe today that many Chinese villages are able to continue with very old traditions in handicraft manufacturing which give rise to a certain link between the regional patterns of production in the past and the distribution of rural enterprises today.²⁸ This is a family resemblance which seems to be heavily dependent on structural constraints in the transport sector because the competitive advantages of low-productivity rural industries depend on the relative high transportation costs leading to barriers between different local markets. There can be complex causal relations between certain structural determinants and social phenomena, like, for instance, the relation between a certain size of the population and the costs of government because contingent social institutions shape those relations.²⁹

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- ²⁷ An almost astonishing example is the question of fee-taking and taxation in late Qing China, see Hickey (1991). The incapability of the Central government to finance local government, the emergence of a decentralized system of financing by fees, then morally denounced as "corruption", and the following conflict between the local governments and the Center over revenue possibly resulting from transforming the fee-taking system into a system of regular taxation, all those aspects of Late Qing local government sound remarkably similar to the state of local government in many places of China today. The whole issue can be linked with a social science approach towards the role of gifts in Chinese society, thereby discovering a reason for the family resemblance, see Gransow (1991).
- ²⁸ For instance, in the field work of our project (realized together with the Rural Development Institute, Beijing) there is a Hubei village which specializes on the production of nails. The villagers refer even to a Song dynasty tradition of this handicraft. The newly established industrial enterprise in the village now specializes on wires, a closely related activity. There are many other examples in the literature.
- ²⁹ The costs of government play an important role in studies of Late Qing China. The question of family resemblances, for instance, could then be linked to the ongoing scholarly controversy over the question whether there was an unbroken trend towards a more bureaucratically unified and efficient modern state ("state-building") since the middle of the 19th century, or whether there were ruptures and set-backs. As the example of the tax system shows there can be contradictory views, like Mann (1987) who argues that there was a continuous rise of state power until 1949 whereas Duara (1988) even diagnoses "state involution" before 1949. For assessing such views it is very important to identify frames of reference in terms of family resemblances (e.g. interpreting the role of tax farming in Nationalist China and observing the reappearance of similar systems in the 80s, see Mann, 1987, p. 208, and Herrmann-Pillath, 1991b) and structural constraints (costs of organizing taxation).

place of historical consciousness in present social action can only be understood by means of translation, and we face the problem of a double, interlocking framework, namely the framework between historical accounts and contemporary Chinese dealing with their own history on the one hand and the framework encompassing both levels and the Western observer on the other hand.³³

Sixth, this leads us to the more general question how to reach a clear view on starting points of current developments, which is the general task of the historian: where does the present come from? This is almost inevitably linked to the question of the legitimacy of social action. For instance, the evaluation of the potential consequences of increasing migration and mobility in contemporary China might depend on our knowledge about migration in the past because here we could reap some insights into the inherent potential of migrant societies in achieving self-organization and preventing disorder from emerging. If we argue that in former times China was a migrant and frontier society and that social structure was adapted to this fluid state we might ask whether today a similar structure will possibly emerge because there are still traditions of self-organization rooted in tradition. Another example is the ongoing controversy over pre-49 economic growth³⁴ since our evaluation of communist economic development depends on our assessment of the starting point, not only in terms of the level reached but, more important, in terms of the institutional structures and growth patterns prevailing. Hence, any kind of value statement on the present, even if based on social science, presupposes some related value statement on the past, based on translation.

Seventh, as we see, referring to history is not only crucial because we do need to know about the past as a starting point for the present, but also because there might be scientific progress in our knowledge about the past, as in the case of the controversy over China's economic development after 1911. As a matter of fact, perspectives on late Imperial China do change and this will have implications for our view of contemporary China.

³³ A wonderful argument in this direction is Duara (1994). Chinese today are constrained in their political choices over the constitution because truly federalist approaches have been buried in a fuzzy semantics which imbued related ideas with negative values. This, in turn, goes back on a very long history of state thinking which rejects the formal decentralization of political power in China, actual centrifugality notwithstanding, see e.g. McMullen (1987). In both cases, a core idea was "feng jian" which in the first movements of provincial constitutional autonomy could have been developed into an alternative Chinese view of political order. But the potential was destroyed and could not be revived but in the late eighties by people like Yan Jiaqi, if only to face just the same intellectual oppression by the representatives of state power as in former times, see Waldron (1990).

³⁴ See Myers (1991) versus Huang (1991), following the important contributions by Rawski (1988) and Huang (1990).

history of Late Qing and Republican China. We try to answer the question whether the latter work hence is meaningful for contemporary Chinese studies. Of course we will only give some superficial hints at a more elaborated investigation, and we will discuss all those issues with one big stroke, like certain kinds of Chinese calligraphy. This is taken literally.

4. A Chinese Pattern of Social and Economic Change

Involuntary growth may be linked with the traditional family...

Recently the American economist Paul Krugman argued that in East Asia a growth pattern has prevailed which is based on growth of factor inputs but not on increases of productivity. This observation fits remarkably well into two different strands of thought referring to the results of the organization of economic activities in China.³⁷ The first is the issue of the traditional family and its being a possible obstacle against modernization in terms of organizational capabilities, and the second is the question whether the traditional growth pattern was involuntary because of a certain pattern of institutions and incentives leading to a lock-in into mere quantitative growth.

Both strands of thought are linked in a certain way because the most recent idea of involution proposed by P.C.C. Huang presupposes that primary groups redistribute income between their members so that single members of the group may work with a marginal productivity of labour which moves towards zero, yet maximizing average output for the group. The main reason contributing to such a constellation is the vast surplus labour which can be offered with zero opportunity cost. By this a pattern of factor allocation emerges which leads to a maximization of labour input in order to maximize output but neither with productivity increases nor with incentives to increase productivity. Since redistribution in primary groups presupposes that members of the group with higher productivity earn an effective wage below their marginal productivity, this growth pattern is not efficient. Moreover, primary group production outcompetes production by organizations using wage labour because those have to pay the market price reflecting marginal

³⁷ See Krugman (1994). On the next points see Redding (1990) and Menkhoff (1993, pp. 149ff.) (family enterprise) and on involution, of course, Huang (1990). Huang's argument belongs to a tradition of similar approaches like Elvin's (1973) "high-level equilibrium trap" and Chao (1986).

poratization.⁴¹ Although this role of the lineage and clan organizations was well-known in the area of land management, we know today that also many other economic activities could be channelled through those traditional institutions. During the economic expansion of late Qing many institutions were adapted to the needs of business. This included not only the kinship structures in the narrow meaning but in particular the more elaborated institutions of the extended family like the charitable estate. The main behavioral and normative foundation of this flexibility of tradition seems to be the fact that already since Ming times Chinese corporate kinship structures diversified their economic and power basis considerably such that, basically, an instrumentalist attitude towards all possible sources of power and influence made a strong response to modernization possible, too, leading to an inclusion of modern professional careers and industrial entrepreneurship into lineage strategies.⁴² Furthermore, after the demise of the middle-age aristocratic China and the Mongol interlude in Ming and Qing times even Confucian institutions like, above all, the examination system fostered strong individual identification with corporate groups because there was a systematic difference between upward and downward mobility of the individual and the social mobility of the group. Individuals could fall and rise, whereas the lineage preserved its corporate identity.⁴³

The point has already been made very early by Mark Elvin that institutional or ideological explanations of China's failure to industrialize are inherently weak. This proves to be true in the case of economic organization because today we know that institutions like the charitable fund were remarkably similar to the organization of large Chinese multinational companies of our days, in the sense of "family resemblances" mentioned above. For instance, in Madeleine Zelin's study of a late Qing salt merchant family it becomes evident that the charitable estate not only

⁴¹ A useful survey of those organizational functions is Naquin/Rawski (1987, pp. 46ff.). Hamilton (1991a) tries to construct a direct link between such historical accounts and the modern development of business in a Chinese cultural setting.

⁴² Examples from Hubei are analyzed by Rowe (1991). This is the main reason why Confucian beliefs regarding the family and merchant values did not contradict each other in real life. The ill-conceived but much-quoted Confucian downgrading of the merchant refers to the political order exclusively, and of course, to the interests of the established elites to prevent new upwardly mobile families from encroaching on their position. Rozman (1991) therefore rightly proposes to distinguish at least between "five Confucianisms" with distinct approaches and validity for distinct social areas.

⁴³ See Elman's (1991) overview of recent insights into the role of the examination system in Late Imperial China, where, amongst other points, it is again demonstrated that the ruling elite more and more mixed with the merchant group. One should also pay attention to the fact that there were considerable regional differences in the composition of elites, well surveyed in Naquin and Rawski (1987). By means of the provincial quota system, those differences fed back onto the national level.

...whose societal role should be reconsidered like other issues as the status of women and affinal kin in order to understand the institutional foundation of the economy...

Such kind of a reconsideration of Chinese tradition therefore has implications for our view on the present. Regarding the Chinese family, a linkage is obvious with the even more general treatment of the problem by Jack Goody.⁴⁸ Goody, too, argues that there is no fundamental difference between early modern European corporations and the lineage trusts and funds. But this point is embedded into a more encompassing argument regarding the failure of some common views juxtaposing the European family with the Asian and in particular the Chinese one. Quite interestingly, following his analysis the main distinction seems to refer to the different attitude of the state and religious bodies towards the extended family and the lineage. This seems to be an analogy to the role of the state in the rise of modern accounting.

Whereas in Europe in particular the Church launched a long-term battle against the extended family, in China the state fostered the growth of a particular type of the extended family even against sometimes widely diverging customs in popular culture. Hence one could even follow Goody's radical argument that the basic historical substrates of the European and the Chinese family are closely related with each other but that emerging structures of political power changed both into a different direction, with Europe going the way towards the more constrained nuclear family and China going the way towards the extended family and the lineage in particular. However, if popular culture is scrutinized historically, differences in term of essence might be not as large as commonly supposed.

Goody's point is of interest because we learn that one of the most important fields of progress in sinology seems to be the growing capability of research to distinguish between the view of China as represented in written sources produced by the Confucian elites on the one hand and social reality on the other hand, which means distinguishing empirically between Redfield's "Great" and "Little tradition".⁴⁹ Our view of the traditional Chinese family is heavily influenced by the peculiar mixture of reality and normative judgements which is implicit in all accounts of social life in traditional China written by the users of the Chinese script, namely people trained by Confucianism. Social practice could not only be different

⁴⁸ Goody (1990) and (1983). On the question of state policies towards the family, see in particular Ebrey (1991).

⁴⁹ For an overview, see Ebrey (1990). In our project related work has been done by Chen Lai (1994a) and Wang Yi (1995), the latter explicitly interpreting folk beliefs as part of an interactive cultural system including the Chinese government.

which agnatic as well as cognatic relations can be mobilized e.g. in order to organize business activities.⁵¹

Aside from the fact that in the past other social interactions have been assessed in a distorted way, too, we should not take Confucian obsession with diminishing the role of the women in society as social reality. If we want to understand why today, for instance, in Chinese business emancipation of women takes place at a much greater speed than in Germany, leading to a much larger role of women in business, than we have to look at those traditional structures. Hence, again, misperceptions of the starting point of social changes might lead to misunderstandings of what is going on today. Furthermore, there is even the possibility that remnants of the Confucian discourse still influence the self-perception of Chinese today, giving rise to descriptions of social reality which might be partly normative and which thereby distort reality.⁵²

...such that the societal framework for economic activities is recognized to have been much more complex including many kinds of self-organization and networking activities...

Hence, going back to our general perspective on growth patterns, the main failure of earlier arguments concerning the relation between the Chinese family and modernization could be the implicit transfer of our Western concepts of the family onto a different field. The European view of economic growth being simultaneously a process of rationalization and individualization is deeply entrenched in all the special fields of social and economic history. Regarding the family, a case in point is the Chandlerian tradition in the analysis of the modern corporation.⁵³ People pre-

51 Hence, in the sense of section 3 of this paper, social and cultural change is analyzed misleadingly. For instance, Yang (1994) argues that rural industrialization in a Sichuan village causes cultural change leading to a growing importance of affinal relationships in economic organization and change of wife's residence to her parent's home (regarding the latter, see Judd, 1989, for other observations on actual practice). However, from our analysis this conclusion by no means follows. Instead, we would argue that just another pattern inhering the Chinese cultural tradition comes to the fore. So there is no change on deep structures but only of surface patterns. This is by no means "social change". Affinal kin and its importance for business can also be analyzed in the context of Hamilton's (1991b) "networks". In our project, some insights can be found in Sun Zhiben (1995).

52 An empirical observation of this kind of behavior refers to Taiwanese families, see Schak (1991). Schak demonstrates that non-agnatic ties are much more important than agnatic relations for explaining the pattern of help and support between kin, e.g. married daughters and their parents or mother's brothers as compared to father's brothers. Nevertheless, people describe the pattern within the framework of the traditional language of "filiality" which is regarded to be the norm.

53 On the following see the volume edited by Brown/Rose (1993).

grasp this so-called "third realm".⁵⁵ The matter has turned even more complicated after being linked with the elusive topic of "civil society" since first one had to realize that there was a Chinese society at all, in the meaning of being distinct from the state and the family, and second, because one immediately started to compare Chinese society with the European one christened "civil". Before looking at some details of those reflections, let me make my ground position as clear as possible.

The crucial difference between European and Chinese society in the last couple of centuries cannot be understood simply by comparing "China's" society with a stylized European one (e.g. "France") in the narrow meaning and then looking at state-society relations. The most elementary fact about European state-society relations is that there was a European society on the one hand and a system of competing states on the other hand.⁵⁶ Competition between states led the rulers to discover certain aspects of society which might be useful in the scramble for power, thereby even supporting certain autonomous developments of society. But I do not think that there is a fundamental qualitative difference in state-society interactions aside from the effects resulting from that elementary fact of political competition taking place in Europe and being absent in China. This should be stressed because the idea of "civil society" confers a certain inherent qualitative difference even in terms of a value judgement onto our image of both societies. If one compares one European state and the respective "society", artificially delineated according to political boundaries, on the one hand with the Chinese state and the Chinese society on the other hand, this establishes a wrong system of reference because in Europe "society" was a cross-border phenomenon.

This being said, let us turn to the blind eye of our earlier view of China's traditional society. One of the most conspicuous examples which brings this point to the fore is the history of Hong Kong.⁵⁷ Until today there is a majority of people viewing the Chinese as being focused on business and the family, with no political motivation and with no interest for the common good. This is a very common remark on Hong Kong people who are supposed to be the most capitalist ones of the world, at least according to the views of the arch-liberal economics laureate Milton

⁵⁵ Huang (1993) invented this term which is closely related to Habermas' view of the "public".

⁵⁶ This, of course, is not a new insight, see Bünger (1987). But so far this observation has not been linked with the civil society discussion. On the importance of conceiving society in Europe as "European", eventually leading to a societal consciousness of being autonomous from the different states, see Poggi (1978, pp. 86ff.) and Tenbruck (1990, pp. 196ff.).

⁵⁷ Quite interestingly, even today both views clash, see DeGolyer (1994) contention that Hong Kong people show a very pronounced political consciousness and readiness to organize themselves, which contradicts many statements and beliefs regarding the political immobility and lethargy of "Hong Kong Man". Historic Hong Kong was no exception, see e.g. Strand (1991) for the case of Beijing/Beiping.

Chinese pattern of economic development conceiving the family as core institution.

There are many topics which are now discussed when trying to assess the quality of the so discovered traditional Chinese society between state and family. Arguments stressing the weak "bourgeois" or "civil rights" aspects of Chinese self-organization seem to forget that the assertiveness of rights in European society simply mirrored a much more intrusive state.⁵⁹ As we see from the Hong Kong example, if there was a real need to organize against the ruling class it could be well done. That means, if the state is weak, "civil" society will be weak, although society in general will be strong, and not the other way round, which suggests that just because there is no tradition of a "civil" society, the state is presumably strong.

...which are closely related to the fluid state of Qing China as an extremely mobile society of migrants and sojourners...

Social life in Late Qing China was ordered by a plethora of institutions that transcended the family. At a closer look, a lot of those institutions were linked with a phenomenon which has not yet been paid the deserved attention to, namely migration.⁶⁰ Many arguments on civil society in China argue from a static point of view, opposing state with society e.g. in the concrete context of a certain city. But maybe the most important challenge to state and society in China always was the social organization of migration given the fact that population pressure as well as

⁵⁹ It is possible to lend considerable historical evidence for this view. For instance, in Bernhardt's (1992, pp. 173ff., 203ff.) study of peasant resistance against landlords in Late Qing and Republican China it becomes obvious that the quality of peasant's collective action changed considerably when the state became more involved in the setting of rents.

⁶⁰ With this I mean that migration is normally treated as exception from the rule, and not as the rule, but see Naquin/Rawski (1987, pp. 130ff.). My point is that what we regard to be the dynamism of Late Ming and Qing China is in a principled way the dynamism of a migrant society, similar to North America in the 18th and 19th century. That is to say, my perspective on what is known changes, not the content of our knowledge about China. One of the clearest and systematic statements on Late Qing China as a migrant society is Nishizawa (1992). Here we see the picture of a society undergoing constant "internal colonization". One has to stress that mobility and migration should not only referred to by thinking in terms of interprovincial migration. There were considerable movements of the labour force between counties and within the rural areas, see the short remarks by Rowe (1990, p. 250). Moreover, the regional impact of natural disasters or climatic local depressions of agricultural production should not be forgotten. As Will (1990, pp. 38ff., 226ff.) shows, during the apex of Qing power a lot of bureaucratic effort was spent on keeping the population in place if local famines occur. There was a high readiness to migrate which seems to be very similar to our contemporary experience with migration in China.

fluid and mobile society. The main instrument of integration was fostering "Chineseness" in terms of a common value system and of common beliefs because this was the only way to reach a certain match between society and the traditional polity. As far as we know, Chinese officials basically knew what a full-fledged state machinery in taxation, juridical system, police and so on could mean, given the almost mythical experience with legalism and totalitarianism, and given the long history of reform attempts and proposals of Chinese governments. But the costs of establishing such an intrusive state in the context of a societal network of interlocking frontier societies in constant flux would have been prohibitively high. So the Confucian state chose a way of government which might be called "management by exception" and "management by identity".⁶⁵

...a society which transcended fragmented economic regions through cultural regionalism as a means of informal institutional integration...

Understanding this type of government is difficult from the viewpoint of the modern West European national state. If we look at the interaction between economy and society, the most important aspect is the question of the mapping between economic regions and what Kindleberger (1989) called the "social area". China's traditional economy was by no means an integrated national market but only at the end of the 19th century. Given the limited traditional means of transportation and communication, the interaction between the possible autarchy of certain economic regions and the possible political as well as social identification of its population with that region could have led to a split of the empire. But precisely the culturalist way of rule prevented this from occurring and instead even supported economic integration just by means of a shared symbolic universe of all Chinese.

The crucial aspect of this observation results to be that fragmentation of social areas in terms of language, behavioral norms, religion and so on is an obstacle against economic integration of its own quality. In economic terms, this means that culture is a determinant of transaction costs, as distinguished from transport costs. Only the sum of both kinds of cost determines the density of economic interactions in space and time. China's vast society was integrated by means of

⁶⁵ Many scholars (cf. Dull, 1990. p. 82) studying the Chinese government in Imperial China have stressed the remarkable fact that the relative size of government (measured in personnel per capita of population) shrank drastically during Late Ming and Qing, giving rise to what has been called "liturgical rule" by Mann (1987), meaning indirect government through the "pouvoir intermédiaires" of local social elites. Although Mann's description does not refer to my point explicitly it may be a reasonable hypothesis that regarding one of the most important state/society interfaces, viz. taxation, the use of local merchant elites for indirect taxation was an efficient means, given the highly fluid state of a society of sojourners.

...a fact which has been neglected by recent theories on involutionary growth...

But before looking at the implications for state-building, society and the economy in contemporary China, let us shortly go back to the starting point of our flight with bird's eye watching on China. How is this related to the analysis of the growth pattern of traditional China? P.C.C. Huang's analysis of "involution" leaves one important aspect of the traditional economy out of sight, namely migration as a basic feature of China's economy and society.⁷⁰ Migration might be linked with two core points of the analysis of involution. First, moving into a frontier region means that in fact factor labour input is the driving force of growth since land is not scarce under the local conditions. Although for China in the average land might be scarce this need not be the perception of the migrants just when arriving at a certain place and living there, say, for one generation. Now it depends on the local agrarian ecology how migrants deal with the problem of matching labour with capital. Following the classical point made by Mark Elvin we could argue that in particular in the Jiangnan regions, which are well-endowed by nature, there were no strong incentives to substitute labour by capital since agrarian ecology and technology let the expansion of labour input be the more optimal solution. This means that just repopulation of such areas raised the demand for labour and not for capital, strengthening the incentives either for migration or, of course, for reproduction of the labour force in the family. Those incentives matched traditional beliefs in particular regarding the family which were also crucial for the organization of migration. Hence a pattern of social, biological and economic reproduction emerges from our analysis where migration is the crucial process leading to involution.

⁷⁰ I feel that this is a major weakness in Huang's (1990) argument because in Qing China migration took place in large scale. After the Taiping rebellion, this also included resettlement just in the well developed Jiangnan regions. This view may be motivated by a similar view on migration in contemporary China where Huang follows the wishful thinking of mastermind thinkers like Fei Xiaotong that rural industrialization will take place without larger movements of people, see (1990, pp. 288f.). From the vantage point of today, this simply did not materialize. But it may also be false for the past. For a sketchy impression on Lower Yangzi region dynamics see Naquin/Rawski (1987, pp. 147ff.). For other contributions akin to Huang's this neglect of migration is even more salient, for instance, with Chao (1986, p. 30) even arguing that "migration as a disturbing factor (for marriage patterns, H.-P.) was minimal in Chinese history". Chao's analysis of man-land ratios hence suffers from the failure to distinguish between perceived local scarcity of land and real global scarcity which is very important for assessing the incentives for individual action which result from population pressure.

Almost every aspect of China's political turmoil and dynamics in the 20th century led her changing order away from that kind of societal integration. This is true, for instance, for intellectual change and political leadership as well as for the agrarian crisis of the thirties. Although there are conflicting views on the Communist attempt at restoring order in the economy and the polity, in these pages I join the school of thought that regards the policy of the CCP towards the peasants as exploitive and being oriented towards a model of urban industrialization. Even the Dengist agrarian reforms should be interpreted as favouring the peasants by default. As a matter of fact, Communist economic policies preserved the disintegration of the traditional order in terms of freezing certain fissures and ruptures between the peasants and the new elites as well as between economic structures. Main instruments were the coercive procurement system, the hukou-administration and the rural government by Communist cadres.

But in a certain sense this kind of "freezing" social change in the vast rural areas of China means that today, when the economic reforms of the eighties eventually led to a stepwise retreat of the state from controlling the peasants, the past returns to the present in many respects. The re-emergence of certain traditional forms of social organization and, above all, economic behavior, in many rural areas of China seems to be closely linked with the failure of the Communist government to proceed with the task of state-building outside the urban world. To oversimplify, Communist modernization led to a fundamental dualism between an urban state and the rural society in terms of economic structure as well as social and political change.⁷³ "Oversimplification" means that there are of course many linkages between both worlds, established, for instance, through personal networks which were built by the rusticated urban youths of the seventies and by the military which before 1978 offered the single way out of the villages. But in terms of formal political institutions, like e.g. ordered relations between communities and the provincial government, there is no systematic integration between the two worlds of China.

Then we realize an important, maybe crucial point, namely that local-central political relations and the urban-rural relation are intertwined in a very complex way in China. In both regards, the traditional social order of Late Qing society had provided institutional solutions which were peculiar to China. Modernization in the 20th century did not offer any new solutions but mere coercive action by an urban

group in the sense of being focused on land as basis for social status. As detailed studies e.g. of the role of merchants in tax administration have shown, such a dichotomy did not exist, see Mann (1987, pp. 25ff.).

⁷³ Watson (1991) makes this point on cultural dualism in China. Pennarz (1994) gives an illuminating study of the social and economic dualism between the emerging market economy and the traditional markets in Sichuan.

same which means, basically, that we need to know what our facts are at all. For instance, what is a "peasant"? Or, what is the "family"? Or, what is a "city"? What does it mean if one talks about "state-building"? Simply changing the translation of certain concepts will alter the framework for reference completely.⁷⁴ Hence it remains to be of crucial importance to do sinology, meaning that one constantly tries to discover new aspects of meaning more or less independently from established social science theories. Otherwise, our theories will always prejudice our translation. The intellectual autonomy of sinology is a necessary prerequisite for defining "reality" on which social science might be applied.

Take, for example, the analysis of traditional religion. This is of utmost importance for assessing the behavioral foundation for economic change, given the still strong influence of the Weberian approach on our views of the rise of the modern economy, as well as for the assessment of the distinct qualities of the traditional Chinese state, because from the comparative perspective a fundamental aspect of social order is the relationship between the religious and the political realm (the spiritual power and the secular power). But in order to analyze traditional religion one has to delve into its symbolic realm, trying to understand the meaning of certain concepts, first, in terms of their systematic relationship with other concepts, and second, in terms of their translation into "Western" concepts. This is sinology, not social science. The result of such an activity will be the construction of a certain "type" characterizing traditional Chinese society and, in our example, religion, with a limited number of analytical strokes, viz. by means of sinological hypotheses about the meaning of certain religious symbols.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ One example: In the Wakeman/Rowe dispute that we already mentioned above Wakeman (1993) also discussed the question whether Hankou was a "city" at all. This gives an impression of the fundamental problem of any translation which uses theoretical terms. Our definition may also be the criterion of application such that if Hankou is not a city the "civil society" hypothesis cannot be rejected and vice versa. For instance, one could argue that the massive presence of government officials in Hankou is not representative of purely commercial cities.

⁷⁵ This is done, for example, by Feuchtwang (1991). The interesting point is that we cannot assess the relative meaning of Chinese popular religion in comparison with other religions before being able to evaluate the relation between state and popular religion. But this is extremely difficult, because one has to understand, for instance, the meaning of the interlocking hierarchies of gods and ghosts in popular religion. There is the encompassing "bureaucracy" on the one hand, but also an autonomous realm of local power and even uncontrolled violence on the other hand. So it is by no means clear whether even popular religion was integrated into the Confucian system or not (cf. Rawski, 1991). Another related problem is the assessment of the other "two" religions of China. For instance, in our project Ge Zhaoguang (1994) argues that the actual behavioral and moral standards reflected in Daoist religious texts were strongly shaped by Confucian values. Since those questions are crucial for assessing the Weber-hypothesis in terms of a social science theory, we are left

the self-perception of today's societal agents, to patterns of socialization, the peculiar characteristics of the starting point or many other aspects of social change.

Fourth, now let us have a look again at our one-stroke-sentence that symbolizes the complex structures of Chinese calligraphy (albeit in ugly English): *Involuntary growth may be linked with the traditional family - but in Late Imperial China there were corporate structures emerging out of the family whose societal role should be reconsidered (like other issues as the status of women and affinal kin) in order to understand the institutional foundation of the economy such that the societal framework for economic activities is recognized to have been much more complex, including many kinds of self-organization and networking activities which are closely related to the fluid state of Qing China as an extremely mobile society of migrants and sojourners, a society which transcended fragmented economic regions through cultural regionalism as a means of informal institutional integration - a fact which has been neglected by recent theories on involuntary growth and which highlights the crucial aspect of economic, social and cultural change in the 20th century, namely China's disintegration into an urban and a rural society with distinct economic and cultural features, finally leading into the trap of Communist immobilism.*

In what way could we think about learning something about China's future from looking at the past reconstructed by sinology? Taking our terribly long statement as a point of departure, the crucial question seems to be what will happen if during the transition to the 21st century the urban-rural dualism breaks down. I venture the hypothesis that this will lead to a society which will be very similar to late Qing society, but where, however, many outward symbolic realizations of still comparable social functions will be other ones. For instance, today cultural integration may not work through traditional religion but through the global Chinese mass culture. In order to compare both and, most important, to compare the role of the state within both symbolic systems of past and present, one needs to do thorough sinological analysis of meanings and referents.

Already today we can firmly forecast that China will become a highly mobile society again as well as being regionalized. There are clear structural and institutional factors leading to such a development which I have analyzed in depth in several other contributions. This is foremostly linked with the rise of the peasantry as a social force of its own, however including local elites in the rural areas. The flow of migrants and sojourners is already by no means a "blind" flow but is well organized, and like in China's past, native place relations play an important role in providing the normative framework e.g. for collective action. So far the state is not able to cope with that challenge by administrative and institutional means but

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